

“STATE TERRORISM” IN JAFFNA



V. YOGESWARAN
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
For JAFFNA



Dear

I address this letter to you as one Parliamentarian to another.

You have been invited by the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to participate in the celebrations to mark fifty years of Universal Franchise in Sri Lanka.

Many of you may be aware of the tragic and sordid events that took place in Jaffna from the 31st May till about the 8th June, in the wake of, during and after the Development Council Elections when the Tamil Nation was forced to exercise its franchise in the midst of absolute terror and violence let loose on them by the strong arm of the State, the Police and the armed forces.

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I, the duly elected representative in Parliament of the people of the electoral district of Jaffna was personally a victim of this State of violence and terror and wish to bring to your notice the disastrous manner in which I was

victimised, lest this goes unnoticed by, or is deliberately hidden from, those who should be most concerned. Though what I suffered is infinitesimally small compared to what the Tamil Nation and the City of Jaffna suffered, my party leaders will be writing to you about the other events.

I quote below, extracts from my speech in Parliament made on the 9th of June, 1981 in which I have set down all that happened to me on the fateful night of 31st May, 1981.

“Mr. Deputy Speaker, from 1977 onwards I have participated in a number of debates on the Floor of this House. Today my voice is my own but my clothes are all borrowed. The verti I am wearing is a gift from the Member for Trincomalee, the national banian is borrowed, the banian I am wearing under is my father's. So, as I told you at the outset, only my voice is my own.

I have no worldly possessions of my own except my heart which is beating within me. It is working quite well, quite firmly. And I am more than ever

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I quote below extracts from my speech in Parliament made on the 9th of June, 1981 in which I have set down all that happened to me on the fateful night of 31st May, 1981.

"Mr. Deputy Speaker, from 1957 onwards I have participated in a number of debates on the floor of this House. Today my voice is my own but my clothes are all borrowed. The vest I am wearing is a gift from the Member for Trincomalee, the national banner is borrowed, the banner I am wearing under is my father's. So, as I told you at the outset, only my voice is my own.

I have no worldly possessions of my own except my heart which is beating within me. It is working quite well, quite firmly. And I am more than ever

convinced, more than ever determined, more than ever resolved to free my people from this tyrannical rule. One arm of the Government has let loose on an unarmed people, violence unparalleled in any civilized country during peace time.

As I told you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the fateful night of the 31st of May, 1981 never expected to survive. I never expected my poor wife to survive. Standing here today I sometimes wonder whether I am taking part in my own obituary reference. I force myself to say "No I am addressing this House on a very important debate".

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition has described graphically the events that took place in Jaffna during this period. I will only tell you about the dastardly attack on me and my house. This must be a unique instance of a parliamentary representative living in his own electorate and amongst his people, living amongst the people whom he loved and perhaps loved by them in return, having had to hide, to hide from house to house. From whom? The custodians of law and order!

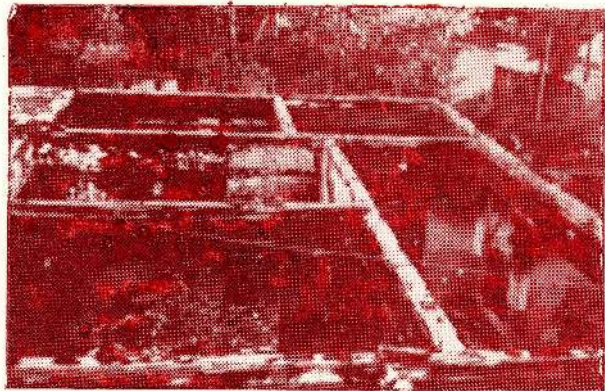
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As I told you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the fateful night of the 31st of May, 1931, never expected to survive, I never expected my poor wife to survive. Standing here today I sometimes wonder whether I am taking part in my own ordinary reference. I force myself to say, "No I am addressing this House on a very important debate."

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition has described graphically the events that took place in India during this period. I will only tell you about the daily attack on me and my house. This must be a unique instance of a parliamentary representative living in his own electorate and amongst his people, living amongst the people whom he loved and perhaps loved by them in return, having had to hide, to hide from house to house. From whom? The custodians of law and order!

I was telling this House about the incidents of the 31st of May, 1981. I had gone to 3 or 4 meetings, the last meeting at a place called Tellipallai, in support of TULF candidates, and I was returning home. I went to one of the meetings in the Jaffna Electorate, and the meeting was over by quarter to nine. I questioned one or two persons standing there about the meeting. They told me that the police had come and disturbed the meeting. Then I came home and wanted to attend another meeting. My wife told me that there had been some trouble and asked me not to go as most likely the other meeting too could have been abandoned by that time.

At that time I could see the flicker of flames from the bazaar area from my house. Immediately my wife told me "I think they will attack our house". Of course, being a parliamentarian, I thought they may come and shout but would not enter the house as I was a Member of Parliament. I tried to contact the District Minister for Jaffna. He was not at his residence in Jaffna. I telephoned his Co-ordinating Secretary and told him "The Police are burning some



**Top view of my house -
Completely Burnt by the Police**



Another view of my House



parts of the town" - (at this time there was laughter from the government side) - Mr. Deputy Speaker, while they are laughing the whole world is laughing at them You have burnt part of a great city and you exhibit nothing but your derisive laughter. Those who read this Hanzard will look down upon you Do not do that. Do not laugh. This is a serious matter.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, then I tried to contact the Government Agent of Jaffna but I could not get him Then I booked a few trunk calls. One to the Deputy Minister of Defence with whom I had talked over this matter even earlier; by another call I wanted to talk to the Hon. Prime Minister and by another call to Trincomalee where my Leader was and I was waiting for these calls.

Close to my house there is a fairly important junction - the Point Pedro - Hospital Road Junction. From the junction I could hear loud noises. My wife told me that they would definitely attack our house. I said "No, they might shout and go away. Let me get through to the Hon. Prime Minister and the

Deputy Minister of Defence and tell them what is happening". She was adamant that we should go. I opened my office room window. Through the office window I could see my front gate. I saw 50 to 100 people some in khaki uniform, some in white banians and khaki shorts, some in sarongs, some armed with rods, some with swords and some with rifles, standing near the gate. I really could not comprehend what the situation was. They tried to open the gate forcibly. The gate was locked at that time. Those people were terribly intoxicated. Before they came to my house they had looted foreign liquor shops and consumed "White Horse" whisky and "Hennessy" brandy. They could not open the gate. They pushed the gate. It did not open. I saw an officer shoot at the lock. Then I told my wife that it was not safe to wait there any more. and we both ran. We jumped over two or three walls and got to safety. Then they opened the gate. They poured something on all the doors and set fire to them. I climbed over the wall and escaped. My wife also climbed over the wall. After that I missed her.

Forty five minutes after I had hidden in my neighbour's house I scaled the walls and wanted to look where my wife was. There was one police officer in banian and khaki shorts. He got hold of me by the hand, but as he was intoxicated - I told you earlier that most of them were intoxicated - I was able to wrench myself away and again scale over the wall and escape. Till about 3 or 4 o'clock nobody knew where my wife was. Then we went and searched in the neighbourhood and found her.

In my premises the jeep was securely parked in the garage, and the garage was locked. They pushed the jeep out of the garage, hammered the jeep with iron rods, pushed it on to the road, poured petrol on it and set it on fire. The jeep was reduced to cinders. There was a Peugeot 404 car which a friend of mine had parked there. They set fire to that car too. I presume they must have looted some jewellery, but all the jewellery was burnt or missing; I have not seen a single item yet. The typewriters and all the office equipment I had were completely burnt. I am an attorney - at - law and a notary public. All the

deeds, protocols and originals of hundreds of deeds were also burnt. About 12 or 13 young boys had given me their passports to alter them from "Middle East" to 'All Countries'. I told them that I would attend to it when I go to Colombo on the 8th or 9th to attend Parliament. All these passports were burnt. Really, my wife was left with the gown she was wearing and I was left with the yellow sarong I was wearing at that time.

That morning I went to my father's house. He is a doctor. He lives about 300 yards away from my house. My father and mother live there. I have had to live incognito in my own electorate and among my own people. I went and stayed elsewhere. On the 1st of June 1981 at 5.00 p. m. some army men had gone to my father's house and wanted to know where I was. He had told them "I do not know where he is. You have to give me one or two days' time. I can contact him." They said "No need. If we want we will come tomorrow morning." Again at 2.00 a. m. on 2nd of June, 1981 about 7 or 8 Police officers had come and scaled the walls of my father's house. Both my father and mother are old.



My Jeep completely burnt

These policemen had scaled the walls, banged at the door and shouted "Open up; we are police officers." They opened the door and the policemen asked, "Where is your son?". They had said, "We do not know where he is. He is staying with some of his friend." Then they asked "Can we search the house?" They searched every room and under every bed on the pretext, they had come to offer protection. What did they want? They were searching under the beds. They wanted to give protection, not at my house, but at my father's house. They harassed these poor people. I feel sorry that I entered politics and gave room for my parents to be harassed at this age. But there are certain duties and rights that we have. We also have to do our duty by our people.

So Sir, this whole question of offering protection is all an eye-wash. As I told you earlier, it was really a miracle that I escaped.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is another small matter which I want to refer to since the Hon. Minister of State is here. During this period my father-in-law

died of a heart attack. This incident also contributed to his heart attack. The newspapers were not published during these days. My father-in-law's relatives wanted to make a radio announcement about his death through the SLBC. In that announcement they had said “So-and-so father of so-and-so and father-in-law of V. Yogeswaran, Member of Parliament for Jaffna”. But what did the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation do? They cut the words “Member of Parliament for Jaffna”. The people are electing a Member of Parliament for Jaffna, but the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation deletes the words “Member of Parliament for Jaffna,” even after full payment is made for such announcement.

So Sir, one arm of this Government had unleashed terror on unarmed, innocent people - violence, unprecedented terror.

I belong to the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which obtained a mandate in the last General Elections of 1977 from the Tamil speaking people to struggle for the restoration and reconstitution of the free sovereign, secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam. It is most unfortunate that the government of Sri

Lanka without paying heed to the clear intention of the Tamil speaking people expressed through their right of franchise, should have chosen to suppress their aspiration by planned acts of terror and violence unleashed on the Tamil speaking people at regular intervals. The incidents that I have referred to in my speech are the latest and, as the available evidence indicates, were a part of a planned strategy by an influential section of the ruling party to rig the District Development Council election in the Jaffna District and frustrate the very aim of universal franchise.

Sri Lanka like South Africa has disfranchised a part of its population namely the Hill Country Tamils totalling about a million. It is also harshly punishing with terror and violence the Tamil speaking people who have voiced their desire by their franchise to reconstruct and restore their State of Tamil Eelam.

In this context I request you to consider what Parliamentarians like you and I can do to realise the real aims of Universal Franchise.

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I trust I would have the opportunity to meet you and discuss matters of common interest.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

C. P., J.

