

1

**UNIVERSITY TEACHERS FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS (JAFFNA)
SRI LANKA.**

Special Report No: 11.

Date of release: 15th September, 1998.

**A TAMIL HEROINE UNMOURNED & THE SOCIOLOGY OF
OBFUSCATION**

“ I cannot bring myself to condemn these young men who murder. They themselves are victims, puppets used by their leaders. The real culprits are those who work behind the scene, from their nice hide-outs abroad, in countries like France, Germany and the United States. They are the ones who pull the strings.

“ They brainwash the poor boys, and often they use drugs to make them ready to obey orders without asking questions. They use poverty and unemployment afflicting Algeria as their wedge to get at these boys. We have to get to the root of these problems.

“ Women have a very important role to play. They educate the children and turn them into men. A good part of the future of any society depends directly on women. Convincing women that they should strive for a better future means laying the foundations for a better society in the future.....

“ I think the extremists are enraged at Algerian women because we are courageous, because we are the source of life... They attack women because a woman is a symbol of life, which is why women fight against terrorism, which is death. By killing women the extremists want to strike at the whole future of our society.....”

-Saida Benhabiles, 50, Head of the Parliamentary Commission on Social Affairs in Algeria, who has a death sentence passed on her by religious extremists. [Interview with Patrica Unzain, Island 18th October 1997]

**ANOTHER OUTRAGE:
11th SEPTEMBER 1998**

We announced in our Bulletin No.17 last May that we would come out with a publication bearing the title ‘The Murder of Mrs.Sarojini Yogeswaran, Mayoress of Jaffna & the Anatomy of Fascist control’. In making inquiries about the emergence of fascism in Tamil society, as the document progressed, we found that it is best divided into two parts. The present report is the first part dealing with the ramifications of Mrs.Yogeswaran’s murder. The second part which requires further cross-checking will appear in the next few months.

As we were finalising this document, news came of the bomb explosion in the ceremonial hall adjoining Nallur Kanthasamy Kovil in Jaffna which killed the new Mayor of Jaffna, almost the entire security forces hierarchy in the City of Jaffna, along with several other civilians. Apart from Pon Sivapalan, Legal Secretary TULF, and Sarojini’s successor as Mayor of Jaffna, the bomb explosion on 11th September killed Brigadier Susantha Mendis, Jaffna’s Town Commandant, Captain Ramanayake, Jaffna SSP Chandra Perera, ASPs Chandramohan and Sarath Fernando, Jaffna OIC Chief Inspector Mohandas and PC Gerard. Among the civilians killed were Assistant Municipal Commissioner Pathmanathan, Municipal Engineers Easwaran and Pathmarajah, a Municipal typist and Mrs.Mallika Rasaratnam, Architect in the Urban Development Authority - bringing the number to at least 13 dead.

The first thing the incident once again demonstrates is the LTTE's absence of any concern for its own civilians. In July last year the LTTE attacked Thangathurai, MP Trincomalee, at a school function. It killed a lady school principal Rajeswari Thanabalasingham and educational works engineer Ratnarajah, along with four other civilians. These further demonstrate the insensitive and diabolical nature of the overseas Tamil lobby that supports the LTTE. Rajeswari Thanabalasingham, Ratnarajah, Pathmanathan, Easwaran, Pathmarajah and Mallika Rasaratnam were professionals who remained in the North-East because they believed in their people and were committed to them. It would have been easy enough for them to go abroad legally as privileged emigrants.

What is even worse, many of those who worship and sustain the organisation that killed them are almost certainly people who were in school and university with them and are now living abroad. When the LTTE controlled Jaffna a great deal of fuss was made by LTTE lobbies, medical conferences were held, and the US State Department lobbied, to highlight the deprived conditions of people in the North - East. After the people of Jaffna defied the LTTE's attempts to drive them into the Vanni, and returned to their homes under Army control, their eloquent concern for them vanished. It was as though the people - their own people - no longer needed to eat, work, receive medical attention and go to school. Now it was as though any human existence for the people had to be terminated and the handful of dedicated professionals who made such an existence possible, killed, to prove their perverted point. This is the evil that the Tamil people are up against. There is no balanced way of writing about the diseased wider social phenomenon comprising the LTTE.

Since we have always tried to address issues from the perspective of the ordinary people, we will say something about the lady who occurred as a mere name with a title towards the end of the list of the dead. It is also the reflection in the life of a family of the tragic misdirection of the Tamil struggle. Mallika Rasaratnam obtained her degree in architecture from the University of Moratuwa in 1976. She and her family later moved to Jaffna. Since then she had been doing private work in Jaffna. She believed in the Tamil cause, had a concern for the people and had remained in Jaffna through thick and thin.

During the forced exodus of 1995 she had a difficult choice. She had an ailing husband, an old father and two daughters. Leaving her father with Roman Catholic nuns and clergy who remained in the city, the rest of the family went to Karaveddy, Vadamaratchy. The LTTE tried to use the helplessness contrived by them to recruit her. She told the representative of the ROOTE indignantly that she would stay where she was and if unable to return to Jaffna, leave for Colombo when her savings were exhausted. To further rub in her helplessness she was told that if she were leaving, she would have to leave a member of the family behind. She responded that if they would bring her down to that level, she would have to treat one child as lost and save the rest of the family.

She moved back to Jaffna in April 1996 after the Army took control, and being the only professional architect in Jaffna, there was a heavy demand for her services. The Municipality wanted her in the UDA and the University of Jaffna wanted her to lecture in aesthetics. She also did the designing to rebuild old St.Peter's Methodist Church which was devastated by the war. The work was to be under her supervision. She lost her father last year, and her ailing husband who looked after their children's studies, earlier this year. Mallika exuded beauty in everything she did, from her designs, to her articles in the old Saturday Review, to her correspondence on professional matters. Though herself a Hindu, the Church of St.Peter when rebuilt, will remain a fitting memorial to her faith in the future of Jaffna and her commitment to its people. The manner of her death is the strongest indictment of those who sustain her killers.

Mayor Sivapalan, who had his education at Victoria College, Chullipuram - at the same school as the late TULF leader A.Amirthalingam - also became a lawyer by profession. After Mrs.Yogeswaran's murder, he out of a sense of duty accepted the job of mayor. The former deputy mayor had resigned and started making statements in favour of the LTTE. Sivapalan began by

making statements to the effect that the LTTE could not have killed his predecessor and pretending in word that they were not in town. At his first council meeting he wanted to pass a resolution calling upon the Government to stop the war and talk to the LTTE, which he withdrew when some others objected.

As a person he was a good man and innocent, and like most civilians, incapable of the kind of security precautions needed to function in the face of the LTTE. He had been warned several times by younger ex-militant councillors not to operate from the Kalyana Mandapam (Ceremonial Hall), but to use the TULF Stanley Road office. He had even been warned about individuals in the Municipal Council who were very likely to be compromised with the LTTE. This does not mean they were hard-core members, but rather people who had got favours from the LTTE or were compromised in some corrupt activity and cannot therefore turn down an instruction from the LTTE. Sivapalan was beginning to take notice of the threat, but typically, had only recently attended an opening function in Ariyalai for which invitation cards had been printed a week in advance.

It is believed that the bomb was concealed in the roof of the Hall when some work was done on it some months ago - when Mrs. Yogeswaran was Mayor. The possibility that it had been targeted for the fatal meeting has not been ruled out. The meeting concerned was about regulating traffic in the City and about road arrangements. It was Sivapalan's and Brigadier Mendis' wish that meetings regarding civil matters should be held in the premises of the civil authority concerned. He was not dealing with an 'army of occupation'. In fact the military authorities had been very respectful to him. It is simply that the LTTE's terror had reduced the people to a position where nothing can move in Jaffna unless the Army takes the initiative. It may sound like wisdom of the grave, but why did the security authorities tasked to protect the Mayor overlook some basic things?

The main failure of the TULF is that it does not touch the destructiveness of the LTTE's brand of chauvinism. It means opening wounds in an awkward common history. Its politicians having to function in the North-East know that the LTTE will sooner or later target them. In this situation they hope against hope that it will spare them if they regularly make pro-LTTE statements. The LTTE in turn watches them and sends them messages lulling them into complacency. Sivapalan had been told that complacency would only help the LTTE to deliver a blow demoralising the people further. When Sivapalan's name had been suggested for Mayor, the expatriate-based IBC Radio tauntingly suggested that the TULF is preparing another sacrificial lamb - as though democracy for Tamils here did not matter!

A poignant note on Sivapalan's death is that he had told his wife in advance that should he be killed, he should be interred in Jaffna - the land of his birth. Once more a son of the soil who strongly identified with its people had to be killed by self-styled liberators. Sivapalan's colleagues and the people of Jaffna valued him as one who had come forward bravely to perform the onerous task of reviving civil life in the face of terror. His own complacency and failure to face up to the threat to his life which had been at the back of his mind, resulted from his party's misguided approach of appeasing the LTTE. This was the tragedy of a brave man who set out to do good.

Brigadier Susantha Mendis who was earlier in Kayts earned a reputation for being responsive to public feelings. He took on the onerous task of restoring civil administration in Jaffna, where Brigadier Hamangoda, the first town commandant, had been killed. Mendis moved at the popular level and tried to feel the pulse of the people. He involved himself in sports meets, public functions, and played an active role in reviving the Nallur Temple festival. Credit should also go to him for the successful conduct of local elections and for encouraging people to vote. He personally went around making people feel that civil administration was coming back. Everytime there was misconduct on the part of the Army, he went personally and took responsibility. He once escaped a mine attack. On another occasion when he was at a meeting at the University of Jaffna, a civilian

sent him a note warning him that LTTE agents were present. He showed the note to the Vice Chancellor, but remained alert without creating alarm.

One of the thorny problems faced by Mendis was that the LTTE indirectly controlled Jaffna's only newspaper. This he tackled tactfully without resorting to censorship.

When Sarojini Yogeswaran arrived to start her belated election campaign, he encouraged her, telling her, "Don't worry madam, the people will choose you." When Sarojini won, Mendis led her in to hand over the civil administration to her, telling her, "Madam, you are the boss now, I will not interfere. But if you have any problem, please call me, I will attend to it." He maintained the same approach to her successor Mr. Sivapalan. As the first citizen, soldiers greeted him with a salute. Both Mendis and Sivapalan agreed that in all meetings dealing with civil affairs, the security officials should come to the Mayor's office at his invitation. It was this good intention that gave the LTTE its opportunity. For one thing, intelligence of meetings was available to several persons. Moreover, whenever the Army took over a school or public place for a meeting, a tooth-comb of the premises was conducted a day earlier, and a sentry was placed during the night. This was not feasible when security officials were guests of the Mayor.

This should also remove any misunderstandings about the role of the Army. Brigadier Mendis had been trying to return authority to the people and helping them to manage their own affairs against the LTTE's persistent attempts to do the opposite, and confine them in a prison all-the-more insidious for not having bars.

Again the Tamil press tried to play down the public response to this enormous outrage, even as no condemnation was forthcoming from the leaders of civil society - particularly the churches and University. The EPRLF was the first to issue a condemnation naming the LTTE. Make no mistake, no other force in Jaffna has the ability to penetrate a public institution where hundreds come and go, plant a bomb in advance, and enjoin those who necessarily know to complete silence. The callousness too is hard to find elsewhere. Had not most of the employees left for a religious ceremony at the nearby temple at the time of the meeting, there would have been many more casualties.

Despite the social leadership remaining unseen and unheard, the people expressed their protest by attending the funerals in large numbers. With Mallika's children orphaned by the successive deaths of their father and mother, the neighbours came forward to do the needful. Huge crowds came to her place. Pathmanathan's funeral had to await the arrival of his children from Canada.

When Sivapalan's body was taken to his village of Sittankerni, such was the press of the crowd of mourners that it was with much difficulty that his body was removed from the hearse. In part it is the difference between village and town. The LTTE networks would no doubt try to make out that the people were unconcerned.

A huge word of credit must also be given to the Army in Jaffna for acting with correctness and enabling the occasion to have the dignity and gravity as befitted it. With almost the entire security forces hierarchy in the city wiped out, the LTTE would no doubt have hoped for huge reprisals, destabilising Jaffna beyond repair. The correct thing was done in rushing the injured Mayor to the hospital in an attempt to save his life. There was no indecent panic among the people as some reports suggested. There was no undue disruption. A large crowd concerned about the Mayor's fate had gathered outside the Teaching Hospital. The incident had taken place at 11.00AM. The town was so normal in the afternoon that there was even the unusual instance of a caller at the Brigadier's office at 2.30PM receiving news of the tragedy from the sentry.

It was also refreshing in the night to hear the voices of Generals Balagalle and Munasinghe from Jaffna, saying correctly and clinically what needed to be said. Both Balagalle and President

Kumaratunge gave first importance to the murder of the Mayor. The Sri Lankan Army had come a long way from July 1983 towards one sensitive to functioning in a democratic environment.

While on this subject, we wish to clarify some issues in the last bulletin (No.18). We reported and commented on some remarks made by Colonel Sanath Karunaratne, the Brigade Commander, Pt Pedro, and successor to Larry Wijeratne. Following the murders of Brigadier Wijeratne and Mrs.Yogeswaran last May, there were widely shared apprehensions of a deteriorating situation in Jaffna. Karunaratne had a problem in that he was bound to be looked at too critically after the exemplary record of Wijeratne. It is also true that some of his remarks led to a widely shared perception that the Army had adopted a policy of reprisals. We had several anguished reports coming from persons who clearly understood the destructiveness of the LTTE, and were anxious that the Army should be highly disciplined and accountable.

These same concerns were voiced at a commemoration meeting for the late Brigadier Wijeratne in Colombo, where the Army Commander was present. The latter called for an inquiry into the matter, and this is commendable. We also reported an incident on 30th May where a 19-year-old girl was killed by soldiers at a sentry point after an incident where two soldiers were killed. We do not know if a fresh inquiry was ordered into this.

On the matter of Karunaratne's remarks, we have ourselves had further representations from people in Vadamaratchy to the effect that we had been too hard on him. It was put to us that some of the remarks attributed to Karunaratne had been pulled out of the original context and the meaning was distorted. The real test of the man, it was pointed out, was what he had achieved : He had performed the difficult task of maintaining order soon after Larry Wijeratne was killed, so-much-so that the fears of the people proved unfounded. He has acted firmly on every act of indiscipline reported to him. There had been one incident in July of a psychiatric patient being beaten to death by soldiers, where the culprits were submitted to the normal process of the law. LTTE activity in the area had been competently kept in check. The situation, after the shock of Wijeratne's death, quickly returned to the normality which had earlier obtained. Huge crowds came into Vadamaratchy for the Chellachannithy temple festival signalling a further return to normality.

One of those who raised the matter told us, "Larry Wijeratne became what he was partly because of the manner of his interaction with the people. Karunaratne has on the whole done a good job, and he could become another Wijeratne. When you raise issues you should be careful not to alienate him and push him to an extreme where he loses all empathy for the people."

We brought the matter up here for two reasons. One is to remove any misapprehensions arising from what we had said. **The other is that where the people of Jaffna look to with hope, it is not to the LTTE. Far from it. What their hope rests on today is in seeing a more disciplined and professional Army that will be sensitive to human rights, backed up by political action giving the Tamils control over their affairs.**

We had been a bit alarmist in fearing a deterioration of the situation in Jaffna. The incident of 30th May where Subajini (19) was killed had been about the only incident where the Army got out of control. On the night of 25th July, LTTE cadre who came into Gurunagar by sea attacked the Army post at the temporary prison in Main Street. Most of the soldiers are said to have withdrawn from the area. Two who were caught by the LTTE are said to have been cut to death. However firing was heard and at least seven LTTEers were killed. According to one version the LTTE fired at their own side.

The Army fired shells into the lagoon from Palaly, apparently to prevent LTTE reinforcements from coming in. People were glad that the Army did not put up an all-out fire fight in that crowded residential area. The main tragedy however took place the following day. The normal routine for people returning from the Vanni is for the boats bringing them to drop them in the sea at a shallow

spot off Gurunagar and return. The civilians cannot walk ashore because of a deep channel. Hence Army boats would go out and pick them up. On the day after the attack, seven civilians were so dropped. The Army did not go and pick them up. The refugees stood there for a long time. The people on the shore contacted the ICRC. An ICRC officer in his last week of service in Jaffna rushed to the military authorities, who in turn ordered the refugees to be picked up. The civilians on the shore shouted at the refugees to wait, but their voices would not carry because of the South-West monsoon blowing. Despairing of getting help the refugees began walking away towards Pooneryn, southwards. The lagoon was rough and the refugees disappeared from view. By the time the boat got there, only one refugee, a woman, was saved.

The incident illustrates a gulf and a communication gap that exists between the Army and the ordinary people. It took the ICRC's intervention to get the authorities to do the decent thing. This gulf needs to be addressed. There are also continuing cases of harassment which do not seem to reach the ears of the authorities. For example, a woman was checked recently at the Kondavil check-point, and because the barbed wire corridor was crowded, she crept through the wire and attempted to proceed. A woman security officer called her, was rude to her, threw her identity card, and made her stand in the sun for an hour. The woman whose family had suffered badly from the LTTE said later, "Because it is us and we understand, we are putting up with it. But you cannot blame an ordinary girl for wanting to join the LTTE after such treatment."

The subject of Chemmani graves, where a large number of detainees killed by the Army during 1996 are believed to be buried, has been a hot topic for several months, especially in Jaffna. Hopes had been continually raised in the press that there will be a thorough inquiry and justice will be done. The sources quoted have been judicial officials and officials in the Human Rights Commission. Yet nothing concrete has happened. No professional help has been sought to secure the area, and nothing is bound to happen this year once the rains start. In the meantime the soldier who testified to the presence of corpses in Chemmani had been assaulted by prison staff. The procrastination raises concern that there is an attempt at a cover up, in a matter in which two major-generals and several brigadiers are likely to be compromised.

If the Government is to win the confidence of the Tamil people, it must ignore short term considerations and move decisively in the matter. A number of concrete instances suggest that Tamil youth arrested on suspicion in Colombo and denied access to relatives are being badly assaulted (cases with swollen faces have been known) and made to sign confessions.

The common perception in Jaffna however, is that the Army is doing a difficult job reasonably well and that things have not deteriorated as feared. Some reliable standards are also being established.

Once again the message the TULF and the UNP are drawing from the recent outrage is to urge the Government to talk to the LTTE without conditions. From the TULF's standpoint it is even more ridiculous. They know the LTTE. Is it a measure of their political wisdom that they had to come to this conclusion after sending Sarojini and Sivapalan to Jaffna? It is irresponsible because they know that talking to the LTTE can be no more than a short-lived distraction condemning the country to more tragedy. This confused approach has condemned several well-meaning TULF members to go to the grave, each saying it was not the LTTE that killed the last victim.

The main lesson for them is that one cannot afford to be unclear about the LTTE and play with them like with pussycats. Those who do it carry a time fuse on them and the LTTE decides the time. Whoever touches the LTTE would be used, sucked dry and then destroyed. From Mahattaya and Kittu in the LTTE hierarchy, it has been the fate of many other hopefuls. The TULF Secretary Mr. Anandasangary is perhaps the boldest and sturdiest in the TULF leadership who is in touch with the people and has no illusions about the LTTE. His presence in Jaffna after the blast was no doubt of great help. It was pitiful to see him on television with a pained face, toeing perhaps the party line in not naming the LTTE. He is no doubt a prime target. To be in politics now in the North-East and

to do good, complete professional security with no illusions is essential, and there is no shame in it. The Government is duty-bound to provide it. It is incalculably damaging and demoralising to the people when a public figure is killed because of unwarranted complacency.

Anandasangary has stated in Jaffna that the TULF will appoint a new mayor for Jaffna, that they will not be intimidated by violence and that he would come forward himself if necessary. Many despairing of a total descent of Jaffna into anarchy and a painful death have no doubt appealed to him that the TULF must not give up. It is also remarkable that in the face of total silence from leaders of civil society, an elderly civilian, Mr.Sinnathurai from Avarangal, a former TULF stalwart, was moved to make a bold personal statement over BBC (TS). He said, "If anyone thinks they could use murder to make political gains, the people will rise up and teach them that they are mistaken. We will continue to honour the democratic mandate given to us by the people".

The current tragedy again points to the big difference between Northern Ireland and Jaffna. Whenever an outrage similar to what happened in Jaffna took place in Northern Ireland, the Roman Catholic Church, the SLDP and civil society among the Catholics did not hesitate, even though there was a threat, to condemn the IRA. In Tamil society here, there is not one pillar of it that the LTTE phenomenon has failed to level down into becoming an abject and servile ally of fascism. The silence in Jaffna speaks for itself. One has instead the elite and the press playing their cowardly games. In public they convey the impression that they are with the LTTE and drive the fear of the LTTE into people. The Uthayan predictably took issue with a visiting Hindu swamy who said that things are normal in Jaffna except for disturbances created by the LTTE. But then these same persons go to the Army top brass and pour their hearts out, explaining why they have to play these games. It is touchingly ironical when army officers sympathetically explain their behaviour to visitors. One needs to understand the character of a force that constantly resorts to indiscriminate terror to keep its people in this state of fear and suffocation. Being a phenomenon whose rise was not just linked to, but indeed necessitated, the total destruction of civil society, makes the LTTE vastly different from others like the IRA. The LTTE had crossed a threshold entailing a drastic qualitative change which made it altogether a new organism. The similarities to IRA, however striking, are superficial.

01.MURDERING THE ASPIRATIONS OF A PEOPLE

Mrs.Sarojinidevi Yogeswaran, 65 year old widow and mayoress of the City of Jaffna, was shot dead on 17th May 1998 by two assassins who called at her home during the morning. To dismiss it as just another of those political killings within Tamil society, to be mourned and forgotten, is to miss the point. Indeed this is how a very influential section of Tamil society treated it. Running against many obstacles and ridicule from these same quarters, she was elected Mayoress of Jaffna on 29th January 1998 to the general relief of the populace. She came to be a mother-figure whose sentiments about restoring normal life in Jaffna and seeing an end to 'gun culture' found a resonance in the deepest longings of the people. There was a growing thaw in the political atmosphere and functions of the Jaffna Municipal Council were becoming a focus for revival of democratic activity.

This much would have made her a major figure in Tamil political life in the context of total paralysis brought about by 20 years of internal and external terror. The task called for enormous courage and determination that is today extremely rare in Tamil society. Her significance goes much further.

There is hardly any room to doubt that the tone and character of Tamil political life today is determined by the LTTE. From 1986 it has been trying to ensure that all Tamils who are allowed to function in public life, whether as politicians or as leaders of civil society, could only do so as its cohorts. Terror was the primary means of bringing this about, and its ultimate goal was the creation

of a totalitarian fascist polity. To this end anyone who did not fall into line or was involved in any activity, however innocuous, that had the potential to develop into a healthier alternative for the people, was likely to be eliminated.

Many who found it uncomfortable to function under these constraints, found a ready refuge in Tamil nationalism as a means of overcoming their reservations and excusing their cowardice. Where one avoided looking at the long-term consequences, violations by the State provided some justification for this position. Toeing the LTTE's line need not always involve action. Most of the time it could merely involve being silent in the face of something totally inhuman and unacceptable as will be seen below. The end result provides substance to the contention that fascism is in essence the culture of mediocrity. Mediocrity results from narrowing one's mind and conscience to conform to the dictates of a fascist polity. In most individuals such conformity leads to a loss of self-esteem requiring an outlet, producing a diseased personality. This is the key to understanding individuals who provide a variety of services for the LTTE.

The LTTE in July 1989 murdered TULF leader A.Amirthalingam and V.Yogeswaran, former MP for Jaffna and Sarojini's husband. The trauma Sarojini experienced from seeing her husband killed before her own eyes, led her to strong aversion for 'gun culture' and her courageous stand 8 1/2 years later, resulting in her own tragic death. At the time of their murder, the two leaders were working for a constitutional solution under the Indo-Lanka Accord. From the early 1990s the LTTE has been working on turning the TULF into a party, effectively of its spokesmen, resorting to culling by murder when individuals were seen to fall out of line. Such was the murder of A.Thangathurai, whose work in the rehabilitation of displaced Tamils in the Trincomalee District was a threat to the LTTE, whose appeal depended on the continued alienation of Tamils.

Sarojini Yogeswaran had come to pose an even greater threat without being very conscious of it. Moreover she was careful not to criticise the LTTE in her public statements. But unlike Trincomalee, Jaffna had been crucial for the LTTE's international public relations. Events in Jaffna after the October 1995 Exodus and the takeover by the Sri Lankan Army had been very damaging to the LTTE. Under the LTTE Tamil elite spokesmen who undertook public relations for the LTTE had succeeded in putting it about that the people were solidly behind the LTTE. But after 1995 when people could communicate more openly and even write to the press, it became clear that among a substantial section of the populace there was long accumulated, deep seated anger against the LTTE.

This threatened the huge publicity edifice the LTTE had painstakingly constructed beginning with servile members of the intelligentsia in Jaffna, extending through Colombo and having a global reach.

The task of this network was to sell the LTTE as a liberation group accepted by all Tamils as their sole legitimate representatives, with the exception of a few 'traitors' or 'misguided persons'. What became very clear from 1996 was that the Tamils wanted a healthier and saner alternative to constraining their children to carry arms, and wanted moreover a life free of terror and 'gun culture'.

Thus following the Exodus the credibility of the LTTE's network was placed under severe strain. Their role in grossly misrepresenting the people could not continue without exposing themselves as contemptible liars. In Jaffna itself the pro-LTTE elements were constrained into a resentful silence by public opinion that was very much in the air. Mrs.Yogeswaran's role threatened to continue these developments much further by providing a democratic forum for the people's wishes.

Another individual who did a great deal to discredit the LTTE's claims to represent the Tamil people was Brigadier Larry Wijeratne. He came to be loved by the people (a rare distinction in Tamil public life) to such an extent that many unhesitatingly referred to him as 'our god'. By

maintaining strict discipline on the Army and going among the people he created a fresh atmosphere and organised activities where the youth of Vadamaratchy - supposedly the home base of the LTTE - had regular interaction with youth in the South. The LTTE had to resort to the cowardly and reprehensible act of using a suicide bomber to kill him on 14th May, during ceremonies spontaneously organised by the people to bid him farewell.

Both these murders must therefore be seen as part of the cruel conspiracy to misrepresent the Tamil people as sub-human, who in the face of healthier alternatives in the present world, support a monstrosity that compels mass suicide on their children. The logical step following the murders was to make the events seem trivial by character assassinating the dead, spreading confusion about the murders and greatly diminishing the significance of the persons and their loss.

The absence of any firm cue from the TULF provided the opportunity for the Tamil press, through inclination or otherwise, to play the LTTE's game and deepen the confusion. The 'Uthayan', the Tamil daily published in Jaffna, had the merit that a reasonably perceptive reader would not have been left in any doubt as to who killed Sarojini and Thagathurai.

In Jaffna itself Mrs.Yogeswaran's murder was greeted with a haunting silence, not just from individuals, but from practically all civil institutions, including the university and all religious bodies - not even a timely word condemning the cruel and cowardly murder of a well-meaning widow past three score years.

In the case of Mrs.Yogeswaran and Mr.Thangathurai, division, confusion and fear within the TULF played into the LTTE's hands. The TULF failed to name the LTTE as the killers as was amply evident, and place in stark terms before the people why the two were killed. While one section of the TULF remained silent, another section actively tried to shift the blame onto other Tamil groups, thus trivialising the deaths and the enormous significance of their sacrifice.

Following Mrs.Yogeswaran's murder, only the local trader's association closed shops in protest. The leader of this association too was later killed. It must therefore be kept in mind that we are here talking about a very abnormal society, and this calls for much circumspection in gauging the opinions of the people.

In such a society silence makes one an ally of oppression. This can be seen in some of the propaganda gains made by the LTTE after the murder of Mrs.Yogeswaran. A few weeks later a group from Tamil Nadu including 24 MPs signed a memorandum calling upon the Indian prime minister to prevail upon the Sri Lankan government to stop the war and withdraw its troops from the North-East. Making allowance for the foibles of politicians, would this memorandum have been possible at all, had it been clear to the people of Tamil Nadu, that in the Tamil society of this country, among whom finding courage and heroism is like looking for a needle in a haystack, the LTTE not only killed a courageous woman, but also a widow, to whom every civilised society owes a special courtesy?

The LTTE's claim to be the sole representatives of the Tamil people must therefore be judged in the abnormal context that it relies compulsively on total silence on the part of the very people it is meant to liberate. This silence has been brought about by terror. Terror works by creating a diseased society where individuals are denied healthy and humane options. For the LTTE's image it has worked wonders. Confusion about its nature has led well-meaning outsiders to draw parallels between the ethnic question in this country and the problems in South Africa and Northern Ireland which have been amenable to constitutional settlements. The key difference is the role of terror. **In the latter societies pluralism was never in question and the use of terror by certain groups never succeeded in reducing other sections of society to total subservience, or in silencing the voicing of other options and alternative visions for the future. The case of Tamils is so**

pathological that the totalitarian claims in which the LTTE has trapped itself cannot be met in a constitutional settlement compatible with basic human and democratic rights.

Also little understood is the vast gulf that exists between the pro-LTTE elites widely accredited as purveyors of Tamil opinion and the people on the ground. When Mrs.Yogeswaran was killed, the people were silenced but at the same time greatly disturbed. A very representative comment coming from Jaffna was, "The Tigers are all out to plant their flag on a mound of ashes". When Brigadier Larry Wijeratne was fatally struck by an LTTE assassin, a large number of civilians so lost themselves in sorrow that they rushed into the Pt. Pedro Army Camp - something totally unprecedented.

The nature of, and events surrounding, the murder of Mrs.Yogeswaran provide us with a context to probe the pathological state of affairs governing the destiny of Sri Lanka and of the Tamil people in particular. In addition to elaborating and clarifying comments made in this chapter, we will explore the social mechanisms, both local and overseas, by means of which a detestable regime of falsehood and oppression is sustained.

02. BURYING A HEROINE

A strange event of June 1997 provides an interesting backdrop to contrast reactions to Sarojini's murder. For nearly a year there had been widespread complaints of corruption against a key government official in Jaffna at a time when shortages were felt acutely. Following a high level investigation it was rumoured that the official, who was good at keeping the right people happy, was to be removed. A very unusual felicitation was organised for his benefit where his services, abilities and dedication were extolled (Uthayan 4.6.97). All leading sections and institutions in Jaffna society were represented. The Roman Catholic bishop was represented by his vicar general. The two leading Hindu religious dignitaries in Jaffna spoke. There were school principals and administrators. The University of Jaffna was represented by a senior academic and the vice chancellor. The latter presented the administrator with a 'Ponnadai' (gold embroidered shawl) conferring a mark of distinction. Hardly a more distinguished gathering could have been put together to conduct this festival of flattery - a seedy affair that did little to improve the reputation of the participants. Notwithstanding the high praise, the beneficiary was removed from office.

In contrast when Mrs.Yogeswaran, a lady who sacrificed her life and was worthy of the highest praise was killed, there was not a hum of protest or condemnation, individually or collectively, from these persons or the institutions they represented. She was after all a prominent public figure and it is these institutions that owed it to the people to condemn the murder and give a lead to the public in demonstrating their sorrow and contempt for the act. It was moreover these institutions that could have done it with the least risk, and there was no need then to name the perpetrator. Their silence was not because they thought of Mrs.Yogeswaran as some kind of an undesirable woman who deserved to go unmourned.

Here we encounter the triviality, silliness and craven opportunism of public life under fascism. Even the leaders of civil society are constrained by terror from discussing matters crucial to the life of the community - not even in closed circles such as the University and the churches. To compensate their loss of self-esteem they are provided with enough platforms for mutual flattery. Nothing serious is ever said in public.

The ordinary people felt very angry about the murder, but in the absence of leadership, were gripped with fear. The stony silence of the leaders of society was itself a strong indication to them that the LTTE were the killers. Hardly anyone dared to go to Mrs.Yogeswaran's house on the first day. On this day it was only the EPRLF that condemned the murder in Jaffna and named the LTTE as the killer. The PLOTE followed suit the following day. The EPDP condemned the killing but did not name the LTTE. It was the EPRLF and PLOTE who put up banners of mourning and helped

with transporting the body. On the third day the body was kept in the Municipal Council. It was then that following council employees, crowds started going there in increasing numbers to pay their last respects before the body was flown to Colombo for cremation. One of the speakers at the Municipal Council was TULF secretary Mr. Anandasangari who had come from Colombo. Another was S. Namasivayam, (57), vice president of the TULF branch in Jaffna and secretary of the Jaffna Traders' Association. He was about the only local person to play a prominent role at that time. Through his initiative Jaffna traders closed their shops - the only public protest to mark the occasion.

Namasivayam resigned as secretary to the Traders' Association at the end of May. While cycling home to lunch on 5th June, he was cut to death. Whoever had killed him, it is certain that the silence of others better placed than he was, had left him isolated and vulnerable. We learn that there was a condemnation of the murder of Sarojini by the Peace Committee of which the Roman Catholic Bishop is chairman, and includes several religious leaders. But hardly anyone from Jaffna is aware of it and it certainly did not reach the press when it was meaningful. Moreover, no one of any standing from the body participated in the public condolence meeting. The condemnation is in effect, one for the record.

Public anger and protest against the murder of Mrs. Yogeswaran was thus so successfully damped. While the generality of the people continue to be silenced and key issues concerning the future of the Tamils cannot be discussed, what the outsider could hear by talking to people is either LTTE propaganda or the face-saving rationalisations of people who have surrendered their sanity in order to live with day-to-day reality. It is an abnormal society that one encounters. One could see all the elements of censorship through fear, ad hoc rationalisation, insanity, callousness and outright propaganda in the impressions gathered by the Hindustan Times correspondent:

“One of the disturbing facts in relation to the cowardly killing of Jaffna’s 61 year old female Mayor Mrs. Sarojini Yogeswaran on May 17, is that it evoked no revulsion among the Tamils in general and the people of Jaffna in particular.... Very few said that democracy had been throttled by gun-toting extremists who had a vested interest in keeping Jaffna and the Tamils in turmoil.”

“Day after day, Tamil newspapers complain bitterly about the absence of basic facilities in their areas and put the blame squarely on the Sri Lankan Government.... But when the LTTE brazenly thwarts the government’s attempts to provide supplies or restore normalcy, and the world condemns the LTTE for its depredations, the Tamils swing to the LTTE’s support. They would suddenly turn around and say: We want a permanent political solution, not relief and rehabilitation”.

On the murder of Mrs. Yogeswaran, the report notes that some said she deserved it while others said she had been foolhardy in contesting the Mayoral election in the face of LTTE threats. They said it was just as well she was killed.

“A supposedly ‘moderate’ Tamil MP was brimming with joy and went into peals of laughter when he heard of the killing”. The TULF MP who felt ‘vindicated’ by the assassination had noted that he had been always against the TULF’s contesting in the face of LTTE disapproval.

P.K. Balachandran, the Hindustan Times correspondent draws the conclusion that the more substantial cause for the absence of revulsion is political. He quotes a journalist in Jaffna: *“According to a seasoned north-based Tamil scribe, all this flowed from one fact - the general conviction among Tamils is that any attempt to weaken the LTTE would be detrimental to them. The scribe says, “If the Tamils have to walk with their heads held high, the LTTE should not be weakened.”* Balachandran concludes, with the very quintessence of fascism, *“Every diktat of the LTTE however gruesome or unsettling is accepted without question.”*

What most journalists have been missing arises from the immense gulf under fascist control dividing what people say with what is really in their heart. Do people want the LTTE to come back to Jaffna, hold meetings in schools and take their children away to an unknown fate, so that “they could hold their heads high and the LTTE will not be weakened”? Is this not the very reason that many people are anxious to get out of the Vanni today, as was with Jaffna in the past? The feeling that Tamils have something to lose if the LTTE is weakened, comes mainly from the barrage of propaganda in the Tamil press that subtly puts across the message that the Sinhalese are a barbaric and implacable menace. None of the healthy changes in Sinhalese society are acclaimed or acknowledged. The Tamils are hung in confusion in the dichotomy between propaganda and what they feel and experience. To a reader of the report above, honest answers from Jaffna to the questions “Do you want the Army to leave Jaffna?” and “Do you really want the Army to open the road to Vavuniya, which would mean weakening the LTTE?”, would bring surprises.

The most immediately pertinent point missed or ignored by most observers is that if the people are so spontaneously pro-LTTE as is often held, what is the significance of the ubiquitous network of terror maintained by the LTTE, the intimidation, the systematic manipulation of the media, deliberate distortion of news and the sowing of confusion? When people say cruel things such as that Mrs.Yogeswaran or anybody else was wrong to challenge the LTTE because it is foolish and suicidal, and indeed deserved what they got, is it not because they already accept that the LTTE is leading the Tamils on the path of tragedy?

Then here we have a society so tragically miscommunicating its own wishes, and so grossly misrepresented by its spokesmen and its would-be-friends worldwide. And a noble lady was allowed to pass from our midst, orphaned it seems by the very people she sought to serve.

03.THE MAYORAL CAREER OF SAROJINI YOGESWARAN

In many ways Sarojini Yogeswaran, nee Ponnambalam, was an ordinary middle-class Tamil woman. Born in 1933 she spent her early life in Malaya where her father worked, and returned home to Nallur, Jaffna after the second World War, as the daughter of a Malayan pensioner. She earned her BA (London) and taught at Vembadi Girls High School. Her inherited wealth ensured that she would be relatively comfortable in life. Her induction into Tamil nationalist politics was through her husband V.Yogeswaran, who became the charismatic TULF MP for Jaffna in 1977. Her rise to greatness was on account of her clearly thought out response to a challenge resulting from a traumatic event in her personal life. In the account below we will refer to two excellent detailed articles about her. One is by D.B.S.Jeyaraj (titled ‘Death of a True Heroine’) in the Island of 20th May 1998 (referred to as [DJ]) and the other by ‘Roving Correspondent’ in the Sunday Leader of 24th May 1998 (referred to as [RC]).

During the period of the Indo-Lanka Accord, the LTTE targeted the TULF leaders. Through Yogeswaran who naively attempted to bring about amity between the TULF and the LTTE, the latter tried to lure the TULF leaders into the Mullaitivu jungles, but they declined. Eventually talks were arranged at Yogeswaran’s flat in Colombo. During this period (1989) the LTTE were freely moving around Colombo as they were having talks with the Premadasa government. Although security was provided for the TULF leaders on the initiative of Gamini Dissanayake, a government minister who was himself killed by the LTTE in 1994, on Yogeswaran’s instructions the LTTE delegation led by its intelligence chief Visu was not searched. During the meeting Amirthalingam and Yogeswaran were shot dead in the presence of Mrs.Yogeswaran who had just served refreshments to the killers. The latter in turn were shot dead by the police security who came rushing upstairs upon hearing gunshots. Thus the Tiger Leader completed the act of political parricide on which he had set his mind, by using his chief henchmen in a suicide mission.

“After Yogeswaran’s death Sarojini was quite demoralised for awhile. The Yogeswarans had no children and Sarojini was all alone now. She was not in financial difficulties because of the substantial property inherited. Had she wanted to, Sarojini could have led a peaceful, comfortable existence. Yet her politicisation because of her late husband and desire to carry on his work motivated her to dabble in politics. More importantly she, like most responsible TULFers, was burdened with a “political cross”. It was the TULF that radicalised Tamil politics and fired youth imagination with the vision of Eelam..... She became totally disillusioned with the so called armed struggle. She felt that the only way out for Tamil redemption was the forsaking of violence and returning to democracy. She realised that a negotiated settlement followed by development was the only solution.....

“Sarojini wanted some development-oriented action. An opportunity arose when local authority elections were announced. She staked her claim for the Jaffna municipality. Under the circumstances she was the best bet for Jaffna from the TULF. When party colleagues became worried about her security, she told them bluntly, ‘Don’t worry about that. That’s my problem’. Her courage was inspiringly overwhelming. She got her nomination”. [DJ]

A technical hitch in the TULF nomination which had to be resolved in Court left the TULF with only ten days of campaigning. Sarojini undauntedly led her campaign with almost no resources or infrastructure and with people being afraid to identify with her openly. One man who supported her and paid a heavy price was S.Namasivayam mentioned earlier, who became vice-president of the TULF branch. He was a long standing TULF supporter, known as a good man in the locality, was munificent in contributing to local charitable causes and was in the forefront in addressing local problems.

Another circumstance about Mrs.Yogeswaran which is generally unknown deserves mention. After Yogeswaran was killed, from the end of 1989 until June 1990, the Tigers reigned all-powerful over the lives of Tamils anywhere in this country, with the active backing of the UNP Government. Many TULF cadre were arrested by the LTTE and taken to their notorious camps through Government check points. At this time Mrs.Yogeswaran was among the few we know of, who was sending information out of the country about this outrage.

Marwaan Macan Markar who covered the Jaffna elections for the Sunday Leader was moved by a particular incident he witnessed. On polling day a policeman shooed away Mrs.Yogeswaran from a polling station in Chundikuli, not recognising her as a mayoral candidate. Sarojini smiled it off. There was no self-pity. What came from her was concern for the people and reflections on the uphill task ahead. Under the circumstances her election as Mayoress of Jaffna was a handsome victory and a demonstration of hope.

“Sixty year old Sarojini Yogeswaran knew death was inevitable. Knowing the Tigers well she had no illusions about their sparing her. But she may have thought or hoped that the LTTE would have let her alone for some time at least so that she could get the municipal council to initiate some rehabilitation and reconstruction work that would have alleviated the suffering of the people. But to the LTTE any countenancing of civil administration in Jaffna was anathema. It had to be nipped in the bud and the easiest thing was to gun down an unarmed old woman.

“Sarojini Yogeswaran was not an extraordinarily brave person. But in coming forward to be elected as Jaffna mayoress in a climate of fear and violence, she displayed supreme courage and dedication. She had a vision of restoring on ‘unarmed democracy’ to Jaffna..... Her vision of an unarmed democracy in effect meant a departure from the ecology of the gun that bedevils traditional Tamil homelands, under the guise of liberation struggles. So great was her commitment that she refused armed security while campaigning as well as after being elected. She refused to have bodyguards. Sarojini also turned down an offer by the military to establish a checkpoint close to her residence. This was not due to foolish bravado but to a deep conviction that a genuine farewell to arms was absolutely necessary to bring about a constructive change on the path to self-destruction....

“It was this knowledge that the chariot of death was drawing near that imbued Sarojini Yogeswaran with a sense of impatience. She was stridently articulate about the needs of Jaffna. But some of her recent interviews suggest that she was terribly disappointed by the attitude of the Government in this regard.... So great was Yogeswaran’s anguish that she went on record saying that [President] Kumaranatunga had not delivered all she had promised at a recent meeting.... [However] Sarojini Yogeswaran’s interaction with NGOs and foreign missions was becoming successful. Finances were being sanctioned and promises made for a number of ventures in Jaffna - when the LTTE made its strike. The LTTE’s killing of Sarojini Yogeswaran was a predictable action. The spirit of democratic assertion that was developing in Tamil politics seems to have evaporated at least for now” [RC].

Thus Sarojini who had been seen as a pretty average middle-class woman, through a singular act of courage for which the conditions were created by the nature of circumstances surrounding her husband’s death, was rising to heights of sacrifice and nobility. To many who met her after she became a mayoral candidate, she was a woman with a mission in the face of stalking terror of the most inscrutable kind. She was playing the life-giving role of a mother outside the narrow confines of family. She was trying to give life to a dying people.

Here was how she struck Bandula Jayasekera who interviewed her for national television, which also shows her keen awareness of danger: “The moment I met her she became amma [mother] to me and I became putha [son in Sinhalese] to her. She was loving and motherly. She requested me before the interview not to ask certain questions due to fear of threats to her life.

“Son, if you ask me those questions I have to give direct answers and certain elements will not like what I have to say - so let us avoid them”, she said. She wanted to live with the people who elected her to office. “I am moving to Jaffna [from Colombo] with all my pots and pans”, she told me.... She was a brave woman, a Mother Courage, a symbol of peace, who wanted to serve the people of Jaffna, and rekindle the spark of democracy in the land of the broken palmyrah....” [Midweek Mirror 20.5.98]

We had observed in “Living through Jaffna’s Sultry Sunset” that soon after the local elections there was relief and even optimism. The LTTE had drawn back from outright confrontation. Also before the elections notices of threat and intimidation against participating in, or co-operating with, the elections was issued in the name of “ Sangiliyan Force”. The local population and the journalists covering the elections identified this with the LTTE. Nothing more was heard of this group for two months after the elections. A lady, a foreign correspondent based here, observed that the people in Jaffna did not in general seem to realise that Mrs.Yogeswaran was taking a tremendous risk. When Sarojini on a trip to Colombo was delayed from returning by a minor accident, several people complained.

During the first two months after the elections the LTTE which was present in Pungudutivu, an off-shore island of 10 square miles, 15 miles from Jaffna town and linked by road, concentrated on summoning influential officials and traders for meetings. ‘Sangiliyan Force’ made its reappearance through letters in mid-April, threatening senior officials, traders and individuals not to co-operate with the Army. All councillors were asked to resign. The columnist ‘Paasupathan’ writing in the Sanjeevy (Saturday edition of Uthayan) of 8th April quoted what he termed ‘biased’ news agencies in Colombo and the local military authorities as identifying ‘Sangiliyan Force’ with the LTTE. His failure to say what he thought or to offer an alternative suggestion was a clear indication of his thinking. The LTTE was clearly getting worried about ‘democratic assertion’.

This was about the time the Jaffna Municipal Council had its first sitting. An LTTE threat to Mrs.Yogeswaran had appeared in hideous Tamil verse in its journal ‘Liberation Tigers’ before the elections, which referred to Vettivel’s daughter-in-law whose eyes have not been opened. It added:

“The lady who roams the streets of Wellawatte and lived in luxury in Colpetty, wants a throne it seems.... Say we will come! We will come.....” We have here a good indication of how the feelings of ordinary LTTE cadre having a tough life are deliberately aroused against civilians they target.

04. AFTER THE MURDER

rs.Yogeswaran was shot dead during the morning of 17th May by two killers who called at her residence. She had been talking to the deputy mayor. When she came out, the second person who was behind the first pulled out a T56 (as reported) from hiding and sprayed Sarojini, after which they escaped through the back. The same day a note claiming to be from the Sangiliyan Force was delivered to Uthayan press next door to Sarojini's - in a lane in front of Kailasapillaiyar Kovil. The note stated that the victim had disregarded their warnings to resign, including the final one, and they therefore 'dispatched her to the world of Yama'.

To those journalists from Colombo who heard about the Sangiliyan Force during the elections, the note confirmed their earlier suspicion that the LTTE were the killers. The claim was bound to be authentic as no one trifles with the LTTE. The fear in Jaffna and the reluctance of people to go to her home was again a clear indication that they believed it was the LTTE. The BBC Tamil Service, also on the same day, interviewed the TULF Secretary and the Jaffna based reporter whom they regularly contacted. The latter had until the LTTE quit Jaffna in 1995, worked for the LTTE paper 'Eelanatham'. The lady from the BBC (TS) asked the party secretary, "who killed Sarojini?" The Secretary replied, "I have no authority to say who did it". He was then asked what they were going to do about the vacancy created by the murder. To this an indefinite answer was given.

The reporter from Jaffna answering the question who were the killers, said that it could not have been the LTTE! His reasoning was that since there was a sentry point at the junction, LTTE cadre carrying a T56 could not have come that way. This was obviously not a seriously thought out answer if the truth was the objective, since many other questions arise: Did the assassins have to pass the sentry point?, Were bags being checked?, Who would then be allowed to pass the sentry points with a T56? etc. To those who are politically alert, the TULF Secretary's answer indicated his belief. But the effect of the second interview sowed confusion.

Two days later (19th), Uthayan received a second letter from the Sangiliyan Force written in cruder handwriting. It made the following claims: "All local councillors who have been sent warnings by us, including Sarojini Yogeswaran, are on our hit list. As we were about to deliver our punishment, somebody else cut short our work by killing her, for which we are very grateful. This killing must have been the work of one of the Tamil parties greedy for 'position-chairs'. Since Sarojini Yogeswaran was leading our list, on hearing of her assassination our Jaffna district leader issued a statement to the Uthayan on the mistaken premise that we were responsible. We express our deep sorrow for this. We deny that there is any connection between us and the Tigers as alleged in the press and broadcasting media. We have had no contact with the Tigers from the time we started functioning on Jaffna soil, but we fully endorse their policies which are in agreement with ours".

On 19th May, the same day the second letter was delivered, a staff member of the Uthayan (evidently Paasupathan, the columnist) went to Pungudutivu to meet an LTTE leader (evidently Thooyavan). Such meetings are sought from time to time by the LTTE. As reported in the Uthayan the following day, the spokesman declined to comment on the alleged connection between the LTTE and the Sangiliyan Force. He accused all Tamil parties of co-operating with the Government to show that there is normality in Jaffna and so betraying the struggle. The pertinent comment he made was: "It is inevitable that when selfish people like Mrs.Yogeswaran try to seize positions against the wishes of people in order to quash their struggle, there will emerge from among the people as a countermove, organisations like the Sangiliyan Force. That such selfish persons would be killed by such Forces is also inevitable".

This amounted to an admission by the LTTE that it was they who killed Sarojini Yogeswaran. For the reasons we pointed out earlier, the LTTE admitting an independent force sharing its ideology and objectives is sheer nonsense. Ample confirmation that the LTTE were the killers was available when the Uthayan was distributed in Jaffna on the morning of 20th May and in Colombo the same afternoon. But this confirmation was totally ignored by the Tamil press, columnists and the TULF. We will subsequently examine the consequences of this. Even the second letter was often distortedly reported by merely saying that the Sangiliyan Force disclaimed responsibility, while it conveyed much more.

Why the LTTE went through this rigmarole is a question that naturally arises. We can only make a fair guess. The LTTE being accused of the killing in international news networks and broadcasting media seems to have rattled them. This arose from the first letter and the fact that foreign correspondents who covered the Jaffna elections had already linked the Sangiliyan Force and the LTTE. That the LTTE was getting worried and hence the second Sangiliyan letter is suggested by its reference to the press and broadcasting media. The LTTE in Pungudutivu appears to have overplayed this game in summoning the Uthayan.

05. THE MURDER OF S.NAMASIVAYAM, TULF VICE PRESIDENT, JAFFNA

We said earlier that Namasivayam was a bold man who took the lead in supporting Mrs.Yogeswaran in Jaffna. After she was murdered he refused to be intimidated and took the lead in funeral arrangements and in initiating public observance of grief. In his capacity as secretary to the Traders Association, he persuaded fellow traders to close their shops. This upset the LTTE as seen in the reference in their news networks to 'the hartal in Jaffna being unsuccessful'. Had they been able to say that there was no public observance, it would have added weight to their making out that Mrs.Yogeswaran was viewed by the people as a 'traitor'.

In comparison with the extreme caution of those socially better placed to the point of doing nothing, Namasivayam's grief was irrepressible. He publicly spoke of erecting a statue for Sarojini Yogeswaran. When a well-connected local reporter asked him what his party was going to do about the vacancy, Namasivayam took it to be a taunt and went to assault him - the reporter being known to give a pro-LTTE slant in his reports. During this period Namasivayam also had to deal frequently with the Army.

When he was killed on 5th June, the Police detained on suspicion a butter-milk salesman who had a personal problem with Namasivayam. The case it appeared was open. It made it easy for those who did not wish to go deeper, including the TULF no doubt, to say that they do not know who did the deed. The following facts ascertained by us from persons close to him put a different colour on the matter. It shows how easy it is to cover up the murders of ordinary people.

Shortly after Mrs.Yogeswaran's funeral, Namasivayam received a letter from the LTTE ordering him to drop out of public and political life, to come and meet them in Pungudutivu and that he should pay them Rs.3 million. In matching different accounts, it appears that in an earlier communication from the LTTE, Namasivayam had been ordered to collect several crores of rupees from fellow traders. In reply to this it was conveyed that it is easy to say yes, but doing it is nigh impossible. Namasivayam sent his son and brother-in-law to meet the LTTE. On the question of money they told the LTTE that Namasivayam did not have the money they demanded. The LTTE subsequently brought it down to Rs.2 million, to which again the emissaries said that Namasivayam could not find such money. At length the two told the LTTE that one of them would remain as hostage while the other went to talk to Namasivayam. The LTTE spokesman replied that they could both go back to Jaffna, but Namasivayam must come to them with the money within a given time. If he does not do so, he added, you must not complain about the consequences.

Shortly afterwards the Army blocked the causeway to Pungudutivu from Velanai in the neighbouring, offshore island. This led to speculation that the Army did this because Namasivayam had complained to them. However, as Paasupathan's column (Sanjeevy 4.4.98) indicates the Army was already thinking of means to control officials and businessmen from going to Pungudutivu and answering summons by the LTTE. This problem would have become more worrying in the atmosphere of fear resulting from Sarojini's murder. Moreover, with operations in the Vanni, the Army could not spare the manpower to dominate the 10 square miles of Pungudutivu. The upshot of the closure of the causeway was that Namasivayam could not go.

Then two strange unreported incidents took place subsequently to which neither Namasivayam nor his family paid much attention at that time. To get home from his shop at the junction of Hospital and KKS roads, Namasivayam had to travel west to Kottady along the Hospital Road extension. One day when passing the Muslim cemetery, an area which is fairly deserted, he heard someone calling him. Looking around and seeing no one, he proceeded without waiting. It may also be noted that since Kottady was badly affected, being near the Jaffna Fort, the population had greatly declined.

There is also a small rock-like structure across the road in front of Namasivayam's house, where Namasivayam used to sit in the evenings and talk to passers by. Behind the structure the land was overgrown with scrub. On the evening of 3rd June Namasivayam's son sat there until it was almost dark. He heard a noise in the bushes as if someone was creeping towards him. When he looked and exclaimed, he heard a noise as though the intruder was quickly creeping away.

On 5th June when Namasivayam was cycling home to lunch, he was waylaid near the Vyravar Kovil and killed by being chopped with a sword. His neck was almost severed and three fingers in a hand too were severed. The killer appears to have been an expert who had a good deal of practice sending goats to Yama. These circumstances while pointing to two unnoticed earlier attempts on his life, also go a long way towards ruling out the killer being a civilian from the area. For, in the first instance the stalker's voice may have been recognised. Moreover had Namasivayam become alarmed and more alert after the first time, a person from the area stalking him would have feared being discovered in a failed attempt.

According to a journalist in Jaffna, he asked Thooyavan, the LTTE leader in Pungudutivu, whether the two civilians arrested by the Police on suspicion of murdering Namasivayam were in anyway guilty? In an answer which conveyed more than what was said, Thooyavan reportedly replied, "They are keeping innocent persons".

A conjecture as to why a sword was used in killing Namasivayam has come to be widely believed in Jaffna. The conjecture is related to the fact that Namasivayam made, before a number of persons while Sarojini's body was lying at home, an observation about the killers calling themselves the Sangiliyan Force. He said, "King Sangiliyan was a noble fighter who fought with the sword. He had not used a gun to kill unarmed women!"

06.THE POLITICS & RATIONALISATIONS OF WONDERLAND

In this section and the next we will go into how Tamil society is misled and misrepresented by members of their elite who do not have the moral courage to face up to the fact that their past actions and omissions are far from noble. Some have in the course of time become deeply compromised.

If the leading lights of the University of Jaffna and the churches are asked why they did not condemn the murder of Mrs.Yogeswaran, one would no doubt get the same answer that many of them had given in the past for maintaining a complete silence on mass crimes by the LTTE: They

would say that they are academics or spiritual fathers and do not deal in politics. Let us see how this squares with their record.

A number of senior university dons have made stirring speeches on LTTE platforms and actively aided its recruitment of children. A very senior academic even made a speech unfurling and LTTE flag, "Let revolution burst forth, we are prepared for any sacrifice". While the LTTE was arresting students, two of whom disappeared after arrest, in addition to other dissidents, during August 1991, a senior student counsellor addressing the students said that those who do not conform to the LTTE's requirements of political purity will be eliminated as weeds [UTHR (J) Report No. 8]. There were no checks on such shameful complicity. Needless to say that none of these eloquent advocates sacrificed their own children to the cause to which they inveigled other people's children. When by some freak chance a child of theirs joined the LTTE, a quick exit to the West was arranged in return for their services, while others, especially children, were generally barred from leaving.

Unlike the flag-raising academic who was a technical man, another sophisticated social scientist, who is popular in Colombo, a subtle linguist and master of ambiguity, did the job with enviable panache. A former communist, he was invited to speak at a felicitation meeting for Puthuvai Rathinathurai, LTTE's poet laureate, and also a former communist. This was in LTTE controlled Jaffna. The Professor asked, "You may all wonder what former communists are doing here?" Then he answered with a sweeping gesture, "Why, for it is there that humanity dwells!"

At a meeting in England, an anguished EPRLF member asked him for his position on the LTTE's March 1987 prison massacres in Jaffna of captured EPRLF cadre. The Professor replied, roughly, "It is not who that was killed that is important, but why they were killed."

Both these statements are liable to polar opposite interpretations, although one would have seemed obvious in the context. When cornered and challenged - 'so you have nicely set up things to send other people's children as sacrificial suicide victims' - he even has the grace to concede that he has to play the game to survive.

The churches too have dreary record. They too turned a blind eye to the fascist order and the terrible violations under the LTTE. In a statement circulated by the World Council of Churches in 1992, a Protestant bishop advocated the LTTE as the representatives of the Tamil people, whose support for it, he said, was almost total. The church's journal even thundered editorially, "When God is bringing forth the birth of a new nation, no power may stand against it". Some semblance of sanity appears to have returned after the LTTE tried to forcibly export this new nation to the Vanni jungles in October 1995.

During early 1995 when there was a cease-fire with hopes of peace, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Jaffna was in Colombo advancing the view that the Tamil people were behind the Tigers and canvassed for the LTTE's patently disingenuous demand (as was clearly understood in Jaffna) that the people wanted their day-to-day needs (e.g. banned items like cement and petrol) fulfilled before entering talks on a political settlement as the Government insisted.

After this there was the resumption of war and the Exodus which left the people deeply angry over the LTTE's callousness. The church did nothing to voice these feelings or question where the LTTE was leading the community to. The Government announced local elections for 29th January 1998. There was now a strong case to argue that if the local councils would function, the day-to-day needs of the people could be attended to more expeditiously. This time election monitoring groups from the South were told at a meeting with clergy at Bishop's House that the elections were meaningless, and the Government should instead talk to the Tigers and find a lasting solution. This was almost a reversal of the 'day-to-day needs' line which the Bishop advocated in early 1995. It is this irony that struck Balachandran in his article quoted above. The church fathers did not have the

sense of responsibility or the courage to demand of the LTTE in 1995 to enter into talks about a political settlement. Having kept quiet through the calamities that followed for which the LTTE was largely responsible, they are again making claims that the LTTE are their appropriate leaders. Again they do not have the courage to argue their case in public. It is rather conveyed through closed door meetings and whispering campaigns, where the more discerning visitors could detect something horrifying behind masks of spirituality.

When the 'Island' contacted the Bishop's office following Mrs. Yogeswaran's murder, the paper was told that the Bishop does not wish to comment over the telephone. No comment was forthcoming thereafter. It had evidently become inappropriate for a Christian leader to condemn what was plainly the cowardly murder of a defenseless woman.

Thus the claim of leading sections of society to be non-political is plainly disingenuous. By their actions and silences they have been political in a most dishonorable manner.

NGOs which lack clear direction have also readily provided fora for deepening the tragedy within the Tamil community. During the spring of 1997 a prominent peace group organised an international conference in Colombo. A man well-connected in Colombo's NGO circuit told the audience that the displaced Tamils in army controlled Vavuniya are on empty stomachs and are in chains, whereas those in the LTTE controlled Vanni are also on empty stomachs, but are free! Another speaker was a lady prominent in Colombo's NGO world, an activist in the National Peace Council and is presently affiliated to a Christian NGO in Europe. She told the audience that the people of Batticaloa wanted the Army to quit. Such statements are false or oversimplified stereotypes as suggesting a bad government versus an oppressed people, that sell well in the West. To be clear we will cite an incident in which this lady activist was involved.

The National Peace Council sent a Tamil speaking foreign journalist to Batticaloa with this lady. She took the foreign journalist to a village where the people immediately began complaining about the Army. The journalist however began asking probing questions and the villagers started opening up. They began saying that they also had problems with the LTTE and that all those who carry arms are the same. The villagers then saw three youths coming on bicycles whom they knew to be members of the LTTE. The talk changed direction abruptly, and pointing to the youths the people started saying loudly, "These are our saviours, We cannot live here without them!".

The lady above was once in the central committee of the EPRLF, several of whose members were killed by the LTTE after it banned the group in December 1987. There are several persons from groups suppressed and banned by the LTTE as traitor groups, who after getting some kind of clearance are living down a 'misguided' past by doing propaganda work for the LTTE from strategic places. Their main achievement is to sow confusion.

The journalist who writes under the name Taraki, presently in the Sunday Times, advances the line that the Tigers are powerful, invincible and have the broad support of the Tamil people, and that the Government's attempts to solve the problem politically or militarily without the LTTE would result in defeat and humiliation. His arguments are laced with innuendoes against those who hold contrary positions. They also sound credible if one has forgotten what he wrote a short time ago. When the Army took over Jaffna in 1995 and the LTTE forced an exodus of the population, he maintained that the Government had made a blunder and that the people of Jaffna would blame it for their sufferings. In April 1996 it became clear whom the people blamed more.

On the eve of the January 29th elections in Jaffna he wrote disparagingly of the exercise and observed that the TULF's mayoral candidate Mrs. Yogeswaran seemed to be having few neighbours visiting her. The problem with such writing is that it is cynical and subtly legitimises inhuman and abnormal conditions created by the enforcement of ubiquitous terror. There is neither any protest that subjecting people to such a regime is wrong, nor any credit given to Mrs. Yogeswaran for her

courage. Once minds become conditioned to acceptance of conditions imposed by terror, it will only take a slight shift to convey the impression that Sarojini Yogeswaran's neighbours were not visiting her, not out of fear, but because they hated her or held her in contempt. Taraki is obsessed with power and his writings show no concern for the people and what is becoming of them. The Tamil papers in particular suffocate their readers with such writings to the point of mental paralysis where the LTTE's terror seems to them the order of nature.

The confusion created and damage done by the propaganda of the LTTE's cohorts in the Tamil community should not be under-estimated. An article by the Sunday Times' India Correspondent (14.6.98) strongly and casually identifies the wishes of the Sri Lankan Tamils with the demands of the memorandum sent to the Indian prime minister by several Tamil Nadu politicians - virtually demanding that the Tamils be handed over to the LTTE. The memorandum may be a joke, but if such impressions about Tamil aspirations are widely prevalent in the South, it is very dangerous for all concerned.

As for Taraki himself what he is doing is sad. He was once a fugitive and personally knew what the LTTE's terror felt like, but never apparently had any qualms about its methods when it came to others.

Balachandran's report that a 'moderate' Tamil MP brimming with joy went into peals of laughter upon hearing about Mrs. Yogeswaran's death is not inconsistent with what has been surfacing in the press about goings on within the TULF. To go back a little, the TULF's Trincomalee MP A. Thangathurai was killed at a public function on 5th July 1997 along with six other civilians. If there was any doubt, police investigations made rapid progress and very soon there was no denying that the LTTE were the killers (see the article by D.B.S. Jeyaraj in the Sunday Island of 19.7.97 and the section on political killings below). The TULF maintained that it did not know who had done the killing. Some senior members spoke as though the killing could have been done by some other Tamil group. More curious, the TULF's Trincomalee Branch called upon the President of Sri Lanka to appoint a commission to determine who the killers were. If the party's Trinco branch were serious they only had to ask the people to co-operate with the Police who were making good progress. The reason for the clowning seemed to be that very close relatives of TULF members were implicated. The case has almost dropped out of the news. There was no visible remorse from leading TULF members. [After Mrs. Yogeswaran's murder, the TULF Trinco Branch again called upon the party leadership to find out who the killers were!]

For those who were not following developments, the behaviour of the leader of TULF's parliamentary group rubbed in whom he believed Thangathurai's killers were. In one of his first parliamentary speeches after the murder, during July 1997, he condemned the Government for launching the military operation to reopen the road to Jaffna which he said could have been opened for the purpose of supplying the civilians by talking to the LTTE. He added that the Government's motive in capturing the road was to transport more arms to Jaffna and prolong the war. Subsequently on a visit to the USA, he called upon the US Government to stop military assistance to Sri Lanka. Despite these antics (a laughing matter!) the TULF did not withdraw its support for the Government in parliament. The TULF had shown itself to be a party that will pretend not to notice its members being picked off one by one, on the illusion that it could survive by avoiding confronting or giving offence to the LTTE, however evident its destructiveness.

When Sarojini Yogeswaran was killed a senior TULF member told the first foreign correspondent who phoned him that the LTTE had done the killing. Although he did not repeat this in his subsequent public statements, his conduct showed fighting spirit and deserves credit. But then again the TULF went on a course of obfuscation, maintaining that they did not know who and that the other Tamil groups could have done it. This was ridiculous because for readers of Tamil who had been following the Uthayan, conclusion of the LTTE's guilt was immediate.

On 24th May, a week later, the 'Roving Correspondent' in the Sunday Leader gave a very coherent account clearly pointing to the LTTE. Even the LTTE's denials were very clumsy. Yet un-named leading TULF members went on giving statements to the press sowing confusion and even saying that the LTTE could not have done it. The EPDP in Jaffna added to this confusion by pointing to the PLOTE. Tamil media-men taking the cue, but knowing extremely well what the truth was, played the confusion game. Some of their writings which we will refer to, would leave the reader wondering whether to laugh or to cry.

So pitifully were the Tamil people led, being slowly destroyed in mind and soul, by community and political leaders who have lost their way. We will see below how crucial it is for the Fascist cause to maintain the Tamils of this country in a subhuman condition in order that its lobbying activities abroad can carry weight.

We now take a look at the origins of the fascist disease, why it has such a strong grip on the community today, and its present implications

07.THE BEGINNINGS & OVERSEAS CONNECTIONS

The origins of fascism can be traced to the 70s, in the TULF's (and its predecessor, the FP's) ambivalence between its formal advocacy of non-violence on the one hand, and on the other, its platform rhetoric with violent allusions, threats against opponents termed 'traitors' and cultivation of incipient violent groups. Most Tamils were comfortable with the idea of the TULF as a non-violent party and did not want their complacency disturbed. Most disturbing then was the TULF's silence over the killing of its political opponents. Although people were uncomfortable soon after a killing, they learnt to rationalise and dismiss it. It was then easy to think of these as side effects of State oppression. This was the beginning of moral inertia and political paralysis (see the Broken Palmyra).

We pointed out earlier that the rising spate of state violence, particularly from July 1983, provided scope for character weaknesses in Tamil individuals to assert their dominance, by rationalising away internal violence and lending complicity to internal terror. Most vulnerable to the fascist disease were those in public life who in turn by asserting their influence turned a decline in public morals into a rout. For example when the St. John's College principal Mr.C.E.Anandarajah was killed by the LTTE in June 1985, both the Jaffna dailies, the Eelanadu and Eelamurasu protested editorially - this was about the last such occasion. The editor of the Eelamurasu was detained by the LTTE, warned and released.

In May 1986, the LTTE was well on the way to becoming all-powerful after its public massacre of TELO cadre. It was clear that the people had lost all control. The assertion of brute power brought its dividends in the form of a number of public men used to worshipping power flocking to its banner. One of them was a bishop with good overseas contacts. The editor of the Ealamurasu who had protested to the school principal's murder went fully over to the LTTE to aid its subterfuges in assertion of control over the local media.

Another person whom we will refer to later is Fr.Emmanuel who became the Roman Catholic vicar general of Jaffna. He was deeply upset by the LTTE's massacre of TELO cadre and at that time was talking about a people's movement to check these outrages. During October 1990 when he witnessed the heart-rending scenes of Muslims being expelled from the North, he wrote an anguished letter to a friend in England. Yet by 1995 his drift to the LTTE was complete. There was nothing left of his former qualms of conscience. But he had a new public role. It may also be mentioned that in December 1993 he, with Bishop Ambalavanar witnessed the Air Force bombing St.James' church in Jaffna town from St.Xaviour's seminary in Colombogam. Veneration of absolute power therefore brought to the LTTE considerable middle-class support in Jaffna, which in turn helped the LTTE to takeover overseas networks originally supporting the TULF for the

most part until July 1983. One must also keep in mind the enormous non-material damage done particularly by the Air Force to the feelings and perceptions of people, resulting from their helplessness against such impersonal brute force.

Jaffna was thus crucial from the beginning and the myth sustained by repression, state oppression and a constant flow of visitors being fed with interviews in 'liberated Jaffna', that the people were almost completely behind the LTTE, was key to sustaining this huge organisation. After 1995 the myth began to dissolve.

From the late 50s the ethnic problem in this country accompanied by communal violence was well documented in the West and there was a reservoir of sympathy for the Tamil cause. The TULF too were effective publicists for this cause and were recognised as the principal representatives of the Tamils into the latter 80s. The problem seen as oppression of a minority by a majoritarian state was easily comprehended and amenable to comparative study. But from the late 80s the nature of the problem began to change radically owing to the rising role of internal terror within the Tamil community and also the changing mood among the Sinhalese masses towards an accommodative approach to Tamil grievances, as reflected in the elections of 1993 and 1994. This change, rooted in the Southern tragedy of the late 80s, must be seen as separate from the very alienating manner in which state institutions and the armed forces were functioning. But it opened up a real opportunity of securing peace for a Tamil leadership that was sensitive to Sinhalese fears. This opportunity still exists. The LTTE on the other hand can pursue its agenda only by keeping alive both Tamil and Sinhalese fears.

In practice these changes in the South have been largely ignored and are not taken into account by overseas activists who play an important role in issues concerning this country. Treating this now as primarily an ethnic problem with the State as principal oppressor has a distorting effect that prolongs the war. Too much seems to have been invested to date in this simplification.

In this framework an influential section of the overseas NGO community with ties here, began working on professional peace making. The task was to negotiate a peace between the warring parties - the Government and the LTTE. The question of what it was in the LTTE's inner make-up that caused it to resort to war in 1987 and 1990 (now again in 1995) when there were promising opportunities for peace which the people badly wanted, was ignored or good excuses were invented for the LTTE's conduct. The LTTE played the game shrewdly. It worked it out so that to have a meeting with a couple of its key dignitaries was like entering the holiest sanctum. It was quickly conveyed to visitors that they did not like people who talked about human rights or what the people suffered by their actions. If the visitors persisted - then no more access. The general strategy was to keep peace pilgrims in hope. The gods would decide when to grant an appearance. In the meantime the pilgrims would be watched for good behaviour.

Since those who sought a role in such peace making could not dispense with access, the natural tendency was to play down issues of human rights and democracy. In time they were deemed practically inconsequential, deserving only a token response when it became unavoidable. To local NGOs and churches, upon whom fell a greater responsibility, peace activism influenced by their foreign partners often provided an easy way out: There was no need to think seriously about issues and no need to challenge the Government or the LTTE on important matters affecting the people and pursue them in depth. Access to those with power who counted became the hallmark of success. Consequently persons who were deemed to be close or having contact with the LTTE were brought into peace lobbies, further distorting their perceptions.

This culture has tended to whitewash the LTTE and perpetuate misunderstandings about this country. On the conflict itself this approach has been barren. The more relevant peace work that would involve challenging the routine working of the State machinery that is constantly alienating the Tamils, which is hard but not such exciting work, has hardly got off the ground.

Further, we will refer below to an interview with Fr.Emmanuel, published in the much respected journal, the New Internationalist. This gives unabashedly and very uncritically the LTTE version of things. It partly reflects lobbying by NGO circles among whom Fr.Emmanuel moves in England and the state of opinion prevalent among them. Perhaps one of the reasons why the Bishop of Jaffna failed to condemn the murder of Mrs.Yogeswaran was that the LTTE had given him a meeting in April this year, which he expected and was disappointed in not getting when he was in Madhu last year. The peace activity whose weightage was towards power and overseas connections, one could say with reasonable certainty, is, while weakening the people, helping the LTTE to spread its totalitarian tentacles.

08.THE AIMS AND CHARACTER OF POLITICAL KILLINGS BY TAMIL GROUPS

Particularly in the wake of political killings by the LTTE there is the deliberate spreading of confusion. Theories and allegations pointing elsewhere seem credible since there are other groups with arms, an unsavoury record, and even a motive can be argued. We will try to bring some clarity into this before moving onto Sarojini Yogeswaran's murder.

All militant groups opposed to the LTTE, namely the PLOTE, TELO, EPDP and EPRLF have been involved in killings. The first three are involved in security operations with the armed forces outside the Jaffna peninsula. The EPRLF was involved in political killings while running the North-East Provincial Council during the IPKF period. But it has had mostly a clean record before and after. After June 1990 it has largely functioned as a political party. Killings by the PLOTE, TELO and EPDP have been largely internal,. In killing civilians they have generally not dared to touch anyone whose murder would become a big issue, without instructions or clearance from the Government or the security forces. We take some instances.

In August 1985, TELO killed two TULF MPs, Dharmalingam and Alalasundaram in Jaffna. These are believed to have been done on the instructions of Indian agency RAW.

According to a Special Correspondent (Sunday Island 13.2.94) quoting security officials, Uma Prakash, a leader of PLOTE-PLO which split from PLOTE, was killed near Colombo by Alavangu Dasan, a hatchet man of Manikkadasan, PLOTE's military wing leader. Uma Prakash was used for some time in security operations in Colombo in late 1993 when his group was brought from India, reportedly on a deal worked out by him with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe and Defense Secretary Wanasinghe. The PLOTE was unhappy about it. When these operations were exposed, the Government of the day reportedly found him an embarrassment. Circumstances strongly suggest that his murder by the PLOTE had prior authorisation from the State [UTHR (J) Rep. No.13].

In January 1996, PLOTE killed Sritharan, a government servant and social worker in Vavuniya; and in July it killed, also in Vavuniya, Arjuna, PLOTE's Trincomalee leader, who had been invited for talks by Manikkadasan [Our Bulletin No.12 of October 1996]. These killings were not investigated by the Police and were hardly even mentioned in the press, except perhaps in passing. They may be taken as part of the license the PLOTE enjoyed for aiding the security forces and for supporting the Government in parliament.

Likewise with EPDP's internal killing of Udaya Sooriyakumar in November 1994. The Police investigation appears to have been stalled by the present Government. The EPDP has been lending crucial support to the Government in parliament.

All these were parochial killings by groups aimed at safeguarding their narrow turf, and the outlook was short term. In the case of the Thangathurai and Sarojini murders, although one could superficially attribute motives and argue that these groups could have killed, there are a number of

pressing reasons why they would not go so far. They are vulnerable at many levels. They operate through parliament, have dealings with the main political circles in Colombo, and depend on the patronage of the Government and the security establishment. Any secrets they have, have a strong tendency to become open secrets. Every now and then cadre leaving these groups let out embarrassing secrets which are published by their rivals - such as happened during the recent election campaign in Jaffna. Two EPDP MPs who left the group continue to function under the patronage of influential elements in Colombo. These groups would not have been able to withstand the fall-out had they killed important figures like Thangathurai and Sarojini. On the other hand not a single person other than Rajini Thiranagama has come out of the LTTE and dared to expose it publicly.

The LTTE is not bound by any such restraints. Its strategy is to kill and remain silent when there is bound to be public resentment. Then its cohorts, locally and abroad, get to work in character assassination of the dead and in sowing confusion through the huge publicity machinery which includes almost the entire Tamil media. Confusion and sheer shortsightedness among other Tamil parties also plays into its hands. Thus when Thangathurai was killed, TULF circles talked as though the EPDP was involved. The EPDP through its paper 'Thinamurasu' went on to character assassinate the dead MP. When Mrs. Yogeswaran was killed, TULF again pretended not to know the killer. The EPDP spread the story that the PLOTE was guilty.

Subsequently threatening letters were sent to all surviving local councillors in Jaffna asking them to quit. The letters, we reliably understand, were posted from Pungudutivu where the LTTE then maintained a prominent presence. The letter was moreover addressed to all Tamil parties on the council, calling them traitors. It was quite evident that the LTTE sent the letter.

But when a newspaper office in Colombo telephoned the Jaffna EPDP office, they pointed at the PLOTE. When PLOTE was contacted they pointed to the EPDP.

When the LTTE decides to kill someone the criterion is often based on the answer to the question, "Will this individual or his or her activities pose a long-term political threat to us?". The outlook here is long-term and the aim is nothing short of absolute power in a nation state. The decision to kill Amirthalingam, the TULF leader, who was a resilient politician and was bound to remain a key figure in Tamil, and indeed national politics, was very likely taken years before the murder in July 1989. The ideological justification for the murder was that Amirthalingam who pioneered the popularisation of the demand for a separate Tamil State had gone back on it. The same reasoning had also been used to justify hundreds of other killings. Here, ideology cannot be separated from the drive for power. It is also a trap that has rendered the LTTE incapable of negotiating.

Amirthalingam had dominated Tamil politics for nearly 20 years and was widely looked up to, particularly by the middle class, as a person with the authority, experience and ability to thrash out a lasting political settlement. The LTTE faced considerable problems over killing Amirthalingam and many who worked for it overseas began distancing themselves. But it more than made up for it after June 1990 when it began another bout of war, by provocatively murdering hundreds of unarmed policemen and the security forces under Premadasa and Ranjan Wijeratne obliged the LTTE with large scale massacres of Tamils in the East. It is an irony that several Army officers who were responsible for these massacres then, are today commanding army divisions in the Vanni, facing LTTE forces whom their purblind conduct did much to strengthen vastly, and who are extracting a punitive price.

Another revealing affair was the LTTE's approach to the Theepori group. The latter came out of the PLOTE in early 1985 exposing its internal killings on Indian soil, where the victims were buried in a casuarina grove, through publishing the book 'A new kind of World'. The members of the group came to Jaffna and survived harassment by the PLOTE over the next year until it ceased to function. The LTTE distributed the book to discredit the PLOTE, but was no doubt clear that

such persons as in the Theepori were useful only as long as they were a threat to the PLOTE, but would not be countenanced when it took control. The Theepori leader Nobert, who survived torture and harassment from the PLOTE, disappeared after being taken into custody by the LTTE in 1991, however they would have instinctively assessed him six years earlier, in 1985.

A particular measure adopted by LTTE cohorts to sow confusion after a killing is to spread the story of an independent group having done the killing. This was tried after Thangathurai's murder as well as after Sarojini's murder (the so-called 'Sangiliyan Force' in the latter case). Anyone familiar with Tamil politics would know immediately that when the existence of such a force is claimed by LTTE cohorts, it is none other than the LTTE itself. Historically the LTTE has been too paranoid to allow any other force to exist, even when there were no ideological differences and the other force was too weak to pose a threat. Take the case of EROS. By 1986 its leader had practically accepted the dominance of the LTTE and was conducting a parallel programme of bomb attacks in the South. Once the LTTE decimated the TELO, a group around the EROS leader groveled up to the LTTE to the dismay of several of its cadre. On one occasion the LTTE's Jaffna political wing leader Thileepan went drunk with others into an EROS camp mostly manned by outstation cadre and threateningly asked them to surrender their weapons. On sensing that there was a mood of resistance, Thileepan said it was a joke, patted the camp leader on the back and went away. Eventually the EROS split up and a section under its leader Balakumar became servants of the LTTE. Panagoda Maheswaran's TEA which had no political programme too was not allowed to exist.

In the case of the TULF again the LTTE has been going on killing its members, working towards a TULF that would completely be under their control. Although the killing of leading figures has been widely publicised, a significant number of the TULF's cadre and local level leaders have also been killed by the LTTE - some in its notorious prisons. The continuing soft and confused approach of the TULF leadership towards the LTTE, even at the cost of dignity and truth, is puzzling. Some MPs are already behaving in a very compromised manner and on trips abroad appear to follow itineraries laid down by the LTTE. Although the resolution for a separate state of Eelam was passed by the TULF in 1976, it must be clear to the TULF that there will be no place for them in such a state under the LTTE. Until the LTTE could achieve that goal, however, it may find some use for TULF MPs under its control. If it is true that a TULF MP went into peals of laughter upon hearing Sarojini Yogeswaran's murder, he is living in a world of illusions. If there really was indeed an independent Sangiliyan Force that killed Mrs. Yogeswaran, a very alarmed LTTE would have been the first to be out hunting for them.

Therefore to anyone who knew the psychology of the LTTE and the difference between the LTTE and the other groups, it would have been immediately clear, with knowledge approaching certainty, that it was the LTTE which killed Thangathurai and Sarojini. The manner in which the Jaffna based Uthayan reported the murder of Thangathurai would have confirmed the suspicions of a seasoned Jaffna man, although the reporting was intentionally confusing:

The Uthayan of 8.7.97 reported that the Trincomalee Police arrested 3 persons including a woman over the killing. It added that the Urban Council Chairman Suriyamoorthy who belonged to the TELO was questioned by the Police for 3 hours. On 9.7.97 the paper quoted Lakhanda, a Colombo based Sinhalese broadcasting station, which reported local talk to the effect that persons who had left several militant groups were behind the killing (i.e. an independent group!). The report on 10.7.97 was more to the point. According to this, the Police under SSP T.N.de Silva with M.L.Ubaitullah, an investigator, well known to Thangathurai, arrested 3 more persons, two in Trincomalee Town and one from Chelvanayakapuram. Explosives and ammunition were recovered from two. One of them (the third) had in addition 3 pictures of Thangathurai, a murder list and a cyanide capsule.

20

The reference in the first report to the UC Chairman was plainly a red herring. Quoting misleading gossip from a Sinhalese radio station in Colombo was again suspicious, considering that Uthayan had its own reporter in Trincomalee. Here was again an attempt to foist an independent group. We did encounter more of this kind in connection with Mrs. Yogeswaran's murder.

09. PUBLIC OPINION: THE DISTORTING EFFECT OF TERROR & THE CONTROLLED MEDIA

The question is often posed, 'Whom do the Tamil people support as their leaders?' Several influential writings explicitly or implicitly point to the LTTE - e.g. National Peace Council, the Taraki column and the Tamil press. Most Tamil parties, especially the TULF, too endorse this view in their conduct and statements. The truth is that the more the influence of terror makes itself felt, the more meaningless any gauging of public opinion becomes. This could be seen by contrasting the public mood soon after Mrs. Yogeswaran's election, with that after her murder.

We referred to a particular gauging of the public mood after the murder in the Hindustan Times report which spoke of the absence of revulsion among Tamils. In July 1975, the LTTE (then TNT) in its first murder killed Alfred Duraiyappah, Mayor of Jaffna, who after many years in politics as an independent candidate, having earlier been Mayor as well as MP for Jaffna, had joined the SLFP. This qualified him to be branded a 'traitor' from TULF platforms, although he never crossed over from any party. It could also be said without exaggeration that much of the development seen in Jaffna town in the last 40 years took place while he was Mayor - the new market, stadium, several co-ops and improvements in roads, street lighting etc. The so-called traitor's funeral marked one of the largest public turnouts in Jaffna - with a crowd estimated at 25,000. By comparison the public turnout for Mrs. Yogeswaran's was muted. It is obviously the terror that made the difference - not because the people were indifferent.

To be clear, take the mood soon after the recent January elections. The mood was even upbeat. There was a remarkable voter turn-out. The local elite who tried to discredit the exercise as an "insult by the Sinhalese to impose an 'inappropriate' leadership on the Tamils" fell silent. There was elation and relief in the air which could be felt. The turnaround from despondency to hope was described by a local journalist to Marwaan Macan Markar of the Sunday Leader as 'a Miracle'.

A very remarkable comment on the new mood was contained in Ananth Palakidnar's 'View from Jaffna' (Sunday Observer 1st February 1998): "In recent years the TULF, realising its own mistakes in calling for a separate state and also making extremist comments, had to develop new thinking on how to shift the Tamil cause towards a dignified and meaningful settlement of the ethnic conflict.... the elections have shown the Jaffna people's desire for peaceful and honourable co-existence with the Sinhalese.

"The outcome of the polls has also sent a clear message to the LTTE Supremo V. Prabhakaran that the Jaffna people are tired of war and would prefer him also entering the political arena rather than carrying on his jungle warfare".

This deserves comment. Palakidnar is an old Jaffna hand who understood the LTTE and the people very well. He knew several of the LTTE leaders at school in Jaffna Hindu and spent much of the crucial 80s in the Jaffna based daily, Eelanadu. He was well-placed to sense the mood in Jaffna and even become infected by it. What is quoted above is about the strongest comment he has ever made.

It is again those who were most hopeful that were likely to be very despairing when Sarojini was killed. In despairing they were very likely to say that she asked for it or she deserved it. This is generally not something that is flattering to the LTTE. In the wake of the tragedy the Tamil people were reminded that the LTTE is a fate that will never leave them alone and is determined to grip them like a sticky octopus. All hope vanishes. So it was, with several others killed for their social

commitment. The seemingly adverse remarks came from those who most valued the dead for their work and commitment: “She asked for it for being foolish enough to return to Jaffna from England thinking that her position among the people would allow her to work freely”, or “She deserved it for thinking that the Tigers would countenance anything adverse to them”.

Once despair takes over, the voices of hope cease and the creepy elements who were silenced when hope dawned once more go into action. The message again gets around among a terrified people, ‘the Tigers are your fate, there is no way out except to obey them’. There was enough of it in the Tamil press and broadcasting media (e.g. IBC) after Sarojini’s murder. So the Tigers won and the Tamils walk ‘with their heads held high’? What else could they do? To many outsiders this state of affairs would seem on the surface as though the Tamils support the Tigers, and what’s more, with academics and bishops to put it across?

10. THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

In this section we will mainly deal with writings by Tamils, who are the most intimately familiar with the background, dealing with Sarojini’s murder. We have already quoted from some of these writings in English. Their tone is that the murder was a severe blow to democracy and took the LTTE to task for brutally and cynically subverting the desire of the Tamil people for peace and their right to their own future.

Though not blaming the LTTE explicitly, Kethesh Loganathan’s piece (‘The Cult of Violence’) in the Weekend Express of 23rd May was in the same spirit and he makes his feelings very clear: “Unfortunately, we are now fast reaching the stage where political assassinations [in Sri Lanka] are being viewed as inevitable, and those who dare the powers that be as legitimate ‘soft targets’... [In the transformation of the ‘Tamil psyche’ following the political murder of Alfred Duraiyappah in 1975] it was easy to justify the killing of political opponents by conveniently branding the victims as ‘traitors’.... Little did our Gandhian [i.e. TULF] politicians realise that the dotting ‘thambis’ [i.e. the young militants] would soon be branding them, the ‘elder brothers’, as traitors..... The parade of ‘traitors’, with self appointed jurors, is not over yet. Ultimately what can stop this madness is ‘People’s Power’ - Power that stems from the belief that truth will prevail...”

When one enters the world of the local Tamil media today, it is like entering an intellectual ghetto with different compulsions. The expression ‘People’s Power’ would today be alien to it. One may trace its beginnings to the politics of the TULF, seen as urbane lawyers in the English speaking world, while the rhetoric of violence and hatred in Tamil was heard from their local platforms. The paper ‘Suthanthiran’ (sealed in 1983), owned by the Chelvanayakam family, was the flag bearer of this political culture and was looked upon with horror and dismay by Left political groups who spoke of ‘People’s Power’. The Left was then being fast marginalised by chauvinistic fervor. When the LTTE struck at the EPRLF in 1986 the last survivals of the politics of ‘People’s Power’ largely disappeared from Tamil discourse. The ghost of the ‘Suthanthiran’ haunts almost the whole of the Tamil media today. We have here an example of how the community’s politics (as distinct from ancient history) determines culture.

An interesting indication of the cultural contrast referred to comes from two articles written by the same journalist, one in English and the other in Tamil. Both concern the murder of Sarojini. Our conclusion about the identity of the writers of the two articles derives from the fact that the same interview with Sarojini, both versions agreeing on salient points, appeared in two articles in sister papers. Both articles indicate that the interview was given to the writer alone and is referred to as a ‘special interview’ in the Tamil (Veerakesari) article. The one in English appeared in the Weekend Express of 23rd May. Titled ‘An epitome of courage is no more’, it says of Sarojini: “I had the privilege and opportunity to move around with her.... While I was impressed by the relatively high voter turnout given the prevailing security situation, what impressed me more was the courage and resilience of Sarojini Yogeswaran.... She was clearly committed to the restoration of democracy, as well as to meeting the day to day needs of the people of Jaffna”. The one in Tamil appears in the

column of the writer under a pseudonym in the Sunday Virakesari of 24th May, sister paper of Weekend Express. Virakesari is a mainstream Tamil paper, and remains perhaps the most prestigious.

The article in Tamil titled “Meaningless elections and unnecessary deaths” was largely critical of the Government for imposing unwanted elections. Except for the impersonal remark “The mayor chosen by the people was brutally killed by a gun man. Whoever the killers are the act is one that should be strongly condemned”, there was no expression of the writer’s personal admiration and feelings for the murdered lady, so evident in the English article. The piece charges the Government of having conducted the elections merely for international propaganda, and concludes: “The Government clearly understood one thing and moved its game-pieces (kaaikal) very shrewdly: That is seeking to leave out the Tigers and establish peace is like looking for rabbit horns”.

By the time the article came out it was absolutely clear for four days to any Tamil journalist worth his salt that Mrs. Yogeswaran was killed by the Tigers. If one was to face up to this fact, one had to pose the crucial questions, What is the nature of the LTTE that drives it to kill an admittedly (at least in English) admirable, brave and courageous woman committed to the welfare of the people?, Is it amenable to peace on reasonable terms compatible with democracy?, If the answer is yes, given its past record, who can guarantee its behaviour during a cease-fire for negotiations?, If the answer is no, what does one expect from a responsible Government? Intelligent Tamils well know the answers to these questions. Thus by pretending not to know who killed Sarojini, Thangathurai and many others like Namasivayam, one could produce reams of arguments and conclusions that are meaningless fantasies. In more unscrupulous hands this line of writing can be unconscionably mischievous.

In the case of the writer quoted above one could discern several dissonances between the pieces in English and Tamil: In the first the writer was impressed by the relatively high turn out at the elections, and also by Sarojini’s qualities, especially her ‘courage and resilience’ in making a deliberate personal choice; in the second the elections were unwanted and Sarojini had been reduced to a game-piece or pawn of the Government. The Tamil readers are again given the scary message that you can never - unless you enjoy searching for rabbit horns - accomplish anything by defying the Tigers. One could also occasionally adopt the journalistic device of producing a quotation from an anonymous school principal to the effect that ‘it is because of the Tigers that Tamils walk with their heads held high’.

The singular compulsions faced by those writing in Tamil are almost universal. The editorial of the same Veerakesari movingly mourns the losses of Brigadier Wijeratne and Mrs. Yogeswaran, but then adds: “These killings should be a lesson to those who think that there could be a military solution and to those who suppose that by distracting the [Tamil] people away into the democratic mainstream, the political solution can be postponed”.

These sentiments are easily absorbed by minds long softened by propaganda. They are never urged to think or act responsibly, but rather that they have no choice but to surrender to the Tigers.

In the same Veerakesari (24th May), the column by ‘Lover of Humanity’ (Manitha Neyan) titled ‘The curse of the Tamils’ begins by declaring that it is not known who is responsible for Sarojini’s murder. The ground has thus been disingenuously prepared for turning the blame on the non-LTTE Tamil parties, the Government and the Sinhalese: “..... Instead of resolving the ethnic question politically, the Government has resorted to a strategy of divide and rule by creating divisions [e.g. through electoral competition] among the Tamils.... This is why the Tamil people are clashing among themselves and are killing each other.... It is by those selfish people who as though unable to question the Government’s injustices, lend support to them, that the Tamil race has been pawned. It is because of them that the Tamil race is today moving towards the abyss of destruction..... The

Sinhalese majoritarian racists, political parties and all other organisations are determined in their resolve to deny the Tamil people their basic rights and to crush their [freedom] struggle.....”

Whatever the writer intended, an average reader can hardly be blamed for drawing the conclusion from this rigmarole that the Tigers are the champions of Tamil freedom and Sarojini was a selfish traitor for lending herself to the Sinhalese divide and rule strategy.

The destructiveness of the Tamil media even carries over into that section funded and established for the very purpose of inter-communal justice, equality and understanding.

Such were the aims of the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality when it launched journals in Sinhalese ('Yukthiya') and Tamil ('Sarinihar'). The 'Yukthiya' has enjoyed considerable success in fulfilling these aims. But against 'Sarinihar' there have been long unaddressed complaints that its overall thrust was towards reinforcing those very perceptions that sustained the LTTE's ideological base and ruled out any prospect of ethnic harmony.

In Jaffna itself many people badly wanted to protest against Sarojini's murder, but circumstances ruled out any mass mobilisation. There was similar fear in Colombo. Neither 'Sarinihar' nor any other section of the Tamil press in Colombo found themselves able or willing to mobilise public indignation against the murder. MIRJE itself strongly condemned the murder without naming the LTTE. Yet the only demonstration against the act in the whole island, took the form of a picket in Colombo by some women's groups on 2nd July. Tamils in particular should have been grateful and called upon all concerned to join. This was instead ridiculed in the 'Sarinihar' (11.6.98) accusing these women's groups of failing protest against other named routine violations suffered by especially Tamil women in the course of war, security operations, defective policing and so on.

The reader of course would not know much about the women's groups. But the inference drawn would be that the killing of Sarojini is not such a big issue to deserve such notice by women's groups and that there is nothing distinctive about it when placed against other deaths in the course of war. This again muddles the reader by trivialising a political murder. Moreover every civilised society recognises the life-giving and nurturing role of women which entitles them to special protection, and so finds crimes against them peculiarly abhorrent. More than this, Sarojini was playing this woman's role in a broken society, consciously courting danger in the spirit of sacrifice. Again, in a situation such as the Tamils are in, political killings, particularly of those playing a crucial role like Sarojini, are comparable with genocide. They are deliberately meant to constrain people by denying them choice, to destroy them in soul, mind and body, and to entangle their children in a deadly and cynical power game.

Such are things the LTTE does not want people to see, and it has got a very obliging Tamil media to muddle them. An issue of the same paper earlier this year (Sarinihar 25.2.98) carried an article by the lady peace activist mentioned earlier, obliquely defending the LTTE's bomb attack on the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy - where initially the 50th Anniversary of Independence was to be celebrated. She posed the question: "If a Sinhalese-Buddhist leader is to deliver the freedom(?) day address from that octagonal building, would those who intend demonstrating their opposition to it explode a bomb in the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens?"

At the level of discussion scaled by this prominent peace activist, someone defending the isolated attacks on Tamils in Kandy which followed, can argue: "When the LTTE which is trumpeted as the representatives of Tamils by eminent Tamil spokesmen (e.g. AGOTIC & Tamil Congress) in Colombo, commits murder and sacrilege in Kandy, do you expect Sinhalese - Buddhists who want to demonstrate their outrage to go to Jaffna and attack Tamils there?"

The piece, which appeared as a reply by the peace activist to an earlier condemnation of the attack on the temple by a columnist, had one valid point. For a Government committed to pluralism and

ethnic harmony, the Temple of the Tooth was an unhappy choice for the celebration of the golden jubilee of independence. It had ideological implications that are the very cause of war and division. Had the LTTE allowed normal and healthy political activity among Tamils and if protests by them against a sectarian celebration had not been heeded, people could have demonstrated on the streets and made an impact. But in today's reality the proposed ceremony at the Temple had become a small issue. Protest by Tamils had become meaningless in the context of their not being free to protest against the LTTE's terror attacks in Colombo like the Central Bank blast and the bomb attack in the crowded passenger train. These were done by a leadership (i.e. the LTTE) hoisted upon them by very influential Tamils. The Tamil people were reduced to wishing and hoping that good sense among the Sinhalese would opt for a more suitable location for the ceremony than the Temple.

There is no doubt that many Sinhalese were themselves uncomfortable about the politicisation of religion. Indeed, subsequently the President put her foot down and the Independence ceremony was conducted in a very non-sectarian and statesmanlike manner with no religious dignitaries present. Other points raised in the 'Sarinihar' article are typical of many others appearing in Tamil that are designed to sow confusion. It argues that in a war where many religious sites of the Tamils had been destroyed, the Temple of the Tooth that is closely associated with the ideology responsible for the oppression of Tamils, cannot be regarded as inviolable.

While the present war, for which the LTTE is almost wholly responsible, has inevitably resulted in much damage, the role of the Sri Lankan political leadership has to be judged by a different criterion: Has the President, for example, done her utmost to minimise the harm to civilians while prosecuting the war? It is not for example as though the President ordered the bombing of St. Peter & St. James' Church, Navally in July 1995. What one can fault the President with, is her failure to inquire into and take action against the offenders. The attack on the Temple of the Tooth is qualitatively vastly different. Here the supposed leader of the Tamil people summons some poor lad with an unhappy past who became a Black Tiger, goes through what is in effect a novel religious ceremony, and dispatches him to blast the Temple and end his life. Can a sane people take credit, or derive happiness from this horrifying act? Should we not, rather, question the society and its leadership that drives thousands of young men to this state?

Should it not again be the role of a journal like 'Sarinihar' to examine the politicisation of religion from a broader context, and in particular, the politicisation of religion among Tamils in particular where the consequences have also been very grave? The LTTE has been using the Nallur Kanthasamy Kovil for events that were meant to have a gruesome influence on the psychology of the Tamils, which indeed reaped death in cyclonic proportions.

In October 1986, bodies of Sri Lankan soldiers killed by the LTTE, and others captured (and killed a year later) were displayed for public view in front of the temple. In September the following year, Thileepan's ceremonial fast to death was held again in the temple premises as the main part of the campaign to arouse anti-Indian feelings, ostensibly to wring some undemocratic political concessions from the Indian Government. Was not the influence on the Tamil psyche wholly baneful and a manipulative preparation for permanent conflict and death? Is it not far more important for a Tamil journal under the MIRJE to make an acute study of this phenomenon rather than to publish articles pretending that politicisation of religion is exclusively a problem of the Sinhalese? The LTTE has indeed gone much further: It has made a religion out of politics - a religion of human sacrifice.

Under the present political dispensation, there are particular tricks of the trade in running a supposedly progressive Tamil journal. Out of many examples, the 'Sarinihar' for instance can claim in its defence that it had condemned the attack on the Temple of the Tooth. But after the peace activist's clever and persuasive article (a reply!) the overall impression left behind is contrary to the purposes of the MIRJE. A particular poignant question confronts the Tamils in view of some

of the original nobler aims of the liberation struggle. There are a number of Sinhalese journals which raise questions about Sinhalese society and Sinhalese state ideology that are intended to be self-critical. Even a mainline paper such as the 'Lankadeepa' has been commended as a good influence. After the attack on the Temple, instead of treating it as a challenge and persisting in a religious ceremony, President Kumaranathunga veered in a non-sectarian direction. It shows that at the bottom there are some commendable healthy influences in Sinhalese society. After all these years of liberation struggle, why are we Tamils unable to publish even one journal that would address political and social issues truthfully and objectively?

Given this media culture there is a good deal of trivialisation and character assassination of dead persons that goes on. 'Thinamurasu', the paper associated with the EPDP, revels in it.

'Thinamurasu' best exemplifies the anarchy and political vacuum that exists within the Tamil community. It is the most widely read paper among Tamils, particularly the youth, having colour pictures of cinema stars, cinema gossip and some light-weight political columns. The latter praise the LTTE, run down the other political parties, especially the TULF and EPRLF, and unavoidably the EPDP too. In its columns, the LTTE is credited with restraint in dealing with other Tamil parties, and the latter as having misplaced this clemency in tripping over each other and rushing into elections to grab the crumbs proffered by the Government, in order to stifle and suppress the struggle of the Tamil people. What is ironical is that the paper is edited by an EPDP MP and deputy leader, whose party sits in parliament and votes with the Government on extending the Emergency. Under the Premadasa regime, he was responsible for a satirical radio programme attacking the LTTE. Today the 'Thinamurasu' sells well in the Tamils Diaspora and the LTTE is reportedly scaling down its own publications abroad as the 'Thinamurasu' is doing the job more effectively.

During the 80s, a large number of cadre from the left oriented militant groups had such a high level of political discernment that the LTTE was unable to face them in public debate. It frequently resorted to murder to deal with them. Today the EPDP is recruiting from the exploited sections of society on purely mercenary terms. Unlike older Left oriented political groups which politicised them and gave them a sense of dignity and purpose, the EPDP cadre are bred and politicised on the 'Thinamurasu'. There was recently the tragedy where the EPDP leader Douglas Devananda visiting Kalutara prison was attacked by inmates who are LTTE suspects. As sad as it is, one could bet that the favourite reading material of the attackers is the 'Thinamurasu'. Not surprisingly, rather than condemning the mob attack by LTTEers with lethal weapons on an isolated, unarmed individual, the EPDP's deputy leader Ramesh skirted the issue by blaming the attack on the prison authorities. Given the paucity of healthy writing in Tamil, the young are presently being poisoned by fascist trash. 'Thinamurasu' exemplifies this phenomenon.

A quality characteristic of a culture of mediocrity is that it cannot admit greatness in individuals. It cannot accept that people could be well-motivated and sincere. Attempts for example have been made in 'Thinamurasu' and Paasupathan's column in the 'Sanjeevy' to denigrate the character of Larry Wijeratne. False suggestions have been made to the effect that he was responsible for the Kokkadicholai massacre of 1991 and for the disappearance of many persons in Jaffna. He was a competent military officer doing a difficult job and civilians who knew him never doubted his sincerity. He spent much of his leave in Colombo trying to get things going in Jaffna and often felt despondent. How does one, for example, explain an army officer with precious little time with his family in Colombo, going to the Open University in an attempt to persuade them to reopen their centre in Jaffna? Does such a man fit into a cunning plan to crush the Tamils? Similar attempts on Sarojini too are strewn everywhere in the Tamil press.

11.THE TULF: SNARED IN ITS PAST

The TULF and LTTE share a common past in the ideological and political culture fostered by the TULF (and its predecessor the Federal Party) particularly from the 70s. For all the militant groups,

their rise, corruption and annihilation were determined within the confines of this exclusivist - totalitarian ideology. In time the TULF too became its victim. TULF members with a concern for the people like Thangathurai and Sarojini, who found that things had got out of control, tried to make amends and paid with their life.

The TULF was also in a trap. Although it clearly understands where the LTTE is leading the community to, it cannot expose the LTTE without exposing its own share of complicity in murder and deceit in the past it shared with the LTTE. It would also nullify the moral superiority it claims over the other ex-militant Tamil groups as being non-violent, non-gun toting and moderate, for electoral reasons. All the groups at one time, and today to a varying degree, had cadre who were dedicated and sincere, with leadership potential that could have carried them in a healthy direction. Their annihilation, through combinations of internal repression and LTTE action, also owed to the compulsions of this ideology. They are all, like their elite peers and the press, authentic products of Tamil society. When they are despised by fellow Tamils, it is because the latter do not want to look into themselves.

Yet after the past 20 years where nearly all that is good and healthy in Tamil society has been destroyed, the TULF is forced to step into a vacuum partly of its own creation. The people urgently need a political solution which the LTTE cannot and will not deliver. But if the TULF talks to this Government, as it has been doing, and presents a solution which it endorses, the people will accept it as reasonable. There is also a widespread belief among the people that only the TULF has the capacity and the experience to work out a solution. So the LTTE fears its parent, the TULF, and needs to knock off its members one by one in an effort to bring it under its control.

It is very likely that even at central committee level the TULF is unable to discuss frankly the consequences of the LTTE's actions for the country and the Tamil community. They would have to worry about members who are too compromised with that group. So they find themselves having to go on talking as if the LTTE represents the Tamils, that they would step down if the LTTE came forward for negotiations and, now and then pleading with the Government to talk to the LTTE and solve the problem, knowing well that it cannot happen. Knowing well that the LTTE killed Thangathurai and Sarojini, to keep their fractious party together at least, they have to pretend not to know or shift the blame onto the other groups - in fact since the killing of two TULF MPs by the TELO in 1985, probably on instructions from RAW, at least 6 senior TULF leaders have been killed, starting with former DDC Chairman Mr.Nadarajah in 1988, all of them by the LTTE. Of the remaining 5, the one not mentioned so far is Mr.Sambanthamoorthy of Batticaloa. He was killed in 1989 when he went to inspect his paddy fields after receiving an assurance of safety from the LTTE. Even middle level TULF cadre murdered, were almost all victims of the same group - no exceptions come to mind.

Thangathurai deserves credit for having gone a long way from the TULF's earlier ideological position to state his stand on a solution frankly. About June 1997 he addressed a public meeting in Colombo organised by the Action Group of Tamils in Colombo, a society of well-heeled Colombo Tamils known for its overt support for the LTTE. According to Loganathan, from the article cited above, "... he was heckled.... for advocating the abandoning of the 'Thimpu principles' and to look at negotiations seriously, practically and without being fearful of any compromises if it ensured a just and long-lasting peace. The hecklers would not hear of it. Coincidentally Thangathurai aired his views at a time when the LTTE and its support base were vigorously advancing the "4 cardinal principles" placed at Thimpu [in 1985]."

The four principles included the recognition of Tamils as a distinct national entity, an identified Tamil homeland whose integrity was guaranteed and their inalienable right to self-determination. It is fair to say that on the vexed question of interpreting UN covenants, such issues have been debated by scholars worldwide for 50 years without consensus having been reached. The value of such principles is in practice prescriptive and regulative, and not absolute. Arguments from

historical claims which dominate many conflicts apart from Sri Lanka (e.g. Albanian dominated Kosovo in Serb dominated Yugoslavia) are so bedeviling that the world is tired of them. Thangathurai who moved easily with Muslims and Sinhalese was therefore on strong grounds and had the courage to say responsibly what was today in the interests of the Tamils.

Unlike the members of the AGOTIC, Thangathurai was in close touch with his roots in a very rural part of Trincomalee District. He understood what the war, displacement, being forced out of the district as refugees and educational and economic disruption was costing the people. In the vulnerable districts of Trincomalee and Amparai, the Tamils, through displacement and state aided colonisation of Sinhalese, had gone a considerable way towards losing their parliamentary representation. The Tamils needed breathing space, not permanent conflict. Privately Thangathurai had been even more frank: "The LTTE will never agree to anything reasonable, they neither understand nor care about what is happening to the people". There is little doubt that those in the TULF understand this very well. About a month after Thangathurai made his speech at the AGOTIC forum, he was murdered by the LTTE.

R.Sambanthan, a senior TULF member, a party secretary and presently MP for Trincomalee, made a carefully thought out speech at Mrs.Yogeswaran's funeral in Colombo. He said: "The death of Sarojini Yogeswaran is a great loss to the Tamil people, and particularly to the TULF. Gun culture does not offer solutions to problems. More than that, war will never bring peace. It is through political negotiations that solutions should be advanced...." It may be taken as a appeal to the LTTE, but is far too weak to make an impact on the unhealthy slough of Tamil journalism. It is after all the lack of leadership, ambivalence and nebulousness on the part of the TULF that gives the Tamil media the license to carry on as they do, leaving the people confused and frightened.

It is much easier to blame others rather than come up with the courage and sense of responsibility to look within ourselves. Many allegations are loosely made in the press and accepted uncritically by ordinary people, although deep within they are uncomfortable. Take some allegations loosely made in the Tamil press: The Government is responsible for the war and wants a military solution rather than a political solution; The Government held elections in Jaffna to distract the people into the democratic stream(!), so that it can indefinitely postpone finding a political solution or implementing its political package [worked out with the TULF]; and, The Government is antagonistic to third party mediation because then the predilections of majority Sinhalese can never be imposed upon the minority Tamils. All these could be found, said or implied, in the Veerakesari and Thinakkural (Mathorupahan column in the latter) of 24th May. The TULF knows for sure that all these are extremely unfair or one sided.

If there is a strong gesture from the Tamils that the implementation of the political package would bring peace, it would then be easier to implement. But on the other hand there are strident noises from the AGOTIC types (e.g. Kumar Ponnampalam) that the Tamils do not want the package and only an agreement with the LTTE would do. Although copies of the political package were printed and circulated by the Government, the climate of fear is such that even an august Tamil academic body like the University of Jaffna has been unable to hold a single seminar to examine the package - an issue so crucial to the Tamils. Most tellingly, the Uthayan, the only local paper in Jaffna, was ordered by the LTTE (confirmed by the staff) not to publish the package or its substance! Do these not provide excuses for the Government's dilatoriness, very damaging as it is?

As to third party mediation, it is public knowledge that when the Government called for political talks and the LTTE stalled during the 1995 cease-fire, third party mediation was proposed and accepted by both sides. The French Government in a bid to help nominated one of its eminent nationals as mediator. This was turned down by the LTTE with the blatant falsehood that the mediator was a friend of President Kumaranathunga.

J T

The TULF by its own limitations is unable to do anything to counter this drift created by propaganda and plain falsehood that is carrying the Tamils towards auto-anihilation. It is clear that the existing party formations cannot contribute anything towards rescuing the Tamils. There are several well-motivated individuals in different parties, but they are all tied down to groups with a history that weighs them down. Still it is the TULF, which carries the heaviest burden for the past, that could break this deadlock. That would mean opening up about the past and dropping its pretensions about its record of moderation and non-violence. Is it not time that all those who share a burden for the community get together, not primarily to talk about the right to self determination, but firstly and urgently to restore healthy public values?

12.MISDIRECTION OF FOREIGN CONCERN

There has been from the 70s considerable interest taken by foreign governments and humanitarian agencies in the areas of human rights, in trying to defuse the conflict and in trying to make conditions bearable for civilians during the conflict. Amnesty International has from before the 80s systematically pursued human rights abuses. The International Commission of Jurists too has been sending teams and publishing reports. The MSF and ICRC have been present from the late 80s along with several international NGOs. The Tamil cause has had much sympathy in Britain for several decades. Early warnings of deepening conflict were given in the Minority Rights Group report in the mid 70s, before the Eelam resolution and an active militancy. One might also add the World Council of Churches, and the influential group of churches on the east coast of the USA that have had close contact with Jaffna from the early 19th century. Meetings of the Jaffna College Board of Trustees are held annually on the US East Coast.

All these combined have over the years had a healthy restraining influence on the State. These together with the work of local groups and the accomodativeness of Sinhalese opinion signalled by the election results of 1994, made the prospects for peace brighter here than in similar conflicts elsewhere in the Third World.

Yet the effects of how these beneficial results are presented to the Tamil community, and how information is distorted and presented to foreigners concerned with this country, give much food for thought and reflection. The flow of information and opinion both ways is governed by a totalitarian sieve in the hands of the pro-LTTE elite.

The beneficial effects of foreign concern are presented to the Tamils in such a way as to give the credit to the LTTE. Thus there are several canards which claim that the LTTE protects the Tamils, Tamils in the South are safe today because of Sinhalese fear of the LTTE, and it is because of it that the Tamils can walk with their heads held high and governments are trying to find a political solution. Had there been a freer Tamil press, all these claims would have been seen to be hollow. Far from protecting civilians, the history of the LTTE is replete with scores of instances of trying to provoke the armed forces into killing civilians for its propaganda ends.

In our last report we cited a land mine attack on an Army convoy in front of Eastern University during February, where the attacker as usual ran away. It is good sense that prevented an ugly massacre. The Kokkadichcholai massacre of June 1991 reveals the quintessence of LTTE political-military strategy. From what the civilians told us [our Report No.8], the LTTE blasted a mine near the village killing two soldiers, ran away and watched from a distance without firing a single shot. More soldiers came and rampaged through the village killing 65 civilians, burning and raping some women. The LTTE came the next morning with video cameras when everything was quiet, took pictures of the handiwork and went away. This is certainly not what the villagers would have told unknown visitors and journalists going there. The pictures were soon circulated all over the world.

33

Ten months earlier (in August 1990) the LTTE massacred 120 Muslim civilians in Eravur. The following morning Muslim hoodlums with the protection and aid of the Army, went into neighbouring Tamil areas and massacred scores of Tamil civilians. The LTTE which kept well away, later took video recordings for propaganda. So efficiently were they dispatched that viewers in Europe saw their broken houses in Chenkalady, while their relatives in Colombo knew nothing. This is the kind of protection the Tamils have been getting from the LTTE. So degenerate had this liberation struggle become, that if not for foreign concern, the Tamils would not be talking about a political solution today, but rather, they would hardly be existing as a people. They survived despite the LTTE.

Where a political solution is concerned, successive governments had been warned for a long time before July 1983 that, unless they reach a fair political settlement with the minorities, things were bound to get nasty. A Financial Times Survey of 1979 carried as its leading article, "Sri Lanka: Sitting on a Powder Keg". After the July 1983 violence there was a huge Indian aided military response by Tamil youth joining several groups. By 1985 the Government was spending about US\$300 million annually on the war and the Army by its atrocities, after a report in a leading international news magazine, came to be known as the 'world's most undisciplined army'. There was mounting pressure on the Government to reach a settlement. The advise it had ignored earlier on things getting nasty, it had to heed by 1987. The message of the militancy had gone down. It was in this climate that the Indian brokered proposals of 19th December 1986 and the Indo-Lanka Accord of July 1987 came about.

After the LTTE decimated the TELO in mid 1986, turned down proposals for co-operation by the other groups and became the sole group after striking at the EPRLF in December the same year, it could claim no military successes. From January 1987 it was a year of defeats all over. The only military success it could claim is its massacre of several busloads of unarmed Sinhalese pilgrims in April that year. India stepped in and imposed the Accord when the LTTE was about to lose the rest of Jaffna, its only remaining territory, following its rout from Vadammaratchy. The Accord owed not to the LTTE's strength, but to the plight of Tamils resulting from its intransigent handling of other groups. What the devolution under the Accord owed to the militancy, it owed to the contribution of all the militant groups. If the Accord had been worked by the Tamils in the spirit of co-operation and amity with the Muslims and Sinhalese, its defects could have been rectified in time. After all, issues change with time and people cannot go on being bloody-minded. The LTTE's politics needs to lie, provoke and resort to stratagems to try to convince the world that Sinhalese and Tamil attitudes remain frozen in what obtained in July 1983.

Since the Accord no serious Sinhalese leader has disputed the need for devolution containing the trappings of federalism. There were far more effective ways to fight for changes as and when the need was felt, rather than going on destroying the Tamils and country. The reasons for the wars after July 1987 owe not to the denial of a political solution, but almost entirely to the LTTE's inner compulsions and novel ideas of power. Thus the claim that the Sinhalese are thinking of a political solution only because of the LTTE, falls apart on examination. Indeed if this rate of destruction continues, the Tamils may end up losing even the capacity to run a viable federal unit.

However the propaganda and videos sold by articulate salesman have succeeded at least in confusing foreigners. A good number succumbed to accepting the LTTE as legitimate representatives of the Tamils. The status of several of the LTTE's salesmen is such that in a normal society one would not have doubted that what they said was pretty close to the truth. But when even a senior man in holy orders defends the very entity that has so completely suffocated his own society through internal terror, any good journalist owes it to be more circumspect. It is in this light that we look at Vanessa Baird's interview with Father Emmanuel, ex-Vicar General of Jaffna, published in the New Internationalist of September 1997. The tone of the presentation itself is unsettling as one expects better background research from a journal providing in-depth articles on Third World concerns. Such a journal should not be content with Cowboys versus Indians versions

of Third World conflicts. The article presents a picture of a government committing atrocities in the name of 'ridding the country of Tamil Tiger terrorism' and a 'war waged by mainly Buddhist Sinhalese against mainly Hindu Tamils'. Moving around in this country, one certainly does not get the impression that the ordinary people think of the war in such ethnically polar terms. It is among the elites, both Sinhalese and Tamil, that one finds a good deal said in the media about Sinhalese Buddhists vs. Hindu Tamils. The level of such discussion is reflected by some on the Tamil side being hopeful through appeals to religion of attracting the attention of the BJP government in New Delhi.

Father Emmanuel's claim that the Tigers have 'widespread support', 'are de facto the representatives of the Tamil people, and actually give protection to the Tamils' appears unquestioned. We take the following paragraph from the article:

"Then in Autumn of 1995 the people of Jaffna heard that the Army was about to launch a major assault. They were going to 'liberate' Jaffna from the Tigers, the authorities said. But when the soldiers arrived, the city's inhabitants, 500,000 of them, fled south in a traumatic exodus. 'The Army captured an empty city', says Father Emmanuel...."

We published a detailed report on the Exodus in December 1995 based on several testimonies of people who went through the painful experience. This angered Tiger sympathisers around the world. Other versions in the form of a memorandum signed by academics of Jaffna University and Father Emmanuel's own version were then widely circulated by LTTE networks.

When the Tigers broke off talks in April 1995 after not responding to the Government's invitation to discuss the political solution, and resumed the war, the people were dismayed. They knew that the Army would take Jaffna and it would be a painful experience. Having been through it before in 1987, the people had decided on Jaffna City as their fall-back position where they had the ICRC and international NGOs with radio communications. What Father Emmanuel had left out is the fact that the Tigers ordered the people out of the city under threat with 10 hours notice [our Special Report No.6]. This was the main cause of trauma, humiliation, displacement and loss of self esteem. Father Emmanuel's own role in the affair does not do him credit. The Exodus was in part of an inhuman propaganda exercise by the LTTE, planned in advance, to make out to the world that the people rejected living under Government control. Those close to the LTTE had already left taking their goods. Goods of others were looted by the LTTE as they were forced out. We do know that LTTE agents left for Colombo and abroad just before the plan was put into operation, no doubt with a brief to churn the propaganda mills. We give some previously unpublished testimony of persons in Father Emmanuel's circle.

In a bid to rescue the stalled peace talks with the LTTE, Government sent three public figures from the South to Jaffna in April 1995. Apart from meetings with the LTTE, the delegates were invited to a meeting chaired by Father Emmanuel, which was intended to give them a feeling of the public pulse in Jaffna. The people knew clearly that the LTTE was contriving the situation towards war and were dead against it. But at a meeting in LTTE controlled Jaffna only opinions critical of the Government could be spoken out openly. To suggestions that the LTTE could never trust the Government and give up their arms, one speaker asked the Chair, "Father, in recent years you have been again and again talking about peace. Now do you want peace with arms or without arms?" The Chair was silent. The fact that others did not object to the questioner signalled their approval. At the end of the meeting a member of the audience said for the benefit of the emissaries from Colombo, "You must understand the situation here. What we talk and what we want in our heart are different things. So please don't go away with the wrong impression!" Again the audience was relieved.

There is a huge Roman Catholic population in Jaffna Town, and when the LTTE ordered the Exodus from Jaffna on 30th October the same year, the majority of the clergy and people were

51

dead against leaving Jaffna, but some were working with the LTTE. Father Emmanuel accompanied LTTE's propaganda chief Thamilchelvan, who was tasked with engineering the Exodus, in a bid to persuade Rt.Rev.Deogupillai, Bishop Emeritus of Jaffna, to quit the Cathedral premises where many refugees were gathered, and to leave Jaffna. The Bishop told them firmly, "If you have come to ask me to leave, you are wasting your time", and sent them away. He continued to remain with a large number of refugees.

Another priest who was earlier head of a Roman Catholic educational institution argued that the people must leave, so that the LTTE can do free-firing and stop the Army! Everyone knew that the LTTE had no intention of stopping the Army - but only to cause maximum damage to the city for propaganda purposes.

To avoid any misapprehensions of the 1995 Jaffna Exodus, here is another experience from a civilian lady. She with her family and friends left Jaffna during the second week of November when remaining any further became nigh impossible. Arriving near Chavakachcheri where the road was crowded with expelled civilians, she witnessed an LTTE truck bringing wounded cadre from Jaffna drive through at top speed, knocking civilians and killing three of them before crashing into a tree. The wounded cadre were taken away in another truck. No one cared about the civilians.

Later people were gathered at the temporary University of Jaffna premises in Chavakachcheri where part payment of salaries were to be given. In a crowded room there was a senior professor, also a man of linguistic talents, but not the subtler professor quoted earlier who is weightier in every sense, giving an recorded interview to the LTTE. This was evidently for the benefit of foreign propaganda mills. The Professor said, "No one can separate the Tamil people from the Tigers. This present Exodus is ample proof of it!" The lady felt a torrent of rage rising within her. Her mind involuntarily moved to contemplate the effect of a nearby chair coming down on the good professor's crown. Sensing a disastrous drift in events, some of her companions pulled her out. At long last she found an outlet for some of the pressure within. Seeing an LTTE cadre who was a relative, she shouted at him, "Go and tell your leader that after having brought us all down to this state, there is only one service he can do for us. Tell him to build asylums for all of us!" It is now said of the professor that 'he is fully with the Government'!

Having co-operated in the LTTE's plans, Father Emmanuel shoulders a heavy responsibility for the fate of civilians taken from Jaffna into the Vanni jungles, into miserable conditions with no plans even to feed them - it was left to the so called genocidal Government to do that. Again there are hundreds who died of disease or drowned while fleeing the Vanni by boat to India and Jaffna. Father Emmanuel for all that he has been saying has not said one word about the hundreds of dissidents tortured and killed by the LTTE. These circumstances would place his concern for the Tamil community in a different light. The uncritical reception often accorded to Fr.Emmanuel is an example of how well-meaning outsiders who are taken in by simplified versions of faraway conflicts can act in a way detrimental to the community concerned.

From what Father Emmanuel said in the interview it should not be concluded that he is persona non grata in Colombo. He has many friends and a ready audience in Colombo, especially in church circles, and has regularly appeared in print. That is part of the problem. People are happy to hear him out and go home congratulating themselves on being tolerant, open minded and generous. Hardly anyone would bother to contest what he says. Father Emmanuel has also been raising many valid issues - such as the State's failure to inquire into and punish the offenders in numerous violations by the security forces, including for example the aerial bombing of the church in Navaly which claimed 120 civilians. Again one could be quite sure that those who hear him out would also do nothing about pursuing these valid issues in depth. That is Peace Culture! It is an easy means of doing little that is courageous, awkward or demanding, and yet feeling good.

Uncritical liberal attitudes in the West have generally made it difficult to give publicity to the damage that is being done to the Tamil community in the name of the Right to Self Determination.

Despite several persons within the BBC being uncomfortable about the slanted coverage given by its Tamil Service for many years, little has changed. In Jaffna itself many politically sensitive persons have identified it with the LTTE and switched off. In 1992 we spoke to the Tamil Service in London about the issue of LTTE's political prisoners, which, to the best of our knowledge, numbered about 4000 around that period. During the conversation the TS lady suggested that since we were not functioning in Jaffna, the best person to check on the story would be the BBC correspondent in Colombo who often travelled to Jaffna.

We do not know if he was asked to try. But we do know the answer he would have got if he did. The position articulated by Fr.Chandrakanthan, a subtle and tactful priest-academic to whom journalists visiting Jaffna used to be directed, maintained that we [UTHR (J)] were well-meaning, but were also exaggerating. According to him, the absence of police in Jaffna had forced the LTTE to take on policing functions. As a result, he said, they had detained only about 200 ordinary criminals who were being well looked after! [The enormity of the question of LTTE's detainees and their fate has been documented by us in Reports 4,5,6,8,9,10 and Bulletin No 5 covering five years of information gathering from 1990. We hope to make a final report on it along with the issue of disappearances under Army control in Jaffna.]

Fr.Chandrakanthan's persuasiveness has taken him to places in the West where people are looking for articulate Third World contacts. In a paper presented at the Oxford Refugee Programme, he gave his version of the LTTE evicting Muslims from the North in 1990. There was some trouble between Tamils and Muslims in the East, he said, because of which the LTTE advised the Muslims to leave the North for their own safety! [See our Report No.6 for the truth about that scandalous episode.] In the wake of the Exodus, he was in London, giving the BBC Tamil Service essentially the LTTE version. A review of our report on the event, where we questioned the role of the Tamil Service, was broadcast on this service on the initiative of George Arney, then the Colombo correspondent.

The role of the BBC(TS) could be excused and explained if they were total strangers to the Tamils of Sri Lanka. But they in fact know the society and the LTTE better than most Tamils here do. This would cast their role in a far-from-innocent light. At times it reportage could even be entertaining. The BBC (TS) lady visiting Jaffna once in feigned dramatic ignorance asked a civilian standing near where the railway used to be, Whatever happened to the tracks? The man replied in seasoned Jaffna style, "Why do we need a railroad when there are no trains?" Everyone knew the tracks were removed by the LTTE to reinforce bunkers and their underground works, in addition to help confining the people under their control.

We mentioned the TS interviewing the TULF Secretary and its Jaffna Correspondent on the day Sarojini was killed. If TS did not know Jaffna, this might pass for routine journalism. The TULF Secretary was asked who killed Sarojini? Given the vulnerable position of the Secretary, the manner of the question struck several listeners as of a bully striking someone and asking 'Who did it?'. It may be subjective, but that is how many politically conscious Tamils view the service and the quality of its local information.

A very prominent role in misdirecting overseas concern is played by suave elements in the Tamil diaspora. Their activities include lobbying churches, NGOs, politicians and governments, sending out propaganda materials and holding demonstrations. They are totally cut off from what is happening in the North-East and do not even want to know the truth. A number of persons living in the North-East and sensitive to the plight of the people cannot even open their heart out to brothers and sisters living abroad who are strong supporters of the LTTE. When those visiting members of their family abroad have tried to speak the truth, they had been warned with concern to be silent. When they got back to Jaffna with horrifying stories of rape and murder by the Army, particularly in Vadamaratchy, circulating in the diaspora, they were relieved to find that nearly all of them were without foundation.

Thus has this cause even alienated people from members of their own family who are living abroad in a world of fantasy. The latter are given a very colourful voice in the London - based 'Hot Spring'. It is a journal for diseased minds tasting vicarious martial glory in the horrifying deaths of underprivileged children. These children were forced into the LTTE's hands by the opportunism of a section of a broken society. The harvest of reports of atrocities has become so lean that they need to rely on wild rumours grasped with both hands. A satirical piece on the foul assault on Douglas Devananda by LTTE suspects in detention is one of sadistic humour. Character assassination is regularly directed at persons the readers know nothing about. An article carrying a lady's name tried to build up the late and much loved Brigadier Larry Wijeratne into a Dracula who master-minded the Kokkadichcholai massacre of June 1991. Despite the sensational headline, it only talks about murder and rape during the massacre with absolutely nothing about Wijeratne where a credible source or document is named. The Hot Spring's main link with the Tamil people of this country is through the AGOTIC (Action Group of Tamils In Colombo) whose luminaries have achieved stardom in the Hot Spring.

Such propaganda is underpinned again by a Mafia of terror operating overseas at a lower social level. Its activities include intimidation, extortion and murder. As the result those abroad sensitive to the people at home need to remain a silent majority. There is constant fear among those closely associated with a journal like the Tamil Times of London who try to articulate the good of people in this country. However recent strictures against the LTTE by David Tatham, the British High Commissioner in Colombo, suggests that the LTTE lobby is cutting little ice with Western governments. The party will soon have to end.

The right to self-determination is a precious right. It has helped in focusing attention on the problems of minorities and in applying pressure on governments to redress grievances and recognise their rights as distinct cultural, linguistic or religious communities. But in exercising this right there is a dilemma. Those who care for the right and help others in the exercise of it should be alert and sensitive to the fact that the exercise of this right in the absence of human rights and democracy within the community concerned, renders self-determination meaningless. The politics within the Tamil community has become so depraved, that one may not be wrong in saying, much of the foreign concern is so careless and uncritical that far from improving the quality of freedom and democracy for the community, it has the opposite effect. In the case of the Tamils of Sri Lanka, it has been hijacked by a small articulate segment enjoying the short-lived freedom of the wild ass at the community's expense. At this point the right to self-determination becomes in effect, the right to self-destruction.
