

The Tamil Eelam Movement

Contemporary Crisis and Its Significance

The Sri Lankan Government declared on May 19th 2009 that the war against the Tamil Tigers is over, thereby claimed that the Eelam struggle was finished, and it received compliments from a curious combination of international forces. India and Pakistan welcomed Sri Lanka's victory against 'terrorism'. Israel and Iran congratulated Rajapaksa for upholding democracy. The Turkish government expressed opinions signaling that the PKK would meet a similar fate like the LTTE while quite a few military analysts in India and Colombia considered the possibility of finishing off the armed struggles waged by the Maoists and the FARC respectively in a 'Sri Lanka style' solution. The big powers, USA, France, Russia and China also expressed their solidarity with the 'victorious' Lankan government. The pro-US Colombian government and the supposedly anti-imperialist Cuba and Venezuela conveyed their admiration for Rajapaksa's firmness in dealing with 'secessionists.' Most of the above mentioned countries have also directly and indirectly provided material support to Sri Lanka.

INTELLECTUALS AND THE WAR: Ironically some of the intellectuals, who support these so-called anti-US countries, considering them to be truly 'revolutionary', have characterized the Eelam struggle as being funded by imperialist powers discarding the fact that the LTTE was banned and continues to face a ban in the US, Canada and the European Union and that quite some Tamils who have been suspected of aiding the Tigers have been arrested by these governments. The US, Israel and many countries of the West have supplied the Sri Lankan government with economic and military aid. This despite the fact that none of those countries that have intervened in Iraq and now in Libya for the violation of human rights, raised a finger while over 50000 civilians were butchered by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces between January and May 2009. Media houses like *The Hindu* and *NDTV* that put up a sham liberal facade propagated this blatant lie of 'terrorism promoted by foreign powers', besides even positively projecting Sinhalese chauvinist-triumphalism after the massacre of the Tamils. Recent cables released by Wikileaks shows how the Indian Government opposed foreign powers preventing the Sri Lankan state's war against the Tamils and also how the Sri Lankan government was desperately trying to get greater aid from the US in their war on the Tamils.

While the silence in intellectual circles on the genocide in Sri Lanka is grossly disproportionate to its intensity, the talks and debates on Sri Lanka in the mainstream Indian media and academia focuses on either peace or reconciliation or both. What is conveniently forgotten is the struggle of the people for freedom and justice. The 'left' intellectuals affiliated with the CPM and few other parliamentary left parties, who have no qualms in shouting their support for the Palestinian liberation struggle, are happy to denounce the equally genuine demands of the Eelam Tamil people and to distort the truth of their oppression. That they hold similar positions on the other national-liberation struggles in the subcontinent is testimonial to their commitment to the oppressed peoples. Even those who recognize the war-crimes of the Sri Lankan government are rather silent on the political demand for self-determination

COORDINATION COMMITTEE FOR OPPRESSED NATIONALITIES (CCON)

of the Eelam Tamils and slip into a human-rights discourse instead. The tragedy that befell the Tamils then becomes a 'soft-story' discussion for the NGO's and status quo intellectuals.

The war in Sri Lanka is not about human rights violations alone. It is primarily about political rights of the Tamils as a nation to secede and form an independent state. Unless that is recognized, all appeals for peace and co-existence are just mere shams to cover the naked fascist oppression that exists in Sri Lanka, the brutal face of Sinhala majoritarian chauvinism. The Lankan emperor is wearing no clothes - but why do so few have the courage to point that out?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BETRAYAL: As soon as Sri Lanka gained 'independence' in 1948, it passed the Citizenship Act, which in effect disenfranchised more than 10 lakh plantation Tamil workers in the island. Following the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact of 1964, over 5 lakh of them were expatriated - the remaining were to get Sri Lankan citizenship only in 2003. In 1956, the notorious 'Sinhala Only' Act, that made Sinhalese the sole official language was passed. Tamils staged peaceful protests and the response was state-sponsored riots which led to over a 150 deaths. Large scale riots against the Tamils occurred again in 1958, again as a response to non-violent protests of the Tamils. When the Federal Party declared civil disobedience, emergency was declared in many Tamil areas and the army was deployed to crush protests. Sinhalese academics in this period wrote 'historical works' that received official support which sought to obliterate the historical presence of the Tamils in the island. An example - "The history of Sri Lanka is the history of the Sinhalese race... Buddhism is the golden thread running through the history of the Race and the Land..." (DC Wijewardena, *The Revolt in the Temple*)

Anti-Tamil riots occurred with varying frequencies in the 60's and the 70's. The Republican constitution of 1972 snatched the few minority rights that the Tamils had. By officially privileging the faith of the majority, it made complete Sinhala-Buddhist supremacy a reality. The Tamils, deeply conscious of the oppression that they faced as a collective, realized that future in an united Sri Lanka would only spell doom for them. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which was formed on 1976, passed the Vaddukkodai resolution under the aegis of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam that year which stated that the struggle for "the Free, Sovereign, Secular, Socialist State of Tamil Eelam, based on the right of self determination inherent to every nation, has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil Nation in this Country." The constitution promised a socialist-democratic state, committed to abolition of casteism and religious discrimination.

THE RISE OF ARMED STRUGGLE: The Tamils, who were the worst affected by the language policy of the government, and the rural populace who were under constant economic pressures, began losing faith in the peaceful methods of the TULF. The LTTE which was formed in 1976 gained popularity after the assassination of Jaffna mayor

Alfred Duriappah. The burning of the Jaffna library, which contained numerous valuable historical manuscripts of the Tamils, by Sinhalese policemen in 1981 convinced the radical youth that the Sinhala chauvinist government was bent on erasing them totally and that armed struggle was the only way to secure justice. The Black July riots of 1983 by Sinhalese mobs, policemen and the army, that was given a free hand by the State and which caused the killing of over 4000 Tamils and the displacement of hundreds of thousands led to the intensification of Tamil armed resistance and its greater acceptance among the Tamils. The LTTE, with its programme for a Socialist Tamil Eelam, consciously promoted the involvement of women, dalits and backward castes in its ranks and reached out to a wider section than the other parties.

INDIAN INVOLVEMENT: Other militant groups also emerged in this period. The TELO was openly favoured by the Indian government. After its decimation by the LTTE, the RAW chose the EPRLF who were content to be the stooges of India. Only the LTTE maintained its independent agenda and refused to be a junior partner of any power. Thus, when following the Indo-Sri Lanka accord the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) entered Sri Lanka, they launched their brutal assaults on the LTTE and the Tamil people. The IPKF also trained mercenary squads from the EPRLF in the name of 'Tamil National Army' to create terror among the local people. Yet, the Tigers were able to secure a decisive victory over the Indian army owing to their mass support and the usage of guerrilla warfare. After that defeat, India has supplied arms to Sri Lanka and also trained its armed forces, albeit covertly, mostly owing to fear of a backlash in Tamil Nadu.

CONSOLIDATION AND CRISIS: After a series of military successes, the LTTE consolidated itself in the North and Eastern regions of Sri Lanka, having almost 15000 sq km under its control. When it entered into a Ceasefire agreement with Sri Lanka in 2002, it was functioning as a *de facto* state. It ran schools, hospitals, relief teams, judiciary and police. But by this time, various international powers started stepping up their covert and overt support to Sri Lanka, especially after the media-generated paranoia on 'terrorism' after 9-11. The LTTE was banned in various countries and people suspected to be its members/sympathizers were arrested in India, the USA, and France etc. While the movement of men and material for the LTTE was clamped down, the governments of China, Israel, Russia, Pakistan, Libya and Iran gave extensive military support to Sri Lanka.

The defection of Karuna, the Eastern Commander of the LTTE, in 2004 which was partly engineered by the Lankan government came as a major blow to the Tigers. The December 2004 Tsunami also greatly damaged human resources and infrastructure in Tiger controlled areas. With Rajapaksa's election in 2005 the ceasefire began to deteriorate. On July 2006, the Sri Lankan military started its full scale offensive against the Tamils with blessings from various international powers. Numerous atrocious acts like the Chencholai orphanage bombing of August 2006 which killed 61 Tamil children were committed by the Lankan armed forces with impunity.

Towards the last stages of the military operations in Mullaitivu, the Lankan armed forces violated all established conventions of war. Chemical weapons and cluster bombs

were used on civilian populations. Non-combatants were subject to tortures and sexual violence. Media freedom was curtailed and vigilante groups were propped to violently snuff out any democratic voices. The murders of journalists Taraki Sivaram, Lasantha Wickramatunga and P. Devakumaran are ghastly examples. When the Lankan government declared on May 19th that the war was over and that peace was ahead, it failed to mention the bloody trail that it had left behind.

'POST-WAR' SRI LANKA: The Permanent People's Tribunal in a hearing on January 2010 found the Sri Lankan government guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Chomsky compared the Sri Lankan war on the Tamils to the atrocities in Rwanda. Despite claims to champion 'peaceful co-existence' the Sri Lankan government has been consistently pursuing militarization and colonization of Tamil areas since May 2009, especially in the absence of an organized resistance from the Tamils. Summary executions by mercenary gangs and the army, abductions, illegal detentions and rape are commonplace. 'Suicide' rates among Tamils are one of the highest in the world and many suffer from psychological traumas.

Demographics of the region are changed by State supported Sinhalese settlements and establishment of army camps in Tamil areas. Many Tamil lands have now been used for foreign projects under the guise of government schemes. The assaults on the cultural level are also happening side by side. Besides wanton destruction of Tamil Churches and Temples, there are attempts to change the names of Tamil localities into Sinhala, thereby denying them their local history. Deseccration of statues of Tamil martyrs has been accomplished with systematic efforts. In July 2010, the army demolished the Tamil war heroes' cemetery in Thenmaradaachi, Jaffna, in order to build an army base over it. The purpose of this is two fold: one, to show the Tamils once and for all who their superiors are. Two, to erase all memories of resistance from the thoughts of the Tamils. Despite all this, dreams persist, words are spoken and stories are told.

CCON feels that at a stage where various national-liberation struggles are being brutally suppressed and are undergoing strategic and ideological changes, it is imperative for us to learn from various movements. And since the so-called 'Sri Lanka solution' is being upheld by various oppressor countries, we feel it is necessary to discuss how this 'final solution' turned out to be and what it signifies for the Tamils and other oppressed nationalities.

Public Meeting

Speakers

- A. Bimol Akoijam, CSSS/SSS, JNU
- Satya Sivaraman, Independent Journalist and Activist
- S. Santosh, SAA/JNU and Sabir Ahmed - members of the team who visited Jaffna

Followed by

Documentary Screening - 'Mullaitivu Saga' (English, 45 mins.) by Someetharan , a documentary film-maker from Jaffna

&

Book Release - 'In the Name of Peace: IPKF Massacres of Tamils in Sri Lanka'

1st April, 2.30 pm
SSS-I Committee Room

Oppressed Nationalities of the World Unite !