



## **Rajani Thiranagama - why was she killed?**

**PUBLIC MEETING : Saturday 28th October, 7 pm  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1**

On Thursday 21st September, Rajani Thiranagama was shot dead while on her way home from the University of Jaffna. Rajani was one of the founders of the University Teachers for Human Rights and was one of the few people active in exposing human rights violations by the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) - which now controls the North and East of Sri Lanka; the Tamil paramilitary groups which the Indian Army had infiltrated, armed and brought under its control; and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The situation in northern Sri Lanka is so confused that although one can say why she was assassinated, we cannot place the blame on only one quarter. In the last few months she had received threats and her home had been repeatedly raided by armed men who had taken away documents which described these atrocities. In letters written in the weeks and days before she was killed, she constantly referred to harassment from the IPKF. A few days before she died she wrote, "the local army officer in charge is trying to trap me". Since June 1989, the IPKF have instituted mass conscription to compel civilians to join armed groups under their control in anticipation of a planned withdrawal of Indian troops in December. Recently three young Tamil women who tried to escape this conscription were beaten to death. It is possible that Rajani's killer was acting on

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Demand an independent enquiry!**

instructions from the IPKF or the Research and Analysis Wing-RAW (the Indian secret service). However it may also be the work of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam which since the recent truce with the IPKF is trying to eliminate all those who have dared to criticise them.

The LTTE and the IPKF controlled groups are now blaming each other for Rajani's murder. As she herself had written - in this atmosphere of lies and terror even peoples' deaths are cynically manipulated to gain credit.

Rajani stood up for justice and freedom for ordinary people during the Sri Lankan Government's campaign of terror and repression against the Tamil community. But she also subsequently witnessed and spoke out against the degeneration of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the group which emerged dominant in the struggle for a separate state but declined into a purely militaristic organisation with a callous disregard for the lives of the people. She was in Jaffna in July 1987 when the Indian Armed Forces were welcomed in as peacemakers, and during the "October War" a few months later when she lived through the onslaught by the same "peacemakers" on civilian targets including Jaffna Hospital (where she had been a doctor), refugee camps and villages.

Rajani lived in Britain for three years while writing her Ph.D. thesis in anatomy which was informed by a critique of imperialist anthropology. Nobody who knew her can forget her dynamism and sensitivity or her urge to fight oppression wherever she was. In Britain she helped to set up the Tamil Refugee Action Group and was one of the founders of South Asia Solidarity Group. Identifying with the struggles of other black women in this country, she was involved in fighting racism at many different levels. Her commitment to fighting women's oppression was central to all her political activities: after returning to Jaffna, she was one of very few people who focussed attention upon the horror of women's experience of the war. Recently she had produced and acted in a play which dealt with rape and violence against women in this context. Among her reports and analysis which were to be published in a book, was one which she titled "I have no more tears sister". It specifically documented the atrocities and physical and psychological damage suffered by Tamil women.

Rajani was 35 and had two young daughters. Her many friends in this country are demanding an independent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding her death. Independent monitoring organisations including Amnesty International, have repeatedly been refused admission to the Indian-controlled regions of Sri Lanka.

We are calling on individuals and organisations to send telegrams to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Lok Sabha, New Delhi, India and to the Chief Minister, Provincial Government, Northern and Eastern Province, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka making the following demands:

- *We condemn the brutal murder of human rights activist Rajani Thiranagama on September 21 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka.*
- *We demand that you (1) permit an immediate enquiry into the incident by international human rights organisations (2) conduct a public enquiry into the activities of the Indian armed forces and other military and paramilitary organisations associated with them in Sri Lanka (3) provide an explanation of this atrocity on Indian controlled soil (4) allow human rights organisations open access to the North and East of Sri Lanka.*

**We also urgently need funds to publish and distribute the book written by Rajani which for the first time documents and analyses the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka.**

**Please send donations to**

*Rajani Thiranagama Memorial Fund, c/o South Asia Solidarity Group,  
173 Archway Road London N 6 5BL  
or contact 01 267 0212*

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