

MASSACRE OF MUSLIMS AND ITS MEANING FOR TAMILS

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I. Minorities: Their Historic Role

The three citizenship acts of 1948/49 which deprived the Hill Country (Indian) Tamils of the vote and virtually consigned them to serfdom were supported by most MPs from the other two main minority communities—the Ceylon Tamils and the Muslims. Had it not been for this betrayal of a fellow minority community, the UNP government would have found it exceedingly difficult to justify and secure the passage of these acts. Ironically, the intellectually incisive and strongest opposition came from the predominantly Sinhalese Left opposition. Two Tamil MP's broke away from the Tamil Congress, protesting against its support for the disenfranchisement of Indian Tamils, and founded the Federal Party. The Federal Party challenged these bills in court. Although it tried to defend the hill country Tamils on the basis of their being Tamils, it could not consistently articulate their interests in a meaningful way. More important, they were ineffectual in checking the Ceylon Tamils' (especially the Jaffna Tamils') consciousness of being superior to hill country Tamils. Although the Tamil leadership may not have openly articulated such sentiments, it never challenged those unhealthy aspects in the dominant ideology of Tamil nationalist politics, which arose partly in reaction to Sinhala nationalist ideology centered on Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. By default, it allowed those incipient Tamil chauvinist elements to survive and indirectly legitimised them. A manifestation of this failure is the Eelam Resolution of 1976.

A similar situation now prevails with regard to the Muslim community. Even today, as a matter of political necessity, the moderate Tamil leadership might condemn the atrocities against the Muslims; yet, they will not take any initiative to counter ideologically the anti-Muslim prejudices prevailing among the Tamils. The younger generation of Tamils, especially those in the Eastern Province, have developed, for various reasons, an anti-Muslim stance which forces them to see Muslims in a stereotyped fashion. They are unable to understand the fears of the Muslims or the interests of different Muslim sections. Rather than indulging in top level discussions and designing structures to obtain the support of Muslim parties, they should first address the

problem of widespread anti-Muslim feelings prevailing among the Tamils.

When the Muslim Congress called for a *hartal* to protest against the LTTE's massacre of Muslims in October 1992, the TULF in Colombo supported it. That is fine, although if it was more astute, it would have initiated the *hartal* on its own. But the speeches made at constituency level meetings in Batticaloa by the TULF MP, —an active and concerned person— did not reflect this moral indignation; the fare as usual was 'the charms and glories of the Tamils'. The significance of the *hartal* itself, was largely ignored, thus passing lightly over an ominous portent. This says much about the present nature of the minorities and their leadership. The fact that most Ceylon Tamils would date the beginning of evils to 1956 (the Sinhala Only Act) or the early 70s (standardisation & the 1972 constitution) signifies a dangerous self-centredness.

The oppressive character of the state implicit in the acts of 1948/49, was not simply a problem for the minorities but also, for the vast majority of Sinhalese themselves, as recent tragedies have shown. As the first victims of the Sinhalese chauvinist politics, the minorities had a historic liberating role to play on behalf of all the people of Sri Lanka.

However, the character of the minority leadership was one of sycophancy towards the Sinhalese state combined with a mafia type approach at home, using a mixture of patronage and thuggery to preserve their local authority. The first task of liberation was to expose such leaders, and unite the minorities behind common secular values and liberating goals. Why did this not happen? Why, instead, did the leading Tamil group take to destroying a fellow minority, the Muslims, in addition to a significant section of its own community? Why a repetition of the folly of 1948/49 in this most obnoxious form?

As Tamils, it is imperative that we answer these questions and distance the Tamil cause from the deeds of those who act in our name.



Politics of Servility and Drift to Fascism

Ultimately, the question of whether a particular form of politics is liberating or not is judged not by slogans, provocative and defiant as they may be, but by its capacity to empower the people and give them dignity and control over their lives. If it fails in this test, it is bound to lead to tragedy and then to servility towards the state, or to external powers or to both. Indeed, slogans with regard to the problems of Hill Country Tamils, Muslims and the depressed castes have been raised in Tamil politics, but these were only skin deep, scarcely going beyond immediate political compulsions. The TULF's resolution for a separate Tamil state in the North-East in 1976, drawing the attention of the nationalist popular mind to irrelevant symbols such as the 'Kingdom of Jaffna' and those pertaining to the imperial Cholas, showed gross opportunism. These symbols are not as harmless as they may seem. They pandered to Jaffna's high-caste complacency. The Eelam Resolution by its very nature, weakened the cause of the minorities by leaving the Hill Country Tamils out in the cold. When Muslims, Eastern Tamils and depressed castes showed a lack of enthusiasm for the Tamil cause as articulated by the Jaffna elite and this in turn was reflected in the TULF's electoral fortunes, they were treated with suspicion. Denigrative clichés about them were allowed to spread and enter the popular consciousness. The state encouraged and used these differences to further its ends. The primary task of liberationist politics should have been to raise the consciousness of people so that the state's machinations could have been defeated. Similarly, a political ideology and practice, capable of uniting the minorities, should have been nurtured. What happened instead was that we put forward a set of narrow, emotive slogans, void of content and positively alienating many communities; we made no attempt to understand and to come to terms with the feelings of others. When others did not fall in line, we expressed surprise and treated them as mere traitors.

We need not look far to understand today's attitudes of Tamils towards Muslims. The unwritten history of caste oppression in Jaffna, as Sinnathamby Velayutham points out in his column in the *Thayagam*, was far more violent and humiliating than is admitted. Velayutham cites the case of K. Daniel of the Mass Front for Removal of Untouchability which had since 1966 become a force to reckon with. It had publicly opposed the JVP; however, in 1971, at the time of the first JVP insurrection, following a staged explosion, Daniel was betrayed to the police as a JVP activist. He was held for a year and released without charges. There was little, if any, voicing of public indignation that such an important Tamil activist was the victim of caste motivated treachery.

M. C. Subramaniam, was once described as a traitor worthy of an abject death, by Kasi Anandan, now the LTTE's poet laureate, on a TULF platform in 1972. Subramaniam, then leader of the depressed castes, however, was no traitor. He had been one of the more service-oriented MPS who did not use his position to enrich himself. He did not even accept gifts. A humble bicycle remained his only mode of transport. Though it was predominantly the high castes who went to him for favours, few cared to ask him why he felt as he did.

The LTTE today wears the insignia of the main strand of Tamil nationalist politics. Its slogans have convinced some foreign observers that it stands for caste emancipation. But its real position on the matter is a pointer to its attitude to Muslims. It was commonplace for LTTE supporters to campaign against the EPRLF by associating it with the low castes. When Varadaraja Perumal was chief minister of the North-East, posters appeared in Jaffna referring to his Indian Tamil origins to denigrate him. The LTTE never condemned these; nor did it ask for criticism to be based only on the actions of individuals or organisations. It was, to say the least, happy to stay silent, using anything that served its short term ends. It was this fundamentally weak cause, that made a virtue of insensitivity, duplicity and treachery, that turned the LTTE to the massacre of Muslims. The same insulate and degenerate social values of the Tamil elite, prevented them from having a sense of moral indignation or feeling remorse at the dragooning of children into becoming engines of death; and the sordid history of caste oppression, has now made it easy to rationalise the massacre of Muslim women and children.

LTTE and Muslims

The LTTE has consistently denied the massacre of Muslims. *Kalathil*, the LTTE journal published in Paris, has in its August 7, 1992 issue, an unsigned article titled 'The Tamil Liberation Struggle and the Muslims of Tamil Eelam'. It gives a version of events with several gaps. Massacres of Muslims for instance are not mentioned. Muslims are collectively accused of ganging up against the Tamils, first with the Sri Lankan state, then with 'Indian imperialism' as represented by the IPKF and again with the Sri Lankan state since June 1990. The article repeatedly stresses that (the vast majority of) Muslims collectively regard Tamils as their enemies and have indulged in atrocities against them. It is implied that entire Muslim villages acted as informants to the forces. The article concludes:

It seems that the Muslim people believe that their freedom, identity and dignity will be best protected by their destroying Tamils... What we Tigers wish to say here is simply this:



WHO IS OUR ENEMY? WHO IS OUR FRIEND?.....

The Muslims who are a part of the Tamil Nation are not enemies of the Tamils. They are meant to live in unity with the Tamils. The real enemies of the Muslims are Sinhalese chauvinism and Indian expansionism. They must realise this truth and repent their feeling of enmity towards Tamils. Their future lies in unity with the Tamils.

The context of the article leaves no doubt that this is the authentic position of the Tigers. The Tigers have frequently made it clear that there is only one treatment for enemies and traitors. (See, for instance, p.6 of *Kalathil*, 19.9.92.) Notwithstanding denials, the Tiger policy is to massacre Muslims, including women and children. The old attitude of the Jaffna Tamil elite towards other minorities, ('while we have been lenient, generous and considerate, others have been treacherous and ungrateful to us') has passed unchanged to the Tigers. This is in fact the mirror image of the Sinhalese chauvinist attitude towards Tamils.

Such stereotyping of Muslims or any group of people runs contrary to the whole spirit of the liberation struggle, and is as execrable as Sinhalese communalists subjecting Tamils to collective violence. For the Tamils to see treachery in Muslim homeguard violence is very similar to the stance of Sinhalese chauvinists towards the Tamil militancy. They closed their eyes to July 1983 and all that preceded it and saw the Tamil militancy merely as an Indian ploy. When Sinhalese communalists insisted that we Tamils were Sri Lankans, we felt strongly that we had to say NO! How is it that many fail to understand why many Muslims, depressed castes and Eastern Tamils say NO to the Jaffna elite vision of the Tamil Nation? **The unity of the peoples of Sri Lanka has to be worked for by a politics of understanding and healing.** The same is true for the unity of Tamil speaking peoples.

Recent contacts of the UTHR (Jaffna) with Muslims in the East leave me convinced that the overwhelming majority of Muslims desire normal, peaceful and friendly relations with Tamils, and disapprove of the actions of home guards. The same holds for the Tamils, who have little control over the LTTE. Both communities are trapped in a politics of permanent conflict and destruction.

LTTE's Version of Events

There can be no case for unleashing murder on a community. But, in appearing to make a case, the Tigers advance certain claims and give their own version of events. How true these are will be a pointer to whether their politics is one of strength or one of

deceit, desperation and destruction. The LTTE claims that Muslims were first agents of the Sri Lankan state, then of India and the IPKF, and then from June 1990, again of the Sri Lankan state. Let us see what really transpired.

There have been simmering tensions between Muslims and Tamils in certain areas of the East, as was to be expected. In many places, for example, Eravur and Nintavur, there are no previous records of tension. Muslim youth were part of the Tamil militant struggle in the early 80s. In the mid 80s sections of Tamil militants started becoming rough in their dealings with Muslims and making extortionist demands; the state used this to foment communal violence, particularly in 1984 and 85. Nevertheless, the Muslims largely went along with militant demands, maintained relations with them and paid 'taxes.'

There had been, as mentioned, friction between some neighbouring Muslim and Tamil communities; these, in the normal course of events, erupted and subsided without leaving permanent scars. In 1984 special units of the Sri Lankan constabulary and agents were inducted into the East to foment violence with a view to making these local differences permanent. Attacks on Tamils were led by agents of the state, the worst being at Karaitivu and Navatkudah, near Kattankudy with sizeable damage to Tamil life and property. The second attack was led by a police armoured car. Agents had spread rumours and had announced that Muslims in Kattankudy were about to be attacked.

But it was precisely the task of a liberation struggle to understand the roots of fear and suspicion between communities and politically isolate the few that thrived on them.

That Muslims were collective agents of the IPKF is totally unhistorical. Owing to the conduct of the Sri Lankan forces in the past, it was the Tamils more than the Muslims who welcomed the IPKF. Following the outbreak of hostilities between the LTTE and the IPKF, it was the Muslims in the East who suffered most. About 40 Muslims were killed in the first IPKF reprisals in the East in November 1987; the LTTE had fired at an IPKF convoy and had run away (deliberately, according to local observers) through the Muslim village of Oddaimavady. Upto a 100 Muslims were killed at Kattankudy during December 1987 in LTTE reprisals, following a few individuals attacking the local LTTE agent.

When it became apparent that the IPKF was there to stay, leaders of both communities co-operated with the IPKF. But, because of the attitude of pro-Indian Tamil militant groups towards Muslims, many Muslims helped



the Tigers; Muslim youths were recruited and thus became the main support base of the LTTE in the East, ensuring their survival in the region. When the IPKF withdrew from most parts of the East in late 1989, the main victims of LTTE killings were Tamils. But friction with Muslims increased as the LTTE pushed its brand of authoritarianism. Greater discomfort developed as Muslim leaders politely reminded the LTTE of the pledges it had made to visiting Muslim representatives in India during 1987, promising autonomy for Muslim religious and cultural life. Yet, taxes or contributions were faithfully paid.

The outbreak of the war in June 1990 was marked by the LTTE murdering over a hundred Muslim policemen who had surrendered along with their Sinhalese colleagues. Anger among local Muslims was used by the government to mobilise Muslim hoodlums in anti-Tamil violence. Even then the Batticaloa district remained calm, and Muslim traders continued to feed stranded Tamil civilians. With deliberate calculation the LTTE de-stabilised the Batticaloa District by massacring Muslims in Kurukkalmadam, Kattankudy and Eravur from 12th July to 12th August 1990.

At this time there were a large number of Muslim cadres in the LTTE, including a hundred from Eravur. At first the LTTE told them that the Muslim civilians had been massacred by the Sri Lankan forces. But doubts began to emerge. It later transpired that even some Muslim families who had been close to the LTTE and had materially supported them had been eliminated at random. The Muslim cadres began to fear that the LTTE would next act against them. Most of them deserted and surrendered to the Sri Lankan forces. Some, who were afraid to surrender and remained in hiding, were handed over to the SL forces and, it is believed were eliminated (*UTHR (J), Report, No 8, Ch 4*). What an irony - who should accuse whom of treachery now?

The government, playing the same game as the LTTE, mobilised Muslim hoodlums in the Batticaloa District, as well, in violence against Tamils. Given that the Sri Lankan state is what it is, this was the case of a bankrupt 'liberation group' preying on fomenting destruction and making the people powerless, merely to ensure its own survival.

Against the LTTE's unsustainable claim that Muslims were collective agents of the Sri Lankan and Indian states, let us examine the LTTE's own strategy. Having weakened the Tamil struggle militarily by wiping out other groups in 1986, the LTTE was desperately looking for Indian patronage. The LTTE then boasted that it had given India a foothold in Sri Lanka (*The Broken Palmyra*, vol II, chapter 6). There is testimony from other militant

leaders as well as circumstantial evidence to suggest that the LTTE carried out the Anuradhapura massacre of April 1985 at the behest of the Indian RAW, in a bid to become India's favourite (*Time*, April 1989). Then later, as Sri Lankan patriots working closely with the Premadasa government from April 1989 - June 1990, the LTTE, with the connivance of the Sri Lankan forces, cracked down on Tamil and Muslim opposition, largely passive, through murder and imprisonment. The roots of treachery and deception thus lay elsewhere; the LTTE represents, far more prominently, what it accused its victims of. This brings us to the question, why really did the LTTE turn its guns on the Muslims?

Nemesis of Violence

As pointed out at the beginning, the strength of a particular form of politics is not to be judged by its slogans, Prabakaran's Suthumalai speech, by its capacity to shoot or intimidate opponents, the length of its hit lists, or by its ability to frustrate and destroy, but in the sound human values, dignity, and confidence in personal and collective strength. A politics that is weak is driven to servility by the logic of the ground situation. If the politics of the minority leaders in 1948/49 was servile and unprincipled, that of the LTTE which shares that tradition was even more so. Its dealings with the Sri Lankan and Indian states, while showing an air of defiance, was ultimately servile in a very real and more desperate fashion. This is the thrust of the charges made by the late Dr. Rajani Thiranagama (*The Broken Palmyra*, vol II, ch.6).

The logical culmination of the LTTE's politics is the attempt to survive by making people weak, servile and insecure, and preying on their fears and worst instincts. It thus needed to create division and hatred. Stirring up extreme Tamil-Muslim animosity became a ready means of accomplishing its aims. The pattern of events shows that by August 1990 this had become deliberate policy.

Commenting on the long term effects of this policy, a young man with a 20 year long commitment to the struggle had this to say: "In January 1974, 9 persons died of electrocution when the police charged into the International Tamil Conference in Jaffna. We were then doing our A Levels. The event consumed our youth and distorted our rationality for years. Just imagine what the deliberate masscre of over a hundred worshippers at the Kattankuddy Mosque would do to the Muslim youth."

This politics needed stereotyped enemies, and the fact that Muslims fitted the bill is partly accidental. The LTTE in the past had displayed paranoia when dissent or disenchantment was associated with a village or



communal group. The LTTE, as mentioned, has shown a readiness to use caste and people's origins in campaigning against opponents. Caste had been an emotive issue in Jaffna in the late '60s with the government trying to cash in, as with Tamil-Muslim differences in the East in the mid-80s. The issue is still only papered over. With a politics so depraved, had the Muslims not been there, some other communal division could just as well have easily served the LTTE's purpose. A glaring consequence of its destructive violence is that the LTTE's vision of Tamil Eelam, in the name of which thousands

have been and are being sacrificed, has become totally untenable.

If this vision is to be realised, the LTTE, even if it can manage the Tamils, has to enact a Bosnian scenario where the Muslims are concerned. This is practically beyond the LTTE's capabilities. The rhetoric, however, remains, together with its associated human sacrifice. This obnoxious vision of Eelam too leads a shadowy twilight existence in the minds of prominent LTTE supporters, albeit with a huge dose of amnesia.

II. Tamils In Sri Lanka: A Nation In Limbo

In July 1991 the LTTE launched a massive attack on the army camp at Elephant Pass. Posters went up in Jaffna describing the camp as the last enemy position on the soil of Tamil Eelam. This was neither accidental nor an isolated slip; and it represents the progressive mental transformation of the promoters of leading Tamil chauvinist ideology. It has come to be taken for granted that Tamil Eelam consists of the truncated portion of the Jaffna peninsula under Tiger control. They talk as if Eastern Tamils do not exist, the Hill Country Tamils having been forgotten long ago. The Eastern Muslims may as well have been a barbaric horde in Bosnia or in the Caucasus. Tamil professionals abroad casually maintain that they must go on backing the LTTE. While sending their children to astronomically expensive Western private schools, they close their minds to children at home, exploited, perverted, cornered into becoming walking grenades, and finally mangled to serve their egos and the destruction of their community. Massacres of Muslims are either rationalised or are blamed on the Sri Lankan forces, the press being accused of distortion. They do not even listen to the LTTE, or more significantly, to what it does not say. The long article about Muslims in the LTTE journal 'Kalathil' of 7th August 1992 does not mention a single massacre of Muslims, even if only to blame it on the Sri Lankan forces.

A good sample of this amnesia comes in two recent published interviews given by a Jaffna dignitary, well received in foreign circles and closely associated with the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism. The first, published by the WCC's Ecumenical Press Service in July 1992 and strongly critical of the government, made no mention of what is being inflicted on the Muslims, notwithstanding a commitment to oppose racism and further inter-religious dialogue. The second, published in the *Kalathil* of 10th July 1992, would have sounded incredible if it did not reflect the tone of the first.

Asked about the extent of support for the Tigers among Tamils, he replied: "Those who do not support the Tigers have left the land (Nadu). Those who remain largely support the Tigers..." Asked whether the Tamils through weariness will not gradually withdraw from the national liberation struggle, he replied: "Even without electricity, food and medicine, people have demonstrated a clear will to live. The deprivations imposed on them have only strengthened their resolve...". Even allowing for distortion by *Kalathil*, such answers do a clear disservice to the people of Jaffna, not forgetting the expelled Muslim population, who have suffered much, share deep anxieties about their children and thousands among whom are political prisoners of the Tigers, including for living the Christian faith. What these interviews reveal, both on the part of the dignitary and the editors of the official Tiger organ, is that the East, including its Tamils, in practice do not count.

A struggle based on the social values of an insensitive and decadent elite, has shrivelled morally, mentally and geographically, driving a whole people into a state of limbo. It is a social rather than an individual disease, where the widening gap between the claims of ego and reality, has transformed a sizeable section of the Tamil elite into virtual vampires.

As for the Tigers themselves, this is not to say that they are more concerned for the people of Jaffna than for the Tamils in the East. Balasingam, their spokesman, told the foreign press earlier this year that should the army come into Jaffna, they would vanish into the jungles. His mention of the large number of civilian casualties 'which the government would not like', made clear what he had in mind. Those with first hand knowledge of the debacles in Jaffna of October 1987 and in the East of June 1990 could have no illusions. A politics that has destroyed every real strength in the people could only use them as



corpses for propaganda. Children and young men from the East alienated by the barbarity of Sri Lankan forces may give their lives for this cause. But what is at stake has nothing to do with people, but with the power of a mafia leadership - again Balasingam's description.

The sacrifice of hundreds of other people's children to the quasi-religious ideology of the Tigers, is extolled as new heights of Tamil valour. That in reality child-sacrifice is the symbol of cause cannibalising what is left of a people is not understood. The use of children points to a people, weakened, divided and disillusioned by a politics of destruction, distancing themselves from the Tiger cause as best as they could.

Political Consequence of Moral Decay

How did it become possible for a small group of power hungry men to hold an entire people hostage? Some of the causes were sketched earlier. As early as 1972 Alfred Duraiappah and M.C. Subramaniam were declared traitors worthy of an abject death from a TULF (FP) platform. Both, for their services in a limited capacity, had a considerable following. The first was killed. As time went by, the killing came to be rationalised. The process of turning nationalists into vampires was underway.

Against this, it was possible for the TULF and then the Tigers to sit down to tea with UNP governments, discuss unsavoury deals, and pass themselves off as Tamil patriots. Such hypocrisy is an accepted part of Tamil life at the top. Well to do Tamils in Colombo could even today have good relations with the ruling establishment, garland Southern dignitaries whose records are seriously wanting, articulate Tiger interests, even boast of good contacts with them, and get along fine. What was then particularly treacherous about Alfred Duraiappah and M.C. Subramaniam? Their main crime was to be a challenge at home and an embarrassment to the TULF, whose political programme lacked cogency and conviction. Its successor, the LTTE, whose record of blood and misery was even less defensible, carried the 'traitor' ploy to even greater lengths in a bid to avert accountability. The mildest criticism or a hint of dissent, came to mean death or imprisonment. Apart from countless murders, the LTTE holds about 4000 political prisoners.

The LTTE finds itself in a position where it cannot face any form of open accountability. It cannot thus mobilise international support for a settlement which would involve the risk of open political activity and hence a need to come to terms with dissent as well as with Muslim and Sinhalese minorities in the North-East. Its politics of division has weakened the Tamils to a point where it cannot hope to deliver militarily. It must therefore keep

the people in limbo, allowing attrition to run its course. Even if a few in Jaffna and others abroad could delude themselves, there are no illusions in the East.

The East : Walking On Hot Coals

The May 1992 issue of the London based Sri Lanka Monitor, whose editor was in the country at the time, reported two singular incidents in the East. In separate incidents a train and a bus were stopped by the Tigers and the Tamils were ordered to separate themselves from the Muslims. The reasons were clear. In the first the Tamils refused and the Tigers went away. In the second, a Tamil who refused was gunned down when the Tigers opened fire. These and other testimonies make it clear that the Tamils want their alleged leaders to stop killing Muslims. It reveals an irony that while many well placed people around the world, including leading churchmen, treat the Tigers as the sole representatives of the Tamil people, an important segment of the Tamils has given clear indications of their disapproval. Leaders must be seen to arguably, if not demonstrably, represent the interests of the people concerned, holding out some prospect of a human existence. What results from international concern of this kind is clearly a disservice to the Tamils.

The opening of the Eastern University was a boon to Eastern Tamils as well as Muslims, long handicapped in education. Recent developments have threatened the basis as well as the development of the university. Some dons recently asked the Tigers for an assurance of security for Muslims students attending the Vantharumoolai campus. They were told that they (the LTTE) had no objection, but that some incident may take place and things may get out of hand. Incidents there are, such as bombs viciously planted in Muslim areas. Boxed into small villages, deprived of means of livelihood and employment and subject to unforeseen and vicious attacks, the Muslims have become a hunted people. It is hardly surprising that Muslim areas have become seedbeds of resentment and militancy. These developments made both ordinary Muslims and Tamils anxious. Whenever the two communities tried to talk, they often found that they had no control over events. If Muslims could not restrain their lawless elements, the position of the Tamils was even more pitiable. They had no influence over their so-called leaders. In the meantime life in the East becomes increasingly unbearable.

Thus the 'leaders' of the people could survive only by making people powerless and denying them any control over their lives, thanks to the incompetence and brutality of the state. These developments are not accidents or mistakes as some Tamils maintain. Some tried to ration-



alise earlier attacks on Muslims as mistakes made by second rate, undisciplined Eastern cadre. No doubt, the LTTE is happy with such explanations, as with other 'mistakes' attributed to 'low caste cadre' in Jaffna. The LTTE is not such an organisation. Whenever competent and respected leaders of Eastern origin posed a challenge to the Jaffna leadership, no mistakes were made. Their authority was swiftly neutralised. This was the case with Kadavul who in 1986 opposed the order to massacre members of the TELO. So with Francis in 1987 who opposed the order to attack Sinhalese in Batticaloa who were part of the community. They had both maintained that there were hard facts about the multi-ethnic East governing the long term interests of Tamils which could not be ridden over roughshod.

While many Eastern Tamils have a soft corner for the LTTE because of the actions of the state, there is growing universal disapproval of its actions. There is little doubt in the minds of Eastern Tamils that they are being used as a human shield to protect the egos and unsustainable ambitions of demented leaders in Jaffna. To this end many Eastern Tamils face the prospect of being permanent refugees in the land of their birth, thus playing into the hands of Sinhalese chauvinists. The latter, have long connived at displacing Tamils to facilitate colonisation.

How Will It End?

There is always the outside chance that the LTTE or the government would have a change of heart and will act with greater wisdom, or that something utterly unpredicted would happen. If not, the Tamils face the dismal prospect of long being leaderless and not having their interests voiced rationally or cogently. Much that is lost, particularly lives, will be irrecoverable. There is perhaps a small ray of hope. The legacy of the past that led to a fascist culture and tragedy is being questioned by an increasing number of young articulate Tamils. That politics is not something to be discussed over beer, but a serious matter involving issues of life and death is also

being understood. Many young people, in reaction to the long-drawn tragedy of their community have rejected the traditional notion that professional studies are the highest form of educational attainment. Several, with good science backgrounds are turning to the study of the humanities and a serious approach to politics. Moreover, rejecting the notion that life abroad is the done thing for those good enough, they are determined to live in Sri Lanka. These are good signs. While a sound leadership may be a long way off, much can be accomplished through broadening the work on human rights. It will distance the Tamil struggle from its atrocious and repellent associations. A broad-based move cannot be derailed as was the aim of the assassins of my friend and colleague, Dr. Rajani Thiraganama. Meanwhile it is to be hoped that the Tamils will soon see an end to the political legacy well captured in John Dryden's satirical description of the Earl of Shaftesbury:

In friendship false, implacable in Hate:
Resolved to Ruine or to Rule the State.
To Compass this, the Triple Bond he broke;
The Pillars of Public safety shook:
And fitted Israel for a Foreign Yoke.
Then seiz'd with Fear, yet still affecting Fame,
Usurp'd Patriot's All-atoning Name.

To be clear, in the course of realising a just order, the Sri Lankan state's historic predilection for brutality and insensitivity, that was ultimately responsible for this tragedy must be challenged and exposed. In doing this, in effect for all the people of this country, a liberation struggle must uphold higher values and must be responsible by all concerned. A struggle that is bankrupt and relies only on its capacity to destroy, degrades everything around, allows no point of reference, and legitimises in the end an incomparably more repressive state. The people are in turn sold into misery and servility. Such a force that masquerades as a liberation movement and uses that mantle to fool the world, is dangerous. This, while challenging the state, must be exposed.

The more one learns the more one knows,
The more one knows, the less one obeys.

Satyajit Ray