

“Enjoy Enjaami”—A song about the aspirations of a tea plantation worker

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The recently-released Indie music video “Enjoy Enjaami” (Enjoy, My dear), a four-and-half minute song about the struggle and hopes of a tea plantation worker in Sri Lanka, has been an extraordinary hit.

Performed by South Indian playback singer Dhee and lyricist-rapper Arivu, the song was released on March 7 and quickly went viral on YouTube and other online media platforms. In the first week, it was watched by 20 million people and has now climbed to over 190 million, a first for a non-film Tamil song.

“Enjoy Enjaami” is a rare phenomenon in contemporary popular music and is clearly resonating with global audiences. The song is drawn from real life and calls on humanity to conserve and live in harmony with nature.

The song’s richly-layered lyrics, which passionately call for the unity of all people across communal lines, are in stark contrast to the poisonous climate of nationalism, xenophobia and war being promoted by imperialist and capitalist governments everywhere.

*Blessed to lead a good life,
Our ancestors have bequeathed us this soil,
Across the river banks, and on the fertile fields,
Our forefathers have sung through their life
The lakes and ponds belongs to the dogs, foxes, and cats,
too..*

“Enjoy Enjaami” is the first music video release by Maajja, an independent music label initiated by A.R. Rahman, the Academy-award-winning Indian composer and musician. Rahman launched the label to promote and support independent artists in India and beyond.

The song, which is performed in a Tamil dialect mainly spoken by Sri Lankan plantation workers and in South India, was directed by Amith Krishnan and produced and composed by Santhosh Narayanan. Krishnan is best known for *The Rice Mill Story*, a deeply-moving short film about the tragic plight of a bonded labourer at a rice mill and the death of his baby daughter.

The highly symbolic visuals of “Enjoy Enjaami” switch back and forth between dark and lush green studio-staged

scenes of a Sri Lankan plantation to brighter, warm orange-toned footage of barren, uncultivated land in South India.

The song is a blend of Tamil folklore and *oppari*—an ancient, traditional lament used in funeral ceremonies and processions—combined with musical elements from pop, rap and classical Indian genres. It begins with dynamic rhythms from the Parai family of drums, a ritualistic percussion instrument.

Parai drums are used in various ceremonies in Sri Lanka’s plantation areas. In the country’s north, and in South India, however, these instruments are only used during funerals because its players are ostracised by the upper castes. This has meant that these instruments were discriminated against and not used in any popular musical genres, let alone in mainstream music.

The song’s bridge, where Arivu continues and intensifies his falsetto singing into a soulful *oppari*, is riveting:

*I planted five trees, nurtured a beautiful garden.
Though the garden flourished,
yet my throat remains dry.*

The symbolic lyrics reference the agony of bygone generations of agricultural workers, sensitising listeners to the anarchic character of a social system, where the wealth of society, which is created by the working class is utilised to fulfil the interests of a handful—the capitalists.

The extraordinary popularity of “Enjoy Enjaami” is bound up with the historic experiences of Tamil plantation workers and the personal lives of the two singers involved, whose parents and grandparents were impacted by the tragic events that beset the Indian subcontinent in the 20th century.

Arivu, the song’s lyricist, was inspired by his grandmother’s stories about the exploitation and oppression of his forefathers as migrant and landless labourers under British colonial rule and during “post-independent” Indian and Sri Lankan bourgeois rule which continues today.

As Arivu explained in one interview, “This is not my song, this is her [his grandmother’s] song. I don’t own any of these lyrics. I am just pen and paper.”

During British colonial rule tens of thousands of mainly

female and poverty-stricken landless labourers were shipped from South India to Ceylon during the mid-19th century to work in the then highly-profitable coffee plantations.

The Tamil labourers were used to overcome consistent labour shortages in the central highlands caused by harsh working conditions and fatal tropical illnesses prevalent in new agricultural land reclaimed from the jungle. Arivu's forebears were among the many thousands.

When leaf disease and a stock market crash destroyed the Ceylonese coffee crops in the 1870s, it was replaced by tea—a new “black gold”—an even more profitable British colonial export crop.

Belated capitalist development in Sri Lanka—as in all the other industrially backward countries—raised a central political contradiction. On the one hand it produced a massive growth of the working class, especially in the plantation sector, and, on the other, it highlighted the political weakness and bankruptcy of the native bourgeoisie.

One of the very first moves of the Sri Lankan “independent” state in 1948 was to disenfranchise a million Tamil plantation workers and their family members. Communalism thus became a cornerstone of Sri Lankan bourgeois rule. State-sponsored Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism was systematically used to divide the highly politicised and diverse working class on the island to shore up and sustain bourgeois rule.

Only the Trotskyists in then Ceylon and India, under the banner of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI) in 1942, fought for the unification of the working class on the basis of socialist internationalism in opposition to British colonialism and the native comprador bourgeoisie.

The descent into communalism in the second half of the 20th century was greatly accelerated by the mass confusion generated by the betrayal of socialist internationalism by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which claimed to be Trotskyist, and its participation in a coalition government with the bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1964. This political betrayal had devastating and tragic consequences in Sri Lanka and internationally.

Four and half months after the joining the SLFP coalition government and following six days of negotiations with the newly “independent” India under Congress rule, Colombo signed the notorious Sirima-Sashtri Pact. Under this infamous agreement, 525,000 plantation workers and families were forcibly deported back to India.

Arivu's grandmother, Valiamma, who is mentioned in the song and appears in person at the end of the video in a silk sari, was among the thousands of workers deemed to be stateless, loaded onto ships and sent across the Palk Strait to India—cargoes of stranded, landless labourers. As Arivu recently noted, “My grandmother couldn't even take leave

of her sisters. To this day, we don't know whether they are alive.”

While the British colonial rulers brought landless labourers to the central highland plantations, the Colombo bourgeoisie made their children and grand-children stateless.

Arivu's grandmother fondly calls him *enjaami* in Tamil meaning “My dear” or “My lord,” thus the song's title.

The song repeats *Enjoy Enjaami* closely followed by the lyrics “come together as one” in the chorus with a musical structure commonly used in pop songs.

This is coupled with a progression of minor chords, heavy bass and staccato chords, rounded out with an effective hook-and-call to attention—“*Cuckoo, cuckoo.*”

Playback singer Dhee, widely known for her distinctive alto voice, was born in 1998 to Sri Lankan Tamil parents in the midst of the country's almost three-decade civil war. She belongs to a younger generation of Tamils who left the war-torn island and immigrated to Sydney, Australia. “Enjoy Enjaami,” in fact, was arranged and composed by her stepfather.

In another interview, Arivu explained, “I'm here not to comfort everyone, but to disturb everyone... I want to talk about tomorrow, definitely there's going to be a good future, definitely there's going to be an equal society. That's why I wrote ‘*Vango Onagi* ... meaning, come together as one!’”

Arivu's optimism is encouraging. A society based on socialist equality is unrealisable in a system that is based on an irrational system based on the private ownership in the means of production and in a world divided by competing nation states.

The historical experience of the 20th century proves again and again that a society based on social equality that, in return, guarantees the preservation of nature can only be established by the unification of the international working class in the struggle for international socialism. Until then, “*Throats are sure to remain dry.*”

“Enjoy Enjaami,” is a timely call from socially sensitive and serious artists.



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