



UNEASY CALM
Veda Nilayam (file photo), which the state government wants to turn into a memorial

Four to tango

Jayalalithaa's heirs are caught in a property dispute with the state government and the income tax department

BY LAKSHMI SUBRAMANIAN

VEDA NILAYAM, 36 Poes Garden in Chennai, is quiet. The black iron gates of the white mansion are closed, and only a couple policemen stand guard at what was once the city's most famous address: the residence of chief minister J. Jayalalithaa, who died on December 5, 2016.

The building, however, is at the centre of a dispute. The AIADMK

government wants to make it a memorial, but her niece Deepa Jayakumar and nephew Deepak Jayaraman oppose the plan. The income tax department is also interested in it. It recently attached her bungalow at Siruthavoor near Chennai and her tea estate in Kodanad.

"The Madras High Court declared us as her legal heirs in May this year," said Deepak. "But beyond those papers, we have not received anything."

Soon after the verdict, Deepak took possession of Jayalalithaa's vineyard in Hyderabad. Deepa said the authorities had denied them information about other properties. "I don't understand what is happening," she said. "The authorities are not even sharing the details of properties solely held by her, apart from those in Poes Garden and Hyderabad. We cannot even access the documents."

It is a knotty problem as some of the assets are registered in the name of companies co-owned by Jayalalithaa. Her assistant V.K. Sasikala, who has been in jail since 2017 after her conviction in a disproportionate assets case, holds stakes in several

of these companies. So far, neither Sasikala nor her relatives have made any claim on the disputed properties.

The High Court had in May ruled that Deepa and Deepak were entitled to inherit their aunt's inherited and "self-acquired" properties. Since Jayalalithaa had inherited Veda Nilayam and the vineyard from her mother, the court order would mandate that the properties be passed on to these siblings.

The income tax department, however, notes that it had attached Veda Nilayam in 2007, as Jayalalithaa had failed to pay her taxes on time. One of her former advocates said the long-pending case had been settled a year before her death. "In January 2015, she opted for an out-of-court settlement, and ₹2 crore was paid to the IT department. This was for the four cases registered against her and

Sasikala in 1996 for not filing returns in 1993-94," said the advocate. But apparently, the case that was settled in 2015 is separate from the one in which the IT department attached Veda Nilayam in 2007.

In April 2019, the IT department filed an affidavit in the High Court stating that Jayalalithaa's tax returns filed in March 2016 showed movable and immovable assets worth just ₹16.37 crore. "Her liabilities towards wealth and income taxes stand at ₹16.74 crore," it said.

As per the affidavit, the department attached Veda Nilayam and three other properties on March 13, 2007. In September this year, it filed another affidavit saying Jayalalithaa's legal heirs should immediately pay her tax dues amounting to Rs36.87 crore. Properties in Siruthavoor and Kodanad, it said, had been attached

under the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act.

According to Deepak, the tax dues are a matter of dispute. "Last year, the IT department told the court that her dues were ₹16 crore. Now it says the dues are ₹36.87 crore. We want to know how the department arrived at that figure," he said.

In July this year, the state government deposited ₹67.9 crore in a civil court in Chennai to take possession of Veda Nilayam. N. Lakshmi, revenue divisional officer in charge of land acquisition in south Chennai, said, "the government has accorded administrative sanction for the acquisition of land and conversion of Veda Nilayam [into a] government memorial."

A 21-page document awarding the land to the government lists the objections and claims of the siblings

Oxford honours VC of Nalanda varsity

INFOCUS



Prof. Sunaina Singh

Vice Chancellor, Nalanda University

The Academic Union, Oxford, in its Oxford debate on 'Universities of the Future' conferred the Honorary Professorship to Prof. Sunaina Singh, Vice Chancellor of Nalanda University, in recognition of the expertise in the fields of Science, economy, and healthcare. This award is a recognition of Prof. Singh's remarkable achievements to re-invent the historic Nalanda University and its academic architecture. All the academic leaders present in this webinar from Europe, USA, Africa and Asia hugely appreciated her efforts to bring the culture of excellence to maturity at Nalanda.

Speaking in the Oxford debate on December 15, Prof. Singh shared her insights on how she is engaged in re-creating Nalanda University as a symbol of Asian Renaissance and resurgence. She said the credit of allocation of land for the sprawling campus goes to the Chief Minister of Bihar, Sri Nitish Kumar. With

a view to create future thought leaders a new academic framework has been envisioned with Master's program, Short-term programs, Doctoral programs and Post-Doctoral programs within Schools and Research Centers.

Prof. Singh shared her experience on the emerging trends of educational transformation during pandemic. She highlighted the needs to remodel and re-structure higher education to meet the interests of the changing world. She pointed out that the future universities should remodel and reinvent itself to sync in with the rhythm of the increasingly complex and continuously changing world. "The generation of our times faces multifaceted challenges such as climate change, instability, and divisive boundaries across nations and civilizations. Thus, the courses need to be refashioned to build it more innovative, integrated, and comprehensive, with qualities of critical thinking,

empathy, creativity, and problem-solving skills," Singh Said.

Prof. Singh recommended the need of interdisciplinary education in higher studies for holistic development of students. She emphasized that the courses need to focus on social aspect, and at the same time, it should instill scientific temperament. This will create leaders of tomorrow who will have new and innovative solutions for their problem and will also be sensitive towards nature. She also acknowledged the use of technology in higher education for vibrant learning.