

THE TAMILS OF SRI LANKA, KURDS AND BHUTAN

by
Nadesan Satyendra

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The Tamils are an ancient people. Their history had its beginnings in the early settlements on the rich alluvial plains near the southern extremity of peninsular India. It was here, that the Tamils erected their first cities about three thousand years ago. It was a Dravidian civilisation which traced its own origins to the people of Mohenjodaro in the Indus Valley around 2500 years before the birth of Christ. It was a civilisation which, in the succeeding centuries, absorbed the Aryan influences from the north of India but at the same time evolved its own rich identity and, in turn, made its own contribution to what is, in the end, a common and shared Indian heritage.

The island of Sri Lanka, which was separated from the Indian sub-continent by less than thirty miles of water, was not unknown to the early Tamils and it was here that the Nagadipa kingdoms were established around three thousand years ago. And, today about 45 million Tamils live in Tamil Nadu which is a part of the federal Union of India and around 3 million reside in Sri Lanka. The Tamils of Sri Lanka constitute about one fifth of the 15 million population of Sri Lanka whilst somewhat less than three quarters are Sinhalese. In Sri Lanka, the Tamils live largely in the north and east and on the tea estates in the central hills whilst the Sinhala people live in the south, the west and in the centre as well. The two people speak two different languages and, by and large, belong to two different religions. A large number of Tamils are Hindus and the overwhelming

majority of the Sinhala people are Buddhists.

THE TALKS IN BHUTAN AND THE KURDS OF IRAQ

In early July 1985, the leaders of the Tamil guerilla movement which were fighting for the establishment of a separate Thamil Eelam state in the North and East of Sri Lanka, were persuaded by the Indian government to enter into discussions with representatives of the Sri Lankan government. The venue of the discussions was the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan.

It is sometimes said that fools fail to learn even from their own experiences but that wise men learn from the experiences of others. The Tamil people are not without wisdom and perhaps the story of the Kurds of Iraq is a story not without relevance at the present stage of the struggle for Thamil Eelam and much that immediately follows is culled from Judy S. Bertelons excellent study in 'Nonstate Nations in International Politics' [Praeger Publishers, New York - 1977].

The Kurds are a people who live in the mountainous area that forms the borders of Iraq, Iran, the Soviet Union, Turkey and Syria. Around 1.5 million Kurds live in Iraq and about 1.8 million live in Iran. In 1918, the aspirations of the Kurds, as a people, were recognised in President Woodrow Wilson's program for world peace, which stipulated that the non Turkish nationalities of the Ottoman

empire would be 'assured of an absolute unmolested opportunity of autonomous development'. And the Treaty of Sevres, imposed by the victorious allies on Turkey in 1920, provided, amongst other matters, for the recognition of Kurdistan. But in the share out of power that followed the ending of the first world war, the Treaty of Sevres was not honoured.

KURDISH REVOLTS OF 1920S AND 1930S

And so it was that during the 1920s and the 1930s there were several Kurdish uprisings against governments which had nominal control over the Kurdish areas. The British fought the Kurds in Iraq from 1919 until their mandate expired in 1932. In Iran, the Kurds revolted in 1920-23, 1930, and 1931. In all cases the Kurdish revolts were successfully put down - and not least because there was no unity amongst the Kurds themselves.

KURDISH REPUBLIC OF 1945

World War II brought renewed opportunities for Kurdish rebellion. It was a period which witnessed the emergence of Mulla Mustafa as a Kurd leader. As the end of the war approached the Kurds made vain attempts to gain recognition by the United States and the Soviet Union for an independent Kurdistan. In December 1945, the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad was established in the Kurdish area of north western Iran with extensive Soviet support, including the protection of Soviet occupation troops in northern Iran. But in less than a year, the Soviets withdrew their troops and the Republic collapsed in the face of Iraqi and Iranian attacks. Mulla Mustafa with 500 to 800 of his men retreated to the Soviet Union where he remained in exile for 12 years. The Kurds learnt that it was not enough to capture territory - it was also necessary to hold that territory against enemy counter attack.

NEGOTIATIONS IN 1958

Twelve years later and a few days after the revolution of July 15 1958, which

overthrew the Iraqi monarchy, the new head of state, General Quasim, promulgated a 'Temporary Constitution' which referred specifically to the Kurds as co partners within the framework of Iraqi unity. Mulla Mustafa was brought back from exile and it was confidently assumed that the equality thus proclaimed would mean a considerable measure of administrative devolution, a fairer share than before of development projects and social services, and enhanced status for the Kurdish language. On this assumption the various Kurdish organisations, in Iraq and abroad, rallied to the support of the new regime. But there was never any serious attempt by the Quasim government to implement the promises to the Kurds, implicit in the Temporary Constitution. In 1960, the Democratic Party of Kurdistan of which Mulla Mustafa had been elected President was declared illegal.

FIGHTING AGAIN IN 1961 AND TALKS AGAIN

Fighting broke out in July 1961 and continued until 1963 when a ceasefire was agreed to following the overthrow of Quasim at the hands of a military junta headed by General Yahya. In March 1963, General Yahya visited Mulla Mustafa and the Iraqi government issued a proclamation recognising 'the natural rights of the Kurdish people on the basis of decentralisation'. The Iraqi scheme of decentralisation suggested that Iraq should be divided into six regions and that in one of them, Kurdish should rank as an official language together with Arabic. A Kurdish delegation was sent to Baghdad and it published a statement of Kurdish claims for home rule, which was intended as the opening move for further negotiations. But the statement was never discussed. In June 1963, the Yahya government arrested the Kurdish representatives, issued an ultimatum demanding the surrender of Mulla Mustafa and launched an offensive against Kurdish positions.

SECOND CEASEFIRE AND TALKS AGAIN

In November 1963, there was yet another change in the composition of the Iraqi government and President Arif assumed

more direct control. This change of government was followed in February 1964 by a second cease fire and negotiations between President Arif and Mulla Mustafa.

The main points of the Kurdish demands put forward to the Arif regime were that:

1. full autonomy be granted to the Kurdish regions of northern Iraq, whose geographical boundaries should be defined and recognised in the Iraqi constitution
2. the Kurdish Language be the official language of the autonomous region and the second official language of Iraq
3. the regime in Iraq should be democratic,
4. the vice president and deputy prime minister should be Kurds,
5. besides the central Parliament, a local assembly would be elected in Iraqi Kurdistan,
6. the Kurds would be represented in proportion to their population in Parliament, in the government and in the central administration,
7. foreign affairs, defense and finances would remain under the control of the central government, all other matters would be transferred to the competence of the autonomous government,
8. Kurdish army units would remain under Kurdish command and would be placed at the disposal of the autonomous government,
9. the budget of the autonomous region would be derived from taxes levied in the Kurdish region plus a just share of the revenue derived from oil royalties,
10. any questions arising in the future concerning the status of the Kurds would be solved democratically through mutual agreement.

TALKS THAT FAILED AGAIN

Arif's representatives began negotiations in February 1964 with Mulla Mustafa's representatives. The Kurds insisted on their demands for autonomy, while the Iraqis were not prepared to make any concessions on this point claiming that Kurdish autonomy would inevitably lead to the secession of the northern region of Iraq. Arif proposed that the Kurds waive

their demand for autonomy, in exchange for which he revived proposals for the decentralisation of the Iraqi provinces, the same proposals that the Kurds had rejected two years earlier in 1963.

No progress was made and full scale fighting broke out again in April 1965, and the Iraqi government committed even larger forces than before against the Kurds. And in February 1966, Mulla Mustafa sent a memorandum to the United Nations Secretary General asking for a UN Commission of Inquiry to be sent to northern Iraq. He alleged that the Iraqi government was conducting a scorched earth policy and deporting thousands of Kurds from their homes after bombing their villages in an attempt to exterminate the Kurdish people. Despite the Iraqi's concentrated military effort and some initial set backs, the Kurds gradually assumed the initiative toward the middle of 1966.

ARM SUPPLIES FROM IRAN TO THE KURDS

"During the time frame we have been examining, Iran emerged as the largest supplier of outside aid to the Kurds. The Shah of Iran permitted Mulla Mustafa's forces a limited amount of refuge in the Iranian border area adjacent to Iraq. Humanitarian relief was supplied to Kurdish refugees fleeing from fighting in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurds also received military supplies from Iran, including rifles, medium range artillery, anti aircraft guns, and ammunition but no airplanes or tanks. The Shah was anxious that Kurdish enthusiasm for an independent or autonomous Kurdish state did not spill over to affect the Kurds in Iran. After all the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad had once existed on territory claimed by Iran. The Shah, however, did want to see the Iraqi army occupied with the Kurds for as long as possible, primarily in order to prevent challenges to Iranian hegemony in the Persian Gulf." [Judy S. Bertelsen op cit]

THIRD CEASEFIRE AND TALKS AGAIN

And in May 1966 the Iraqi army suffered

its worst defeat of the entire war when two battalions were nearly wiped out by Kurdish forces. After a period of intensive retaliatory bombing, the third formal ceasefire was agreed to in June 1966 and a new civilian Iraqi Prime Minister broadcast a 12 point programme which was accepted by Mulla Mustafa as a starting point for discussions. The main points of the 29th June declaration were

1. recognition of the 'Kurdish Nation' to be confirmed in the permanent constitution
2. enactment of a Provisional Administration Law providing for decentralisation and the transfer of wide powers to locally elected councils
3. use of Kurdish language for administration and public instruction
4. representation of Kurds in all branches of the public service in proportion to their population
5. the appointment of Kurdish officials to Kurdish districts
6. a general amnesty 'when violence ends' to include all persons already convicted
7. reappointment of absentee officials as far as possible to their previous posts
8. formation of a special ministry to supervise reconstruction and compensation for sufferers in the 'north' and to coordinate administration in the Kurdish districts
9. resettlement of persons evicted from their homes, release of all political prisoners

The original Kurdish demand that only foreign affairs, defense and finances should remain under the control of the central government, and that all other matters should be transferred to the competence of the autonomous government, was now, not surprisingly, diluted to a Provincial Administration Law which would provide for the rather familiar "decentralisation and the transfer of 'wide' powers to locally elected councils". Also, significantly, the June 29 declaration made no reference to the original Kurdish demand that Kurdish army units would remain under Kurdish command and would be placed at the disposal of the autonomous government - a demand

which had clearly recognised that the in the end, the implementation of any settlement was not unrelated to the power that flows from the barrel of the gun.

But a settlement even on the basis of the June 29 agreements was obstructed by frequent changes of regime or cabinet within the Iraqi government during the period 1966 to 1968 - again, perhaps, a not unfamiliar scenario. In July 1968, the Arif regime was overthrown and General al-Bakr took control. And by February 1969 the Iraqis had launched another, even larger, full scale offensive.

By the end of 1969 it was evident that the Iraqi army had again failed to suppress the Kurds and in November peace talks began. Again the Kurds demanded full political autonomy. And, once again, the Iraqi government regarded the concession to such demands as constituting a major step towards secession.

MARCH 1970 PEACE TREATY

Eventually, Mulla Mustafa was able to convince Kurdish 'hardliners' to sign a treaty. The March 11, 1970 peace treaty between the Kurds and the Iraqi government was not published, but its main points were included in a special proclamation by the Iraqi leader, al-Bakr:

1. Recognition of the Kurdish nation. To this end the provisional constitution of Iraq was to be amended by a section stating that the republic of Iraq consists of two main nations, Arabs and Kurds.
2. Recognition of the Kurdish language, in the form of a constitutional amendment laying down that both Kurdish and Arabic will serve as official languages in those districts in which the Kurds are a majority
3. The legal powers of the districts are to be increased by legal amendment. A new Kurdish district would be formed, with the same enlarged administrative powers and a Kurdish governor
4. A Kurdish vice president will be appointed, and the Kurds will enjoy propor-

tional representation on all executive and administrative bodies, including the government and the army

5. Administration officials in districts with a Kurdish majority must be Kurds or at least speak Kurdish

6. The national right of the Kurds to the development of Kurdish culture is recognised in every aspect, including the establishment of a Kurdish University, the publication of Kurdish books, Kurdish language broadcasts and telecasts, and the recognition of Kurdish customs and holidays

7. All Kurdish students will be permitted to return to their studies and their educational standards will be improved

8. The Kurds will be permitted to establish youth and adult organisations

9. A general amnesty will be proclaimed for all who have taken part in the Kurdish rebellion, and Kurdish public servants and soldiers will be reinstated in office

10. All Kurds who have left their villages would be permitted to return, and for those unable to return for different reasons, new housing would be provided

11. Kurdish soldiers would be granted pensions, and dependents of fallen Kurds would be compensated

12. A Committee for the Rehabilitation of the Northern Districts and Compensation of War Damage would be established and an economic development plan for the Kurdish region would be drawn up and implemented with all possible speed

13. Steps would be taken to assure the speedy implementation of land reform in the Kurdish regions. Also all land debts of Kurdish farmers for the last nine years would be cancelled.

14. The arms held by the Kurdish fighters would be surrendered to the Iraqi government during the final stages of the implementation of the treaty. The same applies to the secret Kurdish broadcasting station 'Free Kurdistan'

15. A high commission consisting of representatives of the central Iraqi authorities and of the Kurds would be established to supervise the implementation of the treaty.

WHICH WAS NOT IMPLEMENTED

There was to be a four year interim period during which the provisions of the agreement were to be implemented. In practise the ensuing four years became an armed truce. The Iraqi government carried out few of the terms of the agreement. Some economic development in Kurdistan was begun; a Kurdish University was opened; however essential Kurdish demands - political autonomy in Kurdistan and a Kurdish share of power at the centre - remained unfulfilled. The March 1970 Peace Treaty, constituted the beginning of the end of the struggle for Kurdish autonomy basically because any agreement which spelled out a four year period for implementation was necessarily weighted in favour of the party which occupied the established seats of power. And a resistance movement tends to be weakened by a prolonged truce as it becomes increasingly difficult for the leadership to retain its influence on a rank and file which recognises that that despite the rhetoric, the direction of the future is one of compromise and adjustment. The March 1970 Peace Treaty failed to spell out any binding 'international guarantee' for the implementation of the agreement despite the covert involvement of the Soviet Union, the United States and Iran in the Kurdish struggle and that was a failure that proved fatal.

SOVIET AID TO IRAQ

Whilst Iran supported the Kurds, by 1974, Iraq had become the Soviet Union's principal ally in the Persian Gulf area. The Soviet Union had by that time supplied Iraq with 188 combat aircraft, 1300 artillery guns and 20 small naval ships. In March 1974, Soviet Defence Minister Marshall Grechko visited Iraq and openly condemned the Kurdish 'revolt'. The Kurd leader, Mulla Mustafa who was once an exile in Moscow was no longer in favour. He was a victim of the changed geo political interests of the Soviet Union in the Middle East.

US AID TO THE KURDS

On the other side, Iran was the primary alliance partner of the United States in the Persian Gulf. In May 1972 President Nixon visited Iran. The Select Committee on Intelligence of the U.S. House of Representatives (under the chairmanship of Otis Pike) disclosed, on November 1 1975, that the Shah had been able to convince Nixon during the visit that the United States should provide covert aid to the Kurds. After the visit Nixon ordered the CIA to deliver millions of dollars worth of Soviet and Chinese arms and ammunitions (some of which were collected in Cambodia) to the Kurds. The Pike Committee Report charged:

"The President, Dr. Kissinger and the Foreign head of state (the Shah) hoped our clients (the Kurds) would not prevail. They preferred instead that the insurgents (the Kurus) simply continue a level of hostilities sufficient to sap the resources of our ally's neighboring country (Iraq). This policy was not imparted to our clients (the Kurds) who were encouraged to continue fighting. Even in the context of covert action, ours was a cynical enterprise."

1974 IRAQI OFFENSIVE

And in early 1974, despite the terms of the March 1970 Peace Treaty, the Iraqi government proclaimed its new constitution and said that they would impose it unilaterally, with or without the consent of the Kurds. In April 1984, the Iraqis launched another offensive sending seven Iraqi divisions, including two armoured divisions, supported by 200 bombers and fighter bombers, into Kurdish territory along three fronts.

IRAQ-IRAN ACCORD AND KURDS BETRAYED

And on March 6 1975, the Shah of Iran concluded the Pact of Algiers with the de facto ruler of Iraq, Saddam Hussein Tikriti. Following his return from Algiers, the Shah summoned Mulla Mustafa to Teheran and told him that Iran was withdrawing all aid to the Kurdish resis-

tance and recalling all arms and supplies; the Shah ordered Mulla Mustafa to halt all military operations against the Iraqis. And on March 18, 1975, 16 years after his return from exile in Moscow and after three cease fires and interminable 'negotiations' Mulla Mustafa gave the order to the Kurdish army to abandon the struggle. The Shah, in return for withdrawing support from the Kurds, had received a favourable settlement from the Iraqis on Iranian navigational rights on the Shatt al Arab waterway. And, once again, the Kurds of Iraq found that they were the victims of the changed geo political interests of their ally - this time, the United States.

LESSONS OF KURD STRUGGLE

And Judy S. Bertelson concludes:

"The Kurdish strategy for attaining their basic goal of autonomy within Iraq was to fight the Iraqi central government until the resulting stalemate might cause a change to a regime in Baghdad more favourable to an agreement with the Kurds. At the same time the Kurds tried to gain as much external support as possible from international organisations and from nation states opposed to the Iraqis."

"This strategy had several effects on the international context. First of all, the inability of the Iraqis to put an end to the 'Kurdish problem' for 14 years contributed to the instability of the central Iraqi government in Baghdad. This instability, combined with the constant need to deploy a major segment of the Iraqi army against the Kurds, severely limited the Iraqi government's actions in the international arena and also diverted funds from Iraqi development projects."

"The constant turnover in the Iraqi central administration resulted in a continual shifting of alliances in the Middle East/Persian Gulf area, depending upon the ideological strain of whatever Iraqi government was in power at any given time. For other nations, Iraq's 'Kurdish problem' allowed them a certain amount of

leverage in their dealings with the Iraqi government. If the Iraqi government acted in a belligerent fashion toward Israel, Kuwait, Syria or Iran, then these national governments could retaliate by aiding the Kurds. The aid that the Shah of Iran provided the Kurds was particularly difficult for the Iraqis to handle. In the end the Iraqis had to concede to Iran navigational rights on the Shatt al Arab waterway (a major point of contention in Iranian Iraqi relations for years) in order to stop Iranian aid to the Kurds... The Shah of Iran was never willing to go as far as he could have for the Kurds, even in terms of weapon supplies. Kurdish nationalism in Iraq was in the long run, disadvantageous for Iran. The Shah could not really allow Mulla Mustafa to succeed because of the effects such success might ultimately have on the Kurdish population living within Iran's borders. For Iran the Kurdish fight against the Iraqis was a convenient way of keeping Iran's chief rival off balance. When it became advantageous for Iran to come to an agreement with Iraq, the Kurds were abandoned"

And the story of the Kurds of Iraq has some lessons for the Tamils of Sri Lanka whose leaders have been persuaded by the Indian government to participate in discussions with the Sri Lankan government at Bhutan.

Let us learn that the struggle of the Tamils of Sri Lanka cannot and will not be permitted to take its course in 'mid air'. Let us learn about and understand the international frame of that struggle. Let us learn that each state has its own interests and that it is those interests that it pursues, whether overtly or covertly. Let us learn the importance of identifying the nature and content of the interests of those states that are concerned with the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Let us learn that the interests of a state are a function of the interests of groups which wield power within that state and that 'foreign policy is the external manifestation of domestic institutions, ideologies and other attributes of the polity'[Ole R. Holsti: Foreign Policy Decision Makers in In Search of

Global Patterns: Collier Macmillan Publishers 1976]. Let us learn from the failure of successive Iraqi governments to deliver on the promises that they had made. Let us learn that they failed to deliver, not because they were governments constituted by evil men but because the reality of the power structure in Iraq prevented them from acceding to the 'just and reasonable' demands of the Kurdish people - demands which had been so recognised by President Woodrow Wilson in 1918. Let us learn that power centres always act in ways which perpetuate or enlarge their own power. Let us learn that the pious declarations in the 12 point programme of 1966 and the 1970 peace treaty, about the 'recognition of the Kurdish nation' remained just that - pious declarations, and that they paved the way for the annihilation of the Kurds in 1975. Let us learn from the failure of the Kurds to secure international guarantees for the implementation of the Peace Treaty of March 1970. Let us also learn that the eventual success of any struggle is, not surprisingly, a function of the capacity of a leadership to mobilise its own people and its own resources at the broadest level. And a leadership which fails to do so cannot lead and must inevitably fail.

INTERNATIONAL FRAME OF TAMIL STRUGGLE

And so let us first turn our attention to the international frame within which the struggle of the Tamils of Sri Lanka must necessarily take place. Structural and other attributes of the international system shape and constrain policy choices to such an extent that this is the logical starting point for most analyses. [David J.Singer - The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations - World Politics 1961].

Geography plays a basic though often silent role in the affairs of a people. It was many years ago - sometime in 1956 or so that the late Krishna Menon was addressing an English undergraduate audience. The United States Navy was patrolling the waters around Taiwan and it was a period of some international

tension. A youthful questioner stood up and asked: "Mr. Menon, Sir, what are your views on the position of Taiwan?" Krishna Menon's response came in a flash: "The position of Taiwan is that it is a few hundred miles from China and several thousand miles away from the United States of America." The audience dissolved in laughter. And the visit of President Richard Nixon to China twenty years later underlined the significance of that which Krishna Menon had said.

And the position of Sri Lanka is that it is a few miles from Tamil Nadu and the Indian sub continent and several thousand miles away from the United States of America. Its influence on the outside world and in turn the influence of the outside world on the affairs of the people of Sri Lanka is a function, not so much of its size, but of its location near the large land mass of the Indian subcontinent and in the centre of the vast expanse of the waters of the Indian ocean.

"Situating almost in the midst of the Indian Ocean, the island of Sri Lanka has in India the nearest landmass across the 23 miles of the shallow waters of the Palk Straits. The next nearest landmass, whether in the south, east or west is hundred of miles away. And though the technological revolution has minimised such distances to a considerable extent, the fact of such geographical proximity of India to her southern neighbour cannot be ignored altogether. In 1971, for instance, when Sri Lanka was rocked by the youth uprising and then Premier Mrs. Bandaranaike sent an SOS for help to several countries, Great Britain was the fastest to move from its base in Singapore to be followed within hours by India, whose navy, in consultation with the Sri Lankan government, virtually cordoned the coastal areas to prevent the possibility of outside help to the insurrectionaries..." [Urmilla Phadinis: India - Sri Lanka Relations in the 1980s in Strategic Environment in South Asia edited by D.D. Khanna]

BIPOLAR WORLD POWER STRUCTURE

We live in a bipolar world dominated by two super powers, the United States of America and the Soviet Union. If history serves as a guide, the confrontation between these two powers would have, in the ordinary course of events, led to war and the supremacy of one or the other as the sole world power. And in time, of course, the hegemony of that sole world power would have decayed and given way to a number of smaller powers and to a multipolar power structure, leading again to a bipolar world and so on.

However, the years after the end of World War II did not lead to direct war between the two super powers. The nuclear deterrent prevented direct conflict. But the confrontation between the two super powers continued unabated after 1945. It was a cold war - sometimes less cold and sometimes more so. The Prussian military theorist Clausewitz remarked in the 19th century that war is a continuation of politics by other means. Nikolai Lenin, some years later, characteristically and brilliantly restated the proposition and said that politics is a continuation of war by other means. And so 1984, witnessed the emerging Orwellian truth that war is peace and peace is war. It is this that is sometimes called 'detente'.

In the years after the second world war, the two super powers, whilst avoiding direct armed conflict have fought many wars by proxy, in the third world and elsewhere and have sought to influence and direct the actions of many 'independent' states, indirectly, sometimes by exerting economic pressure and sometimes by engaging in under cover activities intended to destabilise unfriendly governments. The bipolar world lives in seeming peace, but, often, war continues by other means.

TOWARDS REGIONAL GROUPINGS

Again, given the nuclear deterrent, and the avoidance of direct armed conflict between the two super powers, a movement towards a more diffused multi polar power

structure has already begun. New power centres have arisen in Asia, Africa, South America and for that matter in Europe as well. Both China and India are 'big' powers in the Asian region and have the potential of becoming increasingly influential powers of the world of tomorrow.

"The strength of our defence is that we have been good learners; we have sophisticated our equipment to a great extent without remaining too long dependent on foreign advisors. The very fact that 90% of our requirements can now be produced in India gives us confidence. This factor of defence production is crucial..." [Jagat S.Mehta, Foreign Secretary, Government of India at National Seminar on Defence Studies, Allahabad University, March 1978]

But today, even India and China find the need to lean toward either the Soviet Union or the United States from time to time.

INTERNATIONAL FRAME WHICH SRI LANKA HAS TRIED TO MANAGE

We must recognise that these are some of the realities of the international frame which the Sri Lankan government has sought to manage so that it may be left in peace to 'deal' with the Tamils of Sri Lanka. On the one hand the Sri Lankan government has sought to reassure the Indian government that the Sinhala people have no conflict with New Delhi. After all relations between New Delhi and Colombo were reasonably cordial during the thirty years after independence in 1947.

"Till India has a centre strong enough to keep its States under control, the secession cry of a segment of Tamils in Sri Lanka may not find its echo in Tamil Nadu. In the event of the centre becoming weak and centripetal tendencies asserting themselves in India, this may not be so. It is in this context again that any government in Colombo will perceive the regime stability in Delhi as a vital factor for its own survival as a unified state. And on the Indian side too, an

unstable Sri Lanka may well portend threats to security - stability parameters in the south..." [Urmilla Phadnis: India - Sri Lanka Relations in the 1980s in Strategic Environment in South Asia edited by D.D.Khanna, Department of Defence Studies, University of Allahabad, 1979]

And more recently, Indian Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari declared in a magazine interview:

"...a united Sri Lanka is in our national interests. We have no reason to encourage secessionist forces...the greater the instability in Sri Lanka, the more it will look to outside powers. That is exactly what we do not want..." [Imprint: September 1985].

Sri Lankan National Security Minister, Lalith Athulathmudali, in a speech he made at the 87th Mahapola which was held at the Sinhala Vidyalaya, Kahatagasdigliya stated to a Sinhala audience on the 27th of May 1984:

"If victory was to be achieved, it could not be done by uniting all opposing forces but by dividing them and creating dissension among them... Sri Lankan Kings never opposed the entirety of India. When there was conflict with the Pandyan, they sought the aid of the Cholas and acted against the Pandyan. When the Pandyan and Cholas combined, they sought the aid of Kalinga. Sinhala Kings had that high intelligence and knowledge of statecraft..."

Both Delhi and Colombo have a shared interest in managing a rising Tamil consciousness and President Jayawardene is presumably not unaware of the Kurds of Iraq and Iran.

BUT ALSO CONSEQUENCES OF SRI LANKAN ECONOMIC POLICIES

At the sametime, President Jayawardene's reliance on an 'open economic policy' had certain natural consequences. It was an economic policy which led to and which was at the sametime the result of an

increasing polarisation amongst the Sinhala people themselves and the creation of a new economic elite which was dependent on and linked with foreign capital - a scenario not unfamiliar to many Third World countries.

"...To participate actively in the world economy as a latecomer, it is necessary to enter on terms that serve that wider market at the expense of the domestic population. If the world economic situation is buoyant and the domestic political framework reasonably honest, then there may be enough of a capital surplus generated by economic growth to combine satisfying the greed of the rich, while taking some action to alleviate poverty and hardship. But the logic of the global market is such that a Third World country...has little to offer other than commodity exports (that generally divert productive resources from the domestic economy) and cheap labour (that attracts foreign investment). This cycle has dreadful political effects as well; the export compulsion capitalises agriculture at the expense of marginal peasants and domestic demand, while the investment compulsion both depresses real wages and represses the efforts of workers to resist. In such a context a Third World leader is necessarily alienated from his people, serving interests that are primarily external to those of his country, a situation that is psychologically salvaged by personal aggrandizement, including a sharing of payoffs with a tiny indigenous elite that gets rich whilst the masses are drawn ever more forcefully into a maelstrom of poverty and intimidation..."[Richard Falk, Princeton University in Development Debacle: The World Bank in the Phillipines, Institute of Food and Policy, San Francisco, 1982]

The fruits of 'development' did not filter down and were it not for massive earnings from expatriate Sinhala workers in the Middle East, which helped to inject wealth at middle and lower income levels, the government may have been hard pressed to retain its already tenuous hold on the seats of power. But even with such earnings, the Sri Lankan

government had become increasingly dependent on aid and investment loans from the Western world.

TRADE, AID AND POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS

Again with trade and aid, came political alignments and the Sri Lankan government had in recent years, taken stances, more in line with Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore rather than with the late Indira Gandhi's India.

"...the sheer volume of aid, investment loans and trade with countries like the United Kingdom and the U.S.A. is massive and the political spill over effects of such dependence have already been felt in some cases. Thus Sri Lanka's soft pedalling on the issue of Diego Garcia at the Non Aligned summit, its response on Falkland islands supporting the British case, its rather subdued response on the controversial map published in a US Joint Chief of Staff pamphlet showing Trincomalee as one of the ports available to the US Navy personnel for rest and recreational facilities, its grant of certain significant facilities to the Voice of America under the renewed agreement of 1983, making Sri Lanka in the process an important 'listening post' of the United States, do seem to be political pay offs for economic support...'I seek to make foreign policy', stated Foreign Minister A.C.S.Hameed, as early as 1977, "an effective instrument of economic advancement..." [Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Urmila Phadinis, Gandhi Peace Foundation July 1984]

EVOLVING INDIA - US AXIS

President Jayawardene recognised that India may be moved to destabilise his government not so much because of the political pressure of the Tamil electorate in Tamil Nadu but by the increasing presence and influence of the United States in the Indian region - a presence and an influence which India may regard as a threat to its own role in the Asian region. President Jayawardene was aware that too close a linkage with the United States may provoke that which he sought

to avoid. Again, although the political move towards the United States was facilitated by the open economic policy of the Sri Lankan Government which had linked Sri Lanka with the Western world, President Jayawardene was mindful that in terms of market size, India afforded much greater opportunities to the United States than little Sri Lanka.

"Indeed, American arms manufacturers have seen India as the better prospect in the region, and put pressure on the U.S. government in 1972 to lift an arms embargo as much to gain access to India as to Pakistan." [Stephen P. Cohen and Richard L. Park: India: Emergent Power - National Strategy Information Centre New York 1978]

In an interview with an Indian magazine in early April 1984 President Jayawardene said:

"...I know the whole situation. No country in the world would like India to be annoyed with it. Because you are 800 million people, you are a big market for trade purposes. It is not just the British who are shopkeepers. The Americans are shopkeepers too..."

Clearly, President Jayawardene was not unaware, that for him, the United States was not so much a 'resource' which he could use but an 'environmental factor' on which he was dependent and which in turn could use him to reach to and manage India.

Again, the role of India in the region must be necessarily related to the balance struck between the two super powers. In the ultimate analysis, the United States would balance the benefits of Sri Lanka's strategic location against the predominant role that India must be accorded in the Indian region, if the United States was intent on securing not so much India's support but its strict 'non alignment' in the continuing confrontation between the Washington and Moscow.

"At the minimum, the United States can

and should do nothing to challenge India's regional leadership. This does not imply the abandonment of equally legitimate (though less important) U.S. interests embedded in its relationships with other regional states... even smaller states such as Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka would not appreciate an American policy that unqualifiedly rested upon a recognition of India's hegemony in the region. That India now holds regional dominance nevertheless is the starting point for any rational U.S. policy for the 1980s... At the maximum, the U.S. must consider the alternative of actively sustaining India's regional leadership - although again, the legitimate ambitions and goals of other regional states need not be ignored... a wise Indian leadership will recognise that America's concern for India's neighbours does not represent - and for many years has not represented - an attempt at containment or harassment. Such an activist diplomacy will also identify many areas of mutual cooperation and support..." [Stephen P. Cohen and Richard L. Park: India: Emergent Power - National Strategy Information Centre New York 1978]

The Tamils of Sri Lanka must recognise that we may well be seeing today such 'an activist diplomacy' which has identified the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict as one of the areas for 'mutual cooperation and support' as between the United States and India. And there may be other areas as well.

Let us at the same time recognise that though the interests of India and the United States may 'converge', their interests may not necessarily become identical. The Soviet presence in Afghanistan and the role of Pakistan cannot be separated from the geo political frame of the Indian region. Again it would be in the interests of Pakistan to encourage the influence of China in the region, as a way of protecting itself against the day when the United States may veer too much towards India. And India will seek to interpret a 'strict non alignment' policy as a way of securing its own in-

fluence and power in the Indian region. The evolving matrix of power balances in the Indian region constitutes the structural frame within which the Tamil national struggle must, of necessity, take place. It is a structural frame which is therefore, a logical starting point for any examination of the rationalities relating to that struggle and those who choose to ignore it will do so at their peril.

INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVE

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi seeks to manage the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka in such a way as to further the foreign policy objective of securing India's influence and power in the Indian region - a policy objective which is sometimes expressed as securing a 'non aligned' Indian region.

India knows that the subjugation of the Tamils of Sri Lanka by a Sinhala government will pave the way for Sri Lanka to make its own alliances with one or the other of the super powers in the years to come and to that extent India has a need for the Tamils of Sri Lanka. To put it bluntly: to secure its foreign policy objective of securing the return of Sri Lanka to the 'non aligned fold', India needs to exert pressure on Sri Lanka through the threat of a continuing 'Tamil problem'.

On the other hand India also recognises that the creation of a separate Tamil Eelam state would destabilise the Indian region and that even apart from the effect on neighbouring Tamil Nadu, there may be difficulties in securing that such a new state would not, immediately or at some future date, align itself with one or the other of the two super powers and thereby increase super power presence and influence in the Indian region. At the sametime India would view with disfavour a continued radicalisation of the Tamil struggle with increasing Marxist overtones. Again, India knows that any 'via media' which involves a 'just' solution to the ethnic conflict short of the creation of a separate Tamil Eelam

state, would depend on the willingness of a Sinhala government to accept such a solution. And here Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi presumably recognises that if India seeks to pressurise the Sinhala government beyond a point, this may result in an increasing United States presence in Sri Lanka, rather than a decreasing one. And the point beyond which he may not go may be a function of the foreign policy objectives of the United States in the Indian region and the fear of a further radicalisation of the Tamil liberation struggle may be the point at which both Indian and U.S. interests may converge. In this, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi may be more of a pragmatist than his mother, the late Indira Gandhi.

The actions of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi appear to reflect the need of a 'regional power' to recognise that in the end its role tends to be limited by the policy objectives of the super powers. But this again, is a dynamic relation and not a static one. The 'political space' within which India may act is also a function of its own strength.

INDIA IS NOT IRAN AND THE TAMILS ARE NOT KURDS

It is not surprising, therefore, that unlike the Shah of Iran in 1975, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1985, has not, ordered the guerilla leaders to call off the struggle, unconditionally. He seeks instead to engage both the Tamil militant leaders and the Sri Lankan government in a 'talking process' to work out a 'just' solution. He is also not unmindful that any perception that India has abandoned the Tamils of Sri Lanka will in the long term tend to alienate the Tamils of Tamil Nadu from the Indian body politic and revive Tamil separatism, not openly, but as an underground movement whose nucleus may well be the Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka. And such an underground movement would gather momentum if India fails to find answers to the basic economic problems confronting its peoples in the next few years, because in a multi national state, there will an increasing tendency

for those faced with economic deprivation to attribute that deprivation to the failure of the centre to give wider powers to the nations which constitute the several states of the Indian Union. The 'talking process' is both a way of 'massaging' the reaction of the Tamil liberation groups in Tamil Nadu and also a way of managing the return of Sri Lanka to the 'non aligned fold'. The reality therefore is that India's commitment to a 'just' solution must be taken seriously. It is not only that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi is not the Shah of Iran - India is not Iran and the Tamils are not Kurds.

AND SO, BY ALL MEANS, LET US TALK AT BHUTAN

And so, by all means, let us talk at Bhutan. The Tamils are not an unreasonable people. But please, let us not talk endlessly. And, let us talk with some purpose and direction. Let us not talk endlessly about the so called 'devolution' of power.

Let us remind both India and the Sri Lankan government that as long ago as 1928, the Donoughmore Commission recommended the establishment of Provincial Councils on the ground that it was desirable that a large part of the the administrative work of the centre should come into the hands of persons resident in the districts and thus more directly in contact with the needs of the area. Twelve years later the Excecutive Committee of Local Administration chaired by the late S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike, considered the proposal of the Donoughmore Commission and in 1940, the State Council (the legislature) approved the establishment of Provincial Councils. But nothing was in fact done. Again, in 1947, on the floor of the House of Representatives, the late S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike again declared his support for the establishment of Provincial Councils. Eight years later, in 1955, the Choksy Commission recommended the establishment of Regional Councils to take over the functions that were exercised by the Kacheries and in May 1957, the government of the late S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike presented a draft

of the proposed Bill for the establishment of Regional Councils, but again nothing was done.

WE TALKED IN 1957

Let us say that we 'talked' in 1957 and that in July 1957, the Sinhala Prime Minister Bandaranaike entered into a Pact with the Leader of the Tamil Federal Party, S.J.V. Chelvanayagam which made provision for direct election to Regional Councils and also provided that the subjects covered by Regional Councils shall include agriculture, cooperatives, lands and land development, colonisation and education. The Pact however did not survive the opposition of sections of the Sinhala community which included the then leader of the opposition and the present President of Sri Lanka who declared:

"The time has come for the whole Sinhala race which has existed for 2500 years, jealously safeguarding their language and religion, to fight without giving any quarter to save their birthright...I will lead the campaign".

By all means let us talk at Bhutan with the representatives of President Jayawardene, but let us also remember that in the aftermath of the abortive talks of 1957, hundreds of Tamils were killed and a Sinhala writer Tarzie Vittachi was moved to comment:

"What are we left with? A nation in ruins, some grim lessons which we cannot afford to forget and a momentous question: have the Sinhalese and Tamils reached the parting of ways? [Tarzie Vittachi - Emergency 1958, Deutsch, London 1958]

And let us remember that that was more than twenty five years ago - in 1958. And let us say that we wish to secure that at the end of these talks thousands of Tamils are not attacked again with renewed vigour.

AND WE TALKED IN 1960

Let us say that we talked again in 1960,

with the Sinhala Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake as well with his successor Mrs. Srimavo Bandaranaike. In July 1963, the government of Mrs. Bandaranaike declared that 'early consideration' would be given to the question of the establishment of District Councils to replace the Kacheries and the government appointed a Committee on District Councils and the report of this Committee containing a draft of the proposed Bill to establish District Councils but again nothing was in fact done.

WE TALKED AGAIN IN 1965

Let us say that we 'talked' yet again in 1965 with the Sinhala Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake the government declared that it would give 'earnest consideration' to the establishment of District Councils and in 1968 a draft bill approved by the Dudley Senanayake Cabinet was presented as a White Paper and this Bill provided for the establishment of District Councils. Ironically enough, this time round, the opposition to the Bill was spearheaded by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party which professed to follow the policies of the late S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike who himself had in 1940, 1947 and again in 1957, supported the establishment of a decentralised administrative structure and the Bill was withdrawn.

AND WE TALKED AGAIN IN 1979/80

And we 'talked' again in 1979 and 1980, this time with President Jayawardene's government and the government established District Development Councils in respect of which Patricia Hyndman of Lawasia commented: "The present government has set up District Development Councils with the stated aim of decentralisation. Unfortunately inadequate implementation of the scheme, has meant that the desired devolution of power has not been forthcoming. A government agent described the Councils to the delegation in the following terms - they have no funding, they have no powers, and more important, the scheme is not one of devolution, rather what has been done is to bring all vil-

lage councils to a central spot." [Patricia Hyndman: Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983 - Report to Lawasia Human Rights Standing Committee].

AND WE TALKED YET AGAIN IN 1984

And after the holocaust of July and August 1983, we talked yet again at the All Party Conference summoned at the initiative of the Indian government. After twelve long months, of 'talking' President Jayawardene presented on the 14th of December 1984, a draft Tenth Amendment to the Constitution and a draft Provincial and District Councils Bill as 'conference proposals' for the settlement of the ethnic conflict.

The 'conference proposals' of December 1984 set out a three tier structure of District Councils, Provincial Councils and a Council of State was proposed. The intent of the scheme of the draft legislation was clear. The District Councils were without executive power. Executive power would be wielded by an executive committee constituted with a majority of Presidential nominees and the power of even such an executive committee was limited to the implementation of development plans approved by the Sinhala Minister of Local Government. Again, the District Councils would have limited legislative power of to enact subsidiary legislation but even this 'limited power was made subject to the control and approval of the President. And finally, the funds to be placed at the disposal of a District Council shall be determined by a Commission appointed by the President. The 'new' proposals did not devolve power from the centre: they reinforced the power of the centre to manage the districts. The Conference proposals were evidence of the intention of the Sinhala majority to manage and control the Tamils even in the relatively insignificant functional areas where the District Councils were given some jurisdiction.

AND SO PLEASE, LET US NOT TALK ENDLESSLY

And so, by all means let us talk at Bhutan and elsewhere. But, we repeat,

please let us not talk endlessly about so called 'devolution'. Let us remind ourselves and the Indian government which has sought to assist us, that more than 50 years have passed since 1928 and we have moved from Provincial Councils to Regional Councils and from Regional Councils to District Councils and from District Councils to Development Councils and now, perhaps again to Provincial Councils, with a Council of State thrown in. We have had the 'early consideration' of Mrs. Srimavo Bandaranaike and the 'earnest consideration' of the late Dudley Senanayake. There has been no shortage of Committees and Commissions, of reports and recommendations but that which was lacking was the political will to share power with the Tamil people and do that which is right and just. And while the talking continued for more than 50 years, the relentless subjugation of the Tamils of Sri Lanka has also continued - unabated and with increasing ferocity. And as we have 'talked' during all these years we have learnt that competing Sinhala parties have at all times appealed to Sinhala chauvinism as a way of securing or perpetuating their grip on political power in Sri Lanka and let no one say that we do not learn our lessons well. And so let us not talk endlessly about the 'devolution' of power. Devolution means that power 'devolves' from some higher body, legitimately clothed with the power of the state. Devolution means that the power that is so devolved is subject to the control and direction of that higher body. The Tamils of Sri Lanka do not seek a so called 'devolution' of power which is subject to the control and direction of a Sinhala government - but let us say that we are certainly prepared to sit and talk, as equals, about the way in which power may be shared in Sri Lanka. We are not an unreasonable people.

And so at the very outset let us ascertain the good faith and the political will of those who seek to talk with us. Let us ask: with whom do you say that you wish to talk? Do you accept that you are talking with the representatives of the Tamil nation? Or do you say you

are talking with some 'bandits and terrorists' with whom you seek to do a 'deal' to overcome a temporary difficulty that you face in your attempt to 'absorb' and 'integrate' the Tamils of Sri Lanka? Let us ask, loudly and clearly: do you recognise the existence of a Tamil nation in Sri Lanka?

And let us openly call upon those who have sought to assist us so that we may secure justice, to declare their own position on the question whether the Tamils of Sri Lanka constitute a nation. We recognise that as a sovereign state, India would be reluctant to espouse the division of another sovereign state and therefore we can understand though we may not agree with, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's declaration that he does not support the creation of a separate state for the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. We can also understand Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's declaration in the light of India's own foreign policy objectives in the Indian region. But that which we ask from our friends in the international community today is not a declaration in support of the creation of a separate state: we repeat - we ask them to state their position on the question whether the Tamils of Sri Lanka constitute a nation.

WE DO NOT PLEAD FOR FAIRNESS

We do not plead for fairness. We do not beg for justice. Too many Tamils have given their lives to permit us to do that. They have died so that we, who have survived may have the courage to stand up for that which is right and just. And so we patiently and respectfully request our friends in the international community to make their position clear. Do they agree that the Tamils of Sri Lanka constitute a nation and that there is a need for the representatives of the Tamil nation and the representatives of the Sinhala nation to sit together and discuss a constitutional structure where the two nations may live together in peace and in harmony? Do they take the view that the Sri Lankan government today, accepts that which was implicit in its own 1978 con-

stitution which provided that Sinhala and Tamil shall be the two 'national' languages of Sri Lanka - namely that there were two nations in Sri Lanka, at least in 1978? Or is it that the provision in relation to the two 'national' languages was a mere window dressing, and that the Sri Lankan government, which made constitutional provision for two 'national' languages, denies the existence of two nations in Sri Lanka? And is the position of the Sri Lankan government as that stated by President Jayawardene's brother, Mr.H.W.Jayawardene on his return recently from Bhutan:

"It is clear that a political settlement of the Tamil question cannot be made...on the basis of the claim to be a separate nation or nationality, distinct from other racial groups that are citizens of Sri Lanka..." [The Island - 18th July 1985]

And if the existence of the Tamil nation is denied today, is the purpose of the discussions at Bhutan and elsewhere to give legitimacy to a constitutional structure which will secure the continued integration and absorption of the Tamils of Sri Lanka into a single homogeneous Sinhala Buddhist nation? And please, let us not talk about District Councils, and Provincial Councils. First let us talk about the recognition of the existence of the Tamil nation and the constitutional steps that should be taken to give expression to that recognition. Because, if it is the case that the existence of a Tamil nation in Sri Lanka is denied then it must necessarily follow that the constitutional structures that are suggested on the basis of such denial, are intended to secure the evolution of a single homogeneous Sinhala identity, whether under the cloak of a so called single 'Sri Lankan nationality' or otherwise.

We are entitled are we not, to ask the Sri Lankan government and the international community - 'please, what does your reason say? what does your conscience declare?' How many more martyrs should be born before it is recognised that the togetherness of the

Tamils of Sri Lanka is the expression of a matured national consciousness? And does anybody believe that any resolution of the conflict is ever possible except on the basis of the recognition that Sri Lanka, today, is a multinational state? By all means, let us talk but let us about the essentials - let us not get lost in sub clauses and sub sections of rules and enactments because in the end all these rules and enactments would be worthless without the political will to recognise the existence of two nations in Sri Lanka.

TOGETHERNESS OF THE TAMILS OF SRI LANKA

And, to those who doubt the existence of the Tamil nation in Sri Lanka let us talk about the togetherness of the Tamil people. Let us talk about the time in the life of a people, let us talk about the stage in their history, when they become increasingly aware of the links that link them together, of the bonds that bind them together - and let us say that the Tamils of Sri Lanka living in many lands and across distant seas, have today, become increasing aware of their togetherness. Let us talk about a togetherness which is rooted in a common history, a common culture and a common language. Let us say that it is a togetherness which springs from a common past, but that it is not a function of the past alone. It is a togetherness which has been pressed into shape by the discrimination and oppression of a continuing present, a discrimination which sought to treat separately and which has inevitably nurtured. that which was separately treated, an oppression which sought to annihilate and inhibit but which inevitably consolidated and strengthened that which it sought to oppress. And let us say that the togetherness of the Tamils of Sri Lanka is not a function of the past and the present alone. It is all that and more. It is a togetherness which is given purpose and direction by a growing resolve and a growing determination that we, as a people, will build a future where we, and our children and our children's children will have the opportunity to grow to the fullness of our

potential and where we may return not only to a home but also to a homeland. It is a togetherness which has slowly but surely matured and which seeks to cry out openly and aloud, in pain and in joy: 'Yes we live in many lands and across distant seas, but we, too, are a people.'

WE ARE A NATION

Let us say that the Tamils of Sri Lanka constitute a nation. And to those who ask, 'what is a nation?' let us say that 'the simplest statement that can be made about a nation is that it is a body of people who feel that they are a nation; and it may be that when all the fine spun analysis is concluded this will be the ultimate statement as well.' [Rupert Emerson - From Empire to Nation, Cambridge Mass., 1953]. Nationalism is the expression of a certain consciousness. "But what is a nation? Many great thinkers have applied their minds to this...One of the truest and most moving descriptions I know was given by a little known professor of Ohio University. About forty years ago Professor Taylor wrote: 'Where and what is a nation? Is there such a thing? You would answer that the nation exists only in the minds and hearts of men. It is an idea. It is therefore more real than its courts and armies; more real that you and I are, for it existed in our fathers and will exist in our children. It is an idea, it is an imagination..'" [Achmed Sukarno: Address to the National Press Club - 1956]. And let us say that today, the Tamil nation is more real than courts and armies, because it exists in the hearts and minds of hundreds of thousands of Tamils, young and old, living in many lands and across distant seas.

Let us state our belief that nationalism has not yet fulfilled its historical role. We believe that the study group of the Royal Institute of International Affairs was right when it said in 1939 that 'the nation is the political unit, and nationalism the group symbol of the present stage of civilisation'. And, in the succinct words of Benedict Anderson in 1983, 'the reality is quite plain - the

end of the era of nationalism so long prophesied is not remotely in sight - indeed nationness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time.' Let us talk about the significance of the words of Karl W. Deutsch when he said in 1953: "...that the difference in poverty is so great, that the world's poorest people are so numerous, comprising as they do, more than one half of mankind, these are perhaps the fundamental facts behind much of today's nationalistic insistence on national separateness ..and not before the vast poverty of Asia and Africa have been reduced substantially, not before that, will the age of nationalism and national diversity begin to die.." And let us say that the eradication of the vast poverty of Asia and Africa can itself come about only through the political channel of nationalism and the energy that it releases.

TRADITIONAL HOMELANDS

And let us talk about the traditional homelands of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. We could not have become a people with a distinct language and culture without a homeland and conversely without a homeland we shall cease to exist as a people. Let us say that we are a people with a traditional homeland in the North and East of Sri Lanka and that the Bandaranaike - Chelvanayagam Pact in 1957 recognised the existence of these traditional homelands and further that the present Government in 1978 made permanent constitutional provision for the use of the Tamil language, as a 'national' language, in the 'Northern and Eastern Provinces' as the language of administration clearly because these territories constituted the permanent homeland of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. And let us query the good faith of the government if it now seeks to deny the Tamil people their land and let us ask whether such denial is evidence that it is set on a genocidal path of 'absorbing' and 'integrating' the Tamils of Sri Lanka within the Sinhala Buddhist fold.

JUSTICE OF OUR CAUSE

And let us talk about the justice of our cause and let us ask, 'what wrong have we done?' Was it wrong for those of us who were estate workers and who had contributed much to the prosperity of the Sri Lanka, was it wrong for us to ask that we should continue to be citizens of the country in which we were born? Was it wrong for us to demand that we should not be deprived of the right to vote, that we should not be rendered stateless? Was it wrong for us to demand that land which had been ours for more than two thousand five hundred years, should be regarded as our traditional homelands? Was it wrong for us to protest against the systematic state aided colonisation of our traditional homelands? Was it wrong for us to protest against the promulgation of the Sinhala Only Act, which deprived us of employment in the public service? Was it wrong for us to feel that the down grading of our language was yet another step in wiping out the identity of the Tamil people? Was it wrong for us to feel that this was yet another step in the adoption of the Hitlerite doctrine that the role of a minority is to serve the majority? Was it wrong for us to demand a federal constitution as a way of protecting our national identity? Was it wrong for us to protest against a discrimination which prevented our children from entering universities even when they were more qualified than the Sinhala children who were granted admission? And let us ask our friends in the international community, once again, respectfully and patiently: 'what does your reason say? what does your conscience declare? Please let us hear you, loud and clear, so that the world and posterity may have a record of your stand in support of justice.'

Let us say that that which is oppressed becomes consolidated - and that which is separately treated becomes separate. The repressive acts of successive Sinhala governments have shown the Tamils of Sri Lanka that it mattered little whether they were Indian Tamils, Jaffna Tamils, Estate Tamils, Trincomalee Tamils,

Batticaloa Tamils, Kandy Tamils, Badulla Tamils, Nuwara Eliya Tamils or Colombo Tamils. That which did matter was that they were Tamils. The Tamils of Sri Lanka have been educated about their Tamil identity. And so by all means let us talk at Bhutan - let us talk about the reality of the Tamil group identity in Sri Lanka and the growth of the Tamil nation.

" National and class divisions are unimportant until we make them relevant. And so it is with any other divisions within humanity. We are all human beings, whatever our colour, sex, age, occupation, religion, language group, weight, height, intelligence - definable as human beings different from other species. Our identities are in themselves irrelevant for social distinctions until we make them relevant. We identified black people as Negroes, whatever their age, religion, occupation, capabilities, or self identities. Then the tables were turned and they said, 'Yes, I am a Negro, but let's make this clear as possible by translating it into English and making the dichotomy clear : 'You are white; I am black.' Dark skinned human beings, the same as others, make one of their identities (poor, American, blue collar, man or woman, southerner) relevant as a weapon in their fight for their individual self determination." [Dov Ronen: The Quest for Self Determination, Yale University Press 1979]

RIGHT OF SELF DETERMINATION

And, so let us talk about the right of self determination of the Tamil people. Let us say that in the end, national self determination is but the resultant of the struggle for individual self determination. It is a right of self determination which the international community has come to recognise as one of the peremptory norms of general international law. In the words of Dr.Hector Gros Espiell in his report for the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination of Minorities for the Implementation of United Nations Resolutions Relating to the Right of Peoples Under Colonial and Alien

Domination to Self Determination:

"Today, no one can challenge the fact that, in the light of contemporary international realities, the principle of self determination necessarily possesses the character of jus cogens (that is a 'peremptory norm of general international law')."

And whatever may be the limits of the right of self determination it is nowhere denied that it includes the right of a subjugated people to free themselves from an alien subjugation. And let us say that today, the Tamils of Sri Lanka are by an test a subjugated people, living in fear for the safety of their lives and their property. And let us tell the Sri Lankan government: "Please, do not confuse the right of self determination with the way in which we may choose to exercise it. Please do not continue to repeat that which President Jayawardene's brother said on his return from Bhutan:

'...if the demand that the proposals for a political settlement should recognise the right of the Tamils for self determination extends to the point of an absolute right it can only mean the totally unacceptable claim for a separate state by whatever name it is called. If it means the granting of a reasonable degree of autonomy under the existing constitution according to Sri Lanka's concept of participatory democracy, the government is prepared to grant such autonomy and has founded its proposals on these basic principles...' "

WE ARE NOT AN UNREASONABLE PEOPLE

Let us say: "We are not an unreasonable people. We shall certainly talk with you about the way in which we shall exercise our right of self determination, because we too believe in participatory democracy. But participatory democracy means that we shall participate as equals and we shall talk only as equals and that is why we ask you, at the outset, do you recognise the existence of the Tamil nation, do you recognise the right of self determination of the Tamil people -

if you do not, then you do not recognise our right to choose and therefore we do not sit at the table as equals." And let us say, calmly and without rancour, that Selvarajah Yogachandran and Nadarajah Thangavelu who were murdered in the high security prison in Welikade in July 1984, whilst in the custody of the Government of Sri Lanka, and thousands of other Tamils, brave, honest and dedicated have given their lives so that we may stand up and declare, clearly and loudly - yes, we too are a people and so that our leaders may stand up and say - yes, we speak on behalf of a people or not at all.

But let us also say that We are not chauvinists. Neither are we racists. The togetherness of the Tamil people is not the expression of an exaggerated nationalism. We do not say that our language is the sweetest in the world but we do say that our language is sweet to our ears. We do not say that our culture is the oldest in the world but we do say that it is a culture of great antiquity and that it has made a rich contribution to the world. We do not say that our thinkers are the most influential that the world has known but we do say that their thoughts have left the world with a greater understanding of itself. We do not say that we are the chosen people but we do say that we, too, are a people, and that we are entitled to live our lives in the way we choose.

LARGER REGIONAL UNITY

And let us say that the growing togetherness of the Tamil people, is but a step in the growth of a larger unity. We know that in the end, national freedom can only be secured by a voluntary pooling of sovereignties, in a regional, and ultimately in a world context. Let us say that we recognise that our future lies with the peoples of the Indian region and the path of a greater and a larger Indian union is the direction of that future. It is a union that will reflect the compelling and inevitable need for a common market and a common defence and will be rooted in the common heritage that we share with our brothers and sisters of

not only Tamil Nadu but also of India. It is a shared heritage that we freely acknowledge and it is a shared heritage from which we derive strength. And so, let us talk about the larger regional context of the Tamil national question.

Let us remember the fate of earlier agreements with Sinhala governments and request those who have come to assist us: 'How can you guarantee that that which is agreed will be implemented? How can you guarantee that that which happened to the 1970 Iraq - Kurd peace treaty does not happen to any agreement at Bhutan?' Should we not ask: 'Is it not the reality that competing Sinhala political parties have nurtured a chauvinist mythology around the latent fear that the Sinhala people have for the Tamils of Tamil Nadu? And is it not the reality that so long as that latent fear exists, sections of the ruling Sinhala elite will always use that fear in their efforts to jockey themselves into positions of power. And is it not true that it was only an year ago in April 1984, that President Jayawardene declared in a magazine interview: "How can I say I want regional councils when everybody else is against them?... I am a prisoner...of circumstances, the law, the constitution and the political parties. I cannot throw my weight about and say: do this, do that. I am not a dictator". And is it not the reality that the 'circumstances' will not change unless answers are sought in a larger regional context? Let us ask whether the time has not come to openly recognise that the Sri Lankan Tamil question cannot be resolved except in an international frame.

AND SO, BY ALL MEANS, LET US TALK

And so, by all means, let us talk at Bhutan and if the need arises elsewhere as well. After all we are not an unreasonable people and we are not afraid to talk. And let us have regard to the words of the Basque political leaders many years ago:

"To negotiate, and negotiate with dexterity and foresight is the only

rational course that the Basques must follow in order to salvage from ruin the sacred objects of their cult."

But let us not talk endlessly. Let us recognise that a guerilla movement which is engaged in endless talks will lose credibility and that this is something that is not unknown to either the Indian government or the Sri Lankan government. Let us learn that Bhutan is not a mere exercise in skilful advocacy. Let us learn that at the end of the day we must secure our own strength in order that we may secure that which is right and just. The word justice is not the expression of a mere platitude and perhaps there is no reason to reiterate that particular truth amongst those of us who trace our origins to the land of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. We must recognise that in order that justice may be given the thick edge of action, there is an urgent need to identify and mobilise the entire resources of the Tamil people - and if circumstances compel us, then this must be done whilst the talking goes on and the talks themselves must be directed to bring about this mobilisation. We must recognise that it is only in this way that we can manage the reality of the evolving matrix which constitutes the international power frame in the Indian region and within which, our struggle must inevitably take place. Unity is strength, but let us recognise that unity will not come from pious pleas for unity. Where no way forward is seen, all ways are right. But as a struggle progresses and matures, unity will grow around that which is perceived as the right direction. Today the struggle of the Tamils of Sri Lanka for justice and fair dealing has reached a watershed. There is a compelling need for Tamils everywhere to move to create a forum where the 'rationalities' may be examined and thereby assist in giving direction and cohesion to a struggle for that which is right. Let us learn from the experience of the Kurds of Iraq. It is said that fools fail to learn even from their own experience. Wise men learn from the experience of others. We are a people - not without wisdom.