

AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN SINHALA CHAUVINISM AND TAMIL NATIONALISM?

Rohini Hensman

Purnaka L. de Silva's rejoinder (*Pravada* Vol.6 no.1) to Adrian Wijemanne's dangerously muddled article on the Nationalist Secessionist Guerilla Phenomenon (*Pravada* Vol.5 no.9) is a welcome critique of some of the errors in the latter. However, more needs to be added to this critique.

Wijemanne's fundamental mistake is to lump together struggles for self-determination of an oppressed nation which consists of all the people in a given territory, and self-determination of an ethnic or religious minority which is scattered throughout a nation in which it is oppressed by the majority. In the former case, a struggle for independence or national liberation makes sense; in the latter case, self-determination has to be defined in terms of democracy and human rights, because if an ethnic or religious nation is postulated, this amounts to adopting the logic of the oppressor. The Tamil-speaking people of Sri Lanka, victimised since Independence by the Citizenship and Election Amendment Acts, Official Language Act, standardisation scheme, Constitutional amendments, vicious pogroms, etc., etc., obviously fall into the latter category. And the LTTE, instead of fighting for their human and democratic rights, has adopted the logic of the Sinhala chauvinists.

At first sight it may seem amazing that Sinhala politicians who were supporting a vicious war against Tamils just a few years ago are now advocating an accommodation with the LTTE, but a closer look shows that it is not surprising at all. Indeed, there is considerable common ground between these two camps, which at one time allowed Premadasa to arm and equip the LTTE in a big way. The common ground, of course, is ethnic nationalism. If the legitimacy of Tamil Eelam is conceded, the legitimacy of Sinhala Sri Lanka follows logically. Reading between the lines, one can surmise that while some hard-line Sinhala chauvinists still cling to the goal of imposing their supremacy on the whole island, others, more pragmatic, have realised that this goal is either too costly or impossible to achieve, and are willing to be satisfied with only part of the island. For them, there is no problem of principle involved, since they have as little respect for human and democratic rights as the LTTE.

Does Wijemanne fall into this category? And what about others who advocate negotiating with the LTTE or coming to an accommodation with them? In the absence of any specification of what the substance of such an accommodation or negotiations might be, and given that the LTTE has not indicated willingness to settle for anything less than Tamil Eelam, we must conclude that this is what they are advocating. But have they thought through the consequences of such a decision? Let us look at these in some detail.

As de Silva points out, making sweeping generalisations about a large number of nationalist movements' is ahistorical and unhelp-

ful: it is important to look at the specificities of each situation. It should be recognised, in addition, that the protagonists even in the same nationalist movement may be inspired by very different aspirations and goals. For the political leadership, the goal is clearly the achievement of state power. Economic elites may dream of a dominance which they cannot aspire to while they are a colony or part of a larger nation. For ordinary people, who know that political and economic power is out of their reach, the goal could be security and dignity, self-government and democratic rights, freedom from persecution and discrimination, or any combination of these.

This diversity of aims leads to the very real possibility of conflict between the elites and ordinary people, a conflict which will almost certainly emerge if and when the struggle is successful, but may well surface even before. Conflict within the movement will be least where the leadership is inspired by a social-democratic ideal which is compatible with the democratic aspirations of the people. It will be sharpest where the nationalist leaders espouse an authoritarian, fascistic ideology and politics which pits the emerging state apparatus against its own people. This is the ugly side of nationalism, and it is very real. Let us not forget that Nazism was an extreme form of German nationalism which for all its citizens meant a denial of their democratic rights, and for millions of them meant actual physical extermination. In such cases, the interests of the political leadership and those of the ordinary people are totally incompatible. The LTTE is an example of this latter type of nationalism.

Contempt for Human Rights

Ethnic or religious nationalism by its nature tends to have contempt for human and democratic rights. Why is this? Firstly, because association of a particular ethnic or religious group with state power automatically excludes other groups from having equal rights and opportunities which are an essential condition for democracy. In extreme cases, the dominant group might engage in ethnic cleansing and genocidal massacres of other groups. Both Sinhala and Tamil nationalism display these characteristics. Sporadic anti-Tamil pogroms under both the SLFP and the UNP gave way to an all-out war against Tamils during the UNP regimes of Jayawardene and Premadasa, with large-scale civilian casualties which have not yet been fully enumerated, and tens of thousands subjected to torture, disappearances and extra-judicial killings. The LTTE in turn has carried out massacres of Sinhala and Muslim civilians, and has expelled thousands of Muslims from their homes in the North. In other words, both Sinhala and Tamil nationalism have engaged in utterly brutal forms of ethnic cleansing, one of the hallmarks of fascism. Even a cursory look at other examples of ethnic nationalism, Nazi Germany, Apartheid South Africa, Israel, Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, etc. reveals that in this respect, the

Sinhala and Tamil variants simply follow the general rule. The systematic use of discrimination, expulsion and massacre of men, women and children in order to subjugate a community or drive it out of a given territory is common to all these situations.

What I find so appalling about Wijemanne's piece is that he does not seem to be in the least bothered by the horrific atrocities entailed by ethnic nationalism, which he (wrongly) sees as being invincible. His argument is devoid of ethics or feeling, and seems to advocate a politics of expediency, of all's fair in politics and war, the end justifies the means, and might is right. There can be no place for justice, compassion or human rights in the type of politics he, and others like him, appear to be advocating.

Nationalism and Atrocities

Purnaka de Silva feels that the actual experience of armed combat is essential to an understanding of secessionist guerrilla struggle, but I feel that far more important is the experience or imaginative understanding of the pain of harassment, displacement, loss, terror, grief, bereavement, the immense weight of human suffering inflicted on the helpless, unarmed civilian victims of ethnic nationalism. Only such an experience or understanding can make one fully aware of the culture of cruelty that goes with such politics. Are those like Wijemanne who argue for Tamil Eelam saying that expelling and butchering unarmed Sinhala and Muslim men, women, children and babies are legitimate means of establishing a nation? Do they really believe that the majority of Tamil people approve of such methods? Have they bothered to ask what will happen to smaller minorities in these two ethnically-defined states? Will they have to put up with being second class citizens wherever they are? What about families where mixed marriages have taken place, and children who are the product of such marriages? Have those who so glibly advocate an accommodation with the Tigers taken the trouble to visit the refugee camps and find out what has been happening to such families? Wijemanne's solution means, for example, that Muslim refugees from the North and East (whose existence he simply ignores) will never be able to go home.

The second point to note is that persecution of the other is no guarantee that the rights of the supposedly dominant community are respected. Some upper and middle class Sinhala people have short memories, but the suspension of elections, wholesale violation of democratic rights such as the right to freedom of association and freedom of expression, systematic use of torture, disappearances and extra-judicial killings against tens of thousands of Sinhala people by the Sinhala state will not be so easily forgotten by those, mostly from poorer sections of the population, whose families were the main target of these atrocities, especially between 1987 and 1991. The LTTE has, if anything, been even more ruthless in its suppression of all actual or potential sources of opposition within their proto-state of Tamil Eelam. Even to mention freedom of association and freedom of expression sounds like a joke in poor taste in the light of their massacres of rival groups and systematic killing of all Tamils, including many within their own ranks, who dare to voice any criticism of the leadership's policies. Others have been incarcerated in concentration camps and tortured. From Rajani

Thiranyagama to Sarojini Yogeshwaran, two women murdered by the LTTE for their devotion to the cause of the Tamil people, anyone who stood up for the human and democratic rights of Tamils has been killed or forced into exile. Wijemanne's solution to the ethnic conflict will mean a death sentence or life-long exile for the few survivors who still stand up courageously for the fundamental rights of Tamils.

The murder of Sarojini Yogeshwaran is also a denial of the democratic right to participate in elections. The furore over election violence in the South is very praiseworthy, but it contrasts strangely with the almost total silence over the post-election violence which killed the popular mayor of Jaffna who was making such a valiant effort to rebuild her shattered community, and other elected representatives of the Tamil people. Why these double standards? Is it that only Sinhala-majority areas are entitled to elect their own representatives in free and fair elections? Are areas where Tamils are the majority not entitled to the same right? One can understand why E.V.A.Naganathan justifies the murder.³ Although such cowardice (like all appeasement of fascists) is probably counterproductive, since it has only encouraged the LTTE to murder dozens of his TULF colleagues from Amirthalingam and Yogeshwaran onwards, one can nevertheless understand the fear of someone who could so easily be added to the Tiger hit-list. Indeed, publishing an article which is so highly derogatory of the government, and openly justifies terrorist attacks on civilians in the capital, in a Colombo-based newspaper, thereby proclaiming that Tamils are granted infinitely more freedom of expression by the P.A. government than by the LTTE, could even be seen as a covert criticism of the LTTE.⁴ However, Sinhala liberals do not face the same danger. If they are silent, therefore, is it because they do not believe that Tamils are entitled to democratic rights?

Silenced by terror, torture and murder, the Tamil population has also had to endure having their children lured or abducted into the fighting forces of the LTTE. Can Wijemanne, who glorifies the ability of nationalist guerilla movements to suffer enormous battle casualties and yet keep on renewing themselves (p.26), even begin to imagine the agony of parents whose children fall into the hands of killers who have absolutely no respect for human life? Of course, the rich can afford to take or send their children abroad, so it is the poor whose children are forced to suffer enormous battle casualties, take cyanide, or be used as human bombs, after having been psychologically degraded and dehumanised. Amnesty International reports that children as young as eleven and twelve have been recruited into LTTE forces, and recounts how one of them, in an attack against a Muslim village near Batticaloa, held a child by the legs and bashed its head against a wall.⁵ Is it possible to imagine anything more monstrous and evil than training a child to kill smaller children? Is this what Tamil culture has been reduced to? All the brutality of the Sri Lankan security forces could only kill the bodies of Tamils; it could not crush their spirit. It is the LTTE which has almost achieved this latter objective. The Tamil community has courageously fought off attacks from outside, only to fall prey to the cancer destroying it from within.

Moreover, some Sinhala liberals and foreign organisations are colluding in this destruction of the Tamil people. How else can one explain their acceptance of the claim that the most brutal, degraded elements in the community (i.e. the LTTE leadership) represent the community as a whole, whereas groups like University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), which have persisted in the struggle for democratic rights against enormous odds, are not representative? Isn't this an attempt to portray the entire Tamil people as an inferior species, to whom human rights and democracy are alien? Why don't these people ask why the LTTE, if it is really so representative and popular, has to keep killing Tamils in order to maintain its dominance? Why do they belittle the most admirable qualities displayed by Tamils, such as the courage of those who participated in the Jaffna elections as candidates and voters despite threats, and highlight what is most despicable? Tamils, as a minority, desperately need the support and solidarity of the Sinhala majority in their struggle for human and democratic rights; they do not need this kind of intervention which actually makes things harder for them.

Why this callousness towards people who have already suffered so much discrimination, persecution and injustice? We get a clue to the answer from a communication in which Wijemanne argues that granting a separate state to the LTTE is the only means by which MONEY can be found for just beginning the long and arduous climb up the educational Everest that faces the Sinhala nation.⁶

So there we have it: the Sinhala chauvinist agenda hiding behind all the talk of peace! Let them kill each other in their Tamil nation, it says, then we can develop our Sinhala nation in peace.

Firstly, this is a grossly unethical and selfish perspective. Sinhala people cannot so easily wash their hands of the moral responsibility for the persecution suffered by Tamil-speaking minorities on the island from Independence onwards. They have a moral obligation to pay, in whatever way they can, for rebuilding the lives of the survivors, reconstruction of their homes, schools, hospitals, workplaces, etc.

Secondly, it is also an utterly stupid perspective, and the peace it will supposedly bring is a pure illusion. Human beings are supposed to have sufficient intelligence to learn from the experience of others instead of repeating every single mistake and suffering the consequences themselves. In the South Asian subcontinent itself we have an experience of partition; surely we can learn from it instead of going through the whole ghastly experience all over again? Apart from the millions killed and over ten million displaced in the partition of India and Pakistan, can the aftermath be described as peace? Hardly. The result has been persecution of Muslims in India, Hindus in Pakistan, and Christians in both countries, as well as a permanent hot-cold war along the border. Indians and Pakistanis have had to pay for the hostilities by sacrificing expenditure on infrastructure, education, health and welfare, and are now paying even more with the initiation of a nuclear arms race. Getting visas for cross-border visits to relations and friends or for occasions such as conferences has been extremely difficult, leading to great anguish in situations where, for example, a person in one country is unable to visit a dying parent in the other. Similarly, we can easily envisage

that Tamils will be persecuted in the Sinhala nation and Sinhala and Muslim people in the Tamil nation. The long border between the two, occupying a far greater proportion of the territory of both nations than the India-Pakistan border, will be the scene of permanent havoc, and a major portion of the GDP of both countries will be spent in fighting border skirmishes. If Wijemanne gets his way, he can rest assured that education and other human development indices will sink way below even the abysmal levels now prevailing in India and Pakistan.

We also have to keep in mind the fact that the idea of Tamil homelands in the North and East was first put forward by Sinhala chauvinists in the 1958 riots to justify driving Tamils out of the rest of the island⁷ just as the idea of African homelands was used by the Apartheid regime in South Africa to dispossess blacks of most of their country. The whole of Sri Lanka is a homeland for Tamils, as it is for people of other ethnic communities who have lived together peacefully on the island for hundreds of years, their lives so closely intertwined that they cannot be torn apart without destroying the whole fabric of Sri Lankan society and culture. We have already seen too much of that destruction taking place; the task of well-meaning people must be to repair the damage, not make it worse.

Varieties of Separatist Advocacy

If we look at the people who advocate a separate state of Tamil Eelam, the following types seem to emerge: (1) Tamil fascists, who could never come to power democratically because their own people would reject them. (2) Tamil opportunists, who follow the fascist bandwagon and in one way or another benefit from it. (3) Sinhala chauvinists, who realise that legitimisation of a Tamil nation logically implies legitimisation of their claim to a Sinhala nation. (4) Various groups who profit from the war, including some NGO types who make a business of campaigning for peace but realise that a real peace would mean that they would lose much of their funding and possibly even their jobs.

The majority of people who advocate negotiating or coming to an accommodation with the Tigers probably fall into none of the foregoing categories, but are guilty only of ignorance, laziness and sloppy thinking, for example, ignorance of or failure to find out what has happened in similar cases of partition along ethnic/religious lines, and failure to follow ideas such as support for Tamil nationalism to their logical conclusion, since if Tamils are entitled to their own nation, why shouldn't Sinhalas be entitled to theirs? If these people are genuinely concerned about the rights and welfare of Tamils and a lasting peace, they should keep the following points in mind:

As we saw earlier, partition along ethnic lines will bring not peace but permanent war, as well as personal tragedy for families divided by a hostile border.

Ethnic nationalism is by its nature undemocratic and fascistic. It depends on defining the other in a way which makes it possible to treat them as less than human. But construction of the other requires that we must not share anything in common with them on the basis of which relationships of sympathy, solidarity or friendship could

be established. Therefore all aspects of collective identity other than ethnicity, such as class, gender, or, indeed, humanity itself, have to be stamped out. Aspects of individual identity, especially the propensity to think for oneself and voice dissenting opinions, also have to be wiped out, because they threaten to shatter the myth of monolithicity. Finally, even that sole aspect of identity which is allowed to survive (namely ethnicity) cannot be left to individuals to define for themselves, but is defined for them by the political authority. Just as Sinhala nationalists define Sinhala Buddhists as bloodthirsty fanatics, disallowing alternative definitions based on non-violence and compassion, so Tamil nationalism defines Tamils as moronic psychopaths, disallowing alternative self-definitions of Tamils as people capable of thinking for themselves and acting ethically.⁸ Partition along ethnic lines would therefore lead to authoritarian states on both sides of the border.

This solution is undemocratic in another sense too, because it does not correspond to what most Tamils actually want. Given a choice between citizenship in a democratic Sri Lanka, with guarantees of security, freedom from discrimination and persecution, and equal rights and opportunities on the one hand, and citizenship in a fascist Tamil Eelam on the other, the overwhelming majority of Tamils would opt for the former.⁹ And the Sinhala population owes it to them to provide them with this option. All the propaganda by Sinhala chauvinists against division of the country on the grounds that it will mean a loss of territory for the Sinhalas has obscured the fact that Tamils would be losing much more. In a democratic Sri Lanka, the entire island would be their homeland; in a divided island, less than half. For Tamils who have been born and brought up in the South, Eelam means dispossession. Why should they accept this curtailment of their freedom of movement and restriction of their citizenship rights?

Negotiations

None of this means that the government should not negotiate with the LTTE: it is always better to talk rather than not to talk. But it does mean that the mode and substance of the negotiations should be specified very clearly. Firstly, as Ram Manikkalingam has argued very cogently¹⁰ a ceasefire should not be made a precondition for negotiations. Previous experience tells us that various undesirable consequences are likely to follow if it is. (a) If the ceasefire breaks down, negotiations break down too. (b) Either side can use a ceasefire to repress rivals/dissidents/critics within its own ethnic group. (c) Either side can use the ceasefire to re-arm, strengthen itself and renew the fighting with redoubled force, so that, paradoxically, the ceasefire becomes a means of prolonging the war rather than ending it. If both sides are serious about negotiations, they can negotiate regardless of the fighting, and can, indeed, negotiate mutually acceptable conditions under which the fighting can stop permanently.

Secondly, the substance of the negotiations should be nothing less than complete respect for the human and democratic rights of all Tamils in all parts of the island. And since human and democratic rights are by definition non-discriminatory, this means that these rights should be fully respected for all other communities in all parts

of the island too. As Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake correctly insists¹¹ devolution could be a formula for disaster unless it (a) is based on regional rather than ethnic identities; (b) guarantees the safety and security of local minorities; (c) entails a positive commitment to multiculturalism; (d) rules out incitement to ethnic, religious and other types of hatred; and (e) fosters the return of displaced persons in safety and security. If devolution is seen as a go-ahead for local majorities to discriminate against and persecute local minorities, it will simply perpetuate the ethnic conflict instead of resolving it.

Thirdly, the process of negotiation should be transparent and public. This will favour those who genuinely want peace, and dissipate suspicions of secret deals such as the one between Premadasa and Prabhakaran. Everyone has a right to know the progress of negotiations which will have a profound effect on their lives.

Ensuring respect for the fundamental rights of Tamils in all parts of the island may sound like a less radical solution than giving away part of the island, but it is actually much more far-reaching, and involves a great deal of hard work. What would it mean in practice?

Monitoring what happens at every check-point and police station to ensure that the rights of Tamils are not being violated, and taking up cases of harassment with the authorities. Perhaps this can be done through citizens committees and/or telephone helplines. The task becomes all the more difficult because there is a genuine need for vigilance against terrorist attacks.

Pressurising the government to pursue cases of human rights violations in the past, against citizens of all communities. Campaigning that those who are guilty should never be elected to positions of power.

Pressing for the repeal of all legislation, constitutional amendments and administrative measures which in any way discriminate against minorities or identify the state with a particular ethnic or religious group. (This must include granting citizenship to up-country Tamils who are still stateless.) It is worth discussing whether even the national flag needs to be changed.

Making the equality of Tamil as an official language a reality. This is a huge task. It means that in every police station, every government office and department, there must be people who are competent in Tamil, and all government communications must be available in Tamil, so that official business can be conducted in Tamil in every part of the island. Moreover shop signs, bus signs, road names, etc. etc. should be in all three languages. This has already been done in some cases, but not everywhere.

Re-Building Group Relations

The most important task of all is to (re)build relationships of friendship, trust and solidarity between ethnic groups. It is not the government but groups in civil society which have to play the major role here. Let me illustrate with two examples which occurred in the course of my work. In one case, young Sinhala women

workers visited tea plantations in Nawalapitiya, and came back with women plantation workers and activists who then joined in a workshop with them. On the second occasion, young Sinhala women workers were having a workshop at a conference centre at the same time that, by chance, a group of Tamil A-level schoolgirls from Vavuniya who had been traumatised by the war were having a counselling session, and met in the canteen at mealtimes. Both encounters made a deep impact on the Sinhala women, their spontaneous compassion for the sufferings of their Tamil sisters overcoming any prejudices they might have had. Of course, communication depended on the presence of interpreters—children who knew Sinhala on the plantations, professionals in the first workshop, and a Tamil girl who knew Sinhala at the conference centre—but the desire for communication was quite evident, showing that it is the opportunity that is normally lacking. Encouraging grass-roots communication by much more systematic translation between the two languages and organising joint programmes for women, workers, students, children, etc. is the only way to bring about a lasting peace. Some NGOs are already doing this work in a quiet way, but unfortunately some of the high-profile NGOs supposedly campaigning for peace do not seem to have this perspective.

In the longer term, the communication barrier that has deliberately been fostered by the language policy must be broken down on a more permanent basis. This is not difficult. There are only three languages in Sri Lanka, no problem at all for a child. Children in India routinely learn three languages at school, and many are fluent in more. It should as soon as possible be made compulsory for schools to teach all children Sinhala, Tamil and English, allowing them to choose the language they prefer as their medium of instruction. This would require an extensive programme to train teachers for language teaching. In the meantime, language classes can be started for both children and adults. Literacy in all three languages will empower people who have been kept ignorant and manipulable by their own leaders. Again, this is a field with plenty of potential for activity by groups and individuals concerned to bring about peace.

The time is ripe for a democratic solution to the ethnic conflict. This is what the majority of Tamil and Muslim people always wanted anyway. For a while, driven to despair by the intransigence of the UNP government, many Tamils began to feel that they could never feel safe and secure unless they had a separate state. But this perception changed with the advent of the PA government, and the high voter turnout at the January 1998 Jaffna local elections at which Sarojini Yogeshwaran became Mayor was an indication of the widespread desire for a return to democracy in a united Sri Lanka.¹²

For many years, it seemed as if the majority of Sinhala people were seduced by delusions of ethnic supremacism, but even at the height of the carnage, many ordinary Sinhala people clung to their basic humanity. One thinks, for example, of the famous incident when the security forces invited Sinhala villagers to view the bodies of young Tigers killed in the fighting, and the villagers, instead of exulting, started weeping, saying, -“Anay, mey kiri bona lamai vagay ney!” displaying, incidentally, more compassion for these young people than either the LTTE leadership or Adrian Wijemanne. Tamil

refugees whom I interviewed told many stories of active help and solidarity from Sinhala neighbours, friends and even strangers. Subsequently, the mood has shifted further towards peace. One indication of the change is that the President and P.A. government were elected to power on the promise of attending to Tamil grievances, indicating some degree of understanding among ordinary Sinhala people that these grievances were real and serious. Perhaps the credit for this goes to the UNP government. By unleashing state terror against ordinary Sinhala people, it opened their eyes to what the same state had been doing to Tamils for much longer. Even more revealing is the response to the LTTE terrorist attacks in Colombo and Kandy. Although some of these—e.g. the bombing of the Bank of Ceylon, the commuter train, and the Temple of the Tooth—were directed at purely civilian targets and obviously designed to provoke reprisal attacks against Tamils, they failed to have the desired effect, except on a few die-hard Sinhala chauvinists. Obviously ordinary Sinhala people have realised that they too are the losers in any battle for ethnic supremacy.

No one can deny that Sri Lanka desperately needs peace, but mere sloganeering and good intentions cannot by themselves bring about the desired result: clear thinking and hard work are also required. It is up to those who are serious about ending the war to make the necessary effort.

Notes

1. Some of these, like the Vietnamese liberation struggle, can hardly be called secessionist unless Wijemanne thinks that Vietnam was once part of the United States! Indeed, it would be more appropriate to see it at least partly as a struggle for reunification.
2. Almost all the Tamil refugees I interviewed for my book felt that it is wrong to kill innocent people, and most said that they would like to live in peace and harmony with neighbours of other communities. Muslim refugees from the North confirmed that their Tamil neighbours had wept and pleaded with the Tigers not to expel them, but to no avail. See Rohini Hensman, *Journey Without a Destination: Is there a Solution for Sri Lankan Refugees?* The Refugee Council, London & Colombo, 1993
3. “Slaying of a Romantic”, *The Weekend Express*, 5-6 December 1998.
4. Presumably, Naganathan knows there was a time under the UNP when critics of the government like Richard de Zoysa used to be found dead some time later, and knows that this will not happen under the P.A. On the other hand, he clearly suspects that if he so much as hints at a criticism of the LTTE, he will be a dead man in the near future. The article seems to be written under great psychological pressure, because he refers to a giant Flamboyant tree, brimming with yellow blossoms, whereas everyone knows that flamboyant flowers are red. This is surely a Freudian slip. What the poor man would like to say is that despite their claim to being valiant (red), the LTTE are in reality cowards (yellow), because they resort to despicable deeds like killing unarmed women. The tension

between his respect and admiration for Sarojini and the compulsion to denounce her is also apparent. Given that this article is a response to the publication of the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) *Special Report no. 11, A Tamil Heroine Unmourned and the Sociology of Obfuscation*, (1998), it is very likely that it was written at the behest of the LTTE, and is an indication of their Nazi methods i.e. forcing people to do something vile—killing a child, torturing someone, betraying a parent, colleague or close friend—so that they totally lose their self-respect and become docile tools in the hands of the totalitarian power.

5. See Amnesty International, 1998, *Children in South Asia: Securing their Rights*; excerpts published as Sri Lanka's Children: the AI Report, in *Pravada*, Vol.5, No.10&11.

6. Adrian Wijemanne, "Free Education vs. Reform", *Pravada*, Vol.5, No.6

7. See Tarzie Vittachi, 1958, *Emergency 58. The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots*, London: Andre Deutsch

8. See Ram Manikkalingam, "Tigerism", in *Pravada*, Vol.1 No.4, *Tamil Times*; London, April 1992, and *Tigerism and other Essays*, Ethnic Studies Group, 1995, and Pradeep Jeganathan, "Who are the Tamils?", *Pravada*, Vol.5 No.4&5 for critiques of the LTTE definition of Tamils.

9. This impression is, admittedly, formed on the basis of limited empirical evidence, namely the views of refugees interviewed for

my book *Journey Without a Destination*, but I feel sure that any survey which guarantees confidentiality would come up with the same result. After all, most Tamils are normal human beings; they too cherish their freedom and wish to be able to exercise it without being incarcerated, tortured, or killed. The fact that in Tamil Eelam they would be repressed by a Tamil state is immaterial. Anyone who doubts this should try telling relatives of victims of the 1987-90 violence in the South how lucky they are that their loved ones were hacked to death, herded together and shot, dumped in rivers, burned on tyre-pyres or buried in mass graves by paramilitaries speaking their very own language, or security forces of their very own Sinhala state. Or try to imagine being tortured to death oneself: would it be any consolation that the torturers/executioners speak the same language as oneself? Any normal person would prefer not to be tortured or killed at all for normal activities like telling the truth or expressing an opinion!

10. Ram Manikkalingam, "How Valid is the Claim for a Cease-fire?" *Sunday Times*, 25/9/94; also reproduced in *Tigerism and other Essays*, which includes many useful observations on the LTTE and the ethnic conflict.

11. Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, "After Devolution: Protecting Local Minorities and Mixed Settlements", *Pravada*, Vol.5 No.4 & 5; "From Ethnic Conflict to Dirty War": the Hidden Economies of Armed Conflict, *Pravada*, Vol.5 No.8

12. See UTHR(J), op.cit., p.61; also *Journey Without a Destination*, especially the last chapter. ■

CASTE HIERARCHY AND FEMALE LABOUR Sri Lankan Plantations

Rachel Kurian

The two main divisions found on the Sri Lankan estates were the *Sudra* and the *Adi-Dravida*. In order of hierarchy among the *Sudra* were two sub-divisions, namely *Kudian* and *Non-Kudian*. A common caste found on the estates was from the *Kudian* sub-division, as the *Vellalan* who were generally accepted to belong to the highest social caste on the estates. Many of them, in fact, claimed to belong to the *Vaisya* division. Besides the *Vellalan* at least thirteen other castes and their further divisions belonging to the *Kudian* and *non-Kudian* sub-divisions are found on the estates.

The *Adi-Dravida* or *Panchama* formed the largest proportion of the estate workers. In Tamil Nadu in South India they, historically, worked as some form of hired labour, and they may even have had to scavenge the area. The *Chakkiliyan*, considered to be the lowest caste (their name is derived from the Sanskrit word *Shatkuli* i.e. -flesheater), were often given the task of sweeping (apart from the usual field work for estate production). The *Pallan* and the *Paraiyan* clearly constituted the bulk of the labour on the estates. These two

castes in Tamil Nadu worked for the *Vellalan* and the other high castes, and often had their dwelling places outside the village areas. Given their social situation, it is perhaps not surprising that a large number of converts to Christianity came from these two castes, especially the *Paraiyan*.

Sanskritization Process

As the labourers from South India were incorporated into the plantation system, they were to experience a change or a shift in their status as workers and as members of the new estate community of which they were a part. Their new status depended not only on the particular caste from which they came, but also on the caste ranking in the new environment, and on whether they were male or female. In general, most of the sub-castes experienced upward mobility as the process of migration freed them from the controls of the higher castes. At the same time, however, while this implied greater freedom and power to the male members, it