

TAMIL WOMEN'S LEAGUE NEWSLETTER 1

**tamil
maathu**

**தமிழ்
மரது**

TO SERVE WOMANKIND

September 1984

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CONTENTSPage

- 3.....History of Tamil Women's League
7.....Don't you call this genocide?
10.....கிடுதலுப் போரில் பெண்கள்
14.....Nirmala and other Tamil women in our struggle
16.....Reproductive rights of Tamil women on the island of Sri Lanka
18.....Freedom Song

This is the first issue of Tamil Maathu, produced by Tamil Women's League. Please send your letters, suggestions and criticisms to Tamil Women's League at 23A Sumatra Road, London NW6.

A brief history of Tamil Women's League is given on pages 3-6. If you are interested in knowing more about our activities, please contact us at the above address, or on 01-226 2367.

HISTORY OF TAMIL WOMEN'S LEAGUE

In February 1983, a group of progressive Tamil women in London got together to talk about the possibility of organising an autonomous women's group. It was decided that such a group should oppose oppression and work for racial harmony and world peace, promote Tamil culture, improve communications among Tamil women in the UK and with others, and give help and support to women in need of these.

At this time a campaign was going on for the release of our sister Nirmala Nithiyananthan, who was arrested on 18 November 1982 in Jaffna and held in a notorious male army camp in Jaffna without a female guard or officer.

Why an autonomous women's group?

This is a question asked not only by our brothers but also by our sisters. The answer is, it is not that we do not want to be part of our struggle or that we do not want to work with males in an organisation.

The reason is very simple. Women are the most oppressed in our society. We are oppressed by our culture, religion and also by our men. To free ourselves from that oppression, we must organise to discuss the issues that concern us most.

The class and caste systems make the lives of our poor sisters in Sri Lanka like those of slaves. They are the most oppressed. Our Tamil sisters in the Sri Lankan plantations are the most exploited.

The dowry system undermines women's role as equal partners in marriage and also in our society. The dowry system destroys the very basis of human dignity. We are treated as commercial property, valued only as family ornaments and mechanical doers of housework.

The dowry system is affecting the future of many thousands of poor women throughout South Asia.

Political oppression

Caste and class divide the Tamil nation in Sri Lanka, which is facing genocide by the Sri Lankan chauvinist government aided and advised by the Western superpowers. Still, the 3 million Tamils out of 15 million people on the island are not united to fight against the state.

Tamils have been divided by regional, religious, caste and class differences. Most of the male-dominated organisations and political groups reflect this pattern.

As women, the most oppressed, we want changes in our society in the future, and also want to play a role in the freedom struggle. Hence we thought carefully about setting up an autonomous women's group.

We will work for our national freedom, but at the same time we must also understand our position in society and the role we have to play in the freedom struggle. There will be no freedom without women's freedom!

Why is it important?

Since 1948, we, the Tamil nation, have been facing cultural and political oppression and now genocide by the Sri Lankan government. We know from history how many minority nations have been wiped out by powerful nations. We also know how racism has worked to destroy other small nations. A recent example is that of the Jews in Western Europe in the 1930s.

The Tamil nation in Sri Lanka is on the way to freedom. Our struggle has reached the point of a fight for survival. Without a struggle, there will be no freedom. It is our lives, our future, our freedom for which we must struggle.

Why has this group been formed in the UK?

It is our duty to give our support and solidarity to our people who are struggling for their freedom. Also, we must analyse our situation in a racist state like the UK.

The economic and political situation in the UK is terrible. The

world recession gives little hope for Britain. Over 4 million people are unemployed. A disproportionate number are black. We have no security here. We are third class citizens in the racist United Kingdom. Our children are going to face racial discrimination and violence. We all know how law and order works against us.

We are never going to be 'wanted' equally in this country. We will be wanted for cheap labour. We will be wanted for cheap labour and slavish jobs. We will be wanted by racist thugs for their sadistic pleasures.

So most of us want to go back to our homeland; but we cannot go back unless we have our freedom. We will not achieve this goal unless we all fight for it. We must unite for our freedom and peace.

What has Tamil Women's League done in the past?

Since February 1983, TWL has staged a number of pickets in front of the Ceylon Tea Centre and organised a rally in August 1983 against the pogrom. Up to now, we have attended nearly a hundred meetings to publicise our struggle in Sri Lanka, and get support and solidarity from political, human rights and liberation groups throughout the UK; we have also spoken on an international platform in the Netherlands. We are supported by almost all of the progressive and feminist movements in the UK. We have explained our struggle and expressed our feelings about our people's sufferings in national and international forums.

At a parliamentary level, TWL has met Labour women MPs in 1983 to explain the situation of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and ask them to campaign to stop military aid to Sri Lanka by the British government.

TWL is widely recognised as a human rights campaigning body. It is not affiliated to any particular political party or group.

We are organised as a collective. We discuss and debate all issues together before we put out leaflets or posters, or give talks on political platforms.

This is a brief diary of some of the events we have organised or participated in up to now.

Diary

- 15 January 1983 Picket in front of Tea Centre for freedom of Nirmala
- 6 February 1983 First informal meeting of TWL
- 20 February 1983 TWL committee formed
- 6 March 1983 Black women's international at Brixton. TWL delegate talked about Tamil national question in Sri Lanka. Over 100 black women attending the meeting gave a message of support promising full solidarity with the Tamil people in Sri Lanka
- 16 April 1983 Picket in front of Tea Centre for freedom of Nirmala and other political prisoners
- 23 April 1983 TWL social evening
- 27 July 1983 Picket in front of High Commission organised by CREPP
- 6 August 1983 TWL picket and rally. Chris Smith MP came to Hyde Park to give solidarity speech. TWL speaker said at rally, 'Our brothers, 53 of them, were brutally murdered by government-backed thugs. We condemn the Sri Lankan government and its violation of human rights. Our people in Sri Lanka are facing genocide. We must protest at the violations and continue our campaign for human rights in Sri Lanka'
- 17 August 1983 Meeting in Manchester about Sri Lanka organised by Asian youth

- 13 October 1983 War on Want meeting in Manchester. Speech on 'Don't you call it genocide?'
- 7 November 1983 LSE women students' meeting. TWL delegate talked about 'Tamil women in struggle'
- 15 November 1983 Talk on Third World women at Chequers Adult Education Centre
- December 1983 Meeting of Labour group on human rights in Sri Lanka. A TWL delegate said, 'The government is trying to justify itself by saying that violence against Tamils by the majority Sinhalese is a reaction to the call for separation by Tamil separatists. Tamils didn't ask for separation until 1977 but they have faced violence against them since 1956 in racial pogroms. The government portrays the Tamil nation as terrorists. But in actual fact it is the state that is terrorist. They have organised and operated pogroms against the Tamils in order to exterminate the small Tamil nation from the island. The racism and chauvinism of the Sinhalese parliamentarians and Buddhist clergy is the ideology of the Sinhala-Buddhist state.'
- 10 December 1984 International women's bazaar. TWL had a stall with leaflets, posters and traditional food. We had constructive and interesting conversations with other Third World women in liberation struggles
- 18 February 1984 Social night organised with ESC for fund raising. TWL has been finding it very difficult to raise sufficient funds for its work, especially its international campaign for Tamil women in prisons
- 29 February 1984 Islington mayor met over 18 representatives from human rights campaigns for various parts of the world, including TWL
- 27 April 1984 Second social evening. It was a politico-social evening and was very successful (see Freedom Song)
- 28 April 1984 Conference on 'Women Challenging Racism' organised to discuss women in struggle internationally. A TWL delegate expressed forcefully and movingly the history of the oppressed Tamil nation and Tamil women. One of the questions asked was why TWL is not campaigning for oppressed women workers. A TWL delegate disagreed vehemently and pointed out that the most oppressed women workers are the Tamil women who comprise 60% of the workforce on the plantations, many of whom are stateless and for whom TWL has been campaigning very hard. Regarding the Sinhalese women workers, though TWL does not deny that they are oppressed, it sees the fundamental contradiction as the national contradiction; Tamil women are the most oppressed in this regard and it becomes the most important duty of TWL to campaign for them.
- 3 June 1984 Media conference at County Hall. TWL delegate in a workshop on the Third World and the media discussed the distortions, sensationalism and stereotyping by the British media in their propagation of news about the Tamil problem. We were also able to share a common feeling with the other delegates from liberation struggles all over the Third World
- 26 June 1984 Meeting with Irish political group on political prisoners

22-28 July 1984

International conference on reproductive rights. 400 women delegates from over 60 countries and 120 autonomous women's groups got together in Amsterdam to discuss and debate the political, economic and sexual issues which affect women's reproductive rights. The TML delegate asked a crucial question of the Western feminists who do not understand women in liberation struggles in the Third World such as the Tamil women: 'How can our women fight for their reproductive rights when they do not have the right to exist?' This became a rallying call to the Third World delegates who saw eye to eye with TML on the issue of reproductive rights. The TML delegate explained the politics of our land and people and their control by the larger Sinhalese nation and its back-up forces - the US and British imperialists and their agents. As a result of this, women's bodies, indeed their very existence, is no longer under their control. See leaflet.



Members of Tamil Women's League assembling on 6th August 1983 after picketing outside the Ceylon Tea Centre for the protest march to Hyde Park

**DON'T YOU CALL
THIS GENOCIDE?**



However, the British rule nurtured jealousies and communalism between the communities in line with their divide and rule policy which they pursued

in all colonies.

Anti-Tamil communllism escalated after independence when despite safe-guards against discrimination in the constitution, the United National Party(which also forms the present government) in 1947 took away the citizenship and right to vote of Plantation Tamils.

In 1950 The government started a policy of deliberate Sinhalese settlement in Tamil areas.

In 1956 Government made Sinhalese the official language to please the Sinhalese majority. Tamil leaders staged a peaceful demonstration. They were attacked by a Sinhalese mob. The government took no action.

In 1958 Tamils faced major violence after protesting against injustice. 100,000 had to flee to the Tamil Homelands. Hundreds were killed and women were raped.

In 1961 Police and army violently attacked peaceful Tamil demonstrators protesting against the imposition of Sinhala as official language in Tamil areas(almost 100% of Tamils in the North or East cannot understand Sinhala).

In 1972 to 1976 Tamil youths were arrested and tortured by the police in a massive campaign of state terrorism. These detentions were reported by Amnesty International in 1975.

In 1974 International Tamil Conference disrupted by the police. 8 Tamils died.

In 1977 Anti-Tamil violence reached a peak. Tamils were no longer safe even in their own traditional homelands. In the Plantations 'linerooms' were burnt and looted, Tamil women were gang raped. Evidence of some of the most brutal gang rapes have been recorded before the Commission that inquired into the events of 1977. Hundreds of Tamils were killed all over Sri Lanka. This is what led to the overwhelming support for the formation of a separate state.

In 1979 Tamil youth finding that no solution by peaceful means was possible sought other methods. The state responded with a draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act(based on the British PTA but much harsher). On 11 July President JR Jayawardene gave a Hitler-like order to his commanders to eradicate terrorism in 6 months. Police started killing and torturing on a mass scale. Torture camps were set up, many youth 'disappeared'.

In 1981 A new wave of state violence began. It engulfed the whole Tamil community. Temples were burnt down. The library in Jaffna was razed to the ground destroying irreplaceable manuscripts and documents relating to Tamil culture and history. An M.P.'s house was also burnt down. All this was done by Jayawardene's police.

In 1983 The violence escalated beyond all previous levels. Jaffna town was burnt for the third time by the army, Vavuniya town was burnt, in Trincomalee 250 houses were burnt, 19 were killed. Tamil people were burnt alive in buses, killing, rape, mutilating and looting continued through June and July. On July 22nd three schoolgirls were kidnapped by armed forces in Jaffna. They were raped for three days before being released in Jaffna town. As a result one girl committed suicide, one girl has gone mad, the whereabouts of the third is unknown. In retaliation Tamil youths ambushed and killed 13 soldiers in Jaffna. Since then Tamils in Sri Lanka have faced Genocide.

In a recent massacre in Wellikada Prison, 52 political prisoners were killed. We are very concerned about the safety of Ms. Nirmala Nithiyananthan- a feminist writer- and Father Singarayer, as well as many other Tamil political prisoners, who face similar dangers.

What You Can Do

PROTEST to the President of Sri Lanka

LOBBY your Member of Parliament

SIGN the petition

RAISE it in your organisation(s)

TELL your friends

விடுதலைப் போரில் பெண்கள்

சமுதாயச் சடங்கு, கலாச்சாரம் என்கின்ற பெயரில் தமிழ்ப்பெண்கள் உரிமைகள் காலம் காலமாக மறைக்கப்பட்டு, அல்லது மறைக்கப்பட்டு வந்துள்ளன. பிள்ளைகள் பெற்ற வளர்க்கவும், வீட்டு வேலைகளைக் கவனிப்பதற்கும், குடும்பத் தலைவனின் சகல தேவைகளைப்பூர்த்தி செய்து செய்வதற்குமாகவே பெண் படைக்கப்பட்டாள் என்கின்ற ஒரு கூற்று, பல தலைமுறைகளாக மக்கள் மத்தியில் நிலவி வந்தது. பல்வேறு வடிவங்களில் சமுதாயக் கொடுமைகளை அனுபவித்த வரும் பெண்கள், தமது நிலைபுறந்த அவற்றின் தாக்கங்களில் நசிவுக்கு நலிந்த போகாது, தம்மை விடுவித்துக்கொள்ள முடியாத வாறு, அதிகார வரீகம் சர்வதேச ரீதியில் சட்டங்களை இயற்றிப் பேணிப் பாதுகாத்த வந்துள்ளது.

பெண்களின் உரிமைகள் பறிக்கப்படும்பொழுது மானம் மரியாதை என்கின்ற பெயரில், அவளது வாய்க்குப் பூட்டுப் போட்டு அடுக்கி விட, சமுதாயச் சூழல்கள் முன்வருகின்றன. ஆனால் அடக்குமுறைக் கொடுமைகள் அதிகரித்த நாட்கள் விடுதலை பெறத் துடித்த காலங்களில் பிரச்சனையின் வடிவங்கள் இயங்கியலரீதியில் அனுகூல ஆராயப்பட வேண்டிய அவசியம் ஏற்படுகின்றது. இவ்வுய்வின் அடிப்படையில் நெறிசார்ந்த ஒழுங்கமைக்கப்பட்ட புரட்சிப் போராட்ட நடவடிக்கைகளில், பெண்கள் தன்னம்பிக்கையோடும் துணிவோடும் ஈடுபடும் போது, உருவாக்கப்படும் சட்ட நலங்களுக்களில் இவர்களின் உரிமைகளும் முற்றாக ஏற்றுக் கொள்ளப்படும் என்பதற்கு, உருவாக்கப்பட்டுள்ள சோசலிச நாட்கள் சான்ற பகர்கின்றன. பல தலைமுறைகளாக ஒடுக்கப்பட்டு வந்த இனம் தன்னிலைபுறந்த, அரசு அடக்குமுறைக்கு எதிராகக் கிளர்ந்தெழுந்த, மக்களடிப்படையில் பரவலாக்கப்பட்ட ஒரு போராட்டத்திட்டத்தை முன் வைக்கும்பொழுது பெண்களின் பங்கும், அதாவது அதிகாரப் பூர்வமான நடவடிக்கைகளில் அவர்களின் செயற்பாடும் அத்தியாவசியமாகின்றது. இக் காலகட்டத்தில்தான் இதுவரை காலமும் இவர்கள் உள்ளத்தை உறுத்திவந்த பிரச்சனைகளின் தாக்கங்கள் வெளிப்பட்டு, நிரந்தரமாக அவற்றைத், "தீர்த்து வைப்பதற்கான நடவடிக்கைகள் மேற்கொள்ளப்பட்டு, ஒழுங்கமைக்கப்பட்ட, ஒட்டுமொத்த போராட்ட வடிவத்தினால் அடக்கப்படுவது இயங்கியல்வரலாற்று உண்மையாகும்.

வேலைக்காரிகளில்லாத ஒரு சமுதாயத்தை உருவாக்க முற்போக்குவாதிகள் விரும்பியதும் எமதியதும் உண்மை. ஆனால் அவர்கள் மனத்தில் அக்கருத்துக்கள் ஊடுருவிப் பாய்ந்த அவர்கள் எண்ணப்பாட்டில் ஒரு மாற்றத்தை ஏற்படுத்தி, வாழ்வின் மறுமலர்ச்சி உலகாக்கும் வகையில் அணி திரட்ட முயலவில்லை.

குடிசைக் கும்மாளமடித்த, குதிரைப் பந்தயத்தில் பதைததைக் கொட்டி அதாரியாகத் திரியும் ஒரு மனிதன்கூட, கைவன் என்கின்ற ஆவத்கிழி, பெண்ணின் திறமையையும் சக்தியையும் பயன்படுத்தி, குடும்பப் பாரம் முழுமையையும், அவள் தலையில் கட்டி அல்லப்பட்டு அவகியுற டவக்கிறதே தவிர, வீட்டை நிர்வகிக்கும் பொறுத்பைத் தானே வைத்துக் கொள்ள விரும்புகிறாள். "கல்லாணம் கைவன் புல்லாணம் புருசன்", என்கின்ற முகமொழிக்கேற்ப வாழவேண்டாமே என்கின்ற எண்ணத்தில், பெண் இவற்றைப் பொறுத்ததுக் கொள்ள தன்னைப் பக்குவப்படுத்திக் கொள்கிறாள். இச் சமுதாயச் சுரண்டல்களிலிருந்து தன்னை விடுவித்துக்கொள்ளும் மார்க்கத்தை வீட்டு மூலக்குள் ஒருங்கியிருக்கும் பெண்ணின் எடுத்துக்கூறி, அவர்களை உணர்ந்த கொள்ள வைக்காத வரை, விடுதலை என்கின்ற சொல்லுக்கு அர்த்தமே இல்லாத போய்விடும்.

விருத லைப் போராட்ட ஆரம்பப் பணிகளில் தமிழை ஈடுபடுத்திய பெண்களின் நிலைமையும் கூட இந்த அடக்குமுறைச் சுரண்டலுக்கு விதிவிலக்கானதல்ல. குடும்பப்பிணியிலானாலும் சரி, சமுதாய முன்னேற்றத் தங்கங்களிலானாலும் சரி, இன விருத லை அல்லது வர்க்கத்தின் புரட்சி அமைப்புக்களிலானாலும் சரி, பெண்களின் திறமையையும் சக்தியையும் புகழ் படுத்த முயல்வார்களே தவிர அமைப்பு நிர்வாகத்திலும் பொறுப்பிலும் அவர்களின் நிலைப்பாட்டை உறுதிப்படுத்த முடியாதவாறு அவர்களது மனநிலை மழுங்கிப்போய் காணப்படுவதை நாம் காணக்கூடியதாகவுள்ளது. தப்பித்தவறி ஒரு பெண் தன் சொந்த இன்ப தனிப்பங்க லைப்புறக்கணித்து, தனக்கு ஏற்பட்ட கொடுமை நிறைந்த அனுபவங்களின்பதாக்கங்களைப் பொருட்படுத்தாது, சமுதாய இன விருத லைப் போராட்டப்பணிகளில் தன்னை முழுமையாக ஈடுபடுத்தி முன்னேற்ற வந்தவிட்டாளேயானால், அவளது முன்னேற்றத்தில் ஆர்வம் காட்டி வலுபுட்டி வந்த கணவன்கூட அதைப்பொறுத்தக்கொள்ள அல்லது ஏற்றுக்கொள்ள முடியாத தனிப்பதற்கும், அதைத்தொடர்ந்து வரும் கழிந்தலயால் குடும்ப அமைதி சீர்குலைந்து குழப்பங்கள் உருவாவதற்கும், நமது தமிழ் சமுதாயப் பிண்ணியே காரணமாகின்றது. இச்சூழ்நிலைகளை ஆராய்ந்து, மனித சக்தியை விரையமாக்காத, திறமையுள்ள பெண்களின் ஒத்தழைப்பினால் விருத லைப் போராட்டப் பயணத்தைத் தொடர வேண்டும் என்கின்ற உண்மையை உறுதிப்படுத்த வேண்டிய பாரிய பொறுப்பும் கடமையும் நம்முடையதேயாகும்.

தந்த லைத்தாங்களே தலைவர்களாகவும், வழிகாட்டிகளாகவும் என்னிக் கொண்டு, பொதுவுடமைப் பெட்டகத்தின் திறவுகோல் தங்கள்கரங்களில் மட்டும்தான் தரப்பட்டுள்ளதாகவும் ஐந்தாண்டுகள் போராட்டம் தங்களது தலைமையில் தான் உருவெடுக்க முடியும், என்றும் இளைஞர் அணியினரை நம்ப வைக்கும் மாணிடரும் நம்மிடையே உலாவருகின்றனர். அதிகரித்து வரும் செருக்கடி நிலைமையுடைய இளைஞர்களின் அரசியல் அறிவும் ஈடுபாடும் வளர்ச்சியடைகின்றது. இப்போக்கிற்கு ஈடுகொடுத்து அவர்களை வழிநடத்த முடியாத வாறு அன்றாடப்பிரச்சனைகள் தலைவர்க்கும் போது அவற்றைத் தீர்த்து இதைத் தீர்ச்செல்ல வக்கில்லாத பரிதவிக்கும் தலைவர்களுக்கும் நாம் காண்கின்றோம். இச்சந்தர்ப்பங்களில் பெரும்பான்மை வெற்றி பெற்று வந்தாலும் காலப்போக்கில் நல்ல கருத்துக்களால் வளர்க்கப்படும் இளைஞர்களின் உண்மை நிலையை உணர்ந்தகொள்ளும் வாய்ப்பு ஏற்பட்டு, இப்பெரும்பான்மை இனங்காணப்பட்டு தாமதமாகவே உதிர்ந்து போய்விடும் என்பது புரட்சிப் புரவலன் வெணினி கருத்துக்கொருக்கில் ஒன்றாகும். பொதுமை பொதுவுடமை தர்க்கீகம் என்பன அந்த வார்த்தைகளை உதிர்ப்பவர்களின் சொந்த வாழ்வில் புதுமைப் புரட்சியை ஏற்படுத்தாத வரை மக்களால் இக்கருத்துக்களைப் புரிந்துகொள்ள வைக்கவும்முடியா ஒரு சூழ்நிலை உருவாவதும் உண்மையாகும்.

இன்று லைங்கை வாழ்ந்தமிழ் பேசும் இனம் எதர்நோக்கியுள்ள அடக்குமுறைக்கொடுமைகள் ஒருபக்கமும் சர்வதேசப்படைகளின் குவிப்பு மற்ருருபுறமுமாக மக்களை நிலையான ஒரு பயங்கரச்சூழ்நிலையில் தொடர்ந்த அழிவுநிலையில் வைத்திருப்பதைக் காணக்கூடியதாகவுள்ளது. எனவே எமது பிரச்சனைகளை சர்வதேசப்பிரச்சனைகளுடனும் நிலைமையுடனும் ஒப்பிட்டுப்பார்க்க வேண்டிய பொறுப்பும் கடமையும் நம்முடையதாகும். அத்தோடு இப்படைகளின் கட்டு முயற்சியின் பிண்ணியையும் ஆழமாகப் பார்க்க வேண்டிய நிலையில் நாம் உள்ளோம். உலக வல்லரசுகளுக்கிடையிலான அணுவாபுதப்போட்டி தலைகீழியுள்ள இக்காலகட்டத்தில் எமது விருத லைப் போராட்டமும் அதன்மையடைந்துள்ளது என்பது கன்கூடு. அத்தோடு உலகின் பல பாகங்களிலும் எல்லை, இன, நிற, மொழி,

சாதி அடக்கமுறைகளுக்கு எதிரான போராட்ட நிலைமைகளையும், இவற்றை உடைத்தெறியும் வர்க்க அடிப்படையிலான ஒரு ஒழுங்கமைக்கப்பட்ட சக்தியின் தோற்றத்தையும் நிலைமையையும், அதன் வளர்ச்சியையும் காண முடிகின்றது.

இலங்கைத் தீவில் ஏற்பட்டுள்ள பொருளாதார நெருக்கடியைச் சமாளிக்க முடியாத தனிக்கும் முதலாளித்துவ சோ வனிச அரசு இன்று சர்வ வல்லமை பொருந்திய பயங்கரவாதக் குழுவின் உதவியை நாடிவருகிறது. முதலாளித்துவ போக்களத்தில் பயங்கரத்தாக்குதலில் இருந்தும், ஒருக்குமுறைக் கொடுமைகளிலிருந்தும் நம் இனம் விடுதலை பெற வேண்டுமேயானால் அதி உண்மையான கட்டுப்பாட்டின் அடிப்படையில் உருவான, ஒழுங்கமைக்கப்பட்ட போர்த்தந்திர முறைகளைக் கையாளச் கூடிய, தன்னலமற்ற போராளிகளை உள்ளடக்கிய ஒரு இயக்கத்தின் பரிசும வளர்ச்சி அவசியமாகின்றது.

1948ல் இலங்கை சுதந்திர மடைந்தபோது, ஆட்சிப்பொறுப்பை மட்டும் பெரும்பான்மை வாக்குப்பலத்தின் கரங்களில், பிரித்தானிய அரசு கையளித்திருந்தது. ஆனால் 72 மே 22 ல்தான் நமது தேசிய இறைமையையும் ஆட்சி உரிமையையும் பெரும்பான்மையான வாக்குப்பலத்தின் ஆதரவுகொண்டு கைப்பற்றிக்கொள்ள எண்ணிட்ட இலங்கை அரசு "ஸ்ரீலங்கா குடியரசு" நாடாளுக்கூட்டப் பேரவையை உருவாக்கியது. பெரும்பான்மை வாக்குப்பலத்தால் எமது இறைமை பறிக்கப்படுவதை உணர்ந்து கொட்ட தமிழ் மக்களாகிய நாம் அந்த அரசியல்வாதி எதிர்த்த போராட்ட நடவடிக்கைகளில் ஈடுபட்டு வருகின்றோம்.

இலங்கைப்பொருளாதாரத்தில் அண்மையச் செலவாகியில் 70%தை உழைத்ததற்கும் மலையகத்தோட்டத்தொழிலாளர்களின் குடியிருப்புரிமை 49ல் இலங்கையில்தொகுக்கப்பட்டபோது கைதேர்ந்த சமீபத்தே முதலாளித்துவ சக்திகளின், இனரீதியாகவோ அல்லது வர்க்க ரீதியாகவோ இப்பிரச்சனைகளை தாக்காது தடுத்தவிட்டனர். இலங்கைத் தீவில் நிலை கொண்டிருந்த இந்திய எதிர்ப்புவாத சக்திகளினதும் நடவடிக்கை இச்சமீபத்தே முறைக்கு ஏகவாக அமைந்திருந்தது. இப்படியாக ஆரம்பிக்கப்பட்ட ஒருக்குமுறையினதாக்கம் இன்று தமிழ்ப்பேசும் இனத்தை ஒன்றிணைத்து அதன் ஒட்டுமொத்த விடுதலைப்போராட்ட வடிவமாக அமைந்துள்ளது.

இன்றிற்பலாபலக்களை உணர்ந்து கொட்ட மக்கள், தமது திறமையில் நம்பிக்கை வைத்து, தமக்கே உரித்தான தன்னடக்கம் நிறைந்த கட்டுப்பாட்டோடு போராடி, தம் உரிமைகளைப் பெற்றெடுக்கும் போதுதான், எமது தேசிய இறைமையும் மீட்டெடுக்கப்படும். இந்நிலையில்தான் சகல மக்களுக்கும் தேவையான உணவு, உடை, இருப்பிட வசதிகள் ஏற்படுத்தித் தரக்கூடிய ஒரு அரசை உருவாக்கமுடியும். ஏற்றத்தாமவற்ற சமுதாயம்பாரபட்சமின்றி நாட்டின் சகல வளங்களையும் பயன்படுத்தி, தமது சகல தேவைகளையும் பூர்த்தி செய்யக்கூடிய வகையில் ஒரு புரட்சிகர விடுதலைப்போராட்டம் இலங்கையில் வெற்றி பெறவேண்டுமேயானால், தொழிலாள ஏழைப்பெண்கள் குறிப்பாக மலையகப்பெண்களின் பங்களிப்பு மிகவும் அவசியமாகின்றது. இம்மாபெரும் உண்மையை பல நிலைகளில் ஒருக்கப்பட்ட இவர்கள் உணர்ந்து போராட்ட நடவடிக்கைகளில் ஈடுபடவைக்காத வகையில், ஒரு சோசலிச சுழத்தை உருவாக்குவதும் முடியாத காரியமாகும்.

புத்திஜீவிகளில் பெரும்பாலான பெண்கள் இந்தப் பாரிய பொறுப்பு வாய்ந்த பணியை மிகவும் இலகுவாகச் செய்து முடிக்கக் கூடிய திறமை பெற்றவர்கள். இதன் உள்ளடக்கங்களைப் புரிந்துகொண்ட பெண்களில் பலர், சுழ விடுதலைப்போராட்ட நடவடிக்கைகளில், தம்மை முழுமையாக அர்ப்பணிப்பதன், தமக்கே ஆதவரை காலமும் மறக்கப்பட்டு வந்த அடிப்படை உழிமைகளையும் வென்றெடுக்க ஏதுவாக இருக்கும். எனவேதான் சுழ விடுதலைப்போராட்டம் புரட்சிகரமானதாக விளங்கவேண்டுமென பலர் எதிர்பார்க்கின்றனர்.

சுயன்னை
லண்டன்
8-9-84



Sister from Brixton Black Women's Group giving TWL poster to Commandante Marta Mungia in Esteli, Nicaragua

NIRMALA AND OTHER TAMIL WOMEN IN OUR STRUGGLE

Sri Lanka was a proud nation to produce the first woman prime minister on earth. Srimavo Bandaranayake became prime minister in 1960, after her husband, Solomon Dias Bandaranayake, was murdered by a fanatical Buddhist monk in September 1959.

But Mrs Bandaranayake did not reflect the majority of Sri Lankan women. She represented her class. She served the class interests of the Sinhalese merchant capitalists, ruling and holding together the Sinhalese masses under the ideology of Sinhala chauvinism and racism. And her reign was characterised by the murder of over ten thousand Sinhalese youth, wiping out a whole generation of radical Sinhalese youth. The rape and murder of Prema Manemperi by the sadistic armed forces in 1971 is unforgettable.

Mrs Bandaranayake was the first Sinhalese prime minister to send the armed forces to the Tamil homeland in 1961 to crush protests against the 'Sinhala Only' act. Since then, our homelands in the North and East have been occupied by the Sinhalese armed forces. Our people have been murdered and mutilated by the armed forces since 1976. No disciplinary action has been taken, or inquiry held, by the government.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

Since 1977, Tamil youth have been arrested and tortured under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The inhuman methods of torture were condemned in an Amnesty International report in 1982, and the Sri Lankan Prevention of Terrorism Act is similar to the South African Terrorism Act. It is aimed at any person who does not 'satisfy' the state, mainly Tamil youth.

Nirmala Nithiyananthan was the first Tamil woman to be arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. She was arrested on 20 November 1982 with her husband.

She was held in the notorious male army camp in Jaffna where Prema Manemperi had been raped and murdered by army thugs in 1971. Nirmala's arrest aroused national and international protest against the Sri Lankan government. Nirmala was a political science graduate from Boston in America, and lectured at Jaffna University. An active feminist and Tamil intellectual, she has produced Tamil plays and translated into Tamil literary works and Latin American songs about people's struggles. Her arrest was meant to intimidate the two million Tamil women in Sri Lanka.

Tamil Women's League took up the campaign for her release.

In February 1983, she was transferred to Welikade Prison, where 52 Tamil political prisoners were murdered by government-backed thugs in July 1983. After worldwide protests she was transferred to Batticaloa Prison at the end of 1983.

In June 1984, she was freed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. She is in India at the time of writing. We wish her the best in her work for the peace and freedom of the Tamil people. And we must acknowledge the work, contribution and suffering of some of our sisters.

Urmila

Sister Urmila was one of the courageous women who lived and died in the cause of freedom.

Urmila started her political work with the Tamil United Liberation Front, like many other Tamil women. But when she had ideological disagreements with the TULF, she dedicated her life to the people who believed that armed struggle was the only way to get freedom from the Sinhala chauvinist government. She had to work underground. The hard life she led in the jungle was too much for her, and she died in a hepatic coma. Her work towards our freedom will always be remembered by all of us.

Women in the East

The following women were arrested in early 1984.

Pauline Chandra Selvarajah, 45 years old, was alleged to have helped in the Kattankdu bank robbery.

Malini Selvarajah is her 26-year-old daughter. They were arrested in late February 1984 and assaulted badly. They were kept in Batticaloa, then transferred to Inginiyagala Police Station. They were supposed to have been at Kotahena Police Station in late May 1984, but their present whereabouts are uncertain. It has been reported that Malini and her 21-year-old brother, who was also taken in, were released. Pauline's younger children are with their aunt, and need help of every sort.

Kumudhini Thambirajah, 21 years old, was arrested on 16 February 1984 at her home in Ampilanthurai, Kurukalmadam, near Batticaloa, just 18 days after childbirth. She was taken as a hostage for her husband, who was contesting the district council elections on the TULF ticket. She was in the Batticaloa DIG's office, Amparai Police Station and Bogambara Prison in Kandy; she was last known to be in Welikade Prison. The baby, who is suffering from a congenital heart defect, was placed in a children's hospital in Colombo.

Mrs Kanapathipillai, from Kannankudah, was arrested in April and held as a hostage for her husband. She is known to have been in Amparai Police Station, then in Kandy.

Indra Thangarajah, from Arulhayapuram Colony, was arrested in March. She is thought to be in Kandy.

Mrs Puvaneswary, arrested on 27 February, is being held in Batticaloa.

Mrs Thambirajah, arrested on 12 or 13 March, is thought to have been badly beaten by the police. She is now in Batticaloa or Negombo.

These women have undergone harassment and, it has been alleged, humiliation and sexual abuse at the hands of the Sri Lankan authorities. They need our support.

Our duty

Tamil Women's League believes that we have a great duty and responsibility for the peace and freedom of our people.

In Sri Lanka, Tamils have no way out except armed struggle. This is the only way to throw the occupying forces out of our homeland.

We have no representation in the Sri Lankan parliament. Our fathers and brothers are facing arrest or murder by the armed forces at any time. Our sisters and mothers are constantly facing rape and murder. Our houses, shops, libraries, towns are destroyed. Our people are burned alive in the streets, in shops, in stations, in their homes and cars, sometimes in our temples. The Sinhala chauvinist government is determined to exterminate our nation.

The Sinhala chauvinist ruling class is backed by the US and British imperialists. The Western powers are using the Sinhalese ruling class to further their own economic and especially military interests. The strategic importance of Trincomalee as a sea port in the heart of the Tamil homeland is a crucial factor in the politics of the Indian Ocean and superpower rivalry.

The US and British imperialists and Zionist Israel, their hated agent, are physically present as military advisors in the Tamil homeland today. In trying around the world to dominate nations with their economic and military power, the USA, Britain and Israel are not only causing terrible suffering but also endangering the future of the human race.

Oppressed people throughout the world are fighting US imperialism. In Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, South East Asia, in every corner of the earth the USA is having to face people who are fighting for their political and economic freedom.

We are among them. The Tamil nation in Sri Lanka has nothing left to lose! We have lost our civil and political, our fundamental human rights.

By fighting back, we will win our freedom. There is no way backwards, we must go forward. The future of us and our children is in our hands; we must work with determination for victory.

This paper was distributed at the International Conference on Reproductive Rights in July 1984 in Amsterdam.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS OF TAMIL WOMEN ON THE ISLAND OF SRI LANKA

Certain assumptions are often made by feminists in the West when discussing reproductive rights. These may be misleading when applied to Third World situations.

There are political, social and economic factors which interfere directly and indirectly with a woman's freedom of choice. While women should certainly have the right to contraception and abortion if they want, they also require the right not to be sterilised against their will and not to be pressurised into taking contraceptives or having abortions. 'A woman's right to choose' includes her right to have a baby if she so wishes.

Third World women are often portrayed as passive victims. This is by no means true. Women are struggling against all the forms of oppression they face.

Who are the Tamil women?

48% of the island's population are women. Of the fifteen million people, 74% are Sinhalese, 18% belong to one of the two Tamil communities and the remainder belong to other ethnic groups.

Sri Lanka is a neo-colonial country. The economy is mostly under the control of the West, particularly the USA and Britain. There has never been large-scale independent industrial development. Most severely affected have been the areas where most Tamils live.

The majority of women in the North and East are poor peasants or landless labourers; some are forced to seek full or part-time employment as domestic servants. Most work long hours in the fields, and in addition do domestic chores including cooking on wood fires, fetching water and firewood, washing and bringing up children.

The economy depends largely on the labour of Tamils on tea and rubber plantations; their ancestors were brought from India under British imperialism as indentured slaves. The women carry out the arduous and labour-intensive work of plucking tea-leaves, and of sorting and drying leaves. They work eight or nine hours a day, but receive even lower wages than the men. Again, they do all the domestic chores, and from childhood girls are expected to take part in these.

Educational facilities for Tamil women are generally poor. Few women in the North and East go beyond primary school, and most plantation workers do not receive even basic literacy and numeracy; in a survey, over 98% could not read or write.

Racist and national oppression

In 1949, just after Independence, under the Citizenship Act the majority of Tamil plantation workers were made stateless by the Sinhalese government. They have since been the victims of repeated pogroms by the armed forces and State-sponsored thugs, involving arson, rape and murder. In recent years the community has begun to fight back. In addition, many Tamils have been made forcibly homeless.

The North and East have been under military occupation for over ten years, and this intensified from 1977 under the present regime. Under the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act, arbitrary arrest, detention and torture became common. Members of the armed forces periodically go on the rampage, shooting, burning and carrying out sexual assaults. There is now widespread support among the people for armed resistance movements fighting for the right of the Tamil nation to self-determination. Women are increasingly playing an active part in this struggle.

Social oppression

Particularly on the plantations, Tamil women live in appallingly unhealthy conditions. On average five persons are crowded into one 'line-room' without adequate ventilation, sanitary facilities or running water, conditions in which disease can spread rapidly. Most women are chronically undernourished and anaemic. There are few doctors and just 1 qualified midwife per 10 000 people. The staff at dispensaries are often unqualified, and district hospitals may be miles away. Transport facilities are poor, and time-consuming visits may mean the loss of vital earnings. All these factors make pregnancy and childbirth hazardous; the frequency of death in childbirth is twice the national average.⁴

Because of the high infant and child mortality (e.g. infant mortality in Nuwara Eliya is 119 per 1000), women will usually have several children so that at least one or two will survive to adulthood. From an early age, children will contribute to family earnings, and will support the parents in their old age. In addition, girls will help mothers in their chores, and will look after younger children while their parents are at work.

As well as these pressures, Tamil women in the North and East and in the plantation areas are subjected to caste and patriarchal oppression. Good girls are expected to obey their fathers, elder brothers and husbands, which further curtails their reproductive rights. The dowry system in effect treats women as marketable objects; it affects particularly upper and middle-class women, but is now filtering down to other castes.

Birth control

The emphasis of State birth control programmes, often backed by foreign agencies, is on population control rather than family planning. The main methods are intra-uterine devices, especially the loop, injection contraceptives, usually Depo Provera, and tubectomy. The IUD has a high failure rate. There is no legal abortion except for medical reasons, and contraceptives are not offered to unmarried women, so many women are forced to resort to illegal abortions, which often result in serious injury or death.

Depo Provera, produced by the American multinational Upjohn, has been banned in the USA because of its side effects. It may cause severe menstrual disorders, which for an anaemic woman may be fatal, weight gain, infertility etc.

A tubectomy is irreversible. The financial reward offered may coerce poor women struggling to support their families into having this operation.

Birth control programmes need to be looked at critically, particularly in the light of the commitment of sections of the government to rid the island of all non-Sinhalese by one means or another.

Liberation struggles

Tamil women on the island of Sri Lanka, like other Third World women, are directly affected by imperialism. Hence their struggles are connected with the liberation of women throughout the world, including ultimately women in the First and Second Worlds.

The reproductive rights of women are affected by a number of political, economic and cultural factors besides patriarchy. Feminists, particularly those in the West, must be responsive to the opinions and struggles of Third World women themselves.

As Tamil women participate increasingly in liberation struggles, particularly against the Sri Lankan Sinhala-chauvinist government, they are becoming more militant and their role in society is changing. They need the solidarity of women throughout the world in their struggles.

References

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3. Socio-Economic Survey of Ceylon, 1969-70.
4. Amrit Wilson, to be published.

THE FREEDOM SONG

Freedom for the people in Eelam we want
 Freedom for the people in Eelam we want
 Fight against the chauvinism
 Fight against the oppression
 Overthrow the occupying Force
 repeat stanza

Freedom for the women in Eelam we want
 Freedom for the women in Eelam we want
 Fight against the male dominance
 Fight against the dowry system
 Fight against the way we were in past
 repeat stanza

Repeat 1st. stanza

Freedom from the poverty for the poor we want
 Freedom from the shackles of caste we want
 Unite and fight to get the freedom
 Men and Women all together
 March along the Liberation Path
 repeat stanza

Repeat 1st. stanza

We shall win the war against the ruling class
 We shall win the war against the ruling class
 Get rid of the bourgeoisie
 Get rid of the imperialists
 Get rid of the oppressive state
 repeat stanza

Repeat 1st. stanza

Let us draw together in sisterhood
 Let us voice together the freedom song
 We the most oppressed
 fighting side by side
 March towards the Liberating Dawn
 repeat stanza

Repeat 1st. stanza

FORTHCOMING

Saturday 13 October 1984. Women in Struggle Internationally,
 St. Matthew's meeting place, Brixton.
 TWL will have an exhibition and workshop.