

TAMIL TERRORISTS



**a record of murder
and robbery**

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The origins of the terrorist movement in the North still lie widely diffused in the cross currents and confusion of current events. Nevertheless its impact has grown with alarming rapidity. We are perhaps, too close to its formative period to see it in its true historical perspective. It could be fairly safe to make the assertion that it took shape after the Chelvanayagam-Thiruchelvam leadership of contemporary Tamil politics. Both leaders were too idealistic, too intellectual and too mature to want to indulge in bloodshed. The current scene could be a symptom of despair. It could have been inspired by the irredentism of the JVP* and the insurgency that it staged in 1971. It bears witness to a Tamil hubris.

The terrorists of the North have earned for themselves the popular brand name : the Tigers of the Eelam.

At all events their recent record unfolds a steadily fed stream of bloody assassinations and the destruction of public property. Their brutality has not been less cruel because the episodes have been less dramatic and more widely spread out in time.

According to the findings of the Sansoni Commission which was appointed to go into various aspects of communal disturbances that occurred in Sri Lanka in 1977, the TULF leadership had at a public demonstration in May 1972 made a call to arms.

“There will be a day for the Tamils to use arms. Therefore it is necessary that we should have friendly relationships with Asian organisations in foreign countries.”

M.C. Sansoni to whom the President issued a Commission to inquire into the communal violence which took place between 13.8.1977 and 15.9.1977 was a former Chief Justice of the Island. Neither a Sinhalese nor a Tamil but a member of the minority Burgher community Mr. Sansoni enjoyed the unquestioned confidence of both communities, for his integrity, fairmindedness and a brilliant analytical mind.

* Janatha Vimukti Peramuna or People's Liberation Front—a revolutionary Marxist Movement which staged an unsuccessful insurrection in 1971.

Again both S. J. V. Chelvanayagam and M. Tiruchelvam, both of whom had died by 1977, were reputed for their commitment to a legal and constitutional or at most a non-violent if non-yielding path towards the attainment of what they regarded as the best terms for the Tamils. They might have adopted civil disobedience as a means, never murder.

From colonial times, the Tamils of the North had enjoyed a share of employment in the professions, in state administration and in business quite out of proportion with their numbers. Much of this they had secured through hard work and suppliance. Independence was to bring to the community more in the way of fears perhaps more grievances especially in regard to their pre-ponderance in the public service.

The Constitution of 1978 went on to meet what was avowedly one of the primary aims of the Tamil struggle-recognition of the Tamil language. Their escalating demands and growing militant methods could suggest growing frustration in the face of rising expectation rather than any denial of justice.

The Tiger Terrorist Movement might recall to the historian, Lenin's Cheku or Vanguard elites, Mussolini's Black Shirts, Hitler's Storm Troopers, or the early killer gangs of the KMT or the CCP in China.

Inspired and deluded politicians alike seek a tryst with destiny and often feel that the nucleus of an armed force justified their entering upon the scenes of world history. In every case they prey on the idealism of youth. Student unrest today provides the latest phenomenon in this sequence.

An enigmatic feature of the repeated massacres of innocent persons in the North has been the almost complete unconcern they have evoked from the Tamils elsewhere. They have given an impression of silent acquiescence, of sympathy for the TULF demands. The Tiger Movement has thus deliberately or otherwise succeeded in identifying itself with the rest of the community. The Terrorist Movement has in five years staged more than 265 killings, bank robberies, hold-ups, attacks on Army Camps and the derailment of trains.

Details of the hierarchy within the movement are scanty, but we do know that when the terrorists started off, they were just one youth organisation pledged to achieve Eelam, but by 1980, they had split up into three major terrorist groups over differences in ideology and personal rivalry. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is led by Prabaharan who always resisted any threat to his leadership. In fact, he is known to have killed several of his own comrades because he felt that they would be a danger to his leadership. Till very recently, he enjoyed the patronage of the TULF, but now appears to be under the influence of a marxist lecturer in the UK.

The Peoples Liberation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) led by Uma Maheswaran was always Marxist in outlook, and the strange irony is that when Uma Maheswaran broke off from Prabaharan, it was because Prabaharan did not favour the Marxist approach which he now follows.

The Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) was led by Kuttimani and Thangadurai and consisted of youths who had strong links with the smugglers of Velvettithurai, a coastal town in the north of the Jaffna Peninsula, and their motive for indulging in the Eelam struggle was because such a situation would distract the attention of the Government forces from the smuggling activities.

Although publications here and abroad strain to portray these terrorist leaders as heroes, in reality, they have only indulged in sneaky and cowardly attacks on policemen and soldiers merely because they were the symbols of State authority. In their attacks, they have displayed sadism and brutality of a high degree. The sad aspect of this is that organisations such as the Civil Rights Movement, Movement for Inter-racial Justice and Equality, the Gandhian Organisation, Christian Workers Fellowship, have all taken up the cause of the so-called freedom fighters, and gone to great lengths to express sympathy for their incarceration and arrest, but have spared no thoughts for the hapless victims of the cowardly attacks by the terrorists, and ignored the severe traumatic experiences that the widows and orphans of these victims of violence suffered.

The advantage the terrorist enjoyed is that Tamil Nadu in India has proved a safe haven for them and also a training ground. In spite of the fact that the terrorists had made it clear they were violent by nature when the leaders of the LTTE and the PLOTE shot it out in the streets of Madras, the authorities in Madras allowed them to move about without any restrictions. At the time these two leaders were arrested following the shoot out, political parties in Tamil Nadu were preparing for the Periyakulam By-elections, and as such seized the opportunity to oppose moves for extradition of these Sri Lankan terrorists to gain political advantage in their election campaign. Both the DMK and the AIADMK came out strongly in support of the terrorists.

The hypocrisy of these politicians is plainly seen because Karunanithi, the DMK leader when he was the Chief Minister in 1973, did not hesitate to hand over Kuttimani when he was arrested in India, as he was wanted in Sri Lanka on charges of possession of explosives. This same DMK leader now tries to champion the cause of the terrorists. In August this year, he unveiled the photographs of Kuttimani and Thangadurai in South India at a ceremony organised by the TELO.

However, much remains to be uncovered as to the master-minds behind its operations, its possible foreign links, its finances and ultimate purpose. Its macabre performances have much in common with the Mafia in several European and American regions.

Significantly a leading daily in Sri Lanka some years ago went on record as predicting that "the artificers of Eelam clearly plan to divide the land of their fantasy like Caesar's government into three parts, the North, the East and the Public Service". The observation drew immediate endorsement from scholarly observers of the local scene.

Few will try to deny that on July 24th 1983 a section of the Sinhala community lost its nerve at the death trap laid for 13 soldiers in the North and savaged Tamils elsewhere in a wild thirst for revenge.

However no fair or objective judge of the period can ignore the shooting in June of two young Sinhala airmen in Vavuniya who, still in their morning P.T. kit, were gunned down when they were out buying bread. In May a Sinhala Corporal had been shot dead. Some months earlier the terrorists had attacked a Police Station killing some policemen including a Sinhala Officer. These were to climax in the trap laid for Army vehicles carrying Sinhala personnel. In every case the attack was launched without warning and without tangible provocation.

The terrorists of the North could have made the mistake in terms of terrorist tactics of going to war while a large section of their kith and kin were virtual hostages on soil held by the people whose youngsters they were shooting up.

If the terrorists started their onslaught in 1972 the tide of horror that came in July 1983 took ten years building up.

It may suit TULF leaders, Eelamists or the terrorists that from the suffering of the Tamils in the South they gained a tactical victory of drawing away the Tamils from these regions. Such sublimation of blood lust by political gangster groups is not unknown in history. No life without violence, the Duce is quoted as saying. Whether the Tiger Movement is modelling itself on the IRA, on the PLO or on the Red Brigades or seeking to arrive at a compound of these, it is clear that its immediate purpose is to intimidate.

The Northern Peninsula has often served as a landing ground for smugglers. It could be that this network of operations will now be employed by the terrorists whose mobility, information service and ruthless efficiency have often been the subject of comment. It must not be overlooked that Sinhala Police officers feel that a transfer to Jaffna spells death for them ; that even a Tamil DIG ranking after the Head of the Island's Police service chose to quit the Force than assume command of the Northern Range.

Apparently the Terrorist Movement has two phases in view or has been urged to work to a two-stage program, the first involving a reſort to arms the second requiring the introduction of foreign mercenaries.

It has succeeded on several occasions in disrupting the normal civilian services, available to the public. Repeated raids on banks for example led to the closure of several branches serving distant peasant areas. Again the stoning and burning of buses and trains has led to the suspension of transport services. The resulting inconvenience was intended to bring further odium on the Central Government, which Eelamist sympathisers like to think of as totally Sinhalese.

It would be fatuous to overlook the contribution that firebrands in the South have made to the messianic or heroic configurations of the Tiger Movement. The constant stress on the rights and strength of the Sinhala Buddhist majority has often been misrepresented as a threat to minority communities.

The grand formula 'no provocation by the minorities, no oppression by the majority' presents an ambivalent dilemma. Is provocation by any major group moral, defensible? There is no doubt that the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka has to be settled politically. Violent solutions to political problems are invariably a demonstration of gangsterism whether by Tigers or others.

Statements likely to offend often tend to prejudice interests of peace. Southern insistence that the majority community has no other homeland, almost suggests that the minorities are aliens, intruders or interlopers. Clearly unity and alienation are irreconcilable ideals.

On the other hand, the statement such as the one attributed to a Tamil political figure that the skins of Sinhala people might adorn the slippers of the upper crust of the Northern community must also count as a crude insult.

The wise and the brave alone, it has been said, can own that he was wrong. Terrorism by its very definition is immoral and illegal.

The record of the Tiger Movement before 24th July 1983 includes—

- 07.04.78 – Killing of C.I.D. Inspector Bastianpillai and 3 other police officers
- 22.05.78 – Blasting of 'AVRO' aircraft at Ratmalana, on its return from KKS. (This was on National Heroes' Day)
- 30.11.78 – Killing of a Tamil technician in Jaffna, who helped CID investigations in the 'AVRO' blasting
- 09.07.79 – Police discover large amount of firearms in Thondaimanaru
- 21.04.79 – P.C. Sivanesan killed at Velvettithurai
- 01.05.80 – Theft of Rs. 20,000 from Thunukai MPCS
- 07.01.81 – Hold-up of Urembasiddi Pawn Shop, killing two persons and plundering jewellery worth Rs. 80,000
- 01.02.82 – Attack on Annakottai Police Station and removal of firearms
- 08.02.82 – Shooting at the Army at Pungedutivu
- 20.02.82 – Attack on Chauvachcheri Railway Station and theft of Rs. 35,000
- 29.09.82 – Attempt to bomb a Navy convoy at Karainagar
- 15.10.82 – Killing of Corporal Hewavasam and Tissera at KKS
- Dec. 82 – Attack on Chauvachcheri Police Station, killing two policemen and another

- 04.03.83 – *Attack on Elephant Pass Army Camp*
- 23.04.83 – *Killing of 3 UNP Candidates – organizers*
- 05.05.83 – *Theft of 2 mail bags containing Rs. 20,000 from Jaffna Post Office*
- 18.05.83 – *Killing of Corporal Jayawardene*
- 19.05.83 – *Shooting of a soldier at a Polling Station*
- 31.05.83 – *Attack on Gurunagar Army Camp, killing a soldier*
- 07.06.83 – *Killing of 2 Airmen at Vavuniya*
- 29.06.83 – *Burning of buses in Trincomalee*
- 06.07.83 – *Theft of rock blasting equipment from KKS Cement Factory*
- July 1983 – *Burning of “Yaldevi” Train at Kondavil Station and plunder of Petrol Station*
- 09.07.83 – *Damaging Chettikulam Railway Station*
- 09.07.83 – *Burning a bus at Vavuniya.*
- 15.07.83 – *3 Sub-Post Offices at Vaddukkodai, etc. attacked and robbed*
- 17.07.83 – *Theft of Rs. 45,000 from Mankulam Petrol Station*

The terrorists enjoying as they do the initiative often select the time, place and occasion for any attack directed at the Government. They spare no pains to parade their spite in doing so. Their latest tactical gain has been to inveigle people in the South to attack and kill innocent estate workers of Indian origin. However neither banditry nor gangsterism can wear the guise of offended innocence for long.

The terrorist must accept distinct, if indirect responsibility for the holocaust of July 1983. It is some measure of their mentality that they shrink away into the jungles and do not come to the aid of their kinsmen in their hour of torment.

Their militant methods have cost scores of lives and millions of rupees. It almost seems that their role is to block any settlement of the Island's major problems than to assist in their solution, and the perpetuation of disputes than in their settlement. The movement's very existence as a favoured ally of the TULF puts every Tamil offer or posture of peace in doubt, under suspicion.

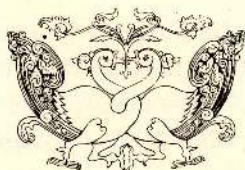
The Tamils can hardly claim to be logical when they support, sympathise or condone Tamil terrorists and protest at Sinhala excesses in any outburst of communal violence.

Terrorism after all is hooliganism, violence in public affairs. Hooliganism, it may be wise to remember deserves to be condemned not merely on the basis of its scale and intensity but intrinsically by reason of its very nature and substance. Hatred it has been wisely stated does not cease by hatred. Still less sham or savagery on either side, it might be added with equal truth. The sincerity, the crusading spirit and dedication of sections of the Tamil youth including perhaps some of the Tigers themselves sometimes merits the admiration of many who totally and unequivocally reject their methods. The terrorists are at least guilty of less duplicity than some of the voodoo figures who may be manipulating their daring and their hopes. But ethnic nationalism, it has been urged by some of the best writers of our day is one of the worst curses of the post war age. It panders to cheap vanities and invokes violence to fuel its adventurism.

The youth of Jaffna, terrorists and less agitated youngsters alike, need to be reminded that their own forefathers threw in their lot with the rest of the country, that the youth of today are being repeatedly invited by the government of the day to play their proper role in the common development of the land.

Their campaign today has been compared with the attempt by the Ibos of Nigeria to establish their own state. But futility

of the bloodshed and misery that overcame the chauvinism of the demand of Biafra ought not to be lost on our own separatists and secessionists in the North of Sri Lanka. The appeal to them to lay down arms and take their place alongside the other communities has been repeated again and again even in the face of the worst excesses. The larger international body will doubtless judge their cause in the wider contexts of history as time sets events in a clearer perspective.



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