

The Story of Velupillai Pirabhakaran

Excerpts by Shivaparan Nagarajah from M.R. Narayan Swamy's *Tigers of Lanka*, posted on Circle Mailing List and Soc.culture.sri-lanka.

It is widely believed that Velupillai Pirabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, is regarded by most Sri Lankan Tamils, especially those in the north and east of the island, as a folk hero leading the struggle of an oppressed nation. On the other hand, he is seen as a ruthless terrorist by most Sinhalese dominated political parties, their followers, and the politically influential Buddhist clergy. Only history will decide whether he is a national hero or a terrorist. However, he has played an undeniable role in bringing the Tamils' grievances to the limelight. The following excerpts from Narayan Swamy's book describes his life upto 1983, the year which permanently changed the lives of Sri Lankan Tamils.

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The Story of Velupillai Pirabhakaran - Part 1

Velupillai Pirabhakaran was born in Jaffna hospital on November 26, 1954 when Tamil-Sinhalese relations were inching towards a flash point. He was the youngest of four children of Vallipuram Parvathi and Thiruvencatam Velupillai. Theirs was a typical middle class family where the youngest was the darling of all. Prabha's mother was deeply religious and very fond of him. His thin-lipped father was strict and upright man who demanded absolute discipline from his two sons and two daughters.

He was affectionate and gave them whatever comforts his salary as a district land officer in the Sri Lankan government could allow. Prabha was his favorite child too, and the young boy would often cuddle up to his father at night. The family nicknamed the young one "durai", or master.

Prabha did his first two years at school in the eastern town of Batticaloa (Mattakalappu), where his father was posted, and then joined the Chithambara College in his home town of Valvettithurai, in Sri Lanka's northern tip, after Velupillai got transfer.

He was an active, at times mischievous, student and rated average in studies. That caused a lot of worry to his father who, like all Tamils, valued education immensely. At the end of his 7th standard, Velupillai took along his son to Vavuniya, where he was posted, so that the boy would remain under his watchful eyes. He later brought Prabha back to Valvettithurai, VVT is short, for further schooling. The doting father also arranged for a tutor to coach his son after school hours.

Prabha's neighbors and schoolmates remember him fondly. "Prabha would actively help out the family during religious functions and happily run errands for neighbors and relatives".

Prabha was an able and enthusiastic assistant to the family during the annual get-together for his grandfather's death anniversary. When the ceremonies were over, he would carry lunch for relatives who had failed to make it.

VVT, where Prabha spent much of his early years, was a small and closely-knit coastal town of some 10,000 Tamils with one catholic church and 3 Hindu temples. One of them, dedicated to Lord Shiva, was a virtual family property of the Velupillais, and the young Prabha would land there to lend a helping hand during all

major festivals. VVT's menfolk were civil servants, traders, fishermen or simply smugglers, thanks to the winding sea coast and the proximity to India.

Boats would sail to Rangoon, Chittagong, Rameshwaram, Nagapattinam and Cochin laden with both legitimate cargo and contraband.

VVT was politically conservative though and more receptive to the relatively moderate Tamil Congress. It was among the few places in Jaffna where the Federal Party did not organize its "satyagraha" campaign in 1961. Otherwise VVT shared the traits of other Tamil areas. Its residents, like Tamils elsewhere in Sri Lanka's northeast, were greatly influenced by India's independence struggle, and photographs of such Indian leaders as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Swami Vivekananda and Subash Chandra Bose adorned many homes.

August 15, India's independence day, was celebrated in the town with pride, and Tamil newspapers and magazines of Jaffna which would come out with a special supplements to mark the occasion were read with avid interest in VVT.

Velupillai was a popular man who would hold endless discussions with friends on the worsening ethnic relations in the country, lamenting the fate of Tamils. The exchange of views would be in Tamil and English, and although he did not understand every word, Prabha was often present by his father's side and listened attentively. This was his preliminary introduction to politics and to the world of Tamil-Sinhalese conflict. It was perhaps during these discussions that Prabha picked up the habit of being a patient listener.

But school did not interest him, other things did. Prabha was fascinated by the life and times of two Indians: Subash Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh, in that order. Bose's brief forays into spiritualism, his innate militancy, his willingness to take on Mahatma Gandhi, his carefully planned escape from India, his fight against the British with the hastily-formed Indian National Army and almost everything the charismatic Bengali nationalist did made him Prabha's hero. He would return to books on Bose repeatedly, gripped in particular by his one war like slogan: " I shall fight for the freedom of my land until I shed the last drop of blood".

Then there were the military exploits of Napoleon, the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, the story of Mahabharata, and the religious discourses of the saintly Kirupanandha Variyar, who came to VVT once a year from Tamil Nadu. Prabha was himself quietly pious, in line with the family, and his favorite deity was Lord Subramania.

There were also political meetings in VVT which Prabha attended and where speakers detailed "Sinhalese atrocities" and called for building up Tamil resistance.

Someone told Prabha about a Hindu priest at Panadura town who was caught by a Sinhalese mob during the 1958 riots, tied to the cot on which he was sleeping, doused with kerosene and burnt to death. "Ours was a God-fearing society and the people were religious-minded. The widespread feeling was: when a priest like him was burnt alive, why did we not have the capability to hit back?", Prabha would ask one day.

The future guerrilla fighter related such stories to his school-mates. His love for the catapult, while the other boys were more interested in sports, was legendary and took him to the world of marksmanship.

His earliest victims were chameleons, squirrels and birds which he felled or killed with pebbles. Some birds which did not die were taken home. When he didn't have a catapult, he would hang any object from a tree and shoot rubber arrows at it: or simply throw a stone in the air and try hitting it with another stone before it came crashing down.

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The Story of V. Pirabhakaran - Part 2

His father did not take kindly to Prabha's many friends dropping in at home. So Prabha remained essentially a loner in his earlier days, shy of girls and always restless. When he was alone, he would recite dialogues from the Tamil movie "Veerapandia Kattabomman", imagining himself to be the legendary warrior, or drown himself in Phantom comics. He was fascinated by Phantom's skull ring, which the marked hero liberally used while fighting evil men, leaving a mark on their chins. Years later, the comics goaded him into adopting an equally ferocious insignia for the LTTE. He also learnt the rudiments of judo and karate, and his family, noticing the boy's interest for anything to do with fighting skills, began teasing him as "veeravan", or the brave one.

One of his friends was Sathasivam Krishnakumar (Kittu), who would emerge as the LTTE's feared military commander of Jaffna. Prabha and Kittu would experiment filling empty soda bottles with chemicals pilfered from school and exploding them. Once Prabha and his friends attached a lighted incense stick to a pack of incendiary chemicals and kept it in the school toilet. The "time bomb" exploded just when they expected it to. " We burst out laughing", a Chithambara school product recalled. "The principal suspected us but none of us admitted making it."

Simultaneously, as the 70's produced the first pangs of militancy, Prabha began preparing for the battles that he perceived lay ahead. he would tie himself up, get into a sack and lie under the sun the whole day. He would also go and spread himself on chilli bags. He even inserted pins into his nails.

As in other Tamil areas, the introduction of "Standardization" pushed the students and youths in VVT, angry at what they thought was a brazen attempt by the government to legitimize racial discrimination, to reject the traditional parliamentary politics for militancy. Prabha was losing whatever little interest he had in education and increasingly spoke to friends about "Sinhalese oppression".

An elderly VVT resident who knew Prabha and his family closely recalled: "We advised the boys not to protest and to keep studying. But I couldn't convince even one person after standardization". Prabha drifted, like many of his contemporaries, to the Tamil Student League (TSL) and the Tamil Youth League (TYL), which organized street protests against "standardization" as well as the 1972 Republican constitution.

TYL acted as the youth wing of the Tamil United Front (TUF). Prabha's earliest contacts outside of his immediate circle were the members of the two leagues, most of whom were elder to him. The included Thangathurai and Kuttimani, both of whom were from VVT, and a cousin who went by the name of "periya" Sothi.

By then, Prabha had been absenting himself from home, initially for days and then for weeks. The young man bristled with energy as he tore around Jaffna in shorts meeting new people discussing Tamil politics, the ancient Tamil kingdoms in India and Sri Lanka, and the possibility of an armed struggle a la Bose.

"Once he began speaking, it was very difficult to stop him. He would go on and on", a former Prabha's aide said. In 1972 he was wounded in the leg when a bomb he was making with Thangathurai and others under a palmyrah tree burst prematurely. It earned him the title "Karikalan" (man with black legs), and when police began looking for Prabha, they made it a point to scan young men's legs in a bid to identify the elusive rebel.

In 1973, when the police cracked down on TYL activists following the arrest of Sathiyaseelan, detectives visited Prabha's house looking for him. He was already under suspicion for an assassination attempt on Jaffna Mayor Alfred Duraiyappah at a carnival, which was Prabha's first major act of violence.

But Prabha had bolted by then and sailed to India with at least four others, including Kuttimani & Thangathurai. He eventually made it to Madras with Periya Sothi and hired a small house at Kodambakkam with the help of T.R. Janardhanan, a local politician who had written a book on the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnic crisis earlier.

Janardhanan remembers Prabha as a shy and quiet young man with big piercing eyes who always appeared to be itching for action. But the latter hardly had any money on him and life in Madras was not easy. Janardhanan was a bachelor willing to pay host to Sri Lankan Tamils who dropped by, and Prabha used the opportunity for free meals and political discussions.

But Prabha was restless and was soon tired of being with Periya Sothi, who appeared content staying in Madras. Chetti, a Jaffna youth, had by then escaped from a prison in Sri Lanka, and he too eventually made it to Madras and took up residence in the city's Mylapore area. Chetti was also a man of action, and naturally he and Prabha forged an instant friendship.

Periya Sothi didn't like the new found camaraderie between the two, and complained to any willing listener that Prabha was getting into bad company. Prabha countered that Periya Sothi was just "cooking and eating in Madras" and that he (Prabha) was perfectly aware of Chetti's criminal record. "But Chetti and his people are active", he told friends. "As for me, I will never, never lose my identity".

Thangathurai and Kuttimani also tried to dissuade Prabha from joining hands with Chetti. But he turned down the advice, virtually snapping his relationship with the VVT duo, and sailed back to Jaffna to be with his new comrade-in-arms.

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The Story of V. Pirabhakaran - Part 3

Prabha was now completely underground, cut off from his family although he managed to retain contacts with select relatives. The months in India had made him a lot tougher. In Vedaraniyam, a Tamil Nadu coastal town and a known landing point for Sri Lankan Tamils who came by boat, Prabha and Thangathurai and the others had led a hard life. The group was often hungry and would eagerly look forward to the "prasadam" distributed at the local temple. Cheap curd rice was the only food they could afford to buy. There were times when Prabha and others would take sleep-inducing tablets in a desperate bid to beat the hunger.

By the time Prabha landed in Jaffna, the 1974 International Tamil Conference had ended on a bloody note. And Sivakumaran, the darling of Tamil youths, had committed suicide, giving Prabha the first practical example of what cyanide could do. Prabha had been impressed by Sivakumaran's exploits and had wanted to meet him.

Now he was also cut off from Thangathurai and had to prepare new hideouts since the earlier ones were known to the police.

In October 1974 Prime Minister Srimavo was to visit Jaffna, and Prabha and Chetti decided to give her a hot reception. The duo went on a violence spree, exploding bombs at half a dozen targets, including the Kankesanthurai police station, Jaffna's main market etc. The explosions did not cause much damage, but as anticipated triggered panic.

Chetti was re-arrested a short while later, putting further strain on Prabha. Chetti had earlier robbed a cooperative store in Jaffna and quietly bought a car, and gave conflicting answers when friends asked him about his new lifestyle.

Prabha once again found himself in financial strain after police caught Chetti, and had to go through the process of forging new contacts and securing fresh hideouts for the second time in less than a year. It was a task he did admirably well, although it took him time to realize that he had been cheated by Chetti.

Prabha survived those days on wild fruits and food that his close associates shared with him. "I used to secretly give him helpings from our kitchen", said a former LTTE member who was not underground then.

Prabha, however, never strayed from the cause for which he had fled his home. The constant search for shelter and hiding places never stopped him from preaching Tamil politics with passion.

Once he suffered an attack on jaundice, but he would not go to a doctor; miraculously, and to his friend's surprise, he recovered. But otherwise Prabha remained his old self.

There would be no stopping him if he began a monologue on the Indian independence struggle and Tamil history. And if he was desperate for money, he would request friends to cycle up to VVT and borrow cash from sympathizers. He himself avoided going to his home town. But despite all the hard work, Prabha remained an unknown entity in Jaffna until Duraiyappah was gunned down.

A day before the assassination on July 27, 1975, Prabha walked into a friend's house armed with an unloaded and almost rusted revolver, a bundle of matchboxes and some assorted materials. The friend watched in amazement as Prabha began collecting the tip of the matchsticks and making pellets out of them.

"Can you shoot with this?" the friend asked mockingly. Prabha, his mind engrossed in the art of making bullets to kill, replied without any visible display of emotion: "Keep quiet. See what happens tomorrow".

The next day, Prabha set out at dawn. The friend had no idea where he was headed to. But when he heard that Duraiyappah had been shot while visiting a temple, the friend guessed rightly -and easily- who could have been responsible.

It was Prabha's first murder, and the first major assassination by Tamils. The assassination created a sensation in Sri Lanka. It also made Prabha famous. His name soon acquired a halo and for the first time Jaffna youths began hearing about a secret group which called itself the Tamil New Tigers (TNT).

Although three accomplices who took part in the killing were arrested, Prabha-like the phantom he had adored- remained one step ahead of his pursuers. He would never be caught, never face police torture and never see the insides of a prison in Sri Lanka.

He spoke little and gave nothing away even by way of hints either about his movements or future plans. After killing Duraiyappah Prabha walked into the house of a trusted contact and asked if he could spend the night.

The unsuspecting friend nodded and Prabha dozed off. In the morning, he disappeared, as calmly as he had walked in. The police hunt triggered by Duraiyappah's murder forced him to take extreme precautions. His sixth sense for safety never deserted him.

The "boys" although admired, did not enjoy many sympathizers in Jaffna those days. Most Tamils abhorred violence.

Prabha had warned his friends not to sleep in their houses after the killing, but they had ignored the advice. Prabha himself made no mistake on that score. His constant companion was a revolver which he kept under the pillow when he slept.

He also asked his friends to be constantly armed- it did not matter even if the weapon was only a kitchen knife or chilli powder. The TNT's armory was limited to two revolvers, one of it bought with stolen money.

Prabha's obsession with safety was such that he would not meet anyone, including possible recruits to the militant movement, if there was anything even remotely suspicious about them. There were others he met without revealing his real identity.

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The Story of V. Pirabhakaran - Part 4

Prabha had torn and destroyed all his photographs in the family album before leaving the house. But there was no guarantee that the police did not have a picture of him.

Now Prabha made new contacts, many of which proved long-lasting. He however declined to go to India to escape the police dragnet. Tamil politics was slowly but inevitably moving towards a confrontation with Colombo.

In 1976, S. Subramaniam, who then headed a small militant group of his own, teamed up with Prabha. In subsequent years, Prabha would get many more associates, but Subramaniam alias Baby, would remain an invaluable asset and loyal friend.

On March 5th, Prabha led a raid on the People's Bank at Puttur in Jaffna and escaped with 500,000 rupees in cash and jewelry worth 200,000 rupees. The money would go into the building the LTTE, which was founded on May 5th and for its secret training camps in the forest of Killinochi and Vavuniya.

Prabha was at Vaddukoddai where the TUF transformed itself as the TULF and declared its intention to fight for a sovereign state of Eelam, electrifying Tamil politics. Amirthalingam was the hero of that convention and was referred to as the "Thalapathy" (general) of the Tamil struggle.

Prabha knew him and respected him. After the July 77 elections, which the TULF swept in the Tamil areas, their relationship blossomed. Although his interest in political work was minimal, Prabha used to quietly meet Amir and other TULF leaders at their homes. Prabha was slowly coming out of the shell he had confined himself to all these years.

The LTTE opened 1977 by gunning down a police constable on February 14 at Maviddapuram in Jaffna. On May 18, two more policemen were shot near Inuvil, about 4 miles from Jaffna. LTTE activists approached them on bicycles, opened fire and went away pedaling- a method that was to slowly become a LTTE trademark in Jaffna.

Simultaneously Prabha began building the LTTE by recruiting and training trusted young men at an out-of-the-way place called Poonthottam, some two miles from Vavuniya town. Around the same time, Thangathurai opened another training camp in Mullaitivu district.

Prabha had already prepared a logo for the LTTE with the help of an artist in Madurai during one of his clandestine visits to Tamil Nadu. It showed the head of a roaring tiger, paws outstretched, with two rifles and 33 bullets set against a circle ringing the tiger's head. The tiger was the insignia of the ancient Tamil Chera kingdom, and Prabha was visibly enthusiastic when the logo was first shown to him. He went on to form a five member central committee of the LTTE, putting himself as a member of the leadership council. He charted a constitution which all members were expected to sign and accept. It called for the establishment of a casteless Tamil society by armed struggle, warned members against tainting their loyalty to the LTTE with family ties or love affairs.

Training would take place either in the farm at Poonthottam, with a huge cardboard cutout of a man, or in forest areas where a tree with some natural clearing would serve as the target. Prabha adored English movies, particularly the Westerns, and would keep enacting the deadly "sudden deaths" of the Wild West. "He would take slow steps with a revolver tucked into his shirt, take a sudden U-turn, whip out the revolver in a flash and fire at the imaginary enemy," said an ex-Tiger. "He never got tired of it. He thought it was fascinating".

But the Tiger supremo was not only a good shooter; he was also a meticulous planner. If a bank was to be raised, he would place the place under watch for weeks, if necessary for months. The planning for the operation would be done in a systematic way. He would take lead role in the discussions, but share operational secrets only on a need-to-know basis. Before a major operation got under way, Prabha would tense up, walking up and down with his hands clasped behind. He did not like to or accept defeat.

He would be furious if things did not go his way. Even in friendly physical combats, he would not accept defeat. If he feared he was losing, he would turn vicious and bite his opponent. His philosophy was: Never say die.

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The Story of V. Pirabhakaran - Part 5

In 1977, he was joined by Uma Maheswaran, and suddenly the world to open up for the Tigers. Until then almost all entrants to the LTTE were obscure young men. Uma was different. He was not only older to Prabha by some 10 years, but he was also secretary of the TULF's Colombo chapter and a known orator.

In London, the EROS had already sent two batches to Lebanon for learning military warfare from the PLO. The bitter internal rivalries that were to mark the Tamil struggle in later years was absent then. So EROS functionaries decided to open up the training to others as well, the LTTE included.

One of the first three Tamils to go to Lebanon was Arul Pragasam, alias Arular. He reached Kannady, also in Vavuniya, in 1976 with a view to settle down and establish a base to woo the educated class into joining the EROS. He was followed from London by Shankar Rajee, another founder member who established the first contacts with the LTTE.

Arular, with his Kannady farm barely 20 miles from Prabha's hideout, met the LTTE leader several times beginning September 1976. With his degree in engineering and newly-acquired knowledge in Lebanon, Arular passed on to Prabha ideas about making explosives. In turn, Prabha agreed to provide incendiary chemicals to Arular.

Once a LTTE courier carrying nitric acid to the Kannady farm was caught by the police after he could not give credible explanation about his presence in the Vavuniya forest. Arular, who came rushing from Jaffna on hearing about the arrest, told the police that he had ordered the acid to pour it into snake pits. Mercifully, the police were convinced by the explanation and released the courier. But Prabha would not leave any evidence; at the first opportunity he had the police station raided and all documents related to the arrest were taken away. The courier promptly escaped to Tamil Nadu.

Prabha once came over to the Kannady farm in May 1977 and took Arular out on a hunting expedition. Prabha had a rifle with him and the pair decided to try their skills on a flock of ducks in a pond. The birds were in plenty, both in the water and on tress by the bank. Prabha took the first aim carefully after the two had stepped into the waist-deep water. Almost all the birds immediately took off in fright, barring one which began splashing in the water in visible discomfort. Prabha who was in shorts, held the rifle in one hand and ran towards the struggling duck and caught it, convinced that he had wounded it. Arular and Prabha began walking back to the farm.

"It was then that Prabha looked at the duck and was surprised that it was not bleeding anywhere", Arular said. "I realized that it might be the duck I had fired at the previous day but (which I had) failed to trace. But I did not tell him that and insisted that the bird had indeed been shot by him. He was happy to hear that".

In normal times, however, Prabha avoided handling a rifle. He was fascinated by revolvers and possessed one all the time. He would never miss an opportunity to practice with that. Prabha was an excellent marksman who could repeatedly get the bull's eye. At times, the guerrilla-in-making would even ask visitors for a friendly shooting match.

One such request was made to Shankar Rajee, who initially hesitated, saying he was not familiar with Prabha's .22 revolver. But Prabha persisted and asked Rajee to exhibit his skill on an empty "Milk Maid" can placed on a mud wall some 20 feet away.

Rajee who found the LTTE training camp vastly different from the Fatah camps he had been to in Lebanon and Syria, fired first. The bullet grazed the can and toppling it. Prabha walked up to the fallen can, picked it up and replaced it on the wall. He returned to where Rajee was standing, turned, took aim and fired. It was bulls' eye.

Rajee was naturally impressed. If he was inquisitive about the source of Prabha's marksmanship, he found the answer: "I saw in the room a "Teach Yourself Shooting" book published in London. It was evident that whatever he knew, it was self-taught".

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The Story of V. Pirabhakaran - Part 6

In 1977, the Tigers were considered close, and even sympathetic, to the TULF, much to the chagrin of the EROS and other left-wing Tamils who thought that Amir and Co. were nothing more than a bunch of bourgeois politicians.

As violence by the militants continued even after the general elections, the TULF got worried. Amir called a meeting of the LTTE leadership at his residence at Moolai village in November 1977. Seven of LTTE men, including Prabha, Uma and Baby attended.

Amir spoke slowly but firmly. The TULF, he reminded the Tigers, had won the elections and should be given a chance. The killings, he added, had gone up and should be put on hold at least for the time being. "I am not asking you to give up violence, but you should cool down," he said.

Prabha was silent. In fact none of the LTTE members responded by way of argument. Amir was the superstar of Jaffna in 1977 and no one was dared to upset him.

One man, however, did rebel against Amir. But he immediately faced the Tiger's wrath, underlining once again the unwritten understanding between the TULF and LTTE.

The victim was M. Kanagaratnam, a TULF MP who switched allegiance to the ruling UNP after the 1977 elections. On Jan 27, 1978, Uma and Prabha shot him on a Colombo street. It was the first LTTE hit outside the Tamil majority northeast.

The police issued thousands of "wanted" posters for four men after the shooting. Uma headed the list, but Prabha did not figure in it. Uma promptly went underground.

3 months later, Bastiampillai and 3 other policemen were gunner down in a stunning attack by Chellakili at a LTTE forest hideout. Uma was there too, but played no role in the killings, simply watching the men die from the top of a tree where he was hiding.

A section of the LTTE decided to claim responsibility for all that the group had done for the cause until then. Uma had by then become chairman of a reconstructed nine-member central committee. Prabha had himself proposed his name; although it technically meant that Uma was the numero uno in the LTTE, the effective military leadership remained in the hands of Prabha.

The government, alarmed at the escalating violence in Tamil areas, hurriedly issued the Proscription of the LTTE and other similar organizations Ordinance, outlawing all Tamil militant groups. In May, the police issued a list of 38 "wanted" men. Heading the names was V. Pirabhakaran. He was no more an unknown commodity.

Amir was bitter about the LTTE claim. He could not stomach that a relatively unknown bunch of young men was trying to overshadow the TULF. His anger was compounded when party colleagues made their displeasure known. "You said the boys were under your control," he was repeatedly told. "Now see." An angry Amir called for Uma and made his displeasure clear to him.

In the summer of 1979, the 11th World Festival of Youth and Students was held in Havana. The LTTE came out with a pamphlet outlining the Tamil struggle in 6 languages- English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese and Tamil- for distribution at the Cuban capital. The TULF had been invited to the jamboree, and the LTTE decided to take advantage of it. But luck ran out for the Tigers. A London-based LTTE emissary

who was to carry them to Cuba was denied visa by the Cuban embassy at Madrid and he returned to London, from where the pamphlets were posted to the festival secretariat at Havana.

Prabha remained more or less aloof from this publicity blitz. He remained content with what he thought was more important-recruitment, training, and collection and storage of arms and ammunition.

In 1978, the LTTE had been joined by Kittu, Mahathaya and Raghu. All three were from VVT. Raghu had wanted to be a policemen, but was rejected because he hailed from VVT.

By 1979, the Tigers had spread their fangs to eastern province, where Charles Lucas Anthony, a young firebrand catholic, was to prove an invaluable addition from Trincomalee. The new members were asked to sign and express their allegiance to the LTTE constitution. Preliminary training got underway almost at once.

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The Story of V. Pirabhakaran - Part 7

On Dec 5, the LTTE raided the People's bank and decamped with 1.2 million rupees after killing two policemen and wounding a third. The police launched a vicious crackdown which forced scores of militants to flee to Tamil Nadu. Prabha was one of them.

The security hunt scattered the "boys" and seriously disrupted their network. But the LTTE used the opportunity to send trainees to Lebanon to master what the EROS had learnt. The Tigers paid 100,000 rupees to the EROS for despatching 16 men to Lebanon; the PLO also pressed the LTTE to send cadres for training. The LTTE leadership council decided to send four members -including Chellakilli and Uma- in the first batch. Uma, in keeping with his status as the group's chairman, decreed that Prabha could travel later. None of the four who were picked to go to Lebanon had passports. But a sympathetic Tamil Nadu MP helped them to get Indian passports.

The passports were taken to London to get Syrian visa with the help of the PLO mission there; but to the LTTE's horror, the British customs seized them after a courier who had hidden them inside a Tamil typewriter could not explain why he had them. The LTTE couldn't care less. It promptly got four more passports made in Madras.

Eventually, however, only Uma and another LTTE activist made it to Lebanon via Paris, where the Tigers had to stay one night at a railway station because his contact failed to turn up on time from London. The training ended within 3 months. But the Tigers were not happy. Prabha had desired that the trainees bring back some arms. Uma failed to do that. On top of it, Uma complained that the training was lousy. The financial aspect of the trip also sparked a major row between the LTTE and EROS, in particular between Prabha and Rajee.

Prabha thought that the LTTE had been cheated and wanted Rajee to present himself before the LTTE's central committee. Rajee refused. Amir intervened after this dispute showed no signs of abating. The matter was finally settled when Rajee agreed to cough back 285 pounds to the LTTE. That incident was to remain a sore point in Prabha's dealings with Rajee for a long time.

It was around this time Prabha and Uma began to quarrel. One of the main cause of their differences, which was to have far-reaching consequences for the future of Tamil militancy, centered around Urmila. Prabha suspected Uma having sex with Urmila, which in the LTTE's book was a serious crime.

When Prabha drew up the LTTE constitution, he had made it very clear that he considered family life and love affairs as impediments to revolutionary politics. When the first word about the alleged Uma-Urmila affair reached his ears, Prabha did not believe it. But when he did, he promptly asked Uma to quit the LTTE along with Urmila, Uma declined.

In interviews years later, Prabha never mentioned Urmila by name and simply accused Uma of having violated the LTTE's conduct code. "It was a problem between an individual and the Tiger movement," he said in 1984. "I am in no way responsible for the problem. It was Uma who created the issue.... A leader of a revolutionary movement shoul commit himself totally to the discipline of the organisation. If a leader violates the basic rules and principles, then there will be chaos and the organisation will crumble."

But the break -up did not come about quickly. It was bitter and protracted. Prabha first began complaining about Uma within the LTTE, accusing him of being unworthy to the Eelam cause. One day he rang up London and poured scorn on Uma, shocking the LTTE representative. The latter argued that it was not a problem beyond redemption and should be sorted out amicably.

Moreover, he had introduced Uma as the LTTE chairman to other Third World groups which had offices in London; it would be embarrassing to tell them now that the chairman had been axed because he was having illicit sex. But Prabha would not budge.

It was then that the London representative s of the LTTE decided to bring into the Tiger fold a SriLankan Tamil who lived in London. The man was a Marxist, had a firm footing on ideology, was committed to the cause of Tamil independence and was eager to play a more active role. Until then, he was operating from his council flat, writing Tamil and English pamphlets for any Sri Lankan Tamil group which approached him. And almost everyone did: the LTTE, the GUES (which was the student wing of EROS) and the Tamil Liberation Organistation (TLO), which claimed to be the biggest expatriate group of Tamils. The man who the LTTE now sought was Anton Stanislaus Balasingham.

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The Story of V.Pirabhakaran - Part 8

Balasingham was a former journalist who had worked for the "Veerakesari", the Colomob-based Tamil newspaper which in 1978 published the LTTE's first public statement and was noted for its coverage of events in SriLanka's northeast. He had later joined the British High Commission in Colombo as a translator, before moving to London where he enrolled at the South Bank Polytechnic. He was living with a young Australian woman Adele when the LTTE approached him with an unusual request: Would he go to Madras and take ideological classes for LTTE members and perhaps, in the process, help the Tigers overcome their internal differences? Balasingham agreed.

Balasingham was not unknown to the LTTE leadership. The first LTTE document in Tamil, published in 1978, had been authored by him. He had also penned the pamphlet for the Havana summit. The LTTE would

suggest to him what it wanted; Balasingham would prepare a draft, which would be sent to Uma for corrections and modifications, and then published as a LTTE document.

In 1979, he had written the LTTE's first major theoretical work, called "Towards Socialist Tamil Eelam". It first came out in Tamil and then in English, and was an instant hit among the Jaffna intelligentsia. Balasingham was naturally held in high esteem. When he flew into Madras in 1979, there was excitement and expectancy.

Bala was effusive. He shook hands politely with Prabha, Uma and others when they were introduced at his hotel room. He carefully examined a revolver which Prabha displayed to him, saying it had belonged to the slain police officer Bastiampillai. Bala returned it to Prabha with a smile, and announced that he was ready to hold classes for the LTTE.

Somehow Uma and Bala remained distant from each other, although both shared a keen interest in Marxism. On the other hand, Bala developed an instant rapport with the younger Prabha. And this only further fuelled the Uma-Prabha fissures, defeating one of the main purposes of approaching Bala in the first place.

Bala was irked by Uma's questions at his classes. Uma was no doubt well read, but he also had the habit - which was to later cause him enormous problems with Indian officials - of asking too many questions. If Uma was not satisfied with what Bala said- and this happened quite often - he would make his distaste very evident. Bala knew that Uma had been superimposing his thoughts on documents which he prepared in London. Prabha, in contrast, was a sound listener and asked virtually no questions.

One reason for Prabha's behavior was his near total disinterest in Marxist politics and ideology. He was a practical man, solely interested in ways to build up his militant group. If he was ill, he never bothered; if a colleague was sick, however, he would make umpteen requests about his health. If a friend dropped in at the camp without notice and demanded food, Prabha would not hesitate to run out, hunt a wild hen and cook it with pleasure.

His interest in reading- he would often request friends to read out long articles for him- was confined to military matters; dialectical materialism was not for him. Occasionally, he would get immersed in Tamil novels and magazines and, much to others' surprise, even in the children's "Ambulimama" (chandamam) magazine.

But he would listen to Bala attentively. Bala, in turn, was impressed by the young man's ability to put together a group of Eelam and his determination to wage an armed struggle. A Jaffna academic who met Prabha at Vavuniya around the same time too came to a similar conclusion- a practical man but without any grasp of ideology which "Towards Socialist Eelam" was seeking to convey. "I don't know all that," Prabha said of socialism. "But I want all these caste differences to go."

Prabha was furious when the academic argued that it was important to politicise people before taking to the gun. "What people, people, you talk about?", he burst out. "We have to do some actions first. People will follow us." When the academic persisted, Prabha commented with undisguised contempt: "You (arm chair) intellectuals are afraid of blood. No struggle will take place without killings. What do you want me to do? You people live in comfort and try to prove me wrong. So what should I do? Take cyanide and die?"

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The Story of V.Prabahakaran - Part 9

Killings, Prabha thought, were important, even necessary, in a struggle; it also helped revolutionaries to steel themselves. Even when his comrades argued against unwarranted killings during bank hold-ups, Prabha would brush away the argument. He did not kill without any reason; but if he had to kill, he would not hesitate. It was not unnatural then that Prabha finally decided to do away with Uma.

After Bala flew back to London, Prabha kept pressing the charges against Uma. The latter presumed that Bala was prodding him to do so. When a colleague presented Urmila before Prabha, he spat angrily at her feet. Urmila burst out crying. "Why do you want me humiliated?" she asked, turning towards the man who had forced her to present herself before Prabha.

Prabha refused to apologise to Urmila for his behavior. He threw the LTTE constitution at those who asked him to forgive Uma. Didn't the constitution specifically bar members from making love, he asked? Prabha appeared to relent only when the LTTE's treasurer, Iyer, for whom he had high regards, cautioned him to go slow.

Uma, however, maintained that his differences with Prabha arose over the LTTE's attitude towards the TULF, which Uma thought had become ineffective after the 1977 elections.

Uma did not leave the LTTE; he was expelled by the central committee on Prabha's request. But Uma the politician would not give up easily. He continued to pose himself as the leader of the LTTE, further infuriating Prabha. S.Sivashanmugamurthy, a Uma confidant, disappeared with some of the LTTE's arms. Prabha reacted fast, taking away weapons from other hideouts to prevent them from falling into Uma's hands.

Prabha was very angry. The LTTE constitution barred splitters or ex-members from forming new groups. Here the man who was named chairman of the LTTE by none other than Prabha was calling himself the real LTTE. The Uma-Prabha enmity had reached alarming proportions.

But if Prabha thought Uma's betrayal was the end of the problem, he was wrong. Uma's exit had not been smooth; not everyone had been happy with Prabha's insistence that Uma should be sacked for making love to Urmila- an allegation for which there had been no eyewitness.

By start of 1980, several Tigers also began questioning the murder of two LTTE members which were widely blamed on Prabha. One victim was Patrick Patkunan, who played a key role in the initial EROS-LTTE links and was done to death at Vavuniya. Prabha and Patkunan had never got on well. The second man was Michael (of Batticaloa) who was also killed in a LTTE camp. (Nedumaran, in his book, states that Prabha merely expelled Patkunan and Michael from the LTTE for violating discipline).

A new five member central committee was elected, but Prabha demanded that he be given overriding say in the organisation. Not everyone agreed. One group decided it had enough of underground existence and went off to form a "Tamil Protection League". Another demanded that the LTTE should transform itself into a mass organisation. At one point it seemed that the only man prepared to side with Prabha was Baby Subramaniam.

This was too much for a man who had left his house in his teens to fight for Eelam. He was seeing the slow but sure disintegration of a group he had formed and nursed with great care. One day, in sheer disgust, he threw up his arms and announced that he was quitting the LTTE. "I have done so much for the movement and no one recognises," he said, his eyes all tears.

A man who had once boasted to friends while looking at a mirror in Madras- "I am the history" - seemed to be calling it quits. He declined to be persuaded to stay on. A LTTE member tried to give him a revolver as parting memento. But Prabha would not take it. He simply walked away to an uncle's house to make history afresh.

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The Story of V. Pirabhakaran - Part 10

After a while, Prabha, pain written large on his face, contacted Thangathurai, Kuttimani and Nadesuthasan of the TELO at a relative's house at Thirunelveli, Jaffna. "I left you as a "Thambi" (younger brother). I have come back as a thambi", he told Thangathurai, his kinsman from VVT. "You should accept me or I will choose to death."

Thangathurai was willing to embrace him. But the opinion within the TELO was divided. At least three men, including Sri Sabaratnam, did not want Prabha in the TELO. Kuttimani suggested that Prabha should be given some arms and asked to operate independently. Thangathurai took the final decision. Much to the chagrin of others, he made Prabha responsible for a TELO military training that had been planned for in Tamil Nadu. The LTTE would later describe Prabha's association with the TELO as a "working alliance" between the two groups.

Note:

The LTTE adds that the alliance was formed in early 1980's but "broke off following the arrest and imprisonment of the TELO leaders." Thangathurai and Kuttimani were arrested in April 1981, but the "Diary of Combat" itself records that the alliance was still on in October 1981 when Tamil guerrillas ambushed and killed two army soldiers. Other Tamil sources maintain that the LTTE-TELO tie-up lasted until early 1982.

Prabha went about contacting his old Tiger buddies; his charisma brought back some of those who had broken ranks only weeks earlier. The depleted LTTE group which gathered around Prabha was soon in possession of more than 10 revolvers, two AK-47's, two G-3 rifles and one 9mm pistol. It had earlier bought some used weapons from former Indian army soldiers in Tamil Nadu.

Note: A former LTTE member says he once openly carried a rifle, bought from an ex-soldier, while travelling in a Tamil Nadu bus. But none of the passengers questioned him. "Probably everyone may have taken me for a rich landlord," he said.

Armed with that, Prabha and company threw in their lot with the TELO. On March 15, 1981, two men - presumably Kuttimani and Prabha - went cycling to Kalviyankadu in Jaffna and shot dead old hand Chetti from point blank range for allegedly being a police informer.

Ten days later, the TELO pulled off the Neerveli bank robbery, and at the end of the bloody ambush, which left two policemen dead, and the group was richer by a staggering 8.1 million rupees. The operation was commanded by Kuttimani.

The heist sealed Kuttimani's fate. On April 5, he, Thangathurai and Jegan were arrested while trying to escape to Tamil Nadu. Prabha was lucky; He was to have left them on the sea front, but the job was entrusted to Sri Sabaratnam at the last moment. The trio's unexpected arrest again brought out the best in Prabha. Without wasting time, he began shifting the hidden arms to new dumps. Some of the places were raided by the police just after the weapons were moved out.

Simultaneously, the police began cracking down on suspected militants and their sympathisers, partly to finish off the TELO and partly to maintain peace during the District Development Council (DDC) elections proposed for June 4.

But Uma had other ideas. Uma had claimed to be the inheritor of the LTTE legacy after splitting with Prabha. But he had come under pressure from friends both in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu to end the dispute with Prabha by giving up claim to the LTTE's name.

Uma had already moved in that direction, associating himself with a Tamil magazine called Pudhiya Padai (New Path). It was edited by Sivasanmugamurthy, an ardent leftist and his trusted lieutenant who would eventually become the deputy in the People's Liberation Organisation Tamil Eelam (PLOT). Uma was then bitterly opposed to the TULF for deciding to take part in the DDC elections and angry with Amir who, he thought, had a soft corner for Prabha.

Uma was determined to sabotage the DDC polls. On May 24, the PLOT shot a UNP candidate, A.Thiagarajah. One week later, a PLOT gunmen - probably Uma himself - opened fire at a TULF public meeting near Jaffna town, killing two policemen. The killings unleashed massive anti-Tamil riots in Jaffna and elsewhere in Sri Lanka. Police and the military went berserk, and one of the buildings which went up in flames in Jaffna in the violence was the town's public library.

One of the hundreds who saw the monument of Tamil glory burnt down with its invaluable collections was Prabha.

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The Story of V.Pirabhakaran - Part 11

Now Prabha's main worry was then to escape. Since the arrest of Thangathurai and Kuttimani, life in Jaffna had once again become nearly impossible. He was avoiding his normal hideouts, afraid that they might be known to the police. After the Neerveli robbery he had trekked to the forests in Mannar, to the west of Vavuniya, with Sri Sabaratnam and remained there for a while. Later, back in Jaffna, he began to sleep where he could, even in thickets and fields, and avoided moving about during the day.

Annamalai Varatharaja Perumal offered to help and arranged a safe house on Prabha's request. Perumal rented a house and asked his mother to stay there. The Tigers paid the rent. Prabha never stayed there, but would frequent the place when he liked.

But the police heat continued, and on June 5 Prabha sent Raghu, one of his most trusted colleagues, to Shivaji Lingam, a TELO activist at VVT, requesting a safe house. Shivaji arranged for one without delay. It was located near the VVT army camp, but no one suspected it.

Prabha came that night with some 10 others, armed with one G-3, one AK-47, one SMG and one shotgun. The group also possessed revolvers. The house was spacious enough to accommodate the entire lot and had its own bath; so no one had to step out for any reason. But Prabha's intention was not to stay. He asked Shivaji if a reliable boatman would take him and his friends to Tamil Nadu.

Until 1983, no Tamil militant group had a boat of its own. The "boys" were ferried by friendly and at times unsuspecting boatmen, who were known as "Ottis". The Ottis were masters of the Palk Strait, commanded a thorough knowledge of both the weather and the movements of customs and navy boats.

There were tough men and most militants feared them. Each ride to Tamil Nadu cost about 100 - 200 rupees, although some ottis charged nothing. Later many ottis joined the militant groups.

A boat was arranged for Prabha and his group on June 6. That night, the entire lot moved out of Shivaji's hideout. Just as they were stepping out, a rifle held by someone who was still inside the house misfired. The bullet got embedded in the bed.

Prabha, with his penchant for secrecy, was furious. He calmed down only after being assured that sound could not have travelled very far.

There was another dangerous moment when the group set out again. An army jeep cruised that way without headlights. Everyone, Prabha included, went flat just in time until the jeep passed by. Prabha got up, looked towards the direction of the vanishing jeep and resumed walking to the shore. Within minutes, he was on his way to India.

Life in Tamil Nadu was no bed of roses. Prabha's men, with the booty from the Neerveli loot gone with Kuttimani's arrest, found the going tough. But a small group of Tamil Nadu politicians and friendly forest guards helped Prabha to open a training camp for some 25 men after clearing a forest strip in Madurai.

A retired Indian Air Force officer imparted training to the Sri Lankans. Only revolvers and shotguns were used for firing sessions since the group was low on ammunition for the automatic weapons.

Prabha and others led a low-key life, spending the least amount of money on food. Their treasurer Iyer, demanded and kept meticulous account for every rupee spent. The upper limit on expenses for a single individual for a day was 12 Sri Lankan rupees.

In Jaffna, meanwhile, the PLOT raided the Anaikottai police station in July and the People's Bank at Killinochi three months later.

On Oct 15, Charles Lucan Anthony, alias Seelan, who was the most high-profile LTTE hit man in Jaffna after Prabha, ambushed an army jeep on the Kankesanthurai road, killing two soldiers. It was the first attack on the Sri Lankan army by Tamil militants.

In 1982, Uma's right-hand man Sivashanmugamurthy was shot dead by a gunman, believed to be Seelan, at the Chitra press in Jaffna, where Pudiya Pathai was published.

Uma sailed to Tamil Nadu a bitter man, accompanied by two men who had sided with him during his earlier fight with Prabha: Somasundaram Jyotheeswaran alias Kannan and Thuraiarajah Sivaneswaran alias Kaka. But Prabha was more than ready. He was not the one to stand any opposition.

Sivashanmugamurthy's murder had already led to trouble in Madras. Kandasamy Padmanabha, who had broken away from EROS, had issued a statement in Madras condemning the slaying .

Prabha and Sri Sabaratnam drove in a car to Pathmanaba's house, but the latter was not in. Prabha's men, however, insisted on checking the house and whipped out a pistol when they were denied entry.

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The Story of V.Pirabhakaran - Part 12

Now if Uma wanted a fight, Prabha was more than willing to give him one.

Pavalar Perum Chitranar, an Indian Tamil who supported the Eelam campaign, tried to patch up the differences between Uma and Prabha but failed. By the time the two came face to face, Prabha had formally renounced his links with the TELO following a leadership tangle and become the undisputed leader of the LTTE.

On May 19, Uma and Kannan were about to board a motorcycle outside a restaurant at Pandy Bazar in Madras when the latter saw Prabha and one of his old hands, Raghavan.

Both Uma and Prabha whipped out their revolvers almost at the same time, but it was the more agile Tiger chief who fired first. Prabha let go at least six rounds. Uma, however, managed to get away. Kannan was not as lucky; he suffered five wounds and was bleeding when he was arrested.

Prabha and Raghavan also tried to flee, but ran into a crowd and were caught by policemen who had rushed to the scene. Uma was tracked down near a railway station six days later and overpowered, but not before he had fired at the policemen who pinned him down.

All hell broke loose immediately. The Tamil Nadu police had two of Sri Lanka's most wanted men and quickly slapped a variety of charges against them.

It wasn't 1973 when Sri Lankan officials could fly to Madras and take back Kuttimani in handcuffs. The arrests of Prabha and Uma, both of whom had by then established contacts with sections of Tamil Nadu politicians, were different.

The Sri Lankan government was, of course, delighted. Sri Lankan Deputy Defense Minister T.B. Weerapitya announced one million rupees as reward to the Tamil Nadu police for making the arrests. Prabha's arrest was a major setback to the LTTE, several of whose members were then in Tamil Nadu. For once, the Tigers were foxed. Without consulting Subramaniam, the eldest of them, the others - including Kittu, Pandithar, Pulendren- decided to do something dramatic to prevent Prabha's extradition.

The plan was to get on to the roof of the LIC building in Madras, the tallest skyscraper in the city, and threaten mass suicide if their leader was not freed. When Subramaniam heard of the weird scheme, he was aghast. "Forget this idiotic idea," he said angrily. "It is my duty to have Prabha released. I'll get it done somehow."

Baby, as Subramaniam was widely known, went about the task methodically. Until then, he had been the LTTE's unassuming public relations man in Tamil Nadu, meeting contacts, educating them about the Tamil struggle in the island and slowly building up a support network in the state which would sustain the Tigers even when they took on the Indian army years later.

Prabha, even when he was in Tamil Nadu, stayed in the background, not exposing himself unnecessarily. Baby pleaded with Nedumaran to do something. The latter hardly needed any prodding.

Nedumaran, who had split from the Congress(I) and formed the Tamil Nadu Kamaraj Congress (TNKC), organised an all-party meeting in Madras on June 1 which urged the Tamil Nadu government and New Delhi not to deport Uma and Prabha. The DMK did not take part in the meeting, but chief minister MGR sent a representative. Subramaniam attended as an observer.

Karunanidhi was not silent, however. Only the previous year he had organised massive street protests to denounce the anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka. Now he campaigned against the extraditions, alleging that Prabha and Uma would be executed if they were sent to Colombo.

Arch rival MGR realised the political stakes and asked the police to cool off. His Man Friday in the police force, K.Mohandas declared that his men were neither interested in the prize money nor in extradition.

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The story of V.Pirabhakaran - Part 13

In Jaffna, news of the arrests was received with shock. S.C.Chandrasasan, a lawyer and son of the legendary leader Chelvanayagam, returned home to find Prabha's father waiting for him. Velupillai wanted Chandrasasan to go to Madras and ensure his son's safety.

In Madras, Chandrasasan met Karunanidhi, whose DMK was then an ally of Prime minister Indira Gandhi. Karunanidhi rushed an emissary to Gandhi who promised that Uma and Prabha would not be forced back to Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan Inspector General of Police Rudra Rajasingham, a Tamil, had to fly back a dissatisfied man after arriving in Madras with a fiat to bring home the wanted men.

On August 6, a Madras court released the accused on conditional bail and ordered them to stay in different cities in Tamil Nadu and keep the police informed of their whereabouts. Prabha was assigned Madurai and Uma Madras. All the places had sympathisers to host them.

It was the beginning of a very fruitful period for Prabha. Madurai was not new for him. He had been there in 1981 when he with the TELO. Most of them had sided with him after he revived the LTTE.

He decided to stay with Nedumaran. One sub-inspector and two constables were to guard him. But Nedumaran wielded influence and the police were generous to turn a blind eye when Prabha stepped out of Nedumaran's house to make new friends, renew old contacts or even travel out of Madurai.

Madurai provided Prabha ample time to go through all that he had achieved and what he had failed to since taking to militancy almost a decade earlier. It was time for introspection and for reading and preparing for the years to come. It also gave him a good insight into the Indian polity; how it functioned and how it could be subverted if one had the right links.

Nedumaran had reasons to be impressed. He remembered seeing Prabha in Jaffna in 1981, but the latter had not revealed his identity then. Naturally he was shocked when he came face to face with Prabha in prison. "For several reasons I did not tell you (who I was)", Prabha told him. It was a plus point for a man who believed in secret work.

Some LTTE members, including Baby and Chellakili, lived in the TNKC office in Madras and kept in touch with Prabha. The Tigers often went without food or sleep, but never hesitated to heavily spend on newspapers. Indian and foreign magazines and a wide spectrum of leftwing literature. They also bought glossy books and journal on arms and ammunition. Baby was the most meticulous of all and acted as a father figure.

In the meantime, Prabha began experimenting with a code language in a major way. He had tried it in other forms earlier in Jaffna, giving each Tamil alphabet a number. "It is for safety," he had told friends.

Now, in Tamil Nadu, with more heads put together, the code looked a lot tougher to understand or decipher. An Indian who witnessed the experimentation mistook the secret language to be Chinese or Japanese.

Money remained a problem. Prabha and his associates usually managed to survive on bread and jam. It meant Prabha had to suppress his love for non-vegetarian food, crabs in particular. Nedumaran often encountered the Tigers with hungry looks on their faces, but they would shy from admitting the truth when asked if they had had food.

When Prabha was not dreaming about Eelam or discussing with Nedumaran ideas on a Tiger flag and uniforms, he would relish Tamil literature, particularly books on and by Subash Chandra Bose, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. He even had a Che book translated from English into Tamil so that he could go through it without help.

He was not overtly religious, but would occasionally walk up to the historic Meenakshi Amman temple in Madurai. He dressed crispy but simply and expected others to do so. He shaved everyday and scolded those who did not. His motto was talk little and hear more. But otherwise he treated his colleagues with respect. There was no bullying, when he talked, others listened. No wonder he continued to be called "thambi" (brother), while Uma was and liked to be addressed as "thalaivar" (leader).

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The Story of V. Pirabhakaran - Part 14

Prabha's main interest was in setting up centers in Tamil Nadu where he could provide old and fresh recruits training in the use of arms and teach them rudiments of guerrilla warfare. If the bases existed in India, so much the better. There would be no raids from Sri Lankan authorities, if there was trouble he could count on friends in Tamil Nadu for help.

He opened safe houses in Sirumalai, Pollachi and Mettur where fellow Tigers were taught about the use of walkie-talkies and the handling of arms.

Prabha confided to fellow Tigers that his earnest desire to see at least 100 young people in LTTE uniforms in Jaffna. But Prabha was not the one to stay in Tamil Nadu indefinitely. After seven months in Madurai, he decided that Jaffna awaited him. He asked Nedumaran if he could leave. When he got the consent, the LTTE leader simply disappeared one day while travelling from Madurai to Madras.

The police first refused to believe that the man who was to be under surveillance had escaped to Sri Lanka. They launched a manhunt for him in Bangalore and Pondicherry. By then Prabha was already in Jaffna.

The Tamil peninsula hadn't changed much. Unidentified men had shot two Tamil youths after taking them away from their Jaffna homes barely a week after the Uma-Prabha shootout in Madras. The bullet-riddled bodies of the two men who were considered LTTE sympathisers were found in a rice field nearly 10 miles from Jaffna town. The killers were widely believed to be from the PLOT.

The killings shocked the Tamil community. Since the murder of Sundaram in January 1982, people had been speaking in whispers about "boys" killing "boys". The Uma-Prabha clash was bad enough. But killing two Tamils in cold blood in Jaffna was a shocker.

The Killings only fuelled Prabha's anger. After Uma and Prabha were let out on bail, Perum Chitranar had tried to bring them together again. Prabha had issued a statement through his lawyers that "hereafter there should be no division among us. Both groups should get together."

He and Uma also gave separate assurances to lawyer Chandrahasan that they would not fight anymore in India. Perum Chitranar reminded Prabha about the situation in Tamil Nadu when Dravida Kazhagam had split and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam was formed. DMK leader C. Annadurai had declared that despite the break, both parties would be like a double barrel gun. Prabha and Uma, Perum Chitranar emphasized, should be like the DK and DMK.

The LTTE supremo agreed to let Uma have a group of his own, but under no circumstances should he claim himself to be a Tiger leader. Before he left for Madurai, Perum Chitranar extracted a promise from Prabha and Uma that they would never try killing each other. Perum Chitranar and Prabha never met again.

In Prabha's absence, the LTTE had been keeping the Sri Lankan security forces intermittently busy. On July 2, the Tigers ambushed a police patrol at Nelliady, a small town 16 miles from Jaffna, and shot four Sinhalese policemen and seriously wounded three others.

Two months later, the LTTE attempted to blow up a naval convey at Ponnalai during a visit to Jaffna by President JR, but the mine only damaged the causeway.

The most daring LTTE operation came on October 27. A group of eight Tigers led by Seelan arrived at the Chavakachcheri police station in a hijacked mini bus, armed with one G-3, one repeater rifle, two revolvers, one SMG and grenades. The police station was well guarded and considered impregnable. Accompanying Seelan were Aruna, Shankar, Pulendran, Raghu, Mahathaya, Santhosam and Bashir Kaka. This in effect was the LTTE hardcore in Jaffna at that time.

As the bus reached the police station, Seelan and raghu burst into the double story building, firing at the guards outside. One of them died instantly. The Tigers then sprinted towards the first floor. Seelan was at his military best, springing from room to room, shooting one policeman hiding under a table and destroying communication sets.

Shankar and Santhosam attacked the residential wing at the police station's rear. Aruna and Bashir Kaka cleaned the armoury of two SMG's, nine rifles, one pistol, 19 repeater guns and two shot guns. In the melee, a police suspect who went berserk after hearing the firing was also shot. One policeman jumped out of the balcony and broke his leg after suffering the bullet wound. Two constables saved themselves by hiding in a toilet.

But one policeman fired back and got three victims- although none of them died. One bullet pierced through Pulendran's shoulder, another hit Raghu and broke his right hand bone, and the third went through Seelan's knee cap, seriously wounding him. He was carried back to the van by Aruna.

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The Story of V. Pirabhakaran - Part 15

It was a serious blow to the Tigers since Seelan, the number two in the LTTE, acted as the commander when Prabha was away. He was one of the best shooters in the Tiger ranks and a trusted associate of Prabha. He was a tough man but fainted that day due to excessive loss of blood. He was later sent to Tamil Nadu for medical attention.

There was no military operation by the LTTE until Feb 18, 1983 when Prabha and Seelan were back in Jaffna. That day, LTTE gunmen shot a Sinhalese police inspector and his driver at Point Pedro.

Though the only effective group in Jaffna by the end of 1982 was the LTTE, the police were clearly worried. The army was assisting the police in anti-military operations, but not a single key LTTE member had been arrested or killed though their popular base was negligible.

The police intelligence was paying no dividends; in fact such was the police network that LTTE cadres hesitated to buy more than two food packets from shops in order not to provoke suspicion.

In November, the Tigers shot a 30-year-old Tamil man in Jaffna after calling him out of his house. Police found near the body a handwritten note in the name of "Eelam Liberation Tigers" calling for public support to wipe out "anti-social elements".

The next month, gunmen killed K.Pulendran, UNP's Vavuniya organiser, while he was watching TV. The army chief of staff in Colombo Major General Tissa Weeratunga who only three years earlier had achieved remarkable success in Jaffna, confessed that the situation had changed dramatically. "We are not on top," he told David Selbourne in an interview. "The initiative is with the terrorists. They choose time and place. We can only be reactive".

The officer's predicament was understandable. Despite the injury to Seelan, the Chavakachcheri attack had been a complete success and proved what a small committed group could do. After the attack, authorities closed down 16 outlying police stations in Jaffna.

One reason for the militancy was the recurring anti-Tamil violence and the government's failure to accept demands for regional autonomy. The TULF, the moderate Tamil political force, was being increasingly viewed by those who had voted for it as opportunist and willing to strike a deal with JR while the "boys" were fighting it out.

The TULF was already split, and though the breakaway TELF did not enjoy mass support, its formation was itself significant. But the average Sinhalese, fed on government propaganda, considered the TULF secessionist and responsible for the violence in the island's north.

When JR proposed a "national government" in December 1982, one month after prolonging the life of parliament for six more years, the TULF, with nothing else to do, jumped on the proposal. It said the "national government" would provide an "opportunity" for negotiations to seek a permanent solution to the fundamental problems of the Tamil people". Few Tamils were impressed.

Naturally, Amir, once the darling of Tamils, was reduced to defending his actions in Public. In October 1982, Jaffna was gripped by a stinging general strike called by the TELF and the General Union of Eelam Students (GUES) to protest JR's visit. "Eelam people are very hospitable but not to invaders," said a poster stuck on the Jaffna hospital.

On February 22, the LTTE shot at TULF MP M.Alalasundaram at his Jaffna house for allegedly carrying on a smear campaign against the Tigers, provoking a strong condemnation from Amir. He did not die at that incident. There was more violence in March, including an ambush of two army vehicles at Killinochi which left five soldiers wounded.

Note: Prabha met Madhivadani in January, 1984. She was among nine students (five boys and four girls) who launched an indefinite hunger strike in Jaffna on January 9, 1984 to protest the lack of security for Tamils in southern universities. They were all students at Peradeniya University, Kandy during the July 83 riots. The LTTE, then opposed to the policy of hunger strikes, abducted the nine on January 16 and took them over to Tamil Nadu by boats. Tamil sources say Madhivadani and Prabha met at the LTTE office in Madras for the first time. They reportedly got married in a temple in Madras.

In June 1986, his wife gave birth to a daughter, who was named Dwaraka. It was their second child. The first, a boy, had been named after Charles Lucas Anthony, the LTTE's fallen hero.

According to Rohan Gunaratna (Indian Invention in Sri Lanka), Madhivadani flew to Colombo quietly on January 20,1990 with her two children after spending six years in Europe. The trip was arranged by the Sri Lankan National Intelligence Bureau on the instructions of Defence Secretary Sepala Attygalle. Madhivadani, who was wearing a T-shirt and jeans, spent the night at the Katunayake airport and was flown the next day by an air force helicopter to a LTTE jungle base. LTTE and Premadasa's government were on a truce during this period.

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The Story of V. Pirabhakaran - Part 16

The Tigers understood the mood in Tamil areas. So when the TULF decided to take part in the local government elections in May 1983, the LTTE decided to confront Amir head on.

The previous year Prabha had had a meeting with the TULF boss in Madurai over the situation in Sri Lanka. But there was no way the guerrilla committed to Eelam was going to let the politician get away with the laurels of another election victory.

By then the LTTE had gone further international. In March, the group circulated a document at the Non-Aligned summit in New Delhi, justifying it's armed struggle. And at home, the LTTE issued hundreds of open letters in Jaffna in response to the TULF's election campaign, urging the people to boycott the municipal council polls.

On April 29, gunmen on cycles shot K.V. Ratnasingam, the principal UNP candidate at the hustings, at Point Pedro while he was cycling home. Two hours later, three youths shot S.S. Muthiah also a UNP candidate. Later that evening, gunmen stopped the van of a UNP nominee from VVT, pulled out his guard and gunned him down.

In all cases, the assassins left behind notes saying the victims had been sentenced to death for defying the LTTE's call not to fight the elections.

Note:

My father was contesting for Mayor post on behalf of TULF in this elections. One night Seelan. Mahathaya, Basir Kaka and another member (I think it was Chellakili) came and knocked the our house door, in Jaffna. I opened the door and they said they wanted to talk to my father. They all came inside. Before they entered the house they removed their slippers and were very polite. Everyone sat on around a table and they discussed and argued with my father about the elections. After about 45 minutes they told my father "You are the principal candidate and first you should withdraw from the elections. And we can request the rest to withdraw as well."

Also gave 48 hours time do that. After they left Amir and Sivasithambaram (Leader of TULF) came to our house and told my father not to do so. My father discussed the matter with family members and LTTE members and called "EelaNadu" and "Veerakesari" Tamil daily news papers to inform that he had withdrawn from the Jaffna municipal council elections.

After this all UNP and Tamil Congress nominees withdrew from the contest. But the arrangements had already been made by the government to have the elections.

The Tamil voters gave a stunning verdict on the election day. Almost 90% of the population in the north stayed away from the ballot box. The TULF received barely 2% of votes in Point Pedro and VVT, Prabha's hometown.

The TULF got less than 10% votes. There had been 80% polling in the DDC elections the year before.

My father was the 2nd candidate for the DDC elections and elected as deputy chairman of the council in Jaffna. It functioned for a while. But it didn't have any power and finally they resigned.

About an hour before the balloting ended, Seelan crept behind a wall and hurled a grenade outside a voting center at Kandarmadam in Jaffna and also opened fire, killing one soldier. Without wasting time, Chellakili removed the T-56 assault riffle of the dead soldier. Seelan then called off the attack and the Tigers, as usual, melted away.

Note:

This polling booth was about 5 min walking distance from my house. I was outside my house talking to my friend before this incident took place. I saw Chellakili and Seelan coming in a bicycle. Seelan was sitting on the bar of the cycle and holding the gun covered by a piece of cloth. They recognised and told me to go inside the house. And told not to come out for some more time. I knew that something was going to happen. Before we made any guesses we heard the grenade and firing started.

It was another perfect job, and the furious Sinhalese soldiers went on a rampage, setting fire to and destroying 64 houses, three mini buses, nine cars, three motorcycles and three dozen bicycles in a span of three hours.

Note:

My house was fortunate to escape during this rampage.

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The Story of V.Pirabhakaran - Part 17

July 1983 brought bad luck to the LTTE. On July 15, a mini bus and two jeeps loaded with troops arrived at Meesalai, near Chavakachcheri (10 miles from Jaffna town), following a tip off that the much-wanted Seelan was there. He was indeed there, enjoying the coconut water when the soldiers reached the village.

The troops were, however, immediately spotted and two boys ran to warn Seelan. The latter lost no time. He stuffed his SMG into a bag and ran out of the house where he had been camping. It was afternoon. Two other

LTTE members, Aruna and Ganesh, also set out with Seelan on bicycles. Aruna had a gun and Ganesh carried a few grenades.

But the soldiers spotted them and opened fire. The three flung their bicycles and began running across rice fields. But it was difficult for Seelan to keep pace with the others; his knee injury, suffered during the attack on Chavakachcheri police station, had not healed and it pained him immensely as he tried to keep up with Aruna and Ganesh. The bullets were already beginning to graze him when he decided to give up the fight.

Wounded and fatigued, and unable to run any further, Seelan asked Aruna, his childhood friend from Trincomalee, to shoot him and escape with the SMG.

It was a bombshell for Aruna. He was being asked to kill the LTTE's de facto number two. Aruna argued that Seelan needed to run only a little more to get into a village. But Seelan insisted that he could not take it any more and ordered Aruna to kill him right there.

"Shoot! I am telling you, shoot!" screamed Seelan, standing in a rice field and barely managing to escape from being hit further. The soldiers were inching ahead cautiously.

"What are you staring at?" Seelan asked, when Aruna hesitated. "Shoot me so that I don't get into their hands alive. This is my order. Shoot and run".

Aruna picked up his rifle and aimed at Seelan's face. He saw tears in the eyes of the man who was staring at death. Aruna hesitated once again.

"Shoot!" Seelan implored. "I beg you please shoot".

Aruna placed the barrel on Seelan's forehead, just above the center of the eyes, and fired. Seelan collapsed dead.

Anand, who had been watching the scene with disbelief from a distance, was himself wounded immediately afterwards. When Aruna picked up Seelan's SMG and resumed his run, Anand confronted him with a similar request: shoot me and escape! This time Aruna did not waver.

Note:

Seelan's death was a terrible blow to the LTTE. Sri Lankan security forces were jubilant when the body was identified. In the past two years Seelan had done more for the LTTE than perhaps anyone else. He had been wounded twice, but had returned to the battle field. He was a hardened Prabha's loyalist.

Note:

Many readers might know that Prabha named his son "Charles Lucas Anthony", Seelan's original name.

Prabha was at a hideout in Neerveli with Kittu, Chellakili and Pandithar discussing the financial position of the LTTE when he got the news of Seelan's death. Prabha was silent for a while.

"It was impossible to make out what his feelings were. But he was thinking hard," Kittu recalled later.

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The Story of V. Pirabhakaran - Part 18

Prabha would of course wreck vengeance. There was no way Seelan's death would go unpunished. Indeed, the death was going to trigger a chain reaction which would alter the very course of Tamil militancy.

On July 20, the Sri Lankan government issued a ban on press reporting of Tamil militant activities. The TULF declined the same day to attend an all-party meeting called by Jayawardane on the ethnic strife, saying it was preparing for its convention at Mannar on July 23 and 24.

TULF had no longer control the "boys" it had once encouraged, the LTTE chalked out an elaboration plan to avenge Seelan's loss.

Chellakilli and Kittu drew up a plan to ambush a military convoy at Thirunelveli, close to the Jaffna University. The chosen spot was a narrow road which had been dug up to lay communication lines. Prabha approved of the site and Chellakilli's plan after seeing the spot for himself. Virtually the entire LTTE brass- Prabha, Kittu, Chellakilli, Iyer, Victor, Pulendren, Santhosam and Appaiah among others- was to take part in the carefully prepared operation.

Note:

This spot was about 8 min walk from my house on the main Palaly Road. I was preparing for the Advanced Level examination that night at home. When I came home around 8pm that night I saw some "boys" were running around and I saw Chellakilli. But I never thought that they were planning to attack an army convoy.

The army was living in a world of its own. Having succeeded in eliminating Seelan, it was looking for Chellakilli, not realising what he was upto.

On July 23 night, an army patrol codenamed "Four Four Bravo" and comprising 15 men moved out of the Gurunagar camp, near Jaffna town in a jeep and a half truck. It reported at 23.28 hrs that it was moving towards Urumpirai and it was all very quiet.

Moments later, the patrol neared Thirunelveli, where the Tigers lay in wait. Chellakilli, Victor and Appaiah had placed detonators on the road and had been giving final touches when the patrol neared the site.

No one appeared to be watching them. A few curious residents had earlier peeped out of their windows; but Chellakilli and Victor, who were dressed in army uniforms, had shouted rapidly in Sinhalese. The ruse succeeded. The fear of the army simply drove the curious ones into their homes and the few houses which were still lit hurriedly switched off their lights.

It was Chellakilli who set off the mine. There was a thunderous explosion and the jeep went flying in the air before landing with a heavy thud. The waiting Tigers immediately opened fire from an assortment of SMG's, G-3's and riffles, and lobbed scores of grenades and petrol bombs.

Most soldiers were killed as they scrambled out of the truck, firing their weapons. Prabha let go his G-3 at the truck from behind a wall. But one soldier managed to crawl beneath the truck and fired at the wall.

Prabha had been assigned the task of finishing off survivors in the truck since the mine was originally meant to destroy it; why Chellakilli exploded it under the jeep no one knew. The ambush was brief and bitter, and ended with the massacre of 13 soldiers- the biggest loss for the Sri Lankan army at the hands of Tamil militants.

The victorious Tigers gathered around Prabha after the attack, talking excitedly. Prabha congratulated everyone for a job well done. Suddenly it struck Kittu that Chellakilli, who had planned the ambush and

driven the attack group to the site, was missing. Victor ran towards a shop where Chellakilli had taken up position. Chellakilli's body lay there bleeding. A bullet had pierced his chest.

It was the second major setback to the LTTE within a fortnight. The group at Thirunelveli fell silent as victory gave way to gloom. But they had to move because one of the soldiers had managed to escape and would be alerting the base headquarters. The soldiers' weapons were dumped into a getaway van and so was Chellakilli's body, which was finally laid to rest not far away as it began drizzling.

Back at their hideout, Prabha broke down. He had been silent in the van. Now he began to wail. Seeing him, almost everyone began crying. It was the first and last time Kittu saw Prabha cry.

Note:

Army did come in the next morning from Palaly camp. But I was able to go very close to the spot before they came in. In the evening things changed very drastically. Two soldiers went beserk started going into neighboring houses and started killing all the men. There were about 30 (not sure about the number) deaths that evening alone. I was lucky to escape in that massacre. After they took the bodies of the soldiers to Colombo on July 24, 1983, and everyone knew what happened after that.

*** The End ***