

Sir Alec Guinness on Sir Ralph Richardson

SUNDAY



40p



Tamil shops in Colombo being set on fire, during the July riots

HAVE SRI LANKA'S TAMILS BEEN CHEATED BY MOTHER INDIA?

The Bangalore Scoundrel

How Hegde caught the Congress(I) bribe-givers redhanded

COVER STORY

HAVE SRI LANKA'S TAMILS BEEN CREATED BY MOTHER INDIA?

The island paradise of Sri Lanka has been torn apart by hatred, since the ethnic riots in July. M. J. AKBAR, who was recently in Jaffna and Colombo, reports on the unique paradox that characterises Sri Lanka today: a minority Tamil population with a majority complex and a majority Sinhala population with a minority fear.

'In the past countries went to war to dominate another country. But the latest technique of aggressive countries was to swallow up a country by utilising the treacherous internal elements. There were the fifth columnists who were prepared to sell their country.'

—Prime Minister Premadasa of Sri Lanka in a speech on 27 August this year.

That statement was said in a code which even the Indian embassy in Colombo should be able to understand. Simple translation of a simple warning: the Prime Minister of the island paradise of Sri Lanka was telling his Sinhalese audience that India had aggressive designs and wanted

to swallow the paradise by using "treacherous elements" like the Tamils. India—and Mrs Gandhi, in particular—had made a bit of a habit of such a menu: Bangladesh in 1971, Sikkim a few years later, it would be Jaffna next. This last sentence was not explicitly stated by the Prime Minister, but that was only because convention had some loose control over the choice of words; everyone knew what he was talking about. The fear of the big brother's embrace/clasp/whip is the dominating factor in the psyche of any small brother, and it takes the minimum of provocation for that fear to become an obsession. Today, the Indian soldier is the obsession. Nor is it just the obsession of the Sinhalese. Just as much as the Sinhalese dread the thought of an Indian intervention, the Tamils welcome that thought. The

President Jayewardene inspecting a guard of honour: 'the Indian soldier is the obsession'



Tamil perception is totally concentrated on the hope of liberation through the power of Mother India. The rhetoric of politicians, always a sure guide to the quality of the groundswell, is becoming militant. Tamils quote a statement said to have been made by Gamini Senanayake that if it took 18 hours for the Indian troops to land in Jaffna, it would take only 18 minutes for every Tamil in the country to be killed. Sinhalese are dredging up militant statements made by Tamil leaders: "At the public meeting on 24 May 1972, Mr. A. Amirthalingam said, 'There will be a day for the Tamils also to use arms. Therefore, it is very necessary that they should have friendly relationships with certain organisations in foreign countries.'" Mr Gamini Jayasuriya, minister of agricultural development and research, reminded a receptive Parliament currently devoid of any TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front) representation.

A triangle surrounds the conundrum: India, Tamil hope, Sinhalese rage. It is an unstable triangle, the lines are liquid and totally controlled by every passing shiver in the mercury. The Tamils want to hold the Sinhalese hostage by the threat of the Indian army, the Sinhalese want to hold the Tamils hostage by their superior numbers and their army, and India is not quite sure what it wants except that it wants the problem to somehow just go away. However, if life were so simple there would be no need for Kissingers, of American or desi variety, would there?

A breakfast decision taken two oceans away by a man with severe problems of his own (like selling grains to the Soviets, arms to the anti-Soviets and hype to his electorate) suddenly compounded the problems of President Junius Jayewardene (incidentally, the Christian names are no indication of current loyalty to Christianity, just a reminder of the colonial past in which education and advance was easier if you submitted to a new god). When President Ronald Reagan invaded Grenada on the blatantly false pretext that a thousand American students were in grave danger after a militant coup, his strategy was based on his self-felt need to take on the Soviets, Cubans and their surrogates somewhere in the world before formally launching his bid for reelection to the world's most powerful chair. President Reagan could have hardly guessed how many nests he had poked, and how many hornets would begin buzzing in stray corners. One of these corners was Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lanka ruling establishment today is a step ahead of Pakistan in its desire to find everything right about American policy. This is a result of President Jayewardene's faith in free market capitalism and fear of Soviet-backed Delhi. In fact, there is a powerful viewpoint being expressed in Colombo at the moment, that Sri Lanka should leave the Non-Aligned Movement and formally join the Western alliance in order to get guarantors for its political independence. So it took a few hours for the message of Grenada to sink in: if Reagan could make invasion respectable on the excuse of a thousand students, how could it stop India from intervening in Sri Lanka for the safety of millions of Tamils? After that, it did not take a long while for posters to appear in the capital asking Reagan to get out of Grenada.

It was this fear of intervention that was President Jayewardene's first priority after the July riots. Feelers were sent to friendly countries asking if they could help not only with arms but also men (Sri Lanka's 15,000-strong army would hardly pose a problem for an Indian force operating with local popular support). The cocktail circuit in Colombo is rife with stories that Bangladesh, of all nations, promised to defend its ally with blood. However, the moot point is that the USA and Great Britain, while agreeing whole-heartedly that the sanctity of Sri Lanka should not be violated, did not have much to offer in real terms against an Indian attack. President Jayewardene's priorities have not changed in the least: he still must do everything possible to prevent such a situation. It was this deep-rooted apprehension which



Sirimavo (left) and Anura Bandaranaike

made Mr Hector Jayewardene (brother and special envoy of the President) sign literally on the dotted line in New Delhi so that Mrs Gandhi could tell Parliament that Colombo had acknowledged that India had a role to play in the region, a remarkable concession considering the mood in Sri Lanka then.

But it was that mood precisely which was not only President Jayewardene's ally but also his creation, and so began the dance of the two faces—a performance that President Junius Jayewardene has given with such dexterity and virtuosity that all the wise men of Delhi, despite their experience and power, find themselves foxed. President Jayewardene's strategy is based on the very simple technique of showing his audience only that face which he wants to be seen. And his Indian audience is not the Indian people or the Tamils: it is simply Mrs Gandhi and Mr G. Parthasarathy with not too much help from the foreign office. President Jayewardene has cottoned on to the fact that India does not have too many real options, once they rule out armed intervention. His success lies in softening Delhi's hardliners with flattery,

Victoria Building (Pettah) burnt during the July riots





Front page of a banned Sri Lanka newspaper

while continuing to do exactly as he pleases vis-a-vis the Tamils. Mr Hector (also known in clubland as Harry) Jayewardene and Mr S. Thondaman (the Tamil in the cabinet) and President Jayewardene allow Mrs Gandhi and Mr G. Parthasarathy to periodically declare great victories while the Colombo government goes about, with far less ado, its anti-Tamil exercises.

The President Jayewardene, who went on national radio and television while the fires were raging in July to announce that it was really the Sinhalese who were the true historical victims of Tamil arrogance and treachery, has changed on only one respect: he has become better informed about India. He now knows the reasons presumably why the Indian threat has receded: because with extremism raising its violent head in Punjab and Assam, Delhi is the last government which can support any secessionist movement formally. Colombo not only knows the contradictions in India's position, but also spends a good bit of effort letting everyone know it knows. How can India justify feeding and supporting the Liberation Tigers, giving them succour in Madras? Supposing Pakistan began similarly and equally openly giving shelter and arms to Sikh extremists, by basing them in Lahore, how would Delhi respond? It is a good question to which Mr Parthasarathy would have no answer. After all, the Colombo government has the morality of national integrity on its side, even if it may be guilty on many counts. It has used this advantage to the hilt. Result: another great bluff on the Tamils, with the helpless (to be magnanimous) support of India. The agreement that Mr Parthasarathy brought

back from Colombo, and which the Indian side broadcast as a magnificent breakthrough, was as near a sellout of the Tamils as possible. All that President Jayewardene had promised after the enormous tragedies of the past few months was that he would change the name of a stale and discredited idea. The Tamils began by demanding separation, were willing to accept federal autonomy and ended up getting a conditional promise. Worse, President Jayewardene sold the new Regional Council idea as something so wonderful that he would have to go through a referendum to get it passed. Once again, he was keeping his options: supposing the referendum voted a no with the clandestine approval of the ruling party? Where would Delhi be then?

And the truth is that when the July riots, so carefully planned by some Sinhalese, broke out it was India which had the aces. Not merely local but international sympathy was on the side of the Tamils, thanks to the brutality of the marauding Sinhalese. The government in Colombo was unnerved by the pace and intensity of events, and the conflict between the Tamil-haters like Cyril Marthwe and the moderates within the ruling coalition had acquired sharp edges. India had the moral advantage, and it was that which enabled Mr Narasimha Rao to dash across to Colombo and demand the protection for the Tamils, it was this that made Mrs Gandhi get away with the appointment of Mr G. Parthasarathy: no one can doubt his credentials, but as a Tamil himself was he the ideal negotiator? But while Delhi wasted time, President Jayewardene calmly went about the task of demolishing whatever place the TULF had won in the Sri Lanka power structure over years of struggle. The Tamil economic base in the south was rudely shattered by the mobs encouraged by the police and the armed forces: the shops were gutted, and the private homes, symbolising the achievement of a middle class man's life, were put to torch (kerosene supplied free of charge by the government). The political base had been exiled, with the proscription of the TULF, and the terror campaign which is still continuing against any Tamil activist. Far from anyone among the Sinhalese expressing any real regret for July, the mood has hardened with the success of every such anti-Tamil effort in the post-July period. Even the liberal Sinhalese in Colombo, while ruefully accepting that the charred and destroyed Tamil buildings littering Colombo's streets are unworthy of human beings, ask you in the same breath to consider if the Sinhalese did not have the justice of history on

The Sri Lankan army: show of brute force



Cyril Marthwe: Tamil-hater

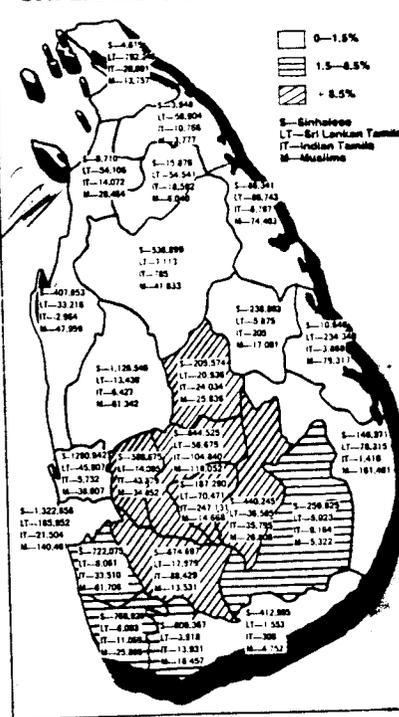
their side. It is almost as if one were hearing a minority sentiment, as if the Sinhalese were justifying the existence of their terrorists as an inevitable consequence of centuries of oppression. And it is, perhaps, true that the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka are a majority controlled by the apprehensions of a minority. They tend not to look upon the Tamils in their country as an entity of two-and-a-half million but immediately add the 60 million in Tamil Nadu to the count. It is a confused and confusing mix of myth and reality—but, however, you mix the two, however you cook it, the only thing that it ends up as is mutual hatred.

That is the key word: hatred. Tamils and Sinhalese do not want to live together not because one community has more jobs than the other, or because they speak different languages or have different religions, but simply because for countless generations the Jaffna Tamils have had total contempt for the Sinhalese and the Sinhalese have returned the compliment with hate. The Tamils have taken comfort and drawn arrogance both from their innate sense of superiority and the secure presence of Mother India at the back. The Sinhalese lost their relationship with the collapse of Buddhism—and

Hector Jayewardene (left) and PM Premadasa



SRI LANKA POPULATION 1961



China and Japan were too far away to become their protectors. And so there grew in this beautiful country a unique paradox: a minority with a majority complex and a majority with a minority fear. This conundrum is now working itself out in all the shades and forms hate can take.

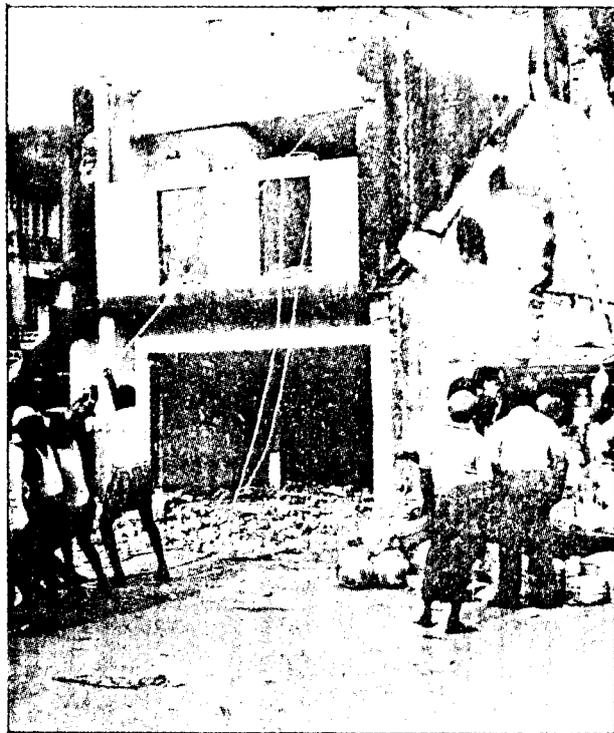
Anyone who thinks President Jayewardene wants an end to that hate has got his sums wrong, and presuming that President Jayewardene did want it to end, could he achieve it? Not at all likely. Interestingly, what the current crisis has done is to bring the two dominant mainstream political parties, whose leaders (Bandaranaike and Jayewardene) hate each other more than Mrs Gandhi and Mr Morarji Desai can conceive of, closer together. Even while Mr Parthasarathy was in town? during his last round of talks in early November, Mr Anura Bandaranaike, son of Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike whose civic rights have been taken away by the Jayewardene government in a display of the worst kind of political vendetta, was happily being crowned leader of the opposition, to cheers from the government benches in Parliament, in place of the absent Mr Amirthalingam. The last few months have, in fact, seen almost fraternal amity between these two great antagonists in the country's politics because of the common cause they have made on the Tamil problem. In other words, the Sinhala section of the country has discovered a rare unanimity. And of course, so have the Tamils. Only, their unanimity is about the desire to get out of this mess on the island paradise—with a part of paradise in their pockets.

In Jaffna, the Tamils behave as if it's all over bar the resolution in the United Nations. And the army of Sri Lanka behaves as if they have finally got their chance to be macho in occupied territory. On the other hand, there is no Tamil-Sinhalese communal trouble in this northern heart of Eelam, for the very good reason that there are no Sinhalese here. There were 4,068 Sinhalese (reference: the 1981 census) compared to 831,112 Tamils in Jaffna, and after July the government quietly picked up all the Sinhalese in Tamil land and took them away to the safety of Sinhala south while the Tamils in Colombo were still facing the organised mobs.

A visit to Jaffna provides a good indication of how far the Tamil north has travelled from the Sinhala south. In Colombo and Delhi the barter was being drawn up: give up the demand for secession, said Jayewardene (in other words, give up your main ace) and Colombo will consider turning the defunct district councils (from which TULF representatives have already resigned) into a bit more powerful district development councils, withdrawing the hated army from the Tamil areas and repealing the abhorred Anti-Terrorism Act (which, among other things, permits the army to dispose of a corpse without any post-mortem). In Jaffna they know such an agreement is a bind: the army might leave in the flow of a Delhi pact, but who is going to prevent it a couple of months later when the glare of publicity has turned away? The act may be repealed but will it stop rogue elements of the armed forces, who have indulged in a series of anti-Tamil attacks (including burning down the famous Jaffna Public Library in 1981), from continuing their harassment? And changing the name of the district council means nothing either. There was nothing wrong with the district councils in principle, which is why the TULF accepted them and put them into practice. It was just that when they began to look for the means to effect their decisions they found that either no one was listening or that they had no money. In other words, no guarantees will have any force until President Jayewardene can also show the ability to kill the power of the extremists within his coalition who will work to sabotage any understanding he may work out.

It is because the TULF knows the Cyril Matthews all

After the carnage



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President Jayewardene with G.Parthasarathy: can he enforce an agreement?

too well that it is seeking a more fundamental change in the Constitution towards a guaranteed near-autonomy. And this is why one of the crucial problems is going to be the right of the provinces to raise their own police forces (a right which exists in every federal structure, including, of course, India). It is Colombo's resistance to this idea which adds to the enormous mistrust that already exists. If President Jayewardene believes that a Jaffna police will only be a body of Liberation Tigers in uniform, why should the Tamils believe that the Sri Lanka forces are anything more than the anti-Tamil thugs in uniform?

And in the end, pacts and agreements signed are nothing but the famous scraps of paper until they are ratified by public acceptability. There can be no doubt in the mind of any reporter who has visited Jaffna that the Tamils are not going to accept the Jayewardene-Parthasarathy agreement, at least in the terms it has been reported till the moment of writing.

The July riots have predictably lent a fillip to the romance of extremism. The army has been entering schools to take down the names of enrolled students missing from class on the presumption that these teenagers have left home to join the liberation fighters. Tamils report the same phenomenon—but in the language of admiration. Children are leaving their homes, a TULF leader told us, with a note behind for the parents promising to rejoin their families on a more glorious dawn. It would be wrong to dismiss that as the stuff of adolescent poetry: the sentiment is turning young men into rebels. Already there is anger against the TULF and guerrilla leaders who have taken shelter in Madras. If the belief spreads that the Tamil leadership has sold out, the leaders will not be able to return to Jaffna—this time not because of the fear of the Sri Lanka army but out of fear of their followers. The heroes living comfortably in Madras and commuting to Delhi by plane or train know that.

The Tamils know what they want, the right to rule themselves, because they feel that the basic social connection with the Sinhalese has been destroyed. Autonomy, with only defence and finance in the hands of Colombo; self-rule, with the right to raise a police force and protect land from the colonisation of Sinhalese—the terminology used is the same as that used by Tamils.

Once again, in history, Humpty Dumpty has fallen. And once again all the king's horses and all the king's men are trying to put it together again.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY VIJITHA/YAPA ASSOCIATES

Jayewardene masterminded the July holocaust

How can the Sri Lanka Tamils vest any hope in the Regional Councils tentatively evolved by President Jayewardene, when it was he (in conjunction with a few others) who masterminded its sabotage 26 years ago? Sri Lanka's post-independence history has made even the most resilient Tamils of the island, irrevocably cynical. Today, if sections of the Tamils, obdurately refuse to even consider the G. Parthasarathy-Jayewardene proposals, one should not castigate them as being fastidious or unrealistically ambitious. Pacts and negotiated settlements agreed to by the Sinhala leaders ostensibly to settle the Tamils' grievances have been abrogated or reneged, time and again. In 1957, after a series of talks between the then Prime Minister Mr S.W. R.D. Bandaranaike and the Tamil leader S.J.V. Chelvanayagam (who founded the Federal Party in 1949) the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam (B-C) Pact was evolved. The crux of the B-C Pact was the setting up of Regional Councils in Tamil areas. The northern province was to constitute one Regional Council (RC) and the eastern province was to be divided into two or more councils. By an act of Parliament, power would be delegated to the RCs, the actual work being executed by elected regional

councillors. The RCs were to have wide powers over specified subjects including agriculture, cooperatives, land and land development, colonisation, education, health, industries and fisheries, water schemes and roads. The finances of the Regional Councils were to come from block grants provided by the government. The B-C Pact was the first step taken by the Sinhala leadership for the devolution of autonomy to the Tamils within a unitary Sri Lanka government.

However, Sinhala militants and chauvinists, with the Bhikkhu Peramuna (Buddhist Monks Front) in the forefront who had been clamouring for an era of "Sinhala only" wanted not just Sinhala domination but Tamil subjugation as well. Jayewardene, a right-wing Sinhala politician, member of the UNP (United National Party) and a devout Buddhist has always been closely associated with the Buddhist clergy. On 4 October 1957, he led his famous march to Kandy to invoke the blessings of the gods for his campaign against the B-C pact.

The stentorian protests of the Sinhala extremists effectively stymied Bandaranaike from taking any steps to translate the Pact into law. It was Bandaranaike's ambivalence and inconsistency vis-a-vis the B-C

pact that first sowed the seeds of mistrust in the Tamils. On 9 April 1958, a group of Buddhist monks went in procession to the Prime Minister's residence in Colombo, squatted on the lawns and insisted on a written undertaking that he would abrogate the B-C Pact. Mr Bandaranaike succumbed to the pressure and the B-C Pact was abrogated with immediate effect. With that the B-C Pact, "one of the few statesmanlike compromises ever to be attempted in Sri Lanka" as a historian put it, came to an ignominious end. Its abrogation, however, opened a blood-spattered chapter of ethnic conflict in post-independent Sri Lanka, in which the Tamils would always be at the receiving end. In May 1958, the Federal Party held its annual convention at Vavuniya in the northern province and resolved to "launch direct action by non-violent *satyagraha* as the B-C Pact had been abandoned." Tamil FP supporters from Batticaloa district, returning by train after the convention, were stopped at Polonnaruwa railway junction and assaulted. A few were killed. From this incident onwards, anti-Tamil riots began to occur at frequent and regular intervals, the latest being the racial holocaust of July 1983.

Ever since Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, there is a discernible trend towards establishing a Sinhala-Buddhist nation. As a revealing tail-piece one needs only to refer to Mr Bandaranaike's assassination. On 25 September 1959, a Buddhist monk named Somarama shot and killed Bandaranaike on the verandah of his house when the latter was paying his respects to the visiting monk. Moderate Sinhalese did turn their wrath against the *bhikkus* and many were chased or stoned when spotted on the streets. The probe into the assassination indicted none other than Buddharakita, the Kelaniya temple high priest, and secretary of the Eksath Bhikku Peramuna (United Monks Front). He was convicted for conspiracy to murder. The assassination cannot be dismissed merely as a violent act of hate. It is fraught with political significance. Because of the B-C Pact Bandaranaike came to be criticised by the Buddhist clergy as a man who espoused middle-of-the-road policies. His assassination is the symbol of the brutal intolerance of right-wing reactionaries and Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists to any middle-of-the-road policies that dilute the concept or retard the realisation of a Sinhala-Buddhist nation.

Anita Pratap

Impact of the July riots

ON EMPLOYMENT

- 15,000 unemployed in affected industries; 5,500 in 1,100 shops destroyed in Colombo; 9,500 in 1,900 shops destroyed elsewhere in the country; and, 6,000 to 9,000 engaged in the tourist industry.
- Unemployment rate up by six-tenths of one per cent in the country.
- Two and one-half per cent of those employed in the manufacturing sector are out of employment.
- Three per cent of those employed in wholesale and retail trade are now unemployed.

ON INDUSTRY

- 152 industries within 30 miles of Colombo affected by the disturbances; 63 per cent of the affected units are in the textile and garment sector where 11 per cent of the workers and 15 per cent of the production was affected; Rs 800 million worth of export orders lost.
- The other industries affected include PVC pipes, asphalt, cosmetics and perfumery, polythene film, coconut milling, tyre re-building, dry cell batteries. In the coconut industry nine mills were completely destroyed and a ban has been placed on the export of coconut oil and copra. In the tea sector not much of physical damage has been done to the tea estates. But there was a disruption of work and it presents long term problems if estate labourers decide to leave Sri Lanka out of fear.
- 40 per cent of the affected industries will take at least six months to one year to be operational again while 25 per cent of the factories can start production in one or two months.

Source: US AID report.

'The future will depend on the boys and the guns'

Dr S. Tharmalingam told M. J. Akbar

Prisons Superintendent N.J. Philips yesterday arranged for an armed escort for Dr S. Dharmalingam, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Front (TELF) leader, who refused to leave prison on his release unless he was escorted to Jaffna. Dr Dharmalingam was released on Friday morning on orders from the ministry of defence. He was being detained under the emergency regulations.

—Report in a Colombo newspaper on Monday, 7 November

The man who did not want to go home is 76 years old and spells his surname with a T rather than a D. Till July he was a dissident, today he is in exile: the fact that he still lives in Jaffna does not matter, his heart left the island called Sri Lanka and his body will follow, though his mind will still remain at the service of the Tamil cause. Till July, Dr Tharmalingam was a calm man, ready to pay the demanded price for participation in the struggle for an Eelam; today, he is shattered, and breaks down and weeps in the middle of the conversation. He has not shaved since that day in July when they collected him from his middle class, conservative home in Jaffna and flew him to a prison in Colombo: the white rough beard is both a sign of anger and impotence, a despairing gesture against man and fate. Four months ago, Dr Tharmalingam was a man with determination; today, he is shattered: he trembles at the memory of prison and still is awe at the good fortune which enabled him to survive. He is melting the gold of his wife's bangles to offer it to the gods at the local temple. Dr Tharmalingam saw death in the eye and beat it

Kuttimani, the Tamil leader who was killed



back. He heard death in the adjoining room, and then watched it near him and then miraculously turn away. Dr Tharmalingam was in that Colombo jail on the night when hooligans, encouraged by the authorities, massacred Tamil prisoners inside the jail. Dr Tharmalingam, a political detainee, was on the list but he survived thanks to defensive action taken by the prisoners. We met him three days after he had returned to that simple home of his which he once he would never see again. This was the first interview he has given.

Q: Why were you arrested?

A: I was asked for a *hartal* in Jaffna because Trincomalee was burning; Tamils had been attacked there. Our protest was on the 28th; we were taken in on the 30th. I was in prison for four months.

Q: Could you describe that terrible night of the massacre?

A: (After breaking down and recovering) I saw people being murdered... There were 200 guards with 50 guns, but... On 25th July: we were also marked for death. I am just coming from the bank from where I have brought back my wife's bangles to give to the temple... 37 people were killed on that day. The previous day I was taken out of a cell and put in a hall; that is how I got saved. There were about 300 prisoners in the jail, about a 100 of them Tamils; this hundred included both criminal and political prisoners.

The 37 prisoners who died were selected. The Sinhalese prisoners attacked the other prisoners. It was an unbearable sight. One boy was in the cell in front of me. His father was dead, and he was the eldest of the family. All he had done was reported a complaint of a fire in front of the Jaffna Kutchery to the administration, and they arrested him. He used to say, "I am here. I don't know what my brothers and sisters are doing." He was also murdered... I heard his shouts; it happened between two and four.

They came to murder us on the 27th. We had discussed what we would do in such a situation. We decided to resist. Somebody suggested that we break the table in our hall and make the logs of wood our weapons. They came on the 27th; one person came to murder us, we hit him and he ran away, leaving behind an iron bar, about two feet long. We fought for half an hour; we used that bar to hit anyone who tried to force open the gate of the hall. Our boys fought well. All this while we kept shouting for help, telling the guards that the Sinhalese had come to murder us, but no one came to our rescue.

After that night we were shifted. A military van came and we were taken to Batticaloa. At Batticaloa the people gave us a warm welcome; we had no vests, no shirts; we were about 16 of us, and they brought us to Batticaloa by plane because they were afraid of the Tigers attacking the vehicle on the road and rescuing us.

All the prisoners who were killed were political... they knew what they were doing. In particular Kuttimani's people (a group of Tigers) were selected. Kuttimani was a strong young chap. Kuttimani's eyes were pulled out; he was tortured to death in the prison cell.

We escaped because we started attacking; that shows what cowards they (the Sinhalese) were... We were all prisoners, not physically fit, and yet we managed to chase them away.

In the four months in prison, I could read a bit, but not write. Later, my food came from outside, from a brahmin; I am a vegetarian. When I went in, I said this prison was a jungle, so I would not shave—therefore, the beard. Now I have the obligation to the temple because of a vow I took in jail. I have to convert the gold of my wife's bangles into a *bale*, that is the word in Tamil. I do not know the word in English, and give it to the Nalloor temple.

Q: Did you expect to be released?

A: Yes, I was expecting the release. I asked for the army escort from the prison to my home because I did not trust the police. I did not want to come alone. I have lost weight, and my vision to some extent; I have started wobbling. I am 76 now. I was a practicing medical man till the day they arrested me; but I have stopped now as I am not sure of myself anymore.

Q: Are you going to stay on in Sri Lanka?

A: I am quitting Ceylon. I have been here from birth. I have a right to say that I belong to that one per cent which led a productive life: I produced my own food, kept a goat for my milk; I did not try to lend money; I dug the soil and tried to grow what I could... My children—four daughters, of which three are doctors and the fourth is married to one, in fact, all four sons-in-law are doctors—are in England and Australia. Just yesterday, I got a letter from my daughter. 'We don't want to hear anything like this in the future,' she wrote. Today, I feel we must run away. Now I will look upon India as my country.

Q: What do you think will be the future of the land you are leaving behind?

A: The future will depend on the boys and the guns.

Q: There is a picture of Gandhiji on the wall: how can you talk of violence?

A: The other side does not understand what is *ahimsa*. Even yesterday people came here. I told them we are not doing anything wrong; carry on with the right thing... But violence will not end in anything productive; it will end in something destructive. Some kind of settlement will have to be found or Ceylon will not thrive.

Q: How do you view India's role?

A: We have a lot of hope in India. This time 2,000 Indian Tamils (as distinct from the original Tamil settlers in the north of Sri Lanka) were murdered—for what? They did not ask for anything. They were absolutely innocent. They are treated like sheep. They came here to work. Their sweat and work made Ceylon rich: no one will deny that. Ceylon survives by their sweat. Violence is making Ceylon vulgar—the word is vulgar. At no stage have I handled a gun... the gun, in the end, is of no use: one bullet is not going to help anything.

We don't know what is going to happen. Possibly America is stepping into the game. Isn't it better to sit and solve our problems rather than (ask) someone to come and sell their arms to us? The Tiger boys are boys—young hotheads, doing some wrong things as well. But if my children do wrong, I won't murder them—I'll advise them.

Q: How should the problem be solved?

A: A good heart is all that's needed: a solution where clashes are ended. Let it be some kind of separation: the US federal form, the Kashmir form. From 1979, I have met Mr Amirthalingam five times and said he is misleading us—we should tackle the main points and settle it. Tamils have been kept in the dark. Would it be any use to have a Vietnam? Some honest solution, short of a complete break.



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The Soaltee Surprise

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