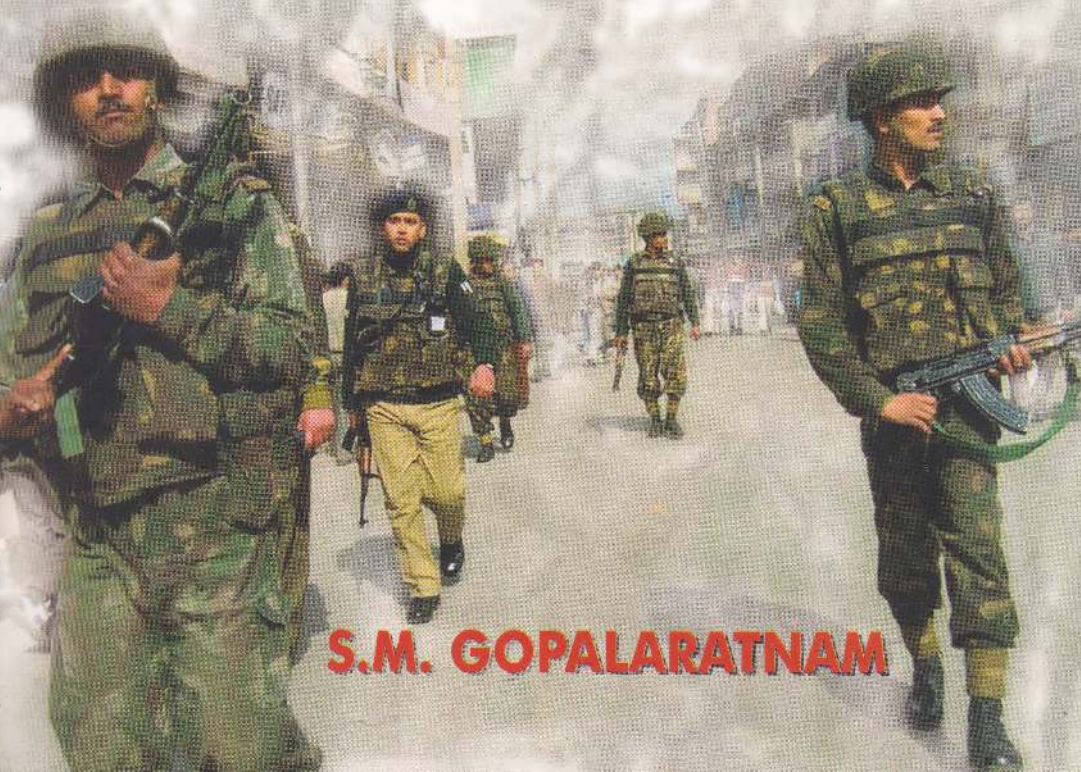


IPKF in Eelam



S.M. GOPALARATNAM

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Preface

I.P.K.F. and its activities in Sri Lankan ethnic conflict a new history.

Lt. Col. Tipinder Singh, Major General Harkirath Singh and Major Gen. Sardesh Pandey who took active part in the I.P.K.F activities have written books based on their experience of IPKF activities and have published them.

The most responsible personality for the IPKF activities in this country Mr. J.N. Dixit, the then High Commissioner for India in Sri Lanka has also written a book on ethnic issue in Sri Lanka and the activities of IPKF.

Besides, Indian Journalists also have written articles on this subject and some of them have been published. All these have been published in English and circulated at International level and read by thousands of people. Yet the readers could not have had an opportunity to know the true and exact details of IPKF activities perhaps they could have understood the justification of IPKF presence in this soil.

MR. J.R. Jeyawardena, the then President of Sri Lanka and Mr. Rajivgandhi, the then Prime Minister of India Signed a pact for the settlement of ethnic problem in Sri Lanka. Mr. J. R. Jeyawardena was obstinate in implementing the sections of the pact favourable for him. As a result the conflict arose between the L.T.T.E and the Indian Army, which continued the activities of Sri Lankan Army i.e. the eradication of L.T.T.E.

Indian Army did what even the Sri Lankan Army hesitated to do. It entered the Teaching Hospital of Jaffna and shot down a number of doctors, Nurses, Patients and bystanders. It arrested and detained not only the youngsters but even the old people for trivial reasons or no reasons. I am a journalist who has been arrested and detained for no reason.

I was in the Indian Jail in Jaffna for two months. This book elucidates my experience in the Indian Jail with some others what I saw, heard and felt there.

Immediately after my release, I wrote my experiences in the Indian Jail from my memories because Indian army did not give me any stationary to write them there. "Junior Vikatan" published in hennai in Thamil Nadu published my articles in series for six months from November 1989 to March 1990 and thousands of readers appreciated it.

Though I have written immediately after my release from the prison, my wish to publish it as a book accomplished only after twelve years. My friends wished that English Translation of this book should be published. I too had that idea. I wished that the IPKF and its activities in Eelam should be made known to the whole world. Now after twenty years it's coming out.

My experiences are published in English as "IPKF in Eelam". My sincere thanks are due to my friend SASI Bharathy Sabaretnam, Indulxerax owner Mr. Arutchelvam and Professor K. Sivathamby for his valuable suggestions to publish this book. I wish to convey my sincere thanks to the E-Kwality Graphics (Pvt) Ltd, Printers for the fine designing and printing of this book. My thanks are due to Mr. Srithar singh- Poobalasingam Book Depot - proprietor - who insisted on the publication of English translation of this book.

Thank you my readers

Yours

S.M. Gopalaratnam
(Gopu)

IPKF in Ealam

CHAPTER 1

I was shocked when I heard the news that the soldiers of the IPKF (Indian Peace-Keeping Forces) had destroyed the machinery in the "Eezhamurasu" office by exploding a bomb.

Having decided on what should be the headlines in the papers the next day, we had written it out and given it for composing. An apt title had been given. We had also handed over the other materials to be printed on the first page. The 'dummy' of the lay-out of the pages too, was given. We were satisfied with the confidence that the employees in the printing section would do the work allotted to them correctly and beautifully.

After all this work was over, Asst.- editor Sarvendra and myself were discussing the dark clouds looming over Jaffna, and what the consequences of this would be. During the past two months, the peace of the land had been shattered. What would happen in the future? What would the IPKF do next?

Sarvendra and myself kept asking these questions repeatedly. It was past eleven in the night. Sarvendra's house was far away. Employees in the printing section too, had to travel three or four miles to reach their houses. In the present situation, we were apprehensive as to when and where the Indian soldiers would come, and what they would do.

My house was hardly a quarter of a mile from the office. "All of you finish your work and remain in the office. I am going home", I said to Sarvendra and Maniam (of the printing section). They agreed. As I left, I added, "Read the proofs of the pages carefully. If all goes well, we shall meet tomorrow morning. I descended the stairs and cycled home.

My wife was waiting for me, reflecting on the prevailing political situation in the country. After I had my dinner, I too began to wonder; "What next? What new will I hear at daybreak?" With these thoughts in my mind, I went to sleep.

5 a.m on Saturday 10th October 1987. One after the other, two bombs exploded in Jaffna. At a time when there had been a respite in the shelling for a few months, the sound of these explosions shook the city. I received the news that the "Eezhamurasu" office had been bombed. I rushed there.

Considered as the biggest democratic country in Asia, India had been opposing oppression and voicing its support of human rights, democracy and freedom of the press. New Delhi had sent the IPKF to protect the Tamils in Sri Lanka and establish peace there. But, one section of this IPKF had destroyed the machinery and printing section of the "Eezhamurasu" newspaper office.

The second bomb had blown up the printing machinery of the "Murasoli", situated in the commercial quarter of the city, a little distance away from the "Eezhamurasu" Office.

When I reached the "Eezhamurasu" office, people had gathered in front of the building, and were enquiring about the incident. Some of them tried to enter the printing section where the blast had occurred. Most of the people inside the building and gathered there merely to watch the 'fun'.

The scene of the previous night, when I had taken leave of my colloquy, kept recurring in my mind. What had happened to those who had remained in the office the previous night?

Mayilvaahanam Amirthalingam was the owner of the house adjacent to the "Eezhamurasu" office. He ran a finance company called "Thamizharnidhiyam". It was he who had started the "Eezhamurasu" newspaper. I looked out for him, in vain. Raadheyam, who was responsible for the weekly edition of "Eezhamurasu", was at the entrance of the office trying to restrain the crowd that had gathered there, from entering the premises, and answering their questions. As soon as he sighted me, he came close and said, "The army has taken away Sarvendra and the others who had remained here last night".

"Were they here when the blasts occurred? They have not been injured, I hope?" I asked. "The bomb was planted only after they had been taken away", said Raadheyam, and advised me to go underground for some time.

The worst had happened. What next? I thought, as I returned home.

CHAPTER 2

Wednesday, the 25th of November, 1987. It was not yet six in the morning.

I heard the sound of a vehicle halting at my doorstep.

Though I was in bed in the drawing room, with my eyes closed, I was reflecting as usual on the previous day's incidents and the things to be done hereafter.

Hearing the sound of the vehicle, my wife opened the door, disregarding the fact that it was not yet time for the curfew to be relaxed.

"The Indian army is here ... please get up" she said softly, as she entered my room.

They were expected ... But not so early in the morning. I rose and came out. The young Sikh soldier whom I had seen the previous day, was in the driver's seat. Two other soldiers who had been in the jeep, got down. Two others stood near my door.

As soon as he saw me, Captain Singh who was in the driver's seat, asked in English, "Is there anyone by the name Selvanathan?"

"There's none by that name here", I said. "Ask everyone in the house to come out" ordered Captain Singh.

Both my daughter my wife and my son-in-law came out. Captain Singh got down from his seat. Taking me along, he pointed to a few houses and enquired about their occupants. I told him.

Saying that they had received information that Selvanathan was staying in that street, Captain Singh added, "Let's see", and drove away in the jeep along with the soldiers.

An unknown fear gripped my wife and children. "Go and do your work" I told them, and went to the backyard. Not even a quarter of an hour would have passed.

"They've come back," said my wife.

I came out. The same jeep. The same Captain Singh. By now, he was familiar with my name.

"Mr. Gopalaratnam Vijayanathan is here, it seems where is he?" he asked.

He had come with the right information. Can't conceal anything anymore.

"Vijayanathan is in another place. I'll go and get him," I said.

"Is it far away? why don't we take the jeep?" asked Captain Singh.

"There are girls there. They might get scared. I shall go and get him in a few minutes," I said. He agreed.

The previous day, Vijayanathan had stayed in a house a short distance from mine. Earlier, he had stayed in my house for three or four days. Vijayanathan had worked in the printing section in the "Eezhamurasu" office. He was a Nosey Parker! (I shall tell you more about him later).

I hurried to Vijayanathan's house. He was bathing by the well. I brought him along quickly.

"Do you know Selvanathan?" Captain Singh asked him.

"No" replied Vijayanathan. "You know very well. Get inside the jeep," said Captain Singh and took him away.

My wife murmured. She felt that Vijayanathan had invited trouble by his disobedience in roaming around freely. It was not without truth.

Captain Singh had come straight to my house in search of Vijayanathan because of the information provide by somebody. In future, they might come to fetch me also directly.

Shouldn't waste any more time. I went to the backyard and began to bathe. I wouldn't have drawn even four buckets of water from the well.

Once again my wife came and announced, "Two army men are waiting outside". Her face had blanched as if she had seen a ghost. The children too, were worried.

Consoling them saying, "Don't be frightened. Nothing will happen. Even if they take me, they will leave me soon," I came to the front verandah.

One of the soldiers was a Tamilian. He said in Tamil, "Please dress and come." The other, however, said, "Jaldi, Jaldi" (Quick, quick).

I wore my veshti and shirt hurriedly and came out. A few yards away from my house, past the lane, in Kannaathitti Street, Captain Singh was in a jeep. As soon as I approached the jeep, Captain Singh asked me, "who is this Vijayanathan? what work does he do and where?"

It was surprising that he should ask me this question soon after he had taken Vijayanathan with him.

"He was the machine operator in the 'Eezhamurasu' office" I said. He took out a piece of paper from his pocket.

"Who is Selvaratnam?" he asked.

"He's the General Manager of 'Eezhamurasu'" I said.

(They had come that morning, mistaking Vijayanathan to be Selvanathan).

He then showed me that piece of paper and read out the names.

One after the other, the names Selvaratnam, Basheer Kaakha, Radheyam, Kandaiyah, and Velsamy had been written. But my name was not there.

In the meanwhile, Captain Singh told me that Vijayanathan had confessed that he was a member of the LTTE, and that kumar and Vijayanathan were safe in his custody in his camp.

Captain Singh had gone to the place where Vijayanathan had stayed the previous day, and taken kumar, a youngster who was there. This kumar too had worked in the 'Eezhamurasu' office as a binder. He had married a young girl who had worked as a type-setter (compositor) in the same office. This young girl and another one related to her (she too was a type-setter) were staying in that house. That is why I had gone there and brought Vijayanathan earlier, to avoid the army men from going there. Now, the Indian army had arrested both kumar and Vijayanathan. the latter's name was not in the list which Captain Singh had in his hand.

I could not believe that Vijayanathan had confessed to being an LTTE member. He was not likely to have done this within half an hour of his arrest.

"I only know that Vijayanathan worked as a machine operator in the 'Eezhamurasu' Office. I do not know whether he was in the LTTE or not", I told Captain Singh. "Why did you arrest kumar? His eyesight is not too good" I said.

"Kumar is an associate of Vijayanathan" said Captain Singh, and asked, "What are you doing? And how do you know Vijayanathan?"

Vijayanathan may have blabbered something. The informers too, would not have avoided mentioning my name.

Vijayanathan and Kumar must be released. I could clear some of the doubts only by giving facts about myself. Also, my typical journalist's brain was eager to find out what was happening inside the IPKF's prison.

With this objective, I said, "I'm the editor of 'Eezhamurasu'." Pointing to the names on the paper in his hand, the Captain asked, "Can I meet these?"

"In the present situation, where can we search for them?" I said. "Some of these men have been working in the 'Eezhamurasu' office since its early days. I don't think they are in any way connected with the LTTE".

"Okay; you come with me. It'll be good to have your help" he said and asked me to get into the jeep.

At nine in the morning, the IPKF's jeep took the chief editor of the 'Eezhamurasu', S.M. Gopalaratnam, that is myself.

The jeep reached the Liberation Tigers' Fair Price Shop (which had once been the Udhayan Supermarket) at the Ariyakulam Junction, via Kannaathitti Road, Kasturiyar Road and Stanley Road. At present it was the IPKF's camp. The Captain, myself and four other jawans alighted from the jeep.

Some of the jawans from the camp came forward on seeing me. Captain Singh took us into the glass cabin which had been the Udhayan Shop.

There, on the ground, sat Vijayanathan on one side and kumar on the other. Some jawans stood at the entrance of the room. A few were inside too. As soon as they saw me, Vijayanathan's and Kumar's eyes moistened. Captain Singh who took me to them, asked Vijayanathan, "Do you know Selvaratnam's house?" "No" he replied. "You must tell the truth. Where is Selvaratnam's house?" he asked again.

"His house is in Chandilippa. But I do not know where. I've not gone there" said Vijayanathan. Only a month ago, Vijayanathan had taken my wife and myself to Selvaratnam's house in Chandilippa. We had stayed there overnight and returned the next morning. How would it have sounded, if I had revealed the truth after Vijayanathan said that he did not know anything?

From that cabin Captain Singh took me upstairs. At that time, some of the soldiers standing downstairs, those on the stairs and several of the ones standing upstairs, stared at me suspiciously. Captain Singh who noticed this, said something to them in Hindi. He repeated the name Khushwant Singh. From his manner I could make out that he advised them that I was a journalist like Khushwant Singh and that I should not be treated like the others. (Khushwant Singh was the former Chief Editor of the 'Illustrated weekly of India'). The soldiers who had come with us, and those standing here and there, relaxed their taut faces and went away from us.

There was a telephone on a table upstairs. There were two chairs near it. Captain Singh sat down in one and asked me to take the other. He then said, "There is nothing wrong in the Tamils demanding a separate Tamil Nadu or fighting for it. But if the Tamils wish to succeed in their fight, they should obtain the assistance and support of India. If, instead, they attack the IPKF, how can they hope to win? Indian is like an elephant. If the Tigers, who are a mere mosquito, stand behind an elephant and scratch its back, can India remain quiet? You may have damaged half a dozen tanks and killed a few soldiery. If India wills, it can bind the entire northern province of Sri Lanka with its armoured tanks. Damaging a few tanks is not a loss at all to India." He then stared at the bare ground (which was once a Naga Vihare) and said anxiously, "We've unnecessarily lost a considerable number of soldiers here."

I had heard that it was on that Naga Vihara ground that the Tigers had brought and dumped the bodies of thirty two Sikh Soldiers or jawans a few days back.

Captain Singh then took out the same piece of paper on which some names were written. He asked in surprise why my name had not been included in that list. He enquired about Selvaratnam and Basheer Kaakha in particular.

I needed a smoke. "Don't you smoke?" I asked the Captain.

Pointing to his turban, he said, "Sikhs don't smoke". (Some of the Sikhs Jawans are not like this captain. I shall tell you about them later).

"You need a cigarette" he said and asked the jawans there, "Do you have cigarettes?" None of them had any. A jawan brought some beedies. I took one and returned the rest.

After sometime, Captain Singh came down with me and got into the jeep. I followed him. Four jawans also got in.

The Captain told me that we were going to the Perumal temple area and that I could go home, inform my people not to worry about me and then return.

The jeep halted in Clock tower Street, just before the Perumal temple. I got down from the jeep and went towards my house. Two jawans followed me.

From the jeep Captain Singh ordered, "Don't. There is no need to follow him. He'll go home and return".

On reaching home, I told my wife that Captain Singh had treated me quite well, that she need not worry about me, and that I would return within three days. I then went to the shop nearby, bought a packet of cigarettes and got into the jeep.

The jeep went towards the Jaffna Railway Station. It was now one of the important camps of the IPKF.

Close by, was my friend Arumairatnam's printing house of "Swarnam Publishers". It had also become an IPKF camp. It was from here that the weekly 'Yugasakthi' edited by Arumairatnam, was published. As soon as the IPKF landed in the area, its publication had been stopped. The jeep halted in front of this building.

Captain Singh called one of the jawans there, told him something in Hindi, and asked me to go and wait with him, adding that he would return soon.

The jawan who took me to the first floor of the printing house, drew up a chair, asked me to sit and himself sat on the bed that was spread on the floor.

Some jawans were going here and there. One of them brought me tea. I offered him a cigarette from my pocket. A few of them smoked. A copy of the 'Frontline' magazine carrying Prabhakaran's photograph lay there, a jawan took it and showed me, 'Prabhakaran' I said. Another jawan took the magazine and changed the topic.

Sitting by the window on the first floor, I surveyed the condition of the printing press. Boxes containing the types were stacked along the wall. In a corner above, old newspapers were arranged in order. On the ground were the jawans' beds. In the next room, newspapers, bits of paper and other things were heaped as waste.

Only a couple of days ago, my friend Arumairatnam had come home and discussed with me details of publishing an evening edition, obtaining permission from the IPKF for this and of regaining possession of the printing press. The incident flashed in my mind.

I was reminded of other incidents too. A month ago, in this very press, we had spent a whole day trying to print an issue of the 'Eezhamurasu' newspaper. As the work could not be completed, we worked into the night. Suddenly, it started raining heavily, followed by thunder and lightning. Power supply was cut. Kumar, his wife and another girl, and myself walked home in the rain. On the way, near Usha Nataraja's residence a house was in flames despite the rain. All these scenes flashed in my mind like a movie.

With these reflections, I sat there. It was past noon. A jawan came with a plate of dhal and four or five chappathis and compelled me to eat.

I took just one chappathi and ate it with the dhal. Had I known that this was to be my staple diet for the next two months, I would have eaten a couple of chappathis more.

After a long time, Captain Singh arrived. When I came down, he asked, "Did they take proper care of you? Did they give you something to eat?" He then told me to get into the jeep. As soon as I got in, the jeep started moving. At that time, army jeeps were returning to the station through Hospital Road. Saying something in Hindi, Captain Singh got down. The jawans also got down hurriedly. They asked me to get down from the seat and remain inside the vehicle.

The Indian Army jeeps were returning at great speed to their head quarters at the Railway Station. One of the jeeps was driven by a Sikh officer. Captain Singh saluted him.

Although the jeep was going quite fast, the Sikh officer said, "Don't take him inside the fort". "Yes, Sir" replied the captain. The jawans also saluted the officer. After all the army vehicles had passed, they got into the jeep again.

CHAPTER 3

Captain Singh kept repeating the officer's words, "Don't take him inside the fort"; wondering why the officer said this, he drove the jeep. Passing through Hospital Road and Kasturiar Road, the jeep stopped at the petrol pumping station at the Windsor Theatre junction. That petrol station too, functioned as a branch office of the IPKF.

Asking me to take a chair, Captain Singh kept murmuring the officer's words, "Don't take him inside the fort". He rang up somebody over the phone and spoke to him in Hindi. He then told me, "people belonging to some sections of society have a greater responsibility. Society should respect these people. Teachers, doctors, policemen and pressmen should be respected in society. They have a responsibility. "In a different tone he added, "only because you are a journalist, we are giving you such respect. Had you been a businessman, we would treat you differently".

"The officer whom we met on the way said that you were not to be taken inside the fort. But we HAVE to send you to the fort. You won't have any problem there. Don't be afraid! You will be treated well. Within three hours they will clarify some of their doubts with you and send you back. Sometimes there may be other things to be done along with this enquiry. Then you may have to stay for one more day" said Captain Singh. He added consolingly, "For security reasons, they may blindfold you for some time while being taken to a particular section (of the fort). Don't worry about that".

"You have not had lunch. My jawans will take you home. After you've had your lunch, they will take you to the fort". "Won't you come there?" I asked. "No; but I shall enquire and learn about you later in the day or tomorrow", replied Captain Singh.

"What about Vijayanathan and kumar? When I am being taken for questioning, are they required?" I asked. Captain Singh thought for a while and answered that he would soon set them both free.

Then, he took the jawans and myself to the Udhayan Supermarket camp.

Singh said something in Hindi to the jawans there, and added that Kumar would be released immediately and Vijayanathan within an hour. Kumar's wife Gnaneswari and Vijayanathan's father came and stood there. Asking Gnaneswari to take Kumar home and assuring Vijayanathan's father that he could take his son within an hour, I got into the jeep again.

I must tell you in detail about this Vijayanathan.

Vijayanathan had worked as an assistant operator in the printing section of the 'Eezhamurasu' office. I had not much to do with him. Though he was appointed only to mind the machines, he involved himself in all the other work also. He would poke his nose into everything and act a little smart. If he chanced to get a motor vehicle, he loved to drive it. And he was a daredevil at driving!

A shell which dropped in front of the Jaffna Hindu College Refugee Camp, injured a person and he lay on the road. Nobody came forward to take him to the hospital immediately. It was almost time for curfew to be clamped. How did Vijayanathan take out a van? How did he get the injured man into the van? How did he take him to the Hospital and get him admitted? We never know. In a few seconds Vijayanathan had done all this.

In a place called Kokkuvil Pirambadi, the Indian Army opened fire indiscriminately. The soldiers came in armoured tanks and shot people and ran over them. After they left, it was Vijayanathan along with a brave few, who went to the spot in a van, put the injured in it and took them to the hospital.

There was no apparent connection between Vijayanathan and the Liberation Tigers. But some of the youth and a few elderly men too, made it appear that they were associated with the liberation Tigers. It was easy for Vijayanathan to do this, because some of the important representatives of the Tigers used to come to the 'Eezhamurasu' office. It was known that Selvaratnam was a prominent member of the Liberation Tigers. He was later the General Manager in the 'Eezhamurasu' office. Selvaratnam would not stay in the office for long. If he resolved to do something and it was not implemented, he would get angry. If the work allotted to a person was not carried out satisfactorily, and some one else completed it well, he would receive Selvaratnam's praise.

Vijayanathan understood this too well. After the printing section of the 'Eezhamurasu' had been destroyed on October morning by the IPKF, the question arose as to whether to continue the publication of the paper or not. As there was no communication since the afternoon of October 9th from Basheer Kaakha who was responsible for what appeared in the paper, as well as everything connected with it, I left the decision regarding the publication of the paper to the administration. The next day, Selvaratnam came to me and said that the paper must be published. We explained the probable consequences of this action, and began the work. Very few employees had turned up. As far as the editorial section was concerned, Selvaratnam knew that the work would be completed at any cost!

There was no one responsible enough to be entrusted with the work of bringing the paper needed for printing, distributing the printed newspapers and carrying out miscellaneous work that had to be attended to immediately. Those who reported for work, were hesitant to take up the responsibility of going out or doing anything important.

Vijayanathan volunteered to do such work. He undertook the job of going to the houses of the type-setters and bringing them to the office. He functioned as a secretary to Selvaratnam. He burdened himself with all kinds of responsibilities, as if he had been promoted as the Manager.

From October 11th till the 22nd, 'Eezhamurasu' was printed and published from Jaffna itself, but in a different place.

Vijayanathan undertook to bring the employees from their houses and distribute the printed papers.

The Indian Army was closing in on Jaffan city, On October 22nd, Selvaratnam came to me in the evening and said, "It is not safe for you to be here now. Come with me". He added that I should bring my wife along.

The evening, carrying some of the things necessary for the publication of the newspaper, my wife, two young boys and myself traveled in a van driven by Vijayanathan. We spend that night in a house in Chandilippay. The next morning too, passed there itself.

In the evening, the van carrying us and driven by Vijayanathan, followed Selvanathan on his motorbike. We passed Pandatharippu and Maadhakal. On Vijayanathan's advice, we reached Tholpuram and got down at the building which had once been the Village law court. It was 11 p.m. then.

The atmosphere in that place was horrible. A huge, independent bungalow. Neighbouring houses not close enough. Plenty of workshops. Darkness everywhere. As soon as we got up in the morning, my wife told me, "This is a safe place for you. If I am here, you may not be able to go elsewhere, seeking safety. I shall go home. God will protect me".

What she said was true. Hence, when Vijayanathan left in the van to get the papers that had been printed the day before at Jaffna, as well as some other things, I sent my wife with him. On his return, Vijayanathan brought some girls from the Tholpuram and Moolaay areas. (They know typesetting). After my wife left for home from Tholpuram the next morning, we (myself and two other boys who had come with me) began the work of publishing the newspaper. Shortly, Vijayanathan brought all the papers we had printed the previous day, from a house in Thattaa Street Junction. He had also brought with him a young girl called Saroja and her relative Gneswari who stayed with her, and another young girl, Nandini. All these girls had been working right from the beginning, in the printing section of the 'Eezhamurasu'. Only recently, Kumar had married Gneswari. Kumar was employed as a binder in the 'Eezhamurasu' press.

Along with these girls, Kumar had also come and surveyed the place from where the paper was to be published. I had taken my radio with me. We began working, intending the paper to have four pages. Selvaratnam, who had gone to the city, brought back minor bits of news sent by a few reporters. Vijayanathan had been entrusted with the task of providing food to all of us. He would take the van from Tholpuram to Sankaanai twenty to thirty times a day. No one knew on what business he went up and down!

He never failed in the job of bringing the girls (engaged in printing) in the morning and dropping them home in the evening. But he would forget to bring food for us. He had brought a gas cylinder and a gas cooker from some where, he had also brought tea leaves and sugar. Until he brought food for us, we survived merely on the tea and sugar. We published the newspaper from Tholpuram only for a few days. Even during those few days, Vijayanathan did every other work except that of bringing food for us at the right time. He would buy toddy for Hangeul, the machine mechanic a sinhalese. The latter would drink it and go without food. He would not talk much. he couldn't go out anywhere also. It was miserable to see him. One day, it was 4 p.m. but the food had not arrived. My two boys entered the adjacent compound, plucked some of the mangoes from the tree there and started eating them. The girls too had some mangoes.

Looking at the younger boy lying down in hunger, the elder one remarked that henceforth, it would be better to mix the leaves and sugar and eat the mixture to appease our hunger, rather than make tea. This made the young boy burst out laughing inspite of his hunger. The two boys together picked up the wooden planks, small poles and pieces of wood and prepared a make-shift cot for me to lie down. I used the table that was there. That room served as the 'Eezhamurasu' editor's cabin now. At this time one day, 'Eezhanadu' sub-editor Kandaswamy, the Sankaanai reporter Kandaswamy and another Kandaswamy the three in all near Tholpuram came to see me. The house we stayed in, was a little away from the street. There were trees all around. No other houses in the Vicinity. It was quite secluded. The three Kandaswamys who came to see me, were astonished. "How are you staying here? It is scary even during the day. How will it be at night?" they wondered. They were with me for some time, and left saying that they would meet me again. But as long as I was there, they never came.

Food became a major problem for us. Once, we waited the whole day for Vijayanathan to bring us food. He came around 6 p.m. with a parcel, and asked me to eat, saying that he would bring some more food for the boys later. I gave the parcel to the young boys and scolded Vijayanathan. I then drove him out, asking him to bring rice, chicken and other necessary provisions. He promptly returned with all the things I had asked for. Together with the boys, he prepared a good meal. That night we ate heartily, after a long, long time.

The next morning, having bathed as usual, I set out to the Moolaay Pillaiyar and Murugan temple which was a little distance away. Learning that the Ponnaalai Varadarajaperumal Temple was close by, I cycled to the Ponnaalai temple. I returned after darshan and published that day's paper also. In the evening, I received a message from my long-standing friend Peking Maniam, who, coming to know of my publishing the paper secretly from Tholpuram, requested me to visit him, as he wished to meet me but was not well enough to come to my place.

I went to Maniam's house. He was a revolutionary and an important person in the Communist Party. After the party split, he strove to develop the Pro-Chinese Communist party in the north, as long as he could. Now, with a big wound on his leg he could not walk properly. A few years ago, he had organized a rally defying a Government ban, and struck the Assistant Superintendent of Police with a flag-pole. (It's a different matter that he was later beaten back and blue by the police).

Maniam had played a significant role in the protests for entry into the Maavittapuram Kandaswamy Temple. He participated in another protest, and when he was about to be arrested, went underground. It was at that time that he sent word that he wished to meet me. He also sent directions to his place through a trustworthy person. Without letting anybody know, I went to his place. As I expected, he was walking in the backyard of a building. Due to lack of proper food and solitude, he looked worn-out. We discussed the political situation prevailing then. When I left him, I offered to bring him food. On returning home, I told my wife that we should supply food to Maniam for some days. I also told her that his remaining underground too, should not be known to anybody. Every day my wife would prepare good food and pack it. I would take it without anybody's knowledge. This continued as long as Maniam stayed there. It was then that I realized the hardships of remaining in hiding.

Now, when he learnt that I was in hiding in Tholpuram publishing a paper, Maniam wanted to provide food to me. His wife and daughter wished the same. When I went to meet him, he asked me to finish my publishing work and then come and stay with him. His wife said, "Just as you helped him when he went into hiding, he wants to help you now that you are in hiding".

Maniam was a member of the Pro-Chinese Communist Party, while I was publishing a paper controlled by the Tigers. We did not know when the Indian Army would descend on us. And if they caught both of us together, how would it be? what would happen? "We don't mind what happens to us, but you shouldn't be affected" I said.

Though all of them laughed at this, they thought seriously for a moment as to what would happen if both of us were caught by the Indian Army. The next day, I had lunch with them and returned.

The following morning, I had my bath as usual and got ready to go to the Pillaiyar Murugan temple at Moolaay. A little further away, a van going on a small bridge in a street in Moolaay was shot by a helicopter belonging to the Indian Army.

For some time, it appeared as if the place had been struck by thunderbolts. We watched it from our window. The young boys were frightened. The girls who had come to work, were terrified. We learnt later, that two people had died in this shelling.

Power supply was cut off. The machine which we used for printing was also out of order. We had already brought a generator for electricity. From somewhere, Vijayanathan brought a small printing machine. He later informed us that he had brought it from the press belonging to S.K. Thiruchchitrabalam.

The next morning, I went again to peking Maniam alias K.A.Subramaniam's house. The atmosphere in Moolaay since that morning, was terrible, with continuous shelling. I doubted whether we would be able to print the paper that day and whether the girls would come to work at all. None of them came on time. That is why I went to Maniam's house. I had given instructions that Vijayanathan should be informed of my going there, and that I should be told if Vijayanathan succeeded in bringing the girls and there was a possibility of printing and publishing the paper.

As I set foot in Maniam's house, we could hear the thundering noise of the aeroplanes bombing the vicinity. As soon as Maniam's daughter saw me, she caught hold of her father's hand, saying, "Gopu uncle has come; let's all go from here". Her husband, Ravi, stood watching. I too stood without saying anything. Maniam's wife and daughter wanted to go to Ravi's house in Panippulam and were trying to persuade Maniam to come along with them. He was adamant, refusing to leave the house. I landed there just then.

Later, somehow all of us left the place. We discussed present-day politics as we went along. In Panippulam, Maniam took me to a place a little distance away from Ravi's house, to ease our tension. We spent an hour there, drinking. Then we went to Ravi's house, and after lunch, I had a short nap. We received the information that the situation in Moolaay was very bad, and that the Indian troops had landed on the beach and were entering the town. In the evening, Maniam and myself got ready to go to Maniam's house, disregarding the protests of his relatives. Ravi dropped us, went back home, and returned in the night with ldiyappam string hoppers and mutton curry. Both of us had dinner and talked late into the night.

In the morning, just as Maniam was suggesting that we would go to Panippulam, Vijayanathan arrived. He said that he had taken all our things to a house in Sankaannai, that Selvaratnam had made these arrangements, that we could publish the paper from there, and that Selvaratnam had asked him to fetch me. I went with him.

A huge house in a small street in the heart of Sankaannai. The important things in the house had been kept in two rooms there and locked. Chairs and tables lay in the main hall. Vijayanathan had kept the types and type-setting trays in the dining room. The printing machine and generator were in the front part of the house. Vijayanathan and brought the girls also.

The situation was not good. Selvaratnam and Thilakar came. "We shall continue to publish the paper" they said. "Though it may not last long, we shall bring out the paper as long as we can", I told them. We were forced to reduce the number of pages from four to two.

E.R. Thiruchchelvam had come from Jaffna to see me. He had come once, even when we were at Tholpuram. When Thiruchelvam had come, Thilakar had brought some news. It was about the atrocities of the Indian Army. Some of the news was not authentic. He had brought a piece of news about the attack on women near the Perumal temple. Immediately, I asked Thiruchelvam who had come just then. We found that the news was not true. We also realized the unreliability of the reporter who brought the news. In Sankaannai area, a well-known person a well-wisher sold five hundred copies of the newspaper every day. Vijayanathan failed to supply the copies regularly. When he had gone out, that person came

and asked us for the copies. We said that he had not kept back any. He was very angry. He rebuked us strongly and left. When Vijayanathan returned, someone informed him of this. He told Thilakar and Selvaratnam that person had insulted me. They came and expressed their regret over the incident. They talked with me for a long time. finally I explained to them that the matter was not as serious as they imagined it to be.

Reports trickled in, of the entry of the Indian Army into the dust meet through Moolaay. At the same time, there was continuous shelling like thunder from both directions over Sankaanai. I told Selvaratnam about the difficulty we had in Tholpuram, in procuring food because of Vijayanathan's carelessness. Selvaratnam arranged with that Gentleman (I mentioned earlier) to supply food to us. Hence, we had no problem regarding food after we came to Sankaanai. But after the Indian Army entered the town through Moolaay, there were clashes. Food was not only irregular in supply, but not cooked properly also. The rice was not cleaned well and was full of sand; so we could hardly eat it. When we realized that this was the kind of food eaten by those fighting for a cause, we did not complain. One day I went to the market and bought some things, including sweet potatoes, which we steamed and ate.

One of the girls, Saroja, took pity on me and brought me food from her house. The boys and myself shared this. Two other girls and Kumar, also stayed with Saroja. One evening, all of them requested me to come with them. Saroja's parents asked me to come every day and eat with them, as long as we stayed in Sankaanai. I stayed there for two days. On the third day, I had my bath as usual and got ready to go to the temple nearby. I opened the gate and came out. Saroja's mother and her son were going ahead of me to tether the cow. I had just covered a few feet in the lane, when a gun stopped me. I looked up. An Indian soldier stood there. He asked me in Hindi who were there in the house, and ordered me to return and bring them all. I obeyed his instructions, hurriedly taking the three thousand rupees I had (All in 10, 20 and 50 rupee notes) in the fold of my Veshti and came out. Saroja's father and two of his children came with me. The jawan asked us to go along with the others in the street. Some other jawans too, joined in. All of us were going towards the Murugan Pillaiyar temple in Moolaay. At the same time, a number of Indian soldiers came walking from the opposite direction.

An officer who came with them, told us in English not to be frightened, and to go straight to the temple and remain there. In the meanwhile, one of the soldiers tried to hit me on my back with his gun. I managed to avoid him. Saroja, here mother and her brother went off to a temple closer to their house. We did not know this.

More than a hundred people had gathered in the temple. People from the houses close by, had also come there. Men, women and children who had assembled from 6 a.m. had nothing to eat. We could only quench our thirst with water from the temple well. Those who lived very close to the temple, managed to bring some food for their kith and kin. They shared it as best as they could. The rest starved. We couldn't buy even a cup of tea. I had Rs.3000/- with me; but what was the use? I lay beside Saroja's father in that pillared hall, hunger eating up my very intestines. In the afternoon, some of the local big-wigs sat near a pillar and were talking. I observed that they were talking about me also. One of them was Krishnaswamy, who was the personal bodyguard of A. Amirthalingam, former leader of the opposition. I had once gone to gather the details of an important committee meeting of the Alliance held in the Kallaaru house of P. Ganesalingam, who was the MP of the Pattiruppa constituency. This Krishnaswamy had prevented me from going anywhere near the house itself. After the meeting was over, seeing the manner in which Amirthalingam treated me, Krishnaswamy had remained aloof. Now, he did not recognize me, apparently.

Soon, one of them came and sat in front of me. He introduced himself and asked, "May I know your good name, please? Your face is not familiar. That is why I am asking you". "Do refugees need any introduction?" I asked. Saroja's sister intervened at this juncture and said that I had come with them, and was her relative. "Is that so? Okay" he said, and went off to share the information with the others in his group.

Saroja's fther who was lying down in the pillared hall, said, "Had we known that things were going to be like this, we could have brought the string hoppers, Idiyappam which we prepared this morning". His words increased my irritation.

saying that he had a handful of rice, asked him to eat it. It was a godsend. Saro's father said, "Both of us will share it" and taking the large ball of rice in his hand, tried to wake me up (thinking that I was asleep). After we shared the rice, we went to the temple well, drew water from it in the darkness and drank heartily. Even as many of us enquired whether we could leave the next morning. Some left. So we also returned home.

That night we stayed in a small Amman temple close to the house. One whole week passed and we continued to stay in Saro's house.

I lay on a neem wooden cot on the verandah in Saro's house, wondering how to get to Jaffna and what the situation was like at home. That cot was a hundred years old. It was an heirloom. It had a history, said Saro. It would find a place in new history I told her. Now, it has done so.

After we had published the newspaper for a month from our 'hiding' place, we ceased printing on November 10th; for a week we continued to stay in Tholpuram. Then, on 18th November, I took Saro's father's bicycle and returned home to Jaffna, overcoming the Indian Army's checks.

Even as they entered Jaffna, the soldiers of the IPKF had been shooting indiscriminately with their cannons and guns. All whom they set eyes on, appeared to them as 'Tigers'. The soldiers had violated all norms of International warfare. Entering the main General hospital in Jaffna, they shot at patients, killing several of them. Many escaped with serious injuries. Even doctors and dutiful nurses fell a prey to the guns of the Indian soldiers. Ironically, some people who had been injured in the IPKF's shelling were brought to the hospital for treatment. There was a shortage of medicines. No surgeries were undertaken. More than seventy corpses lay heaped in the mortuary.

Right from the forenoon of Deepavali day -- October 21st -- the areas surrounding the Jaffna teaching hospital were subjected to shelling and firing. The casualty ward was itself damaged by the shelling. In the afternoon, seven people were killed when a shell burst in the seventh ward.

Some of the patients and employees of the hospital who had taken refuge in the X-ray department, were also indiscriminately shot at and killed by the Indian army men. Some were lucky to escape by feigning death and lying along with the dead. No one expected that the Indian soldiers would behave so ruthlessly. An employee of the hospital, who lay still along with the corpses, happened to cough. An Indian soldier who heard the sound, threw a bomb and killed several people including the one who coughed.

Dr. Sivapaadasundaram volunteered to save the children who had been trapped in the hospital, and those who had been born there. But the Indian soldiers, though informed that he was a doctor, shot him at point blank range without even a tinge of humanitarianism. The doctor (true to his profession) managed to push away the three nurses who had come with him, thereby saving them from being killed.

The sight of another doctor, Ganesharatnam, lying dead in a pool of blood with his stethoscope round his neck, was heart-rending. The atrocities which included the killing of hundreds of patients, doctors, nurses and the public inside the hospital itself, committed by the so-called Peace-Keeping Forces of the Indian Army, maybe forgotten and forgiven in course of time, but their scars will remain etched in the Tamilians' public memory forever. The sexual assaults of the Indian soldiers too, are innumerable. In some cases, even elderly women were not spared. A young girl who had lost here parent simultaneously in the shelling of the Sri Lankan army, was molested by the Indian army men. Her corpse was found in a well in Jaffna. I learnt of all these horrors on my return to Jaffna.

The shelling by the Indian helicopters reached Tholpuram. But 'Eazhamurasu' continued to be published. My radio helped me to obtain all the news. After my return home, on November 20th, Vijayanathan also came to my house. He said he was going to Colombo and sought permission to be allowed to stay in my house for a few days. How could I refuse him?

I told him not to inform anybody of his stay with me, and not to go gallivanting outside. He did not have an identity card. But he kept wandering around. And he would return only after curfew was imposed at 6 p.m.

He met the former proprietor of 'Eezhamurasu', Mayil Amirthalingam. Vijayanathan informed me that Amirthalingam too had been arrested by the Indian Army, interrogated and attacked during the interrogation. Vijayanathan said that he had met Amirthalingam on the way, and that he had not told the latter about his stay in my house. How could I believe him?

The editor of 'Murasoli' S.Thiruchelvam and its owner Sivaraja, had both been arrested by the Indian army, retained in the Jaffna Fort Army Camp for three days, interrogated and then released. when he received news of Thiruchelvam's release, Vijayanathan said that he was going to see him. I told him not to.

In a short while, Vijayanathan had vanished. On his return, he said he had gone to see Thiruchelvam.

Vijayanathan told me, "Many people had come to see Thiruchelvam. When he saw me, he asked if I worked for 'Eezhamurasu'. when I replied 'Yes', he said that he did not wish to have anything to do with the staff of 'Eezhamurasu', and that I should leave (without any ill-will) immediately."

I must say something briefly about Thiruchelvam here. When I was working as the News Editor of 'Eezhanadu', K.P. Haran who was the managing Editor of 'Eezhanadu', stayed in a house close to the 'Eezhanadu' office. At that time, an Association (I cannot recollect whether it was a welfare or a Youth Association) in Nalloor Mudamaavadi, celebrated its Annual Day. At that time, after I had gone home, a student came to the newspaper office, bringing with him some information about his Association (Articles about the Association, congratulatory messages by eminent personalities, the Secretary's report etc.). That day, E.K. Rajagopal was in the editorial section on night duty. The young boy gave all the papers to Rajagopal and asked that they to published in the newspaper. Rajagopal told the young fellow that all the material brought by him could not be printed in its entirety, and if it should be published in full, permission should be obtained from the Managing Editor Mr.Haran, next door.

The young man went to meet Mr.Haran. Returning shortly, he informed the subeditor that Mr.Haran had given permission for all the material (brought by him) to be published on the last page, handed over the same, and left. The next day, extensive coverage had been given to the Annual Day Celebrations of that Association on the last page of the newspaper, making it appear as a kind of supplement.

The next morning, on seeing the paper, I wondered, "What's this? It looks like a supplement not a single advertisement!" And I asked Rajagopal. He said he had merely obeyed Mr. Haran's orders. But when Mr. Haran came to the office, he sent for me and asked, "Why have you allotted more than half a page for a minor celebration?" I repeated what Rajagopal had said. Mr. Haran exclaimed, "Oh God! That boy must be really smart!" And he explained what had happened.

For quite some days after, the editorial staff of 'Eezhanadu' spoke of nothing but the smartness of the young boy, who, by a simple lie had fooled Mr. Haran and the 'Eezhanadu' newspaper, and succeeded in having his way.

Later, Mr. Haran selected that very boy as one of his reporters. He was none other than Thiruchelvam.

Thiruchelvam began his career as a reporter for 'Eezhanadu'. He then served 'Dinakaran'. From there he joined a society connected with the Family Planning Department Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation. After some time, he returned to Jaffna and launched 'Eezhamurasu' along with Mayil Amirthalingam and was its editor. Later, he started the 'Murasoli' together with Sivaraja. He was its editor; but after losing his son, he went abroad.

Wherever he went, Thiruchelvam was sure to make a mark. He was a good orator too!

It was after Thiruchelvam left with the editorial staff, that I took over as editor of 'Eezhamurasu', and continued its publication. I went to jail also.

Curfew had just come into effect on the evening of the 24th Vijayanathan, our neighbour's son and two others were standing and talking in front of my house.

I had told him never to stand talking in a group in front of the house or leave the cycle outside the door. Vijayanathan would not listen to my words. That evening, an army jeep which went through Navalar Street, spotted the group of people standing in front of my house. Immediately, the men in the jeep reversed the vehicle and came to my house. Captain Singh who was in the driver's seat, asked them why they were standing in a group, and also enquired about each one of them. I informed the captain that Vijayanathan was trying to sell his cycle to our neighbour's son. Captain Singh then asked about the occupants of my house and ordered them to come out. After I had introduced my daughters and son-in-law, the jeep left.

This is how Vijayanathan was instrumental in bringing the Indian armymen to my house.

As far as Captain Singh was concerned, though he threatened people, he did not cause them much harm. I could see that the young captain was humanitarian in his approach. A true Sikh indeed!

CHAPTER 4

Having informed Vijayanathan's father that he would be released within an hour of Kumar's release from the Army Camp in the Udhayan Departmental Store at the Aryakulam Junction, I got into the jeep and was taken home by the three jawans who were Captain Singh's assistants.

On my arrival, I found the house locked. I went to my friend Selvaratnam's house opposite mine. His daughter Ranji informed me that my wife had taken lunch for Baba, and that her father had taken her on his bicycle. Baba was my elder daughter.

At a time when the shelling and bomb blasts were rocking Jaffna city, my elder daughter's family and my younger daughter had taken refuge in the Jaffna Hindu College refugee camp. When my younger daughter's mother-in-law Mrs. Manickavasagar, learnt of this, she came to the camp with her car, and took them all safely to Chavakacheri. After staying there for a month, they had returned home only on 23rd November. On Wednesday the 25th November, they had planned to go to their house near Naachimaarkoil. After the Indian army took me away in its jeep on the morning of Wednesday the 25th, the children too left for their home. As it would be difficult to cook in their home immediately on arrival, my wife had prepared lunch in my house and taken it for them.

As I had been taken away by the army men, my wife took all the food which she had prepared, to my daughters' house and returned home empty-handed. She was deeply distressed that though I had come for lunch, there was nothing she could offer me. His distress soon turned into a resolve, that until I was properly released from jail, she would neither cook nor eat rice.

My wife returned even as I was having the lunch served by Ranji. Assuring my wife that there was nothing to worry, that I was being treated with respect and courtesy, and that I would be released within three hours or at worst by the next day, I got into the jeep again.

The jeep took me to the Jaffna Fort. Past the front gate of the Fort, the Jawans parked the jeep along the kerb, got down and asked me not to worry. I offered them cigarettes from my pocket. Two of them took one each and lighted it. I too lighted one. They asked where Ravana's fort was, and details about it. I answered them.

One of the three Jawans went into the Fort and returned with a piece of cloth in his hand. "We will have to blindfold you for some security reasons. Please do not take it amiss", they told me.

They asked me to get down from the jeep. My eyes were blindfolded. Two Jawans held me on both sides and took me along. I heard the noise of a generator on the way. After some distance I heard a few men speaking in Hindi.

Those who escorted me asked me to sit down. I obeyed. Someone asked me my name in English. He asked me my address.

I think he wrote it down. A question was also asked as to where I was arrested. I was asked whether I was beaten or ill-treated since my arrest. I said, "No; I have been treated quite kindly". They asked me to get up. The voices of those who escorted me could not be heard now.

Once again, two people held my shoulders and took me with them. A curved path; full of stones. Then I could feel a cement floor. The sound of a door being opened. One of the hands that had brought me, pushed me a little violently. Again the sound of a door being closed. Orders were given in Hindi and English for the blind to be removed from my eyes. As soon as the cloth was removed, a request was made for it to be handed over, and then, with a stare all of them left.

The moment my eyes were uncovered, I was shocked. I know that there was a prison inside the Fort. But it was only then that I saw that a prison was like!

CHAPTER 5

Longingly, holding the bars of the prison door, I turned and looked inside. On a dirty thatched mat spread on the ground, two men sat quietly. They too were worried. I almost wept. I stood by the door for some time.

"Please do not worry sir; what can we do? Come and sit down here" said both the men.

Recovering slowly from my shock, I went and sat beside them. I was a little hesitant that my white veshti would be spoilt. "There's no other alternative. Sit down" said the two men.

"Why have they arrested you?" asked one of them. I said that I was the editor of the 'Eezhamurasu' newspaper.

"Why have you come here?" I asked them. "We had brought things in a lorry, but we didn't have a pass, and we came during curfew time. So they arrested us and brought us here" they replied.

One of them was a tobacco merchant from Velanai. His name too was Selvaratnam. The other was the lorry driver, Vinasithambi, who belonged to Omandai.

I heard sobs from the next room. Who was crying? It was Murugamurthi, owner of the 'Diamond House' a Jewellery shop. Two days ago they had brought him, informed the tobacco merchant.

I had learnt the previous day that the Indian Army had arrested Murugamurthi, owner of 'The Diamond House, one of the most popular Jewelleries in Jaffna. I didn't know he too would be here. Two others were imprisoned in the cell on the other side.

All three of us discussed our situation. The tobacco merchant worried about the thirty thousand rupees which he had in his pocket.

They asked me where I was arrested and whether my wife and children knew about my arrest, I told them that not only my family but almost everyone in Jaffna knew, because from morning till noon I was taken in the army jeep through all the main roads in the city.

They were worried that their wives and children did not know about their arrest and they would be searching for them. While one of them said that his wife would starve, the other said that his wife and children would not eat unless he ate first.

Vinasithambi asked me, "Sir, do you have a cigarette in your pocket?" I looked into my pocket. There was just one remaining. Had I known beforehand that they would imprison me, I would not have offered the Jawans my cigarettes. "Keep that one cigarette safe. After meals, all three of us shall share the smoke" advised Selvaratnam.

In the evening a Jawan came. He knocked on the door and said, "khaanaa". (Khaanaa means food). There were a few plates in a corner of that room. The two men took one each and offered me one. I took it. Not an aluminium plate. It was heavy. It had a dirty colour. One wouldn't feel like eating from it. The Jawan opened the door. Rice was served. A mixture of dal and water was poured on the rice.

This was dinner. We shouldn't think of any taste such as salt, tamarind or chilli. Was there such a thing as coconut milk? We should eat only to appease our hunger that is, eat something to keep body and soul together.

After eating, we went to the well escorted by the Jawan, washed the plate and drank water from the same plate.

The well water too, was hard. I usually drank warm water or water that was boiled and cooled. Could I think of this in the prison?

This was my experience on the first day in prison. If we wanted to ease ourselves, we had to obtain the jawans permission, finish our work and return to the cell.

The door would be opened only the next day. In case we wished to answer nature's call during the night, we had to depend on the jawans generosity. Otherwise, we would have to spend the night in unease.

CHAPTER 6

The next day, the prison door was opened. We were ordered to finish our ablutions and return. A Jawan would stand guard with a gun. There was neither toothpaste nor toothpowder for cleaning our teeth. Couldn't spend much time also near the well.

We knew that the previous night, two or three boys had been brought and imprisoned in the room on our right, and beaten at the entrance to the cell. Those boys too, had come to the well in the morning.

The diamond House, Murugamurthy, came and spoke to me during dinner time the previous night. He said that he did not know why he had been brought and detained here. He too had to eat in the same kind of plate as mine. The next day, I saw Murugamurthy again at the well. He told me, "If you are set free first, please help me to secure my release; if I am released first, I shall do my best to see that you are set free".

He also said. "I am asked how much money I have given the Liberation Tigers. That is why I have been kept here".

It was said that Mrurugamurthy had been interrogated the very day he had been brought to the prison. But he said that on the first day, he had not been officially interrogated, but only a few questions had been asked. Whether at the well or on the verandah outside the cell, wherever Murugamurthy saw a soldiers or an officer, he would explain his plight, pat them on their cheeks, shed some tears and try to win their sympathy. While in prison, he sent letters to the higher officials, and succeeded in going to his shop twice, having his bath and changing his dress. He believed that one could obtain such concessions by spending a little money. He did obtain some concessions in prison. Some of the armymen had been gladdened at his expense. Murugamurthy belonged to Velvettithurai. A millionaire, it must be said. He would not even have dreamt of such a prison life. This was the result of his being a wealthy man. He didn't derive any peace of mind from any of the various political factions.

The next morning in the Fort prison, the three of us were again taken to the well and brought back to our cell after we had had a wash. For breakfast, puris were served. Each one had to take two puris in our hand and tea in our plates. After eating, the prison door would be locked.

The previous night, some youths were brought and locked in. The next morning and noon too, some more were brought in.

We could hear cries of "Sir, sir, don't beat us sir". On peeping out from our cell, we would see men blindfolded and hands tied behind their backs, being beaten by the jawans and dragged in. Then they would be asked to sit. They would be asked to give their names and addresses.

At that time, the jawans would beat them on their backs and heads. After that their eyes would be uncovered and their hands freed. Sometimes they would be pushed into their cells, with their eyes blindfolded and their hands tied. Their eyes and hands would be freed only after several hours. If there was any altercation between two gangs the one would vow saying, "I'll make you count nine rods". The cell in which I was confined, was no:13. I counted the rods in the door. There were only five. The first day we were three in number. The next afternoon the number had increased to five. Two prisoners from cell no:12 were brought to our cell. The number of prisoners in cells 12 and 13 was much higher.

In cell no:14, only the diamond House Murugamurthy was there. As the number of prisoners kept increasing, on the third evening we were shifted to the cells near the well. There were ten rooms in all. Hardened criminals had been confined in this section. Each cell had toilet facilities and provision had been made at the bottom of the door for supplying food and water to the prisoners. Every morning the criminals were allowed to leave their cells to wash themselves and the vessels used for easing. Once this was over, they would be locked up and the door would be opened only the next morning.

We were now in the same position as the hardened criminals. Armed jawans stood guard over us, day and night.

CHAPTER 7

Day and night, suspects were brought in and dumped. Many of them had wounds on their backs, hands and legs.

In each cell, measuring 8'x10', ten to twenty prisoners were confined. In my cell, the number had gone up to seventeen. I found a place near the door, to sleep. At night, I couldn't even stretch my legs, for they would strike against two heads. There was no light. A 'responsible' sergeant (with three stripes) would count us to check whether we were safe inside. There were occasions when prisoners suffered unable even to turn on their sides in their sleep, and so indulged in squabbles.

On the fourth day of my confinement, that is, 28th November, I had tummyache from the morning. By noon, I was forced to go to the toilet several times. Every time I had to request the jawan to open the door to the toilet. After a few visits, I noticed blood in the stools.

At noon, I informed the sergeant-in-charge about my condition. In the evening too, I told the sergeant as well as the two jawans guarding us. They said that the doctor had been informed and that he would come. At 8 p.m. the sergeant came and called me. It was a Saturday. We got the news that mutton curry was being prepared for dinner. Dinner which was normally served in the evening, was delayed that day. When the sergeant informed that the doctor had come, the cell door was opened. I came out. A stout man in army uniform stood beside the sergeant. He was introduced to me as the doctor. The latter enquired as to what my complaint was. I explained in detail. He gave me several strips of four or five different medicines for tummyache, to be taken once every six hours. Like everyone else, he asked me, "Are you an LTTE man?" I said I was a journalist.

There was a strong odour of arrack around the sergeant and the doctor. I already had a stomach upset. The doctor had said that I should not starve that night, but take chappathi or rice. Having suffered all day, I did not want to take any risk, and hence, to avoid further trouble during the night, I did not eat anything. The sergeant who did not generally encourage camaraderie, informed me that he had made arrangements for tea to be given to me. I noticed a tea-kettle being brought. But what I received, was only tea-dregs!

My cell-mates who had become sick of eating dhal and water for the past four days, ate mutton curry to their hearts' content that night, and wondered how those guys had learnt to cook mutton so well!

In the Fort prison, the sergeant mentioned above, was responsible for the boarding arrangements of the Indian army and the prisoners as well as for their safety. He had a Corporal to assist him. I did not know this sergeant's name. I have heard him being called Rampal. I do not know the Corporal's name. The assistant editor of 'Eezhamurasu', Mr. Sarvendra and eleven other employees, who had been first arrested by the IPKF on 10th October and taken to the Fort prison, had named him Gupta. I learnt this only after I met them in the Kankesanthurai camp. Corporal Gupta belonged to Delhi. A very good man. Those who were arrested and brought in fresh, were greeted with blows and kicks by the other jawans. It was frightening when Gupta too asked, "Are you an LTTE?" with a stern face, and raised his hand. But the next moment, he would smile, stroke their backs and leave. I didn't know why he was particularly sympathetic towards me. He would allow me to take a walk in the evenings, and relax the rules for me when he was around.

On Saturday, when he was under the influence of liquor, sergeant Rampal went to cell no:2, and threatened each one of the prisoners by asking, "Are you an LTTE?" He beat some of them on their hands. He came to our cell also, and left after a similar enquiry.

The next day, Sunday, the sergeant was in a fury. With an aluminium cane in his hand, he entered cell no:2, and asked each one of the men if they were LTTE. To those who said 'No', he asked, "Are you a helper?" (to the LTTE). He divided them into two groups - one which said 'Yes' and the other which said 'No'. Once again he asked them. Whether they said 'Yes' or 'No', they were sure to be beaten with the aluminium cane. When this was going on, there were five of us in cell no:3 - the merchant Selvaratnam, driver Vinasithambi, carpenter Balachandran, his nephew Gunabalasingam and myself. I told them, "All of you close your eyes and pretend to be asleep. Whatever he asks, don't open your mouth", and I lay down. The sergeant came to our door, beamed the torchlight on us, and counted EK, Do, Theen, Chaar, Paanch. As usual, he asked, "Are you LTTE?" and when there was no reply, went away. We heaved a sigh of relief.

After some time, he came again to cell no:2. He called a jawan Gambhir, who was on guard, and asked him to open the door. As soon as it was opened, he ordered, "All of you stand up". Once again the same question was asked and once again the sound of beating could be heard.

At this juncture, Corporal Gupta came, gave the sergeant some advice in Hindi and took him away. Soon, we could hear the sergeant bragging and having dinner with someone. Later we heard him snoring. That night we slept in peace.

CHAPTER 8

The next evening, the sergeant was again in a rage. Soon after dinner was served on the verandah and we were locked in the cells, some more fresh prisoners were brought in. Many from cell no:2 were brought to our cell. This group included those who had been beaten the previous day. In the meanwhile, the tobacco merchant Selvaratnam and the driver Vinasitnambi (who had first greeted me in cell no:13) were taken to Palaali.

Cell no:3 was now full. The sergeant came. He was not fluent in English. He would speak a few words in English and then switch over to Hindi. We had to put these two together and guess what was being said. It was not the sergeant alone, but almost all the officers of the IPKF (with the exception of the top-ranking ones) were in the same position. The Jawans, of course, knew only Hindi. We could communicate with them only through sign language.

The sergeant who entered the room saying 'problem' enquired of everyone as usual, and started beating them with the aluminium cane.

Carpenter Balachandran's ear cracked at the top and the blood flowed down on his shirt. The same question was put to his assistant and knephew Gunabalasingam, and when he replied 'No, Sir', he too was beaten up. His hand bled. Thus, all of them were beaten.

Looking at me, the sergeant asked, "You?" As usual I said "Journalist". He ordered me to remain in a corner. He asked two other youths. 'No, Sir' 'I' M TELO' they said, but the beating did not decrease. In the meanwhile, news of the sergeant's attack reached Corporal Gupta through Murli, a barker soldier. Gupta came and tried to dissuade the sergeant. But the latter asked him menacingly, "who are you?" The Corporal pacified his superior in a friendly manner and took him away. Peace reigned for some time. Once again the sergeant entered cell no:2, asked the same question and beat them up. We heard the aluminium cane break. Once again the Corporal came and took the sergeant away.

Balachandran and Gunabalasingam who had not been attacked by the army since their arrest, were beaten and wounded by the sergeant inside the prison cell. He ordered them to go, bathe and wash their clothes. This was done to wash off the blood stains.

News of the attack by the sergeant spread through the army camp. But he locked the door in the middle, preventing the officers from coming to our wing.

A top-ranking officer came, saw us and went away. When another officer came, we told him what had happened. He left, assuring us that action would be taken. It was 1st December. The order transferring Corporal Gupta to another place, was cancelled. We also learnt that the sergeant had been given some punishment.

Somehow, from that day the sergeant ceased coming into our cells with his aluminium cane and indulging in violence.

What I gathered from sergeant Rampal's violent attacks and his talk was that, "the Madras Tamilian and Prabhakaran's Jaffna Tamilian were attacking the Indian Army. And those who said that they were not LTTEs were indeed LTTE". This was his firm belief.

Not only this sergeant but all the Indian army personnel thought, that all the Jaffna youths were Liberation Tigers. Just as the Sinhalese army had taken action against the Tamils considering them as 'Kottiyas' the Indian army regarded the Tamils as Prabhakaran's supporters. And the Indian army took the same action which the Sinhalese army had taken. The "Peace Keeping Force" had become an "Aggressive Force". This was the first reason for the Tamils' disillusionment with the IPKF.

Most of those who were brought to the Fort Army Camp prison, had been subjected to cruelty and torture during their arrest. They were brought in wounded and locked up after being treated for their wounds.

People who had been arrested for flimsy reasons such as going out without passes during 'curfew' time, were locked up without any proper enquiry. Why were they brought in? Why were they locked up? when will they be interrogated? will they ever be released? None could answer these questions. None knew the answers.

The Indian army was convinced that all those confined in the prisons were members of the LTTE. Hence, it became customary for the army men going along the verandah to peep into the cells and make fun of the persons inside. A part of the Fort was occupied by the Sri Lankan army. One evening, one of the IPKF officers brought a Sri Lankan army officer to our cell. It was almost dark. The Sri Lankan army officer looked through the bars in the door and asked, "Has a big Tiger been caught?" The Indian officer replied that only these men had been arrested. His Sri Lankan counterpart suggested, "These fellows should not only be arrested, but also be killed".

Information about the people locked up in the Fort prison was never conveyed to their relatives. Nobody was allowed to see them either. Even if someone came and enquired about them, they got only the standard answer, "There's nobody by that name here".

On 25th November, there were three of us in cell no:13; on the 26th we increased to five in number and then seven. The next day, we were shifted to cell no:3 in the row of cells meant for hardened criminals. Sometimes we were five, sometimes seventeen to eighteen. The number of prisoners kept increasing.

The IPKF in Jaffna which exploded the 'Eezhamurasu' printing press and machinery at 5 a.m. on the morning of 10th October, arrested ten men - including Sarvendra, the boys in charge of folding the newspapers, the distributors and employees of the printing section, who had completed their duties and were sleeping - and took them to the Fort.

Though these employees of the 'Eezhamurasu' were not assaulted by the IPKF, they had to starve during the first two or three days. I learnt this only when I was also imprisoned with them later in the Kankesanthurai prison camp.

Indian democracy, which decided that the only way to prevent the publication of the 'Eezhamurasu' and 'Murasoli' newspapers was to explode their premises, was a novelty to the world!

CHAPTER 9

Before I describe the experiences of the 'Eezhamurasu' employees who were arrested, it is essential that I say something about the prisoners confined in the Fort by the IPKF.

There was Dayaabaran, an eighteen - year - old youth, who had wounds all over his body and couldn't even wear a lungi. He said he belonged to the third sector of Kalliyankaadu.

He was first taken by the LTTE and assaulted allegedly for having helped a 'TELO' with a food packet. Later, he was arrested and assaulted by the Sri Lankan army, allegedly for having helped the LTTE. Now he had fallen into the hands of the IPKF and wounded all over.

Stories were told of how Jeevan alias Jeevaratnam, a youth of Jaffna Arasadi, was assaulted in the Indian Army camp at Muddhirai Sandhai (Nalloor) with his hands tied behind his back, his legs tied and eyes blindfolded; how another youth, Francis Dias Xavier of Koyyathottam, along with other youths who were arrested, were assaulted for several days in the Jaffna Railway Station army camp and other army camps, with their hands and legs tied and eyes blindfolded.

It was rumoured that a youngster was brought to the Fort army camp with a slash on his organ.

Some of the youths brought in with extensive wounds, informed us that they had not only been betrayed by those belonging to the 'Three Stars' and TELO' factions, but brutally assaulted right in the presence of the Indian army men.

Many said that they had been buried neck-deep in sand and tortured and that when they were taken out, they were unable even to walk. All those who had been arrested from various places, tortured and then brought to the Fort prison, appeared to the Indian Jawans there, as members of the LTTE. But the majority of those brought there, had nothing to do with the Tigers. Cooks, those who had pamphlets, those who had stood around where land mines were found, had all been arrested. Even those wearing striped shirts were arrested. Supporters of the TELO, PLOTE, EPRLF, their assistants,

and those who had formerly been associated with these factions and later disengaged themselves, were all taken by the IPKF. The Indian army would not believe them even when they said that they belonged to the TELO and PLOTE.

The Indian army was of the view that the Tigers were trying to shield some of the VIPs. Many of those who had come in wounded, accused the EPRLF men of having betrayed those belonging to the TELO (TELO), PLOTE and ENTLE, and of brutally assaulting them. What was bitterly ironic, was the fact that, several of those who had earlier been arrested by the Sri Lankan army, tortured in various ways and imprisoned in the Poosa Detention camp, had now fallen into the hands of the Indian army, tortured and locked up in prison.

Armed youth who had originally dedicated themselves to the task of rescuing the Tamils from the oppression of the Racist Sri Lankan regime and obtaining their independence, had now disintegrated into several factions, fought with one another, and paved the way for the growth of hostility that was handed down from generation to generation.

The IPKF had been ordered by the Indian Government to seize the arms from the LTTE and to take necessary action against it. It also requested the LTTE to surrender its arms and accept the Indo -Sri Lanka Treaty signed by Jayawardane and Rajiv Gandhi for the welfare of the Sri Lankan Tamils. The heavy contingents of the Indian army brought into Sri Lanka, had absorbed into their fold, members of the TELO, PLOTE and EPRLF which had either been wiped out or deactivated by the LTTE, and under the guise of extermination the LTTE, were doing the same thing which J.R.J's Sri Lankan Sinhalese army had done - destroying the Sri Lankan Tamils - even more effectively.

I also came to learn of some, who having been caught because of the connivance of masked betrayers, tortured by the Indian army, wounded and then imprisoned, vowed to take revenge on those who betrayed them if ever they were freed again. By its actions, the Indian army had only paved the way for the destruction of generations of Sri Lankan Tamils, not for their independence.

One of my co-prisoners in cell no:3 was Krishnaanandasivam, belonging to Aanaikottai. He had earlier been arrested by the Sri Lankan Sinhalese army and tortured. He was imprisoned in the Poosa Army camp for nine months, Now, he was being tortured by the Indian army.

Even four or five days after I was locked up, no interrogation had been conducted. There were no facilities to bathe or change my dress. There was no means by which we could brush our teeth. On my request, one of the army officers bought a tube of Colgate toothpaste for 11 rupees 25 cents, and gave it to me. All of us used it. It was exhausted in four days.

It was on 28th November - Saturday or Sunday, I cannot recollect clearly. Some Jawans who came in the afternoon, opened the door and asked us to come out. We were relieved to think that the enquiry would be over soon. Our hands were tied behind our backs and we were blindfolded. Then we were tied one behind the other by a long rope. We could feel one Jawan holding the rope and leading in front, and another bringing up the rear. We could also hear other Jawans accompanying us, by their voices. We were driven like cattle with shouts of "Hi, Hi, Hi" and a few strokes on some backs. With our eyes blindfolded and unable even to grope with our hands, we proceeded bumping into each other like sheep and cattle. The Indian soldiers renowned for their 'humanitarianism and discipline' shepherded us like animals. As we stumbled along, with our feet striking against stones, the Sinhalese soldiers said something in Sinhalese and laughed; the Indian Jawans too, for their part, said something in Hindi and laughed. In one place, the sound of a generator could be heard. Though we could see the sunlight, we passed an area which was completely dark. At the same time, the unfamiliar voice of some Indian army men could also be heard.

A few of these men asked, "Are you all LTTE?" and beat some of us in the line, on our backs with their canes. Shouts of "Ayyo Amma" could be heard. After some time, we were ordered to go through a narrow passage. I guessed this from the instruction 'Single line'. All other orders were in Hindi. Even as we passed through this narrow passage, we were assaulted. I, who had escaped being beaten all this while, felt that I could no longer do so. I walked murmuring, "Ram, Ram". "Are you an LTTE?" asked a voice. It must have addressed to me. Before I could answer, another voice replied, "No, editor, editor". The hand of the owner of that voice hurriedly dragged me forward. It was Corporal Gupta's Voice. Once again, I repeated, "Ram, Ram".

After we had passed through this passage, we were asked to 'sit down' in a shady place. Even after we sat down, I could hear some of us being beaten on the back and head. Someone came to me; he stroked my head. From my pocket he took out my Identity Card and some change, and then replaced them. He must have raised his hand to strike me. But Corporal Gupta's voice saying, "Old man", "Editor" was heard. I thanked him and the God above, silently.

In the meanwhile, I could guess that some of us had been taken for interrogation. Two of the prisoners near me were taken. After some time, all of us were asked to get up. Then, they took us as before, though we did not know where. Passing through sinuous ways, we were finally asked to halt. Our eyes were uncovered. We were outside our cell!

It appears that the interrogating officer had some other work. He said he would have the interrogation later and sent us back. A few were interrogated. These included the tobacco merchant Selvaratnam and driver Vinasithambi, who had first greeted me on my arrival in the prison. When would the next enquiry be?

In 1971, when the JVP conducted an armed revolt against the Sri Lankan government, many were arrested. Camps were set up. Many were imprisoned. But there were no reports of prisoners being blindfolded or their hands and legs being tied! It was only in the Tamil areas, that the Sri Lankan army began torturing people by blindfolding them and tying their hands and legs. Was this a Mossad brain? Why should the Indian army, famed for its order, discipline, integrity, Indian culture and honour (as claimed by the All India Radio) follow the same methods?

On the morning of 30th November, the tobacco merchant Selvaratnam and driver Vinasithambi were called out from our cell. Some other prisoners were also made to stand on the verandah. They were blindfolded. We were given to understand that they would be taken to Palaali and released. As they got ready for their journey, an elderly sergeant came. Corporal Gupta was also there. The prisoners were asked to give all their valuables to the sergeant. The

CHAPTER 10

1st December, Tuesday night. Dinner was over, and it must have been more than two hours since we had been locked in. Long past nine, our celldoor was opened. A new team of Jawans barged in. They dragged us out and tied our hands behind our backs. Some others blindfolded us. We couldn't understand what was happening. Corporal Gupta came and said 'enquiry'. Some relief!

I requested them not to tie me along with the others and to lead me alone. Accordingly, my hands were tied behind my back in such a way that my fingers could grasp those of the man following me. And, instead of tying a cloth over my eyes, a black mask similar to that used on convicts taken for hanging, was worn on my head.

We were driven to the shouts of "Hi, Hi, Chalo, Chalo", followed by blows on some of the prisoners' backs. Corporal Gupta's voice was no longer heard. We were shepherded over uneven ground. Total darkness sometimes the light from a torch was seen faintly through the black mask. As we stumbled along, eyes covered and hands tied behind, suddenly the question, "Are you an LTTE?" followed by heavy blows on the backs, and screams of "Ayyo Amma" could be heard. As my escort and myself walked with our fingers entwined, my escort received a strong blow on his back. The tip of the cane touched my back too. I chanted "Ram, as usual. Suddenly, someone seized my shoulder saying, "This side". It was Corporal Gupta's voice. Great relief. After some time, somewhere, they said, "Sit down" we sat. Once again I felt Corporal Gupta's hand on my shoulder. Saying, "Stand up" he led me. After we had gone some distance, he said, "wait". Then, "Remove shirt" he instructed. I did so. He took it in his hand. Next, he suddenly removed the mask on my face, and folding my shirt he tied it over my eyes. At this time, sergeant Rampal too came there. His voice and the smell of liquor confirmed his presence. "Why has this fellow come here" my mind asked agitatedly. As Corporal Gupta tried to lead me saying, "come" the sergeant must have offered to take me (in Hindi). After a few steps, the sergeant secretly said, "sit down" and pressed my shoulder. Then, in a mixture of English and Hindi, he whispered in my ear, "No problem, no liquor". I wished he would leave me alone.

At the same time, a little further off, interrogation in the form of questions being asked and answers given, could be heard faintly. The questions and answers were not clear. In the next few minutes, two hands gripped the upper part of my arms. "Chalo" said a voice. I could feel two of them leading me. I felt that I was taken in a meandering way through two doors and along a corridor. When we reached our destination, they pressed my shoulder and said, "Sit down". A chair was placed for me. I sat down slowly. The two hands that had brought me, were taken off. I could see a dim light.

A voice opposite me asked me to sit down. I realised that I was in front of the interrogating officer. The enquiry began.

"What is your name?"

"Gopalaratnam"

"You are that Gopalaratnam, are you? What's your address?"

"Perumal Koviladi; No:21, Sri Venkatesan Street?"

"Is it close to the Perumal temple?"

"Yes, Sir".

"Who is the main deity in the Perumal temple, Sir?"

"Venkatesa Varadaraja Perumal".

"Oh, Oh! Like Tirupathi, is it?"

"Yes, Sir, Here too, the annual utsavam will take place in the month of Purattaasi, just as it is in Tirupathi", I said, and ventured to ask him, "Sir, in the beginning you asked, 'Are you THAT Gopalaratnam? Why did you ask like that?'"

A little hesitantly, the officer replied, "They said that one Mr. Gopalaratnam was here. That is why I asked whether you were THAT Gopalaratnam".

I realized that my presence had been spoken about widely. "Haven't you been to the Perumal temple yet?" I asked again.

"I do want to see it ... The other day too, we came to see the Perumal temple. But at the junction, there was tension as somebody had been shot. So we returned. Who was shot, do you know?"

"A young man belonging to Main Street, they said. It appears that he was brought there and shot. He doesn't belong to Perumal Koviladi".

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"A young man belonging to Main Street, they said. It appears that he was brought there and shot. He doesn't belong to Perumal Koviladi".

"Why was he shot dead?"

"A piece of paper lying by his side mentioned that he had killed and robbed someone. He seems to have prevented somebody from putting up a poster and so was shot, his brother seems to have said".

"Really? who is your 'Eezhamurasu' owner, Sir?

"Now? In reality the Liberation Tigers movement is the owner?"

"Is Selvaratnam not the owner then?"

"He is our General Manager".

"Is Basheer kaakha responsible for the paper?"

"He is responsible for the news and other items which appear in the paper".

"Where is Selvaratnam now?"

"No idea. It's a long time since I saw him".

At this time, a voice on my right asked, "where is Basheer kaakha?"

"Don't know. I've not seen him after the evening of 9th October".

"Where on earth do these fellows go?"

"They never tell us where they go".

The official in front of me asked, "Does Selvaratnam get a salary?"

I replied in the negative.

When the officer said, "Okey, you can go" I was surprised. Was that all? was it for this short enquiry lasting less than five minutes, that we suffered imprisonment for eight long days? With these thoughts, I asked them, "May I go?" "Yes" was the answer. "A request, Please" I said, standing up. "Go ahead" he said.

"I don't know when you'll release me But I'll be greatly obliged if you can get me an hour's permission to go home, bathe and change my dress".

As the officer replied, "Let's see; we'll consider", two hands grasped me and brought me out.

CHAPTER 11

As soon as we came out, the Corporal said, "Come" and led me. After we had walked some distance, he asked me to sit down. There was a little light in this place. I could also feel other men standing around. A little farther off, could be heard another interrogation going on. The upper part of my body which was bare, offered a good feeding ground for mosquitoes. What could I do with my eyes covered and hands tied behind my back?

The Corporal loosened the cloth covering my eyes and that binding my hands. Slowly I would take out one hand, drive away the mosquito and once again insert my hand into the knot. Even at this time, a light attack on the prisoners continued. The Corporal came and said, "No enquiry, come" and raised me. He collected a few others with me and said something in Hindi to a Jawan. That Jawan said, "Chalo" and took us along. As we proceeded quietly without any fuss, I realised that the Jawan leading us was barber Murli. When our eyes were uncovered for the second time, we were in cell no:2 of the prison.

Among those who were taken for interrogation, the five of us were the first ones to return after the enquiry. The rest returned around one that night.

Many of the prisoners guided my hand in the darkness, to feel the marks of the cane blows which they were given while being taken for interrogation. The enquiry was over; Will we be released at least today? will we know the result? As I woke up with these questions, the information provide by a youth that there would be further interrogation, disappointed me.

On Friday, the 4th of December, before five in the morning, jawan Murli opened our door and announced that we should finish our ablutions, and that we would all be taken to Palaali and released there. The previous night, he had conveyed this news indirectly; but we didn't believe him.

At 6 a.m. itself; after we had taken puris and tea, our names were called out. My name was the first in the list. We were made to stand in a line on the verandah. Thirteen in all. Our eyes were once again covered. Our names were called out and re-checked.

At this time, another gentleman called out my name and asked me to come with him. he was the officer who had interrogated the others during the past two days on the verandah. I learnt later that his name was Govindan. I asked him, "Sir, my eyes are covered. How can I come to you?" He said something in Hindi, and jawan Gambhir led me to him.

I answered his questions. Most of them were the same as those asked during the earlier enquiry. One fresh question was, what I had been doing before joining the 'Eezhamurasu' newspaper office.

"Are weapons stored in the 'Eezhamurasu' office?" was another question which he asked.

"No. There are no weapons there. Weapons are not kept there, either I said, He then asked about my salary.

At the end of this enquiry which lasted five or six minutes, the officer told me, "At Palaali too, when the enquiry is conducted, tell the truth just as you've done here".

"Will there be an enquiry at Pallali also?" I asked.

Once again I was made to stand first, on the verandah, and the twelve others behind me. Corporal Gupta said something to the effect that the helicopter would come at 7 o'clock. It was almost time. Some other jawans and sergeant Rampal also came. "Chalo" they said and led us along. I realized from the nature of the path, that we were being taken to the other side of the Fort. First I bumped into a tree. I could here the sound of laughter on the Fort. First I bumped into a tree. I could hear the sound of laughter on one side. A hand caught hold of me and saying "Chalo" pushed me to the other side. After covering some distance, I hit against a wall. I could feel the blood on my lips. I murmured, "Ram" as I advance. Whenever I bumped into something, there was no dearth of laughter.

At one place, we were asked to sit down. I felt with my foot. It seemed to be a stair. We were apparently by the side of a building. What next? The sound of a helicopter was heard. But we stayed where we were. Shortly, the helicopter left. Just behind me was Jayanthan, a young boy from Kadumalai. Behind him was Francis Dias Xavier of Koyyathottam. I made this out from their conversation. Francis would never keep his mouth shut if there was a problem around. He would say something or the other and laugh. Jayanthan would take five minutes to open his mouth. But, once he uttered a word, there was no stopping him! He was a stammerer!

I turned and said that the helicopter must have left. Before Jayanthan could stammeringly begin to say something, someone asked in clear Tamil, "Are you all LTTE?", and came and sat beside Jayanthan. "No" said Francis. Once again, Jayanthan attempted to say something. But before the words could be uttered, the jawan asked, "That old man?" "Pressman, Eezhamurasu" replied Francis. The person who spoke in Tamil appeared to move away. Francis made a comment about that man and everyone laughed aloud. The next second, the sound of a strong blow was heard. Jayanthan slid on to my back. He must have been hit hard. After that I never heard Francis talk or laugh loudly the whole of that day.

After some time, we heard orders of "Stand up" and "Chalo, Chalo". We rose and started walking.

Suddenly, I felt two men lifting me. The next moment I was hurled into space. I fell with a big thud. Fortunately ... my face was not hurt. It must have been a truck or lorry It did not take me long to realize that I had been hurled into it. Slowly I moved and sat on one edge. One by one people continued to fall like rice bags. One by one they moved and sat on both sides.

Once again the number was checked. Names were called out. At the last minute it was discovered that Selvaraja Jayanthan had been brought instead of Appudurai Selvaraja of Tirunelveli. Jayanthan was unloaded from the truck.

The manner in which the IPKF soldiers arrested young men and old alike, (suspecting them to be LTTE men) tortured them and delighted in the victim's pain, reminded me of the story of Androcles and the Lion which I had studied in my school text-book. The essence of that story was the pleasure which members of the royal family in Greece derived from the sight of animals mauling and killing prisoners. In India too, incidents of petty rulers rejoicing in another man's suffering and pain, have taken place.

In the same manner, now in the North Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka, the Indian army's gallant jawan (renowned for their honour and discipline) who had come to provide protection to the Tamils, were taking delight in tying the hands and legs of innocent Tamils, blindfolding them and torturing them.

CHAPTER 12

At last, the truck began to move, with my eyes covered with thick cloth, my ears and mind reckoned our journey. It was evident from the sound of their conversation and laughter, that some more jawans were traveling with us. I realized that traffic in the city was normal as usual, that many vehicles were passing and that this truck was giving way to the others.

The vehicle would be stopped in some places. At that time, the noise of some things being thrown into the truck could be heard. Long after these things were loaded too, the truck remained in that place. At this time, I could feel the jawans taking those things and inspecting them. One of the jawans said, "Made in Washington" and the others discussed it. From their conversation I gathered that these were arms seized from the LTTE and that they were being transported in our truck. Again the truck moved. Since we were informed that we were being taken to Palaali, my mind pictured the roads of Palaali. But the way in which the truck kept turning in different directions, I realized that it was not going to Palaali.

It must have been past noon. I could hear the Jawans talking among themselves and then eating something. It was clear that they had got coconuts and mangoes on the way, and that they had broken them in the truck itself and were eating them. In between I could get the smell of mangoes too. Evidently they had plucked them on the way.

The place where I sat must have been just behind the driver. The man near the driver had a cane in his hand, and was hitting those within striking distance on their heads now and then. We couldn't even move or dodge. Once or twice his cane hit my shoulder. He noticed me murmuring "Ram, Ram" and asked something in Hindi. His question must have been, "What are you murmuring?" I did not reply.

The truck which was going steadily, turned in one place, went very fast and stopped. Some of the things in the truck were unloaded. After it was over, once again the vehicle moved. Again the truck turned at a bend and stopped. Here too, some things were unloaded. I realized that it was evening. These two places must have been the Palaali airport and the Palaali army camp. No orders were issued to unload us.

Once again the truck moved and after going fast for about half an hour, stopped. Jawans could be heard getting down. Then, those ahead of me were unloaded one by one. I got up last. The Sikh jawan who removed the cloth covering my eyes, stood staring at me inside the truck. I felt as if he looked at me sympathetically. Outside the truck four jawans were waiting, apparently to assist me to dismount. Without giving them that opportunity, I jumped down from the truck. The Sikh jawans were stunned! Thanks to God, I did not fall face down. I followed the others through wire fences. They asked all of us to sit in front of the gate. It was drizzling. One by one we were called in. My turn came. When I went in, there were some four or five jawans and a higher officer in the sentry's room near the gate. There also, I was asked to sit down. There were jawans who knew Tamil. The one who questioned me and the one who recorded it, both knew Tamil.

I was asked to take out the contents of my pocket. They took everything from me and entered it in a register. They counted Rs.9/- in cash and asked me if it was correct. I was asked to remove my shirt. I did. They asked me why I had two pairs of spectacles. I said one was for reading and the other to avoid the glare of the sun. The Sikh jawan standing beside me said, "The old man is stylish" in Hindi and laughed. The Tamil soldier did not take part in this raillery.

They inspected my body thoroughly. I was asked to cut the black string round my waist. I obeyed. A priest in Inuvil had tied it as a talisman.

The drizzling increased. We were getting wet. We were called closer one by one, and something was written in green paint on our backs just below the nape. On the right hand too, above the wrist, the same was written. I thought they wrote "Tiger". Later, they wrote on my back and hand also. I looked at my hand. It was written 269.

I thought that I had been marked as the 269th Tiger.

With a gun-toting jawan leading us and another driving us with the word "Chalo" in the rear, we passed through barbed - wire fences. It must have been past 7 p.m. After covering some distance, they asked us to stand in front of a building. Each one was given a vessel. Hot rice and dhal (water) was served.

The journey had begun at 6 a.m. after we had taken two puris. It ended around 7 p.m./ In between, we did not have even a drop of water. We were dying of hunger. Hurriedly, all of us ate. We drank water with the same vessel. The water tasted very sweet! Our stomachs were full.

By this time, it started raining. The gun-toting jawan who had been staring at us, opened the front doors of that building and asked us to go into the hall and wait. At that time, some young men entered from the adjacent room, and hastily saying, "Are you coming from the Fort? Don't be worried ... you won't be beaten", closed the door and went away.

CHAPTER 13

After we had eaten, the jawan hastened us saying, "Jaldi, jaldi" and asking us to bring our vessels along, led us to the rear part of the building. I noticed that those who went ahead of me were beaten and kicked before they entered a room. It was supposed to be a ceremonial welcome! One of the jawan came running towards me also, with his hand raised and his foot ready to kick. Somehow I bent and dodged and got into the room without being beaten. Immediately two or three jawans came. They said that nobody should try to go out, and if they wanted to, they should get their permission and only then leave.

I had not urinated since that morning. I asked for permission to ease myself. The officer in charge shot back in English, "Do you think you are a guest? "I felt like asking him, "Should only a guest urinate and not a prisoner?" But the gun in his hand prevented me from opening my mouth.

An officer was in charge of the prisoners in that building. "You may be an LTTE outside, or anybody for that matter. Here you must be disciplined. If you go out from this room without my permission, the jawans in the four corners will shoot you down. So don't attempt to go out. You may go to sleep now" he said, and locked the door. It now started raining heavily.

This room was unlike the cell in the Fort prison. Like the bedroom of a bungalow, it was spacious. Everyone stretched himself with his head near the wall. There was no need to be cramped. There was space to move around without stamping another person's legs. As usual I managed to get a place near the door. I removed my shirt, kept it folded under my head and lay down with my wet veshti. For a long time I couldn't sleep. The bladder was full. I had not eased myself since that morning. Because of extreme hunger I had eaten heartily and taken a lot of water also. Added to all this, it was raining. These factors combined to increase my unease.

The young men were all fast asleep. Francis Dias who normally laughed and made others also laugh, had become silent due to the beating he got in the morning and the fatigue of the journey. At this time, a jawan passed by the window, checking:

After we had gone to our room, we were asked to form a line. Between the 'A' block and the 'B' block buildings, we were asked to sit in a place. The drizzling had stopped; but the cold was terrible. I was shivering in the cold.

In the midst of the armed Indian soldiers, there was an unarmed man in a civil dress, with hair shining like silver strings. When he saw me, he asked, "Are you feeling cold, Mister?" "Yes, Sir" I replied perhaps he didn't like it, he repeated 'Yes Sir' and asked me, "When you held the gun and shot, didn't you feel cold?"

I did not want to waste the little energy that I had, by explaining to that man that I didn't know how to handle a gun. Once again our names were called out and checked. All of us were then taken to the 'A' block and locked up in a room in front. An armed jawan stood guard outside. It must have been 7 a.m. From somewhere, mess tins were brought for us. God knows, I thought, who had used them and how? But we couldn't starve either. Each one was given a mess tin. Each was served two puris, dhal and tea. Some time after we had finished our breakfast, the ones in our room were called in the order of the numbers painted on their backs and hands the previous day. We no longer had names, only numbers. One wing of the 'A' block building was used as an interrogation centre. Those who were taken for interrogation, were sent to another place after the enquiry was over. Permission was not granted to them to return to our room and meet us.

One by one the numbers were called out and their owners left the room. The ones in the room kept decreasing in number. In the meanwhile, Govindan who had interrogated me in the Fort prison the previous day before we left, came there. I asked him why my number had not been called out. "It must be in another list" he said and went away. Around five in the evening, there were just three of us in the room. '269' – my number was called out. I followed the jawan.

I was produced before the interrogating officer. "What's your name?" the officer began. I told him my name. He asked my age and address, I answered him. As soon as he made a note of these details, he asked me to sit, pointing to a chair in front. I sat. "Before joining 'Eezhamurasu' what were you doing?" he asked.

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He stopped recording, and listened patiently to all that I said. "Is Basheer Kaakha a Muslim?" he asked and added, "We usually use the word Kaakha to refer only to Muslims".

"We also use the word only for Muslims. Basheer Kaakha is the name of the movement, our boys used to call him "Kaakha Anna" in the office. But he is a Hindu" I said.

"Is Selvaratnam responsible for the LTTE finance and accounts?" he asked. "I have heard that he holds a responsible position in the movement. He was a very responsible General Manager of the 'Eezhamurasu' administration" I said.

"Major Periasamy and Major Hariharan wanted to meet you. They would like to use your experience and skill to do something for the IPKF. They have gone to Trincomalee. They'll return in two or three days. Three or four days after you meet them, you can go" said the officer. It was a great relief.

"Good, Sir! It is several days since I had a bath. Before being sent here, because of an officer's generosity in the Fort prison, I had some time to bathe. But I have no change of dress. If you permit me, I can inform my people at home and get some clothes" I said.

"I too would like to help you. I'll try to give you some of the clothes supplied by the Red Cross. I shall see that you join your friends. You'll be in a good environment then". With these words he rose, and brought me out of the room. He said something in Hindi to the Jawan outside, who stared blankly. The officer then turned to another and asked him in Malayalam, "You know where they are, don't you?" When the latter said "Yes" the officer ordered, "This gentleman is the editor of that press. Take him to their place". "Yes, Sir" said the Jawan, all smiles. He then took me along; the man, who earlier in the day had asked me whether I was feeling cold!

CHAPTER 14

When that grey-haired chap took me through barbed-wire fences, armed jawans did not accompany me. He was also an interrogation officer. He took me to the 'C' block building. Our Assistant Editor Sarvendra and the printing section employees of 'Eezhamurasu' had just then filled water in the drums and had their bath as well. Overjoyed on seeing me they embraced and kissed me. The moustached officer (don't know his name) of that wing and the jawans there, looked on with joy and wonder. Sarvendra introduced me to them, "This is our editor". He then told me, "We learnt that you had come here last night. Had they not sent you, we would have asked them to send you here".

It appears that some days ago, Lt.Menon who had been speaking to them, had enquired, "Where's your editor?" When they said they did not know, "He must be somewhere" Lt.Menon had replied.

Sarvendra and the others took me to their room. They had been wakened and arrested at 5 a.m. on 10th October, before the 'Eezhamurasu' printing section had been blown up by the IPKF. They had been in the Indian Army prison for the past one and half months. Sarvendra asked me if I knew all the others there. I knew Balasubramaniam and Vimalan who had been in charge of the 'page lay-out' the day before the blast. After I had taken over as editor of 'Eezhamurasu', I had had occasion to interact with them. I had seen Sudhakar also. He was a photographer. I was acquainted with him also. I has also know John alias Yogaraja, when he worked as a security officer in 'Eezhamurasu'. I had seen Ketheeswaranathan, the circulation officer. But I was not acquainted with him. Of the two compositors Murugaanandam and Sivashanmugam, I had seen the latter. The others were unfamiliar.

Thavaseelan and Vinayakaran, two boys who were in charge of folding and distributing the papers were also unfamiliar to me. They were all introduced to me now.

Dinner arrived. The twelve of them had their mess tins marked with their numbers. Until I got one of my own, they suggested that I could borrow one from those in the 'mandapam' outside; they themselves went and fetched me one. We stood in a queue, got our food and ate it. After that we eased ourselves and went into our room. The door was locked.

Our friends who normally used to play cards after dinner, sat around me that day. There was a world of difference between my imprisonment during the past few days and my confinement that day. The presence of my friends and acquaintances gave me a new feeling of enthusiasm.

They questioned me in detail about all that had happened between their arrest and mine, and also about other incidents which had taken place outside the prison.

I had not had a bath for quite some days. I didn't have a change of dress either. I asked Sarvendra whether I could bathe at least the next day. I also told him that the interrogating officer had offered to make arrangements to provide me clothes.

Sarvendra said that only two days ago, the Red Cross had come and given lungis, vests and towels to those who didn't have them. He also said that clothes would be distributed by the Red Cross only on their next visit and that there was no chance of obtaining dresses then.

Sarvendra said, "Sir, I have a lungi and a towel. You can have your bath and use these. When you get your quota of clothes, you can give them to me. That was enough! Sarvendra and myself talked about various things late into that night. The others too joined in, whenever they wished. In the meanwhile, one Major Chandrakanth looked in at our window. Sarvendra introduced me to him. We shook hands between the bars of the window. After talking for a few minutes, he left. A little later, Lt. Menon came to our window. Sarvendra introduced me to him also. He too spoke about the political situation. A serene face. Major Chandrakanth would speak only in English. He said that he didn't know Tamil. Until we were released, he never revealed the fact that he knew Tamil. Only when we were freed, he took leave of us saying in pure Tamil, "How do you do, Sarvendra? Wish you good health, Father".

The next morning I went with the others and had my bath. I wore the lungi which Sarvendra had given me; I used his towel also. The eight-yard veshti, which for the past many days I had used as a dress and blanket, I felt could not be washed clean. So I folded it and kept it in a corner. When we came to 'C' block after our interrogation, all of us had been given a blanket each, by the interrogating officer. These blankets provided by the Red Cross, had already been given to my friends.

CHAPTER 15

When the 'Eezhamurasu' employees were taken to the Fort prison, they were given the work of cleaning that place. Once they used the mess tins to clean the canal running along the wall of the prison.

In the first week of November, four of the prisoners in Sarvendra's room were taken out. Usually, if there was some work to be done, some of the prisoners would be employed. When the four of them were taken out, they thought that it was routine work.

"There is an LTTE near the inner gate of the Fort. Go and drag it in here" they were ordered. Two gun-trotting jawans went with them. A man lay face down near the inner gate. When the four men tried to lift him up, the jawans insisted on their dragging him by his feet. When they attempted to lift him up disregarding their orders, the jawans were about to beat them. Sarvendra, Vimalan and Sudha turned the man slowly, and as far as they could, raised and dragged him. There were light abrasions on his back. He was also locked up in a cell. It was later learnt that he was an innocent citizen belonging to the Kokkuvil area of Jaffna town. Mistaken as an LTTE, he was released within two days.

Subsequent to the 'Eezhamurasu' employees' arrest, no information was given as to where they were taken and what condition they were in. They were detained in the Fort prison for about forty five days.

After about one and a half months, on 22nd November, they were informed that they would be released. Sarvendra and the others were blindfolded. Their hands were tied behind their backs. They were then taken in a vehicle to Mandaitheevu. When they were made to sit on the ground, it began to rain. After the rain stopped, a helicopter landed; these men boarded it. The helicopter must have come to Palaali. Half an hour later, they were brought to Kankesanthurai and disembarked. Their hands were freed, their eyes uncovered and each was given a number. From No.:149 to 160, all were 'Eezhamurasu' employees.

The Indian army had established a 'rehabilitation' camp in Kankesanthurai. During the Second World war, it was used as a hospital. It is near the Kankesanthurai harbour. Iron tanks (used as petrol tanks in huge trucks) were used in this camp to store water. Buildings marked A,B,C and D were used to confine different types of prisoners. In these blocks, water for drinking and bathing was drawn from the same well. This work was done by the prisoners themselves. Armed jawans would lead and follow them. As if this were not enough, a rope was sometimes tied to the legs of the prisoners bringing water, connecting them with one another.

On 23rd November, Sarvendra was called for interrogation to the kankesanthurai camp. The jawans who had come to take him must have been overawed by his stature. They therefore tied both his legs together with a rope and took him. By the time he reached the interrogation hall limping, Sarvendra's legs were lacerated and bleeding.

When he appealed to Major Nair, the interrogating officer, and showed him his bleeding legs, the Major rebuked the jawans saying, 'Idiots' and asked them to untie Sarvendra's legs. Only after this, he began the enquiry. After the enquiry was over, Major Nair asked Major Lalithnath (the camp officer) rather sternly, "Is this the way to treat a journalist?"

There was a heated exchange of words between the two. After some time, Major Lalithnath went to Major Nair's office and thought over the whole episode. Since then, the practice of tying the prisoners' legs was stopped.

When I went to this camp too, the 'Eezhamurasu' employees were used for the work of drawing water as well as all other kinds of work. Later, gradually the practice of extracting work from the prisoners was given up. Sarvendra and the others requested the officers to allow them to dig 'dung pits' saying, "we have no work and no provision for any physical exercise". But Major Lalithnath refused to give them any work, saying, "You are pressmen. Tomorrow when you are released, you'll publish the news that we made you work like this". This was after I left. I have, however, revealed it now.

CHAPTER 16

I made arrangements for physical exercise in prison. After I explained that yoga was a good form of exercise, only Sarvendra and Thavaseelan came forward to do yoga with me. But we were hampered by illness and lack of space. In this camp, the officers were particular about prevention of infectious diseases and maintenance of health and hygiene. Everyday a jawan would come to each block with a bucket of water and a mop. He would mix dettol with the water and mop each room with that water. After breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner, vessels had to be cleaned thoroughly and stacked neatly. Clothes had to be washed and a bath taken everyday. (They would not allow us to take plenty of water for bathing). Those who were too lazy to bathe, would be dragged and doused. Those who sported a lot of hair would also be dragged and their hair cut close. Doctors would come daily, check the prisoners and give medicines. Once in two weeks, a jawan would come and spray a disinfectant. In spite of all these precautions, the toilets were not clean. Worms would be squirming outside. Due to changes in their diet and meal timings, many prisoners had attacks of diarrhoea. Some even suffered greatly with a discharge of blood in their stools. Itching and skin problems also spread rapidly. Many had measles. As quarantining these prisoners was found ineffective, they were shifted to the army hospital. Those who suffered from a blood discharge, were also finally taken to the army hospital and cured.

One Dr. Lalithkumar, a Medical Officer of Mandigai Hospital, had been confined in our block. He was given a cot. Later, the diamond house Murugamurthy too, was locked up in the same room. Dr. Lalithkumar was supposed to have a close relationship with the LTTE and so was brought to this camp. They had said that he would be detained just for a few days for enquiry, but he continued to be confined without any interrogation. The only mistake Dr. Lalithkumar committed, was to deny permission to the IPKF to set up a camp in the Parutthithurai (Pt. Pedro) General Hospital. Young Dr. Lalithkumar sent petitions in writing, to the higher officers, asking "Why have you brought me here? what is your accusation against me? Take me for an enquiry to your army court". But he did not receive a favourable reply. Dr. Lalithkumar also appealed to the officers who came to meet him, to have an enquiry fast and to release him, as his sister was due for her first delivery around 14th December, and he had assured her that he would attend on her personally.

However, they did not take proper action. Suddenly, Dr. Lalithkumar went on a fast. The camp officer-in-charge, Major Lalithnath, came and enquired. Later, talks took place between the camp officers and the doctor. They requested him to end his fast and to give them forty eight hours' time. The doctor also agreed. The 'protest' fast and the talks took place confidentially. Only a few of us knew this. 48 hours passed; no solution was in sight. An officer informed the doctor that he would be released on certain conditions and he also gave details of the conditions. The doctor should not leave Parutthithurai (Pt-Pedro). In case he wished to go, he should get prior permission from the Parutthithurai Camp Officer-in-charge. No treatment should be given to the LTTE in the Mandigai hospital. In case they came for treatment, the IPKF must be informed. He should not indulge in any propaganda against the IPKF.

These were the conditions laid down for Dr.Lalithkumar. We did not know whether he accepted them or not. There was no indication of his having signed any agreement either. On 12th December, some of the prisoners were released from this camp. Elaborate arrangements were made before their release. In the forenoon, a group of videographers from India came and photographed the prisoners. Pressmen and representatives of the national radio were invited. They were all received at the outer gate itself, and those who were being released were introduced to them and interviews given.

We observed all these scenes from our window. Sarvendra was fuming. "Having exploded two of our newspapers and imprisoned the journalists, are you inviting your pressmen?" he said. From the window of the next room, Dr.Lalithkumar too, saw these happenings. Later, when the camp officer Major Lalithnath came to meet him, he ridiculed the tactics employed by the IPKF, saying, "These audio and video presentations are very familiar to us. The Sri Lankan Defence Minister, Mr.Lalith Athulathmudali used the same tactics and failed". Major Lalithnath did not say anything. Later, when some more prisoners were released on the 14th and 16th, no pressmen or representatives of the other media were invited. As the 48-hour deadline passed inconclusively, Dr.Lalithkumar embarked on his next move. On a piece of paper he wrote, "I do not wish to talk to anyone unnecessarily. Kindly do not disturb me", stuck it on his window and lay down quietly.

The IPKF conducted extensive investigation, found out that Dr. Lalithkumar's sister had a safe delivery on the 12th itself, and informed him. He got down from the cot and slept on the floor. He went without even water for three or four days. The army officer saw him and went away. Suddenly one noon, a stretcher was brought and the doctor taken away on it. An army officer followed him.

Four days later, the doctor came to our wing and said that he was being released that day. His words were proved correct, and he was sent home.

CHAPTER 17

The diamond House, Murugamurthy said that we too would have to do something similar to Dr.Lalithkumar's 'protest' fast; only then will our problems be noticed. In the meanwhile, Vaikunta Ekadasi was celebrated on 30th December, and as usual, I fasted the whole day. I had requested that I be given milk and fruits in the evening under Lt. Menon's orders, I was given seven large bananas and milk in the evening. I shared the fruits with my friends. My fasting that day, gave some of the others the confidence that we also could fast.

Sivanandaraja, the joint Secretary of the citizens' committees, had been arrested and brought to our camp. Murugamurthy said that Sivanandaraja had a lot of influence in the Indian embassy. Whenever Murugamurthy left the Fort prison and went home to have a bath, he wrote letters to Prof. Sivathambi and others including Sivanandaraja, to help him to get released. When Sivanandaraja was brought to the camp and made to stand near the sentry's room, Murugamurthy was happy assuming that he had come in connection with his own release. But when he saw sivanandaraja handing over his belongings, removing his shirt and the army painting a number on his back also, Murugamurthy's hopes were dashed to the ground!

Sivanandaraja was taken to the interrogation wing very often, and interrogated, Murugamurthy too was questioned. He said that he had been irritated and beaten. "The LTTE has three ships. Which one did you buy for them", they seem to have asked him. When he replied that he was not rich enough to buy a ship and that he had not bought anything for the LTTE, they were unwilling to believe him, he said.

On the evening of 27th December, Major Lalithnath who came to our wing, said that two prisoners had been brought in a very critical condition, that they needed a blood transfusion, and asked me if anybody would be willing to donate blood. I said I would give mine. But, with a smile he said that my blood was not needed. I asked Sarvendra and the others. Immediately, Sarvendra, Sudha, Yogaraja and Gunam volunteered and were taken to the hospital and their blood collected. The lives of those two who were serious, were saved. Colonel Gurbaran Singh Babber, Senior Officer of our camp, was very happy about this. Since then, Whenever anyone was brought to our room, the ones who donated blood were introduced to them.

On 24th around 10 pm, Lt Menon had sent one of his sentry guard asking me to report to him. His tent was quite close for our block. Colonel Babber wanted me to translate into Tamil his Christmas greetings he wish to express to the people living in our blocks around. I translated it.

Special food was served on Christmas day. Some of us were taken to dilapidate church near by on our request. Christmas was being celebrated in every block with dances and songs. There was silence in our part of the block

On the morning of Dec. 27th, it was announced that the Commander was coming around midday. Major General Harhirat Singh, commander is chief of the IPKF forces in Sri Lanka with a heavy contingent around him arrived at our place. As the General was stepping in to our hall, Colonel Barber pointing to us told the General that we were the pressmen concerned.

"Why don't you get back and publish your paper?" asked the General.

"Right now we are not we are not thinking about publishing the paper. We are worried about our release from here" was our reply.

"You will you restart publication, if we release you?" inquired Harhirat Singh.

Sarvendra stated, "Our administration has how been declared illegal. How can me restart publication in this situation?"

General replied, "Our Soldiers will provide you with security. You can start publication."

We immediately understood their position. They wanted to make use of us for their propaganda or it might that they are trying to check whether we, as paid employees, a position that we accepted earlier, would be in a position to start that work. Whatever the situation was we wanted to act with circumspection as we had already decided within ourselves that me would use the question of publication for our release. We had also decided that we would not be a propaganda sheet for the peace keeping forces.

"When will you release us?" we asked.

"Let's see" said Major General Hargirat Singh. Col. Babbar introduced Sivanandaraja to the General, who said that Sivanandaraja was "a bad man". When Sivanandaraja asked, "Why do you say so?", Hargirat Singh replied, "We have received many reports about you". Sivanandaraja said, "I only tried to prevent conflicts on both sides and bring about peace". Hargirat Singh interrupted him and asked, "How much did you earn through this?". Sivanandaraja who felt insulted and enraged on hearing such words, shot back, "If you prove that I have received even one cent, I am prepared to come to India and suffer imprisonment in an Indian prison". He added, "You can enquire about me in the Indian High Commission". To, this, Hargirat Singh replied, "I contacted the ambassador, Mr.Dixit, and enquired about you. He said he didn't know anything about you".

In the meanwhile, "Frontline" magazine had published a picture showing Sivanandaraja occupying a prominent place during a reception accorded to the Indian Embassy Official Puri and Captain Gupta, When they came to Jaffna. The diamond House Murugamurthy, showed a copy of this issue which he had in his hand, to Hargirat Singh. Making a note of the date of the issue, Major General Hargirat Singh left our block. One of the officers who accompanied him, asked us to give our names and numbers. Our friends wondered, "When details about us are available in many quarters, should they get them only from us? All this is merely an eyewash". It had become commonplace for high-ranking army officers to come to this camp and visit each block with their retinue, for us to ask them about our release, for them to say that if we were released we would go back and start shooting again, for us to explain our situation, and for them to say "everyone says the same thing". "These officers come here only for the sake of convention; they can't even spend ten minutes in each block". So we decided that henceforth we would not say anything if they came. Nevertheless, whether it was Col. Babbar or Major Lalithnath who accompanied these army officers, we were the first to be introduced to them.

CHAPTER 18

A few days before Christmas, close relatives of some of the prisoners in our camp came to see them. Relative of Vimalan and Ketheeswaranathan from our group also came to see them. These two met their visitors and gave us all the news. I wondered: would my wife know about my whereabouts? If she knew it, would she know how to obtain permission from the District Administrative office to meet me and to come here? Even if she did know these details, would she come without anyone's assistance? I thought. At least she should know that visitors were allowed to meet prisoners.

One Wednesday noon, we were playing dice. Numbers of those whose relatives had come to see them, were being called out. I was answering 'no' for those who were not in our room. No:269 was called out. "No" I answered. Sarvendra, who was beside me, said, "Sir, that is your number". I sprang up saying, "Yes Yes".

A small cabin had been put up in front of 'A' block near the entrance of the IPKF rehabilitation camp. In this cabin, two chairs and a table had been placed on one side. On the other, a bench and a teapoy were placed on the third side, there was a chair. To meet the prisoner in this camp, one had to get permission from the joint Commissioner of the IPKF in the Jaffna District Administrative Office. If a particular prisoner was in this Rehabilitation Camp, as soon as his name and address were given, they would be verified with the list there. At that time, the number given to him in the Rehabilitation Camp would also be checked. This permit would contain the name of the visitor and the name and number of the prisoner whom he/she wanted to meet. Taking a permit was not an easy task. One would have to go to the office several times. Sometimes, the prisoner's photo graph would also have to be given.

Only after passing all these hurdles and obtaining a permit, could a visitor see a prisoner in the Rehabilitation Camp. But, even that could not be done immediately or easily. Some distance away from the Kankesanthurai Rehabilitation Camp, an office had been set up. Representatives of the Red Cross were stationed in that office. They would first examine the permit. Then, they would check the things brought by the visitors. Some would not be permitted to take even a packet of biscuits. Even if one had a permit, he/she may not be allowed to see the prisoner immediately. Thus, only after a lot of fuss (military protocol) would visitors be sent inside the camp, accompanied by armed army men.

Those whose numbers had been called out were made to sit in the courtyard of the 'A' block. I joined them. As the visitors passed the sentry's barricade and advanced towards us, our numbers would again be called out.

My wife was coming to see me. She must have seen me from a distance. As I entered the cabin, my wife who followed me, began to cry saying, "Did I come here to see you in such a plight?" During such meetings, an officer would be present in the cabin. That day, it was Major Chandranath. Seeing my wife in tears, I too cried. She stroked my body saying, "How miserable you look! won't they release you?" I was wearing a collarless vest and lungi. Unwilling to take the risk of being afflicted with diarrhoea, I had gone without rice for the past fifteen days, taking only four chappathis during the day and three at night. I had reduced my intake of water too, as we could not use the toilet during the night. All these factors had resulted in loss of weight and I looked lean.

She had brought me clothes. I took just one shirt and returned the rest. She had also brought a packet of cream cracker biscuits and my favourite dates, a double packet of cigarettes, a matchbox, a balm for headache, a bottle of hair oil and a packet of toothpowder. After checking all these, Major Chandranath allowed me to take them. The sacred ash alone, he asked my wife to smear on my forehead and take away. My friend, Guhamurthy had informed my wife that Gamini Navaratne would return from his tour abroad on 27th December. He had assured my wife that he would do all he could in Colombo. Arumairatnam too, had helped her, my wife said.

Mrs. Soma Shanmugalingam, wife of Dr. Shanmugalingam, was deeply involved in the activities of the Red Cross society. When my wife informed her that nothing was known about my whereabouts, she had gone to the Red Cross, filled up a form with details about me, and told my wife what she should do next. After this, my wife seems to have gone to the IPKF office at Jaffna and asked the officer about me. He checked the lists and said that my name was not there. It was a great shock to my wife. However, the officer asked her to come again the next week. When she went to the District Administrative Office the following week, my name and number had been included in the list. They also gave her the permit to see me.

On 22nd December, when my wife was coming in a motor van to see me (with this permit), some incident took place in Kondaavil. So, all the vehicles were asked to go back. The next day she came again. Before the visitors are sent into our camp, they should hand over the permit card to the Red Cross Office and wait till it was registered and returned. If they were not allowed to see the prisoners that day, the visitors had to stay there itself, and meet their loved ones the next day. Sometimes, they would be asked to go back and return the next day. When my wife came, the boy in the Red Cross Office happened to be an acquaintance of ours, and so it was easy. As my friend Dhanabalasingam was also there, she was sent to meet me immediately. Generally, the lady in the Red Cross Office here, would make more fuss than the Indian Army personnel. People who came to see their loved ones with great difficulty, taking two or three buses from far-away places, were denied permission in an authoritative manner by this lady, who would casually ask them to come another day. After my wife informed me about this, I explained the situation to Major Lalithnath and Lt. Menon. I said it was atrocious to send back ladies and elderly people who had taken a lot of trouble to come there. The Red Cross lady's display of power decreased a little after this. Only ten minutes' time was allowed for visitors to meet the prisoners in the cabin. Of these, five minutes would be spend crying. Hence, many of them complained that a lot of things could not be spoken bout during the remaining five minutes.

When I was arrested on 25th November, no one expected that I would be imprisoned for so long. A week after my arrest, my wife met Captain Singh (who had arrested me) and asked if there was any information about me. At this, Captain Singh seems to have asked her in surprise, "Hasn't he been released yet?" Later, he made enquiries and informed her that I was safe and that they would soon release me. As it was winter time, my wife was apprehensive that I would suffer from the cold, and so asked Captain Singh if he would send some clothes for me. He agreed. The next day, my wife took two (four-yard) veshtis, two shirts, a sweater and two double packs of cigarettes to meet Captain Singh. Unfortunately, he was not there; she was informed by another Singh that he had gone to Delhi. However, the new officer who had taken Singh's place told my wife that he would send those things to me through the Red Cross. But they never reached me. They never returned to my house either, till date. They never will!

My wife told me that Selvam, a boy working in the Red Cross Office of the Kankesanthurai Camp, was of great help to her. Once, the lady officer refused her permission to see me, and asked her to go back. Selvam took her to his house, gave her food and lodging, and sent her first the next morning to meet me. Similarly, the famous writer, Mrs. Vallinayaki who lived in Kankesanthurai, was willing to help me with everything including food. But the officers of the army camp refused to permit her. My advocate friend, Kumaraguru too, was very sorry that he was not in a position to help me. Nevertheless, he got in touch with Col. Babber every now and then, and enquired about me and my welfare. Because of this, Col. Babbar had greater respect and regard for me.

CHAPTER 19

Around 11 a.m. on 24th December, we received the news that M.G.R. the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, passed away early that morning. Murugamurthy and Sivanandaraja, who were in our block, seem to have suggested to the prisoners in the main hall and the other rooms, that they should, on an experimental basis, forgo lunch that day as a mark of condolence for the death of M.G.R. They agreed and requested our co-operation. We also consented. Major Lalithnath who came straight into our room in the afternoon, asked us the reason for our sacrificing our lunch. When Sarvendra said that it was as a mark of condolence for M.G.R's death, he retorted that had we informed him sufficiently early, so much food need not have been wasted. Those who brought dinner in the evening also asked us why we went without lunch. For the sake of M.G.R, we said, One of the Tamil Jawans burst out, "This whole problem is because of that".

Days passed. In the meanwhile, some other officers came and went. We asked about our release. "As soon as you are freed, you'll once again raise your guns against the IPKF" came the usual reply. We expected to be set free at Christmas and then New Year. But nothing happened. In the meantime, my wife came to see me second time. My long-time friend and popular journalist Gamini Navaratne, left on a tour of Germany, England and America in September. Coming to know of the events that were taking place in Jaffna in 1987, He wrote a letter to me from Bonn (Germany) on 22nd October. He expressed the hope that by the grace of Lord Muruga, our family would have escaped the violence unleashed in Jaffna. On her second visit my wife informed me that Navaratne from Germany and Cheran from the Netherlands had written letters. She had not brought them, she said, adding that Guhamurthy had told her that Navaratne would return to Colombo on 27th December, and that he had tried various means to secure my release and failed.

My wife said that as soon as Mr. Navaratne came, Kuhamurthy would explain the situation to him I was quite confident that Gamini Navaratne was the only one who could boldly take action to obtain my release. My wife also felt the same. Not a single newspaper in Colombo had published the news of my arrest and detention, said my wife. In Jaffna, even the 'Eezhanadu' and 'Udhaya' were afraid to publish this news!

My wife began to doubt if I would ever be released at all. I continued to become leaner and leaner. My wife had expressed concern about my health and requested the IPKF officer for permission to bring food for me from home. But it was refused. In the meanwhile, Navaratne returned to Colombo from his tour. The first news that he got was that of my arrest and detention for more than a month in the Indian army prison. It was Kuhamurthy who informed him of this. For a few minutes, it appears he was silent. Immediately, he initiated action. He contacted Mr. Dixit, the Indian High Commissioner in Colombo. The latter assured him that he would get in touch with the IPKF and take necessary action to get me free. Navaratne assumed that I would soon be released. As there was no direct communication between Colombo and Jaffna, it became impossible for Navaratne to get the latest news about me. Since Kuhamurthy was also in Colombo, my wife could not contact him either. Even so, she sent a petition to the IPKF Commander-in-charge, through the Red Cross, requesting permission to give me food, in view of my declining health. She sent a copy of this letter to Navaratne. On receipt of this, Navaratne wrote a letter to her, which I reproduce as it is, here:

Dear Quincy,

After spending nearly three months in England, America and Germany, I returned to Sri Lanka on the 14th of December. I was very disturbed on learning about the distressing incidents which took place in Jaffna, when I was abroad. I was shocked, when on my return, I heard that Gopu was in detention. I got in touch with Mr. Dixit on the phone, and conveyed my condemnation of this action. On 18th December, I met him personally and explained everything in detail. At that time, he appeared quite sympathetic. He assured me that ~~he would~~ do his best in this regard. I hoped that Gopu would be released within a few days. I was very angry that my hopes have been belied.

As soon as I received your letter Yesterday, I contacted Mr. Dixit on the phone again and spoke to him. But this time, he sang a different tune. He said that he could not issue orders to the IPKF and that only the Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi could do it. I then spoke to the Army Chief General, Nalin Senaviratne about this matter. He said that this was beyond his jurisdiction.

On 18th December, When I met President Jayawardane in connection with another incident in Jaffna, I mentioned Gopu's detention also. But even he doesn't seem to be in a position to help in this matter. I have, therefore, decided to explore other possibilities to pressurize the IPKF to release Gopu. Please tell him that I have not forgotten my good old friend from Jaffna and a dear friend too.

*Lovingly,
Gamini*

Navaratne and not stop with writing this letter, Gamini Navaratne, who ran the news agency 'Sandesa', was also the Chief Editor of the 'Saturday Review'. In addition, he was the Colombo representative of 'The Times of India', the popular Indian Daily. Navaratne sent the news of my arrest to this newspaper. He also sent the Indian High Commissioner's statement that he could not do anything in connection with my release and that only the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi could take a decision. This news was published on 1st January 1988, as the 'lead' article on the first page. Simultaneously, 'The Sunday Times' published from Colombo, also carried this news under the caption, "Eezhamurasu' editor under Detention". It was Navaratne who arranged this. When my wife came to see me next, she brought Photostat copies of these and showed me. Lt.Menon and Major Lalithnath also saw them.

"Why have we been imprisoned?" As we asked ourselves this question, some of the IPKF officers also asked themselves the same.

CHAPTER 20

A group of representatives of the Press Trust of India (PTI) and TV media from India came to our camp. Lt. Menon had informed us the previous night that this group would come to interview us also, and that we could speak freely without any reservations. Major Lalithnath had gone to India on ten days' leave. After the usual introductory protocol, the PTI and TV crew came. They interviewed some of the prisoners in the other blocks. When this crew came to our room, some of us were playing cards seriously. We were interviewed in English.

Those who interviewed us, also interviewed many of the prisoners in the next room. During the interview, a youth said, "I was with the LTTE. After my release too, I will join them and fight for freedom". One of the TV crew patted the youth called Ashok, and said that he was "a warrior of integrity". One of the members of the crew that came to interview us, was the Chennai representative of All India Radio, Mr. Perumal. After the interview was over, he came to me and said, I have heard a lot about you but did not get a chance to meet you, "I too wished to see you, but never expected to meet you here" I replied. All of us then enquired of Perumal about happenings in India. He then took leave of me.

My wife came to see me again. She said that she had gone to Colombo and met Navaratne; that a case had been filed in the Supreme Court in Colombo for my release and that Navaratne had asked her to obtain my permission for the same. She added that Gamini had asked her to sign several forms. She said all this softly, covering her mouth with her handkerchief. Sitting right in front, Lt. Menon was watching us. My wife had brought (concealed) Photostat copies of 'The Times of India' and 'Sunday Times' which carried news about me. When I opened and read them, Lt. Menon asked me what they were. I gave both the copies to him. Having read them, he asked if he could keep them. Just then, Major Lalithnath came. Lt. Menon gave the two copies to him. After perusing them, Major Lalithnath returned them to my wife. I wanted to take them to my room and show them to Sarvendra. Major Lalithnath did not like the idea. "Lt. Menon wants these. Shall I give them to him?" I asked. Major Lalithnath did not like that either. He said that my wife could take them back.

My wife had apprehensions as to whether she would be allowed to come again, since she had brought Photostat copies of newspapers carrying news about me. She asked me directly. I, in turn, expressed my fears to Major Lalithnath. "Nothing of the sort. She can come and see you quite often" he said.

Two or three days later, my wife came again, bringing my grand daughter. I told her that we had sent a petition to the new Commander of the IPKF, requesting him to release us before Pongal. I also expressed my hope that I would be released in all probability. Another officer of the IPKF came to our camp. I do not know what his designation is. As usual, he came with his retinue. His name was Sehgal. We were introduced to him. We told him about the petition we had sent seeking our release. Whether he read it or heard about it we do not know. As usual, he also asked us, "After your release, will you again raise your guns and fight?" What was the use of arguing with a man, who, even after we had been introduced to him as journalists, said that we would take up guns and fight?

"Why do you fight with us? We are doing you a lot of good" he went on, irrelevantly. As he was leaving, one of the officers accompanying him, said something to him in Hindi; turning to us, he said, "Your petition is under consideration" and left.

Once again, my wife came to see me. "Will they release you before Pongal?" she asked. "There's been no response to our petition" I said. Major Chandranath, who had been sitting in front and observing us, remarked "You can celebrate Pongal here itself". My wife did not respond to this remark.

Two days before Pongal, that is, on 13th January, all the army Personnel in our camp - from the top-ranking officers down to the Jawans - became excited. Those in charge of each block cleaned the place with the help of the prisoners there, and decorated it. The entrance of our block was decorated with the word "Welcome" in English and in Tamil, using small stones. My colleagues Balasubramaniam and Sudhakar took part in this.

Around noon, the new Commander of the IPKF, Sardesh Pandey came to our block with his usual retinue. Col. Babbar introduced us to him as 'Pressmen'. "My son too, wants to become a journalist" said Major General Pandey to us. I wanted to tell him, "Thank God he is not in Jaffna". But I kept my mouth shut. We asked him about our petition seeking our release before Pongal. "I am an insignificant man; what can I do?" he asked me. "You have taken over charge as the new Commander of the IPKF, according to the newspapers. You are the one who should decide whether to release us or not; aren't you?" asked Sarvendra.

At this, Major General Pandey launched into a short discourse. "You call it Pongal. In Karnataka, we call it Sankranthi. Every festival is celebrated under different names in different states. The manner also varies; people in North India celebrate in one way, those in South India in another, and you in Sri Lanka in yet another way. But all of them were born in the same place and unite in the same place". He added that our petition would be favourably considered; in parting, he offered sweets and biscuits to a young boy in our block. We felt that Major General Sardesh Pandey who belonged to Karnataka in South India, understood our feelings at least to a certain extent.

The next day, we decided to send a Makara Sankranthi greeting to Major General Pandey. It read as follows : —

"When you met us, you said that your son also wanted to become a journalist. On this joyous Makara Sankranthi day, we wish your son a very bright future. At the same time, we request that whenever you think of your son, you should also think of us journalists and our colleagues, who are in your custody". We sent this greeting through Col. Babbar to Major General Sardesh Pandey.

CHAPTER 21

I mentioned earlier that when I was taken to the Fort prison. I had just one cigarette in my pocket and that three of us shared it. Some of the prisoners would ask the Jawans who passed by our rooms for a beedi. Sometimes they would get one or two beedies and establish our unity. Some of the Jawans would have a mixture of tobacco powder and slaked lime with them. The prisoners would ask for tobacco leaves. Sometimes the Jawans would bring whole tobacco leaves and give them to the prisoners. We would powder these leaves, place it on a piece of paper, roll it and smoke it like a beedi.

A boy called Sekar was brought to the Fort prison. He said he worked in lorries in Nelliadi. He was a native of Paranthan. His mouth would be closed only when he was asleep. His mouth had a foul odour. He would pick up the stubs of cigarettes and beedis even from the gutters. He would collect the tobacco powder from those stubs, roll it in a piece of paper and smoke it like a beedi. We never shared a smoke with him. The Jawans would only take him to clean the gutters. His words and deeds earned him the nickname of 'Stinker'.

A few days after I was taken to Kankesanthurai, Sekar was also brought there. He was accommodated in our 'C' block. Here also his nickname stuck to him. But some of his actions earned him respect among the prisoners and the Jawans. Gunaratnasingam, one of the "Eazhamurasu" typesetters suffered from a breathing problem and nearly suffocated. He lay curled on the floor outside the room. This happened a little after lunch one evening. All the prisoners in the rooms and the hall were shocked. We requested the authorities to inform the doctor. The officer in charge of our block had already sent word to Major Lalithnath and the doctor.

Major Lalithnath came rushing. We had laid Gunaratnasingam in the hall. With great difficulty, he vomited a little. The rice which he had eaten some time earlier, was brought out. Major Lalithnath ordered that he be brought to the courtyard which was airy. "Not necessary for all of you to come. Its enough if two or three come" he said. At this juncture, 'Stinker' Sekar volunteered to carry Gunaratnasingam. Later, he cleaned up the mess which Gunaratnasingam had made by vomiting. Apprehension and agitation could be seen on the prisoners' faces. The doctor was not to be seen. Lalithnath, who appeared to be disturbed, jumped over the barbedwire fence. He stopped an army jeep coming towards him, drove it fast himself, and brought the doctor.

The doctor examined Gunaratnasingam. He then slapped him on both his cheeks. "Take him back to the block" he said and went away. In a short while, Gunaratnasingam was alright. "This is military treatment" Sudhakar said later. The rice had not been cooked well. That was the cause of the disorder. Lt. Menon took action against those responsible; but that's a different matter.

Similarly, Srijayakkumar of Aanaikottai, who was in our bloc, suffered from dysentery. He looked emaciated and his voice became feeble. Finally, orders were received to shift him to the army hospital. The Jeep stood outside the gate. But no arrangements had been made to carry the patient to the jeep. It was 'Stinker' Sekar who again came forward and carried the sick man on his shoulder and put him in the jeep.

Once, there was a video screening of a film in our block. Menon asked us, "Which of these do you wish to see – 'Sankarabharanam' or 'Oorkkavalan'?" My voice which said 'Sankarabharanam' was drowned in the chorus which shouted 'Oorkkavalan'. At that time, Sekar happened to smoke the improvised beedi made out of stubs collected from the gutters. Lt. Menon who watched this unobserved, shifted Sekar to the next block.

In the Kankesanthurai camp, prisoners were involved in cleaning the prison, digging 'dung pits', drawing water, sweeping the courtyard, and so on. Thus, they had plenty of opportunities to interact with the Jawans and obtain beedis from them. To the 'Eezhamurasu' employees, such opportunities were very few. Initially, the Red Cross had given them cigarettes under the quota system, they said. When I went there, the prisoners would stand near the window and say, "Ram, Ram, Sir" to the jawans and the block officers-in-charge who passed by. The prisoners would also keep their fingers on their mouth and ask for a beedi. Some of the Jawans obliged them. Others would say, "We don't have them now; will bring them later" in Hindi and go away.

One Jawan would have a few beedis in his hand, and throw them one by one into the hall. The prisoners would scramble to pick them up. The Jawan would take delight in watching this scene. Another Jawan, Prasad, would call me 'Father' would secretly bring a beedi or cigarette for me. He would signal to me, leave the beedi on the sill and go away. After some time, the Red Cross began giving cigarettes to us also, under the quota system – one for each. There were fourteen of us in our room, including Jeevan of Arasadi. Of these, only five smoked! The double pack of cigarettes which my wife brought whenever she came to see me, supplemented this ration and made up the shortage.

CHAPTER 22

In the forenoon of 14th January (Pongal), Col. Babbar came with Pongal greetings. He conveyed his regret at not being able to do anything to help us to celebrate Pongal Joyously. He said that he had brought 'prasadam' for us. Small packets had been kept on a large tray. A jawan stood carrying it. Once again the Colonel greeted me, and asking me to give the Pongal prasadam to everyone, he formally handed over the tray to me and went away. Had I distributed the packets, it would have been uneven, some getting more and some getting nothing at all. So I gave the tray to 'Big moustache' the officer in charge of our block. He asked everyone to come in a line (as usual) and distributed the packets equally.

Delicious Pongal was served on circular (stitched) leaves. It seems, it was imported specially for us from Tiruchi. It was special. In the forenoon a table was placed in front of our block. It was covered with a table-cloth and some packets were placed on it. A carpet had been spread in front of it. We, who occupied the first room, were invited first. Five of us and myself were made to sit in the first row, and the others in rows behind us. After that, those in the hall and the other rooms were made to sit. The Indian Red Cross was giving us Pongal gifts, it was said. And it was to be videographed. Hence this arrangement. But how do we sit still until the videographers and the Red Cross people come? The moustached officer said, "Why don't you sing?"

A few of us sang. The first was sung by a youth of Velvettithurai. It was a song composed by him in support of the LTTE leader Veluppillai Prabhakaran, and sung to the tune of a popular Tamil film song. When it was over, all of us clapped our hands. The moustached officer and the other Jawans also clapped their hands without understanding the meaning of the song. Some time was spent in singing. Teasing songs too were sung. It was past lunch time.

The Red Cross crew came rushing. The lady officer from the Red Cross in our camp (working in the Ladies' prison) also came with this group. Soaps and Tamil weeklies such as 'Vikatan' and 'Kumudam' were given to those of us sitting in the first row. Combs were also given. When plain sheets of paper and ball-point pens were about to be distributed, the lady officer hastily took some of them as well as soaps etc., and went towards those sitting at the back. The others followed her. When we said, "There are journalists here who do not have paper and pens," one Singh who came with that group gave us paper and pens.

Those who had gone to distribute the things to the ones at the rear rushed back to the front rows. The Red Cross representative (his name was Soundhi) stood near the table and said, "we consider all of you as our brothers and friends". They then left in a hurry. We returned to our room. "Do you know what happened?" asked Vimalan and Sudhakar. "What?" asked Sarvendra and myself. The lady officer of the Red Cross threw, from a distance, soaps and other things to those at the back. Selvaratnam, the General Manager of the 'Eezhamurasu' newspaper, who saw this from one of the rows at the back, was furious. He told the others that none should pick up the things that were thrown, asking the Red Cross crew, "Are we slaves? Or dogs?" He added angrily, "Do not think we are slaves or dogs. We are neither. If you wish to give us anything, come and give it in our hands".

The lady officer was moved. The officers then came back and gave the gifts to each one. Selvaratnam refused to accept anything. Hence they left hurriedly. When Vimalan and Sudhakar told us this, we understood what Soundhi meant by saying that he considered us as brothers and friends. On special occasions we were normally given coloured rice, rosagullah or prorrIDGE, puri and channa for lunch. On Pongal day, the special lunch was served only around 2 p.m. After that, we were playing dice. No:269 was called out. I rose. No visitors seemed to be allowed that day. This being the case, why was I summoned, I thought, as I went out.

The jawan took me to Major Lalithnath's cabin. Lt. Menon and the Major were both there. They greeted me and asked me to sit. they enquired about the Pongal celebrations. "It is a festival that is celebrated with the family in every house" I said, and added, "However well you entertain us, it will not give us the same joy; what's the need for prisoners to celebrate?" "When the prisoners in all the other blocks are enjoying themselves with music and dance, why is your block alone quiet?" asked Major Lalithnath. "We prayed this morning. We have decided to spend the day in prayer" I said. "Prayer is good indeed" responded the Major. He did not appear enthusiastic.

He then asked me to take two parcels that were beside him. "Your wife has brought these. Today no visitors are allowed. But the lady officer at the Red Cross Office received the parcels and has sent them here. You can take them" the Major said. "Have you scrutinized them?" I asked. "I don't think there'll be anything harmful in them. You can take them" he said. I brought the parcels to my room. They contained two lungis, one shirt, a packet of biscuits, a cake, dates, Pongal 'Prasadam' and a double pack of cigarettes. We shared the Pongal 'prasadam' immediately. On Pongal day, I was the only one in the IPKF camp who received Pongal 'prasadam' from home. Our group was very happy about this. But even this Pongal was prepared in the house of Dhanabalasingam, brother of Jayabalasingam, the Town council chairman of Kankesanthurai. My wife had left the Pongal which SHE had prepared, in my daughter's house by mistake.

CHAPTER 23

Christmas, New Year's Day, Pongal - all the festival days had passed; we were still in prison. Our petition appealing for our release before Pongal had not borne any fruit. The interrogating officer, who had given us this suggesting to appeal, was not to be found. It was rumoured in our block, that Major Nair was involved in an attempt to bring about a settlement after direct talks with the LTTE. As if in confirmation of this, Major Nair was seen, during the past few days, taking one Shukla from the 'D' block in a jeep every morning and dropping him later. Shukla was believed to be the Nelliadi representative of the LTTE. He was first brought to our block. Major Nair called Shukla often and interrogated him. Later, he was shifted to 'D' block. Around this time, Ranjith Sabaratnam, who was believed to be the financial Controller of the LTTE, and the Accounts Manager of the 'Eezhamurasu' newspaper, was also arrested and brought to this camp. He too was kept in our block for a few days, Selvaratnam, who was the 'tax collector' of the LTTE and the General Manager of the 'Eezhamurasu' administration was also shifted to our block. When Selvaratnam was taken to 'D' block, Sabaratnam was brought back to our block.

Shukla, who was in the 'D' block, was taken out one day. When he returned, and while bathing the next day, some of those in our block asked him something through gestures. He too answered something through gestures. An explanation was then given, of those gestures. According to their explanation, what Shukla conveyed to them was, "All okay. By the end of this month (January) a settlement would be reached. Kittu from Chennai is also trying". It was true that Shukla was taken out on some days. But why he was taken out, was not clear.

The diamond house Murugamurthy was shifted to 'C' block. He had reduced considerably; his speech too, was not consistent and sensible. He had sent a petition seeking his release, as his mother's second death anniversary was due soon, and he had to perform the rituals in connection with that.

One day he receive the news that his brother had passed away. He asked to be released for two days, to perform his brohter's last rites. The Indian Army made elaborate enquiries and informed him that his brother was quite well. Murugamurthy wailed that his mother appeared in his dreams often and said, "Why do you suffer like this? Come to me".

Our request to be released before Pongal had been rejected. Hence, we sent a reminder on 21.01.88 to the IPKF through Major Lalithnath, requesting that we be released at least before 26th January, Indian's Republic Day.

Major Lalithnath, who accepted the petition, came to our room that evening and said that he had received our petition. But, he said that petitioners should not write 'reminder', as it may sometimes have adverse results. Anyway, he said that he had sent it immediately to the higher authorities. We told him, "We are used to writing for the press. We have never sent petitions before"!

The next day too, when Major Lalithnath came, we asked him if we would get a favourable response to our petition. He said he was also expecting a good response. He added that the news published in 'The Times of India' about me was wrong and that it was not necessary for Rajiv Gandhi to decide about my release. I said that it was the Indian High Commissioner, Mr.Dixit, who said that it was Rajiv Gandhi who had to decide about this and he can't give orders to the IPKF. The Major said that it may not be correct. One of the newspapers had mentioned that I was in 'D' block. The Major said that security would be tightened to ensure that such inaccurate information was not given out.

On 23rd January, my wife came with my eldest daughter Vasuki and her daughter Janani. "They did not release you for Pongal. Will they release you at all? Or won't they?" will saked. Menon, who was in the cabin where our meeting took place, did not say anything. Even as she approached me, my daughter began crying. I hugged my grand-daughter and caressed her. Menon observed all this calmly. For the past few days, he seemed to be distressed. His visits to our room had also decreased. Our colleagues commented on this. I told my wife that we had sent a petition to the higher authorities seeking our release on 26th January, India's Republic Day, failing which we would go on a token fast on 30th January, Gandhi's death anniversary. In case even this did not bring about our release, I had decided that from 10th February, I would undertake a fast unto death.

My wife said that when I went on a fast, she would also do the same. She further said that she would go to Colombo, meet Gamini Navaratne, inform him of this and find out what his next (intended) course of action was. I gave her my consent.

When my wife came with my daughter, she had brought one bottle of Horlicks, sugar, biscuits and cigarettes. The lady officer of the Red Cross received this, saying that it would be handed over to me. After my wife and daughter had left, Major Lalithnath and Lt. Menon brought these things in the evening. As usual took out all the things from the bag, so that we could share them among ourselves. At the bottom, I found the keys of our compound gate and that of the main door of my house. When my wife handed over the bag to the lady officer of the Red Cross, she had forgotten to take these keys. Tied in her handkerchief, the keys looked at me pathetically. I informed the Major that my wife had left the house keys in the bag. If they are given to the lady officer of the Red Cross, my wife could come the next day and collect them, I said. He replied, "Keep them yourself. If she comes tomorrow, you can meet her again".

CHAPTER 24

On 24th January, we were playing dice. Two others were playing chess on the board which Lt. Menon had brought and given them a few days earlier. Major Lalithnath came. "Some of you may be released tomorrow" he said. "who are the 'some'?" asked Sarvendra. "who do you think will be freed?" he asked. I said that my wife had already given me the keys to my house, to facilitate my return. "You hold a responsible position in a newspaper office. Its not that easy for you to be released; anyway, let's wait and see" said the Major and went away. After this, our friends began researching on who were the prisoners likely to be freed the next day. Sarvendra and myself decided that we wouldn't be released. We also decided, that if the Major came again, we would request him to hold the two of us (journalists) back and release all the others. We had already made a request to this effect.

For the past three days, Sarvendra's hands and legs were swollen. Diagnosing it as a rheumatic disorder, the doctor had given him medicines. A well-built, stout man, he had reduced considerably in a few days.

We had finished our dinner and ablutions, and got into our room. No one was inclined to indulge in games or recreation. All of us had spread out our beds and were thinking. Our colleagues looked at Sarvendra and myself with sympathy. They had come to the conclusion that everyone except the two of us would be released. Around 9 p.m. Major Lalithnath and Lt. Manon came to our window. "Luck has dawned on the unlucky thirteen" they said. After many days, we saw a smile on Lt. Menon's face. "All of you will be released tomorrow. I got the orders just now. Menon said we must inform you immediately. I too felt the same" said Major Lalithnath.

Both of them went away. Maniam, who turned from the window, hugged me warmly, saying, "Sir, only now I am relieved". Many of them began planning as to how to reach home, and want to do as soon as they were released the next day. It was Sarvendra who warned them not to build castles in the air until they reached home. No one slept that night.

In the meanwhile, three or four men had eased themselves in a tin which Yogaraja had taken. Instead of keeping it away from the window, they had left it on the window sill itself. Lt. Menon who came to the window around midnight, asked "Has no one slept yet?" All of us rose and went to the window. As Menon held his nose tight with his fingers Sudhakar slowly tried to take the tin which was full, and hide it behind his back. Just then someone raised his hand which hit against the tin and upset the foul water on the beds of Vimalan, Muruganandam and Maniam.

"I am going to Madras tomorrow on a week's leave. I am sorry I will not be able to see you off tomorrow. I wanted to bid you farewell and wish you well. That is why I came at this late hour" said Lt. Menon. We expressed our gratitude for the love and concern he had shown us. I gave him some dates. He then left us.

Sudhakar was almost in tears when he said, "Sir, I'm sorry that we've lost the honour and self-respect which we had so zealously guarded all these days". He then cleaned up the place somehow. But after we leave the prison, God knows who would use those bed spreads. What would they think? How would they curse us?

The next day, 25th January, we finished our ablutions early in the morning and got ready to leave. The other prisoners in the hall and the other rooms began greeting us and bidding us farewell. We gave away the unused soaps, combs, bottles used for receiving tea, Horlicks, empty bottles and so on to the others. I gave away some of the cigarettes which I had. A few weeks earlier, three youths who had come with the interrogating officers, had identified some of the prisoners in the hall as non LTTE. Those who had come to identify them belonged to the TELO, it was said. Again, one day, I saw another interrogating officer Rajan, bringing a youth wearing a mask. That kannan and those who had identified him, took leave of us when we were released and sent out.

At 7 a.m. we were taken in a line to Major Lalithnath's cabin. Some of the others from the other blocks, who were to be released that day, were already there. Major Lalithnath who sent them with words of advice, said that there wouldn't be place for all of us in the cabin and so took only Sarvendra and myself inside. The rest sat

in a row outside. We were given tea. Then, a Jawan opened a box, and calling out the name according to the number, gave some things to the Major. The cover marked with my number was taken out first. My ID card and two pairs of spectacles were in it. The Major gave me a paper with three copies, and asked me to sign, as a token of my having received the things. I said, "My wristwatch..." The Major was startled. A jawan took all the other covers and checked them. My wristwatch and the nine rupees which I had when I came there, were in another cover. "Good thing I didn't have a heart attack" said the Major and gave them to me.

To receive his things, Sarvendra put down his tea-cup and came and sat in front of the Major. A jawan took away the cup with half the tea in it. After we received our things, we returned to our room. For breakfast, some rice similar to Pongal was served. After eating it, I asked the others if we could pray. All of us sat in our places and prepared to pray.

CHAPTER 25

No:269 was called out. I thought my wife and had come to see me and came out. A jawan belonging to the interrogation wing stood outside. He led me to reach Rajan's interrogation wing, we had to pass Major Lalithnath's cabin. The Major was inside his cabin. "I'm being taken for interrogation" I said. "Wouldn't be; just to talk to you, perhaps. Go and see" he said. I went to the interrogation centre. In the asbestos shed outside, two others were sitting on the floor, waiting to be interrogated. The jawans on guard there, asked me also to be with them. I didn't move. Shortly, a jawan came and took me.

I was left in front of Rajan, an interrogating officer, in a small room. Offering me a seat, he checked my number and name. He took a file and kept it in front. Before he could ask any questions, I told him about myself. "We are to be released today, and ready to go home. We have even received our things from Major Lalithnath" I said.

He closed the file, and keeping it aside, began talking to me in a friendly manner. "What are these LTTE youths going to achieve? We will not leave this place until the LTTE has been wiped out completely. There is not much difference between our being in India and our being here. There also we have vehicles and planes plying. The same here. The expenditure is not much. If the Sri Lankan army fights with us, we will also fight them", he went on, giving a small lecture. He then asked, "Where is Basheer Kaakha?" I replied that I had not seen him after 9th October.

"Basheer Kaasha is with us. Soon, Prabhakaran will join us" said Rajan.

He spoke a mixture of Tamil and Malayalam. He didn't know Tamil as fluently as Major Nair or Lt. Menon. "Why have you summoned me for enquiry? Don't you know that we are being released today?" I asked.

"Beginning with you, I wanted to complete enquiring all thirteen of you today" he said, and calling a jawan he gave him a file and asked him in Hindi to get a signature from somebody. Shortly, he asked me to leave. I was returning to my room. IT was customary for prisoners being released, to be made to stand outside 'D' block, have their photographs taken, give them some advice and then send them home. Some of our colleagues in that block called me, "Sir, please come here". I went and sat with them. "I am trying to send you home today. In case I don't succeeds, you may have to wait till tomorrow. But don't worry" said Major Lalithnath.

I told him how Mr.Rajan had called me for an enquiry, and asked, "Did he sent a file for you to sign?"

Major Lalithnath was furious. "Who is to ask for my signature?" he burst out. "Each one is trying to act great. I got the orders for your release from the highest authority. No one else can issue orders. But I have not received them in writing. I expect to get them tomorrow I have taken up that responsibility and am trying to implement the orders which I received orally over the phone. You WILL GO HOME" he assured me. He was a man who accomplished what he wished!

There were various sections in the IPKF. It was evident that there was no 'peace' (unity) between them. That we were to be released, was confirmed. And Major Lalithnath had played a very important role in effecting this. Whole-heartedly I thanked him. He came again. "The Photographer has not come. I cannot send you home without taking your photographs. Please go back and remain in your rooms" he said. We returned to our rooms. Our hopes of going home that day had diminished greatly.

Tea was served at ten. "Let's play dice" someone said. "What else can we do?" I asked. The others joined in the game.

In a short while, some officers came to our block. They went to the second room and asked something to some of the ones there. They came to our room also. All of us got up and went towards the door. One of the officers was called Sharma.

He had been the interrogating officer in Marudanaamadam. It was said that he was responsible for torturing the prisoners in the camp. Of the prisoners taken for interrogation from this camp, very few returned without injuries, they said. He had now come as an additional interrogating officer to our camp. He looked at Jeevaratnam of Arasadi Street, who was the fourteenth man in our room, and asked, "Hey, man, how are you?" Major Lalithnath intervened immediately and told him, "They are all journalists. They are to be released today. A few more formalities are to be completed. They are just whiling away the time". And without giving Mr. Sharman an opportunity to ask us any more questions, he took him away.

Some time later, we were asked to come to the courtyard near 'D' block. Again we went in a line. When the others in our block bid us farewell, we said "We are not sure of being released. We may return after all" and moved on. As soon as we went and sat in the courtyard, it was rumoured that there was no film roll for photographing. "I have made arrangements to fetch film rolls for you" said Major Lalithnath. Then some forms were brought and filled up and our signatures were obtained in four copies. Major Lalithnath had determined to send us home that day and sparing no effort. But it was obvious that the interrogating officers were not in a hurry to release us. It was past 3 p.m. The responsibility of taking photographs rested with the interrogation wing. The interrogating officer Major Nair, was not there that day.

One of the officers of the interrogation wing was coming to take our photographs. Major Lalithnath said, "The cameraman is here", and going to the sentry's room spoke to someone over the phone. Those who were being released that day were divided into two groups – those going to Jaffna and those going to Jaffna and those going to other places. Photographs were taken.

My number 269 was written on a small board with a chalkpiece. A photograph was taken of myself holding that board right on my chest. Photographs of each prisoner with his number were taken. I was reminded of the photographs of I.R.Cs (criminals) being displayed in police stations under the caption "Wanted". Were these photographs taken to be displayed at some time in the future? After the photographing was over, Major Lalithnath came with another

Sikh officer. He gave the latter some of the forms which we had signed along with some covers. He then told us, "Everything is ready. Col. Babbar will now say a few words to you. After that he (the Sikh officer) will take you to palaali, and from there by helicopter to Jaffna. If it is not possible for you to go home tonight, arrangements will be made for your safe stay during the night, and your return home tomorrow".

In a few minutes, Col. Babbar came. Two ladies who were to be released along with us, were handed over to their parents. Col. Babbar shook hands with each one of us and bid us farewell. When he shook my hands, he said "I am happy about your going home. But I am sad that I will be losing good friends. Tell your men that if they knock their heads against a mountain, only their heads will break. No damage will be caused to the mountain. If you are nice to us, we will be nice to you. Problems cannot be solved with weapons". He added, "You need not have any reservations. If we have been good and done you good, write about it. If we have been bad and done you bad, write about that also" and shook my hands again, saying goodbye.

I have written it all.

CHAPTER 26

Those going to Jaffna were asked to stand up first. Once again the names were checked. We went to the front gate. Major Lalithnath stood there, shook hands with each one of us and said goodbye. We got into the truck which was parked outside, without our eyes being covered, without our hands being tied behind our backs, and without anybody's assistance. Armed jawans stood guard in front of the truck and behind. The truck left for Palaali. It was exactly 3.30 p.m. I was seeing the outside world for the first time after two months Sarvendra and his friends were seeing it after 108 days. Though we were officially free, we were traveling under military security. They had to hand us over either to our families or to some civil authorities. Until then, we couldn't consider ourselves as truly free.

When our vehicle reached Palaali, it was exactly 4 p.m. We saw two helicopters waiting. We thought, "Wow! they are waiting for us. In a few minutes we shall reach Jaffna. We can sleep peacefully at home tonight". Even as we dreamt thus, one of the helicopters left. The other was being tugged by some people. Our hopes were shattered. The officer who had taken charge of us and accompanied us, was nowhere to be seen.

We were waiting in the truck. Helicopters kept landing and taking off. Time too was running out. Some of us wondered if we would have to spend that night in the Palaali camp. Some feared that if we had to stay in the camp, we would be blindfolded. Two top-ranking officers of the IPKF, who had once before come to our camp with their retinue, were passing by. One of them was Brig. Kalvan Singh. As soon as he saw us, he came close to the truck and greeted us, saying "You are being released. Wish you well". It was past 6 p.m. The Sikh officer who was in charge of us, came in a jeep. At the same time, some distance away, a helicopter also landed. Our hopes rose. The officer gestured to our vehicle to follow, and got into the jeep. Our truck followed it. When the vehicle stopped near the helicopter, we got down one by one. Two youths who had to go to Achchuveli and Aavarankaal, were asked to remain in the truck. Our number had now reduced to eighteen. Of these, thirteen were 'Eezhamurasu' employees. We got into the helicopter. Its rear part which was like a lorry, was open. It had no door, only a net made of ropes. We were asked to sit down. In front of us, closer to the entrance, some army men also sat down. Two officers sat on two seats on the very edge. The helicopter took off at 6.10

We were flying high above. Houses and roads appeared in miniature. The helicopter now began descending. The Jaffana Town Hall and Pannaikkadal could be seen clearly. The helicopter landed. We got down at Mandaitheevu. It was 6.21. We followed the army personnel. At the junction of Mandaitheevu and Pannai, where the Indian army had set up a camp, we sat under a tree.

The Sikh officer came and asked us, "How many of you were in the custody of the IPKF for more than twenty one days?". Sarvendra said, "We spend more than a hundred days". Among the ones who came with us, those who belonged to Mandaitheevu were the only ones to have been released within twenty one days. It was customary for those who had spent more than 21 days in prison, to be given Rs.100/- as pocket money. The Sikh officer had absent-mindedly left the money to be given to us, in the jeep itself, at Palaali. He said he would give the money which he had. We accepted his offer. He gave me Rs.1300/- for the thirteen of us.

It was dark. One of the officers asked us, "If we drop you at the bus stop, will you go home?" "We are willing to go right from here... But sine curfew is in force, we are apprehensive of the army men on the way" I said. Two youths who belonged to Mandaitheevu, said they would walk home.

The officers then spoke in Hindi over the phone to several people. A small truck came and halted. All of us got into it. The vehicle passed the Fort and came to the Kankesanthurai Road. Was it going to the bus terminus? The truck was going along Kankesanthurai camp? Or were we being taken to the university to spend the night there?

The vehicle halted at the University Kalaayogi Aananda Kumaraswami Ladies' Hostel. It was now one of the IPKF's camps. We were still in the truck. An army officer brought two men with him. They were wearing veshtis and shirts. They were both past fifty years of age. I remembered seeing one of them somewhere earlier. The officer asked them, "Do you know any of these men?". Yoganathan, sitting close to me, whispered, "I think they are going to identify us and take us back to prison". No one said anything. We were asked to get down.

One by one we jumped down. I too jumped; but tripped and fell. Immediately, an army officer raised me, cursing me in the process. Our fears had now dissolved. We were asked to stand in a line.

Prisoners who were released, were sometimes handed over to civil officers by the Armymen. The time of our arrival was not appropriate for meeting civil officers. Hence, it was necessary for the army to hand us over to a representative of the Citizens' committee, and obtain confirmation that we were released ALIVE. The armymen had approached some prominent citizens and asked them if they were willing to take charge of some LTTE men who were being released. Who would come forward to take such a risk?

It was Karunakara Gurukkal of Kalatti Muthumaari Amman temple, and Shanmugalingam of the same area, who bravely volunteered to take charge of us. In support of these two, Ravi, the son of the famous baseman Vairamuthu who belonged to Thattaar Street Junction in front of the Amman temple, had also come to the camp.

After our names and numbers were checked, the Gurukkal and Shanmugalingam signed the documents. We were asked to get into the vehicle once again. When the truck stopped in front of the Kalatti Amman temple, it was 9 p.m. We thanked the Sikh officer for having handed us over safely in the Amman temple, and bid him farewell.

Someone said, "No need to eat. Enough if we can sleep and go home in the morning". "No, no" said the Gurukkal. "We shall bring you something to eat", and the two of them left.

Soon, our nostrils were treated to the delicious aroma of hot sambar and then dosais. Having survived mostly on chappathis and dal water for two to three months, the taste of spicy sambar was too tempting to resist. It seemed as though all the sambar would be exhausted. The Gurukkal served hot wheat flour dosais to unexpected guests like us. He brought rice and Kozhambu also from his house. After we had eaten to our hearts' content, around 11 p.m. we slept in the inner hall of the temple. Waking up at 3 o'clock in the morning, we whiled away the time until 6 a.m.

We took leave of the Gurukkal and one by one left for our homes. As Saravendra was unwell, the Gurukkal offered to drop him at his house in Ariyaalai, on his motorcycle. Thavaseelan, a youngster and myself walked via Senior Ozhungai (lane). When Thavaseelan parted from me, I came to Kasturiyar Road. I did not notice any sentry of the Indian army. There was an army camp on Kasturiyar Road. Passing it and turning into Naavalur Street, I proceeded towards my house. On the way, some of the Indian jawans were coming on both sides of the street. People went about as usual. The situation was not bad. I reached home, but the keys I had with me were of no use. A new lock stared at me. My friend Selvaratnam's daughter Ranji, from across the street, welcomed me with wonder and love. "Have you come, uncle? Auntie has gone to Colombo" she informed me. The neighbours made friendly enquiries.

On 28th January, my wife returned from Colombo. She told me that Gamini Navaratne had made all arrangements to file a 'habeas corpus' writ petition in the Sri Lankan Supreme Court. She added that she had signed six plain forms, that Navaratne had consulted several advocates and that many Tamil-Sinhalese advocates had come forward to argue on my behalf in the court. As she felt that there was a possibility of my being released before 26th January, India's Republic Day, she had suggested to Navaratne that we could file the case after careful consideration. Even if the case did not turn out to be favourable to us, (thought my wife) it would expose the activities of the IPKF to the world. Navaratne told my wife that by filing a case, we could bring the highest institutions of India and Sri Lanka to justice. My wife told Navaratne that we did not have money to spend on legal battles. The latter said, "who asked you for money? whatever the cost, I shall appear on Gopu's behalf and argue." When my wife told me all this, she became emotional and could not talk clearly. How many friends would say this? How many Tamil friend would come forward to take such risks? If only they had done it, the world would have known the condition of many of the journalists in Jaffna. Moreover, India's mask of democracy would have been torn to pieces. The love, so freely shown to a newspaper, had somehow been denied to the man who produces and publish that paper. I think that Gamini's love for a fellow pressman was stronger than his love for a friend.

They say that the pen is mightier than the sword. How true it is! It is the only weapon which the common man has. If that is snatched away from him and his hands tied, he can be rendered helpless. There are very few men who understand this, and will come forward to help a journalist in trouble.

I am reminded of what happened in Tamil Nadu. The popular weekly "Ananda Vikatan" Published a cartoon on its front page, which so offended the MLAs of the ruling AIADMK party, that they passed a resolution in the Assembly imposing three months, RI on the Editor of the weekly. On receipt of this news, journalists not only in Tamil Nadu but also from other states in India as well as in Sri Lanka reacted strongly. They condemned the action, published the news and wrote hard-hitting editorials. The editor of "Ananda Vikatan" was released within two days. In India, freedom of the press is zealously guarded. And the pressmen succeed in voicing their views. Because the people love the newspapers and periodicals, they love their publishers and editors also. The patronage shown by the public acts as a shield, protecting the journalists.

Now, that is, towards the end of 1999, it is heartening to note that there is unity among the journalists of Sri Lanka. The Eastern Sri Lankan Journalists' Association has a major share in bringing about this unity. The co-operation extended by the Southern Sri Lankan Journalists' Association to the Eastern Sri Lankan Journalists' Association in its protests, is laudable.

The hand grenade thrown at the house of G.Natesan, reporter of "Veerakesari" in Batticaloa, did not cause much damage materially, but it has brought about unity among journalists. If the unity now established between the Eastern, Southern and Northern Sri Lankan Journalists' Associations had existed earlier, 'Eezhanadu' Kandaswamy need not have suffered torture in prison for several years. The Assistant editor of 'Veerakesari' Srigajan, would not have been arrested in his office and subjected to interrogation. P. Manickavasagam would also not have suffered an enquiry in Colombo.

When the Indian army, Which had come to establish peace in Sri Lanka, arrested and imprisoned Assistant Editor Sarvendra and myself for several months in the Indian prison set up on Eezham soil, if all the journalists had risen as one and raised their united voice, the hypocrisy of the freedom of the press in India and Indian democracy, would have been exposed to the world. The Indian forces would also have left Eezham sooner. However, the activities of the IPKF have done Sri Lanka one good — they have prevented other foreign forces from entering the country.

Tamil kings from India had invaded Sri Lanka time and again. The scars of those invasions can still be seen as historical monuments in some places. The invasion of the Indian army (in the name of a Peace-keeping Force) towards the end of the 20th century of the Tamils of Sri Lanka, has left indelible marks on the psyche of the Eezham Tamils of Sri Lanka. There was a time when India was considered as the mother and Sri Lanka as its child. But the Indian Army's aggressive and selfish attitude has obliterated that fond memory from the minds of the Eezham Tamils. India now, is also a foreign power. And the Eezham Tamils have, once and for all, made it clear, that they will oppose foreign forces of any nature, till the very end.

Let bygones be bygones. May future events prove to be a healing balm to the wounds inflicted on the minds of the Eezham Tamils.

- THE END -

A NICHE FOR GOPU

I was just eighteen then.

Young enough for half pants. Along with my brother kavaloor S.Jeganathan, I met my dear mentor, the late Sillaiyoor Selvarajan in his house.

All that I needed was a job. My brother wished that with the recommendation of Sillaiyoor Selvarajan, I should take up a job as a journalist in "Veerakasari".

"My dear boy, the press is a medium where you'll have to starve. Not only that, its like a jungle. Even if you want to come out of it, it will not allow you. Think twice before you decide".

Every journalist today, realizes how true Sillaiyoor Selvarajan's words were. His suggestion that a journalist should get his initial training in 'Eezhanadu', and that later he could join the staff of 'Veerakesari' or 'Dinakaran' in Colombo, Seemed sensible.

The day I first met Gopu alias Gopalaratnam, with a letter of recommendation from Sillaiyoor Selvarajan at the 'Eezhanadu' office in Jaffna, is an unforgettable one. Today, the Eezham Tamils are publishing various periodicals from the countries to which they have migrated. But, it is a well-known fact, that those who have distinguished themselves as journalists were all groomed in the 'Eezhanadu' workshop.

And they'll all agree that they own their success to the experience they gained from their working with Gopu.

Gopu has carved a niche for himself in the annals of Tamil journalism.

S.S. Kuhanathan

Chief Editor - Paris Eezhanadu

Director 'Nayakam'

T.R.T. Tamil Broadcast - Tamil Television

INDIAN JAIL IN EEZHAM SOIL

(www.alaikal.com)

The day before yesterday, I received a copy of the book "An Indian Jail on Eezham Soil" Written by S.M.G. alias Gopu alias Thiru. S.M.Gopalarathnam, who has been in the field of journalism for the past forty seven years. It has been published from Batticaloa by the World Voice Publications. It is 170 pages long and consists of 26 chapters. with a Preface by Prof. Sivathambi and reviews by Mano Rajasingam, S.S. Kuhanathan the Chief Editor of 'Eezhanadu' and Poet K.P. Aravindan, the book has been well-printed and published.

The Nucleus of the Book

In 1987, the IPKF came to Sri Lanka and bombed the premises of two periodicals, 'Eazhamurasu' and 'Murasoli'. At that time, Gopu was the Chief Editor of 'Eezhamurasu' which was under the control of the LTTE. Along with Assistant Editor Sarvendra, and a host of 'Eezhamurasu' employees including type-setters, Gopu was arrested and imprisoned. In this book, Gopu had narrated explicitly, and with the artistic touch of a journalist, the traumatic experiences which he underwent in the 'Indian' prison for sixty two days. Inevitably, every reader of this book goes through those experiences (in his mind).

The Objective of this Book

Every book should have an objective. Gopu has placed on record the unforgettable experiences of his life, so that future generations may know them. In the present Tamil Eezham political scenario, it is imperative that writers express themselves with a social responsibility. It is possible to take different views of the activities of the IPKF on Tamil Eezham soil. At the end of his book, however, Gopu has said, "Let bygones be bygones. May future events prove to be a healing balm to the wounds inflicted on the minds of the Eezham Tamils". This shows that he has written this book with great tolerance. It is notable that this work appeared as a serial in 'Junior Viakatan'.

Narrative Technique

Though the work as a whole, deals with the real incidents that took place in the author's life, it reads like fiction, because he has strung them together coherently and artistically. The characters and their qualities that struck him, have all been chosen with a discerning eye. Though he has treated all the characters with respect, he has also revealed their other side, so that we understand them properly. Not all writers can do this. Only the most mature can; and we can notice it in Gopu's writings. He has expressed himself in such simple words that everyone can comprehend his meaning easily.

In the Prison

Gopu has portrayed character like the Indian jawans who took the prisoners blindfolded and with their hands tied behind their backs for interrogation, other jawans who treated them mercilessly, kind-hearted officers like Gupta who helped the prisoners indirectly, and the lady officer of the Red Cross Society, as they really were, with their good and bad qualities. He has not glossed over the atrocities committed by the Indian Army. His observant eyes have captured the various factions within the IPKF and the disunity among them. He has recorded the sufferings endured not only by himself but also by the others who were with him. Innumerable incidents have been described. Each chapter flows into the next so smoothly, that we do not realize where one ends and the other begins.

Untold Facts

By reading a book, we can know the details that have been expressed in it. But how successful a book is, depends on how much information it conveys implicitly. This book contains plenty of such information.

Those who are imprisoned are hopeful of being released some day. But those who imprison them, have to spend their whole life in the prison. When we consider the psychological disorders that prison authorities are subjected to, we realize that their plight is worse than that of the prisoners themselves.

We understand quite well that the prison described by Comrade Thyagu in his "Pictures in the Wall" and the Army prison on Eezham soil are very similar.

In his foreword, Prof.K. Sivathamhi describes this situation very briefly but effectively. The entry of the Indian Army into Sri Lanka, is "a note out of tune", he says. This is because, the Indian Army is a product of Indian culture and lifestyle, but it tried to impose itself on the Eezham culture and lifestyle which was entirely different. Thus both Gopu and Sivathambi have expressed the same views in this book.

The Print and the Type

Though published from Batticaloa in the midst of the present turmoil, the cover picture and the print are very good. If we look around for defects in such an excellent work, we find that some of the Tamil leaders have taken a drubbing from Gopu's pen. They may be guilty. But, till the very end, readers are left with the nagging questing, "Won't he ask them to mend their ways and live good lives?"

For twelve long years, Gopu has struggled to get this work published. He has exposed the various corrupt practices that he had to contend with in the field of creative writing. These included even the disappearance of the manuscript itself. Such incidents shock us by their incredibility.

The Kurinji flower blossoms only once in twelve years. This work too had blossomed after a twelve-year-long struggle.

Gopu's creation, like the Kurinji blossom, is unique.

K.C. Durai.

Denmark - 17.4.2001.

Indian Prison on Eezham Soil

When I read the work "Indian Prison on Eezham soil" written by the popular journalist S.M.Gopalaratnam, describing his arrest and subsequent detention in prison set up by the IPKF in Jaffna, various thoughts rose in my mind.

There was a time, when during the freedom struggle, leftist intellectuals like Dr.N.M.Pereira fled to India to evade capture by the British. Today, that very India entered Sri Lanka to 'preserve' peace in the island and in the process, imprisoned its intellectuals on its own soil. These changes, wrought by time, overwhelm me.

However, should we not understand that history repeats itself at different levels and in different situations, with a kind of ironic smile?

Through Gopu's book, we learn many facts. We also remember various experiences (that befell us) which are similar to Gopu's. By his arrogance and unnecessary interference, a man brings pain and sorrow upon himself and others. But he who is honest and sincere, can save himself and others from harm. These truths are brought home to us by the incidents narrated in this work. Vijayanathan, who worked with Gopu in 'Eezhanadu' can be cited as an example of the former, while Gopu himself may serve as an example of the latter.

The brutal acts of the IPKF at the Main Hospital in Jaffna, mentioned by the author in this book, are highly disturbing. Here is an extract:

"No one expected that the Indian soldiers would behave so ruthlessly. An employee of the hospital, who lay still along with the corpses, happened to cough. An Indian Jawan who heard the sound, threw a bomb and killed several people including the one who coughed. Dr. Sivapaadasundaram volunteered to save the children who had been trapped in the hospital, and those who had been born there. But the Indian soldiers, though informed that he was a doctor, shot him at point black range without even a tinge of humanitarianism. The doctor (true to his profession) managed to push away the three nurses who had come with him, thereby saving them from being killed".

These are undoubtedly atrocities. When I read these descriptions, I was reminded of my experiences – I have mentioned them in my book, "Noyil Irutthal" – in the same hospital around the same time. The manner in which I escaped from danger, remains a hair-raising incident even today. Moreover, when the Sri Lankan army entered the peninsula in 1991, the six hundred odd people (like me) who remained there, were subjected to the same sort of imprisonment which Gopu describes in this book. This resulted in my writing a true story titled "The Village That was Arrested" and a folk song, "The Song of the Unbound Circle".

When I read the names of the two people who had a major share in the release of Gopu and his colleagues who were imprisoned, I was again distressed. The first was Kuhamurthy. The second, Gamini Navaratne, who was the Editor of "The Saturday Review". The latter died of illness. Nothing is known of what happened to the former. As I knew both of them personally, their memory saddens me. Those who know them, know that they never shirked doing social service. This book confirms it.

If things had gone according to schedule, as the author wished, this work should have been released long ago. But those who promised to publish it, went back on their word at the last minute. The story of how even the manuscript was 'lost' and found, has been narrated separately.

The most significant aspect of this book is that, one who begins reading it will not lay it down until he finishes reading it fully. It is not an exaggeration to say that this is a must-read book today.

M. Ponnambalam
"Sarinigar" Weekly
Edn : 213 -10 -16 Dec.2000

Soulful "Sound"

The fifth and first anniversary issue of the quarterly "Osai" (Sound) published from Paris, was gratifying. K.P. Aravindan has given his due place to 'Eezhanadu' Gopu, who was a mentor to many like me, and presented him in flesh as it were, before our eyes.

In his short story, "Pudiya Paramparai" (New Ancestry), he portrays himself as an ancestor, and describes his life now in his own inimitable style. The Kuringi blossoms once in twelve years. Similarly, in Gopu alias Gopalaratnam's garden, the flower of a 'short story' has blossomed now. I have read a wonderful story of his, in 'Eezhanadu'. After that, only now have I had the opportunity of reading a short story carrying his unique stamp. We had published the short story "Pudiya Paramparai" (first published in "Osai") in "Thamizhan" the most widely read periodical (in Tamil) in Europe. "Osai" which contains several literary merits, should continue its publication. "Osai" is published by the Literary Readers' Circle. Its Address is :

*"Osai", C/o. S.Thiruchelvam,
20, Rue dela Folie, 75011 Paris,
France.*

"Thamizhan" Literary Platform

If anyone could suddenly walk into the 'Eezhanadu' office even at unearthly hours of the day or night, it would be none other than Gopu. 'Eezhanadu' and Gopu were synonymous. In the field of Eezham journalism, he was an uncrowned king. Even now, whenever I think of Gopu alias S.M. Gopalaratnam, it is only with respect that I do so. If it has been possible to publish the 'Eezhanadu' from Paris and the 'Thamizhan' from London, I can be proud of the fact that it is because of the lessons in journalism which I took from Gopu.

I have never met such an ever-active Tamil journalist as Gopu. His service has been recognized and recorded in the book, "Broken palmyra". Gopu began his journalistic career as a proof reader in 'Veerakesari', was promoted as Assistant Editor in 'Veerakesari' itself, and after seven years entered 'Eezhanadu' in Jaffna. Joining it as New Editor, he helped it grow and remained its editor. when he was the editor of the 'Eezhamurasu' daily, run by the LTTE, he was arrested and imprisoned for two months by the IPKF. His serial "An Indian Jail in Eezham soil" is highly moving.

Whenever we faced complicated problems, he would come to 'Eezhanadu'. He would lend a helping hand whenever we stumbled.

He altered the headline which I had prepared in connection with the Tamil Research Conference, for the 'Eezhanadu'. He ensured that people's passions were not roused, by using words discreetly, saying, "Nine killed in a stampede". It would be more proper to say that we prevented Jaffna from turning into a battlefield the day after the conference, rather than that we pleased the Government officials.

This is just a minor example of how editors of the print media should function with self-control and responsibility, while preparing news items and their headings.

Though we tried not to publicise it then, time has exposed it all. This is one of the incidents that served to lay the foundation for the Tamil Eezham Freedom Struggle going on even today.

S.K. Kasilingam, Paris

A Fearless Journalist

S.M.G. or Gopu or S.M. Gopalaratnam often used to say that a journalist "was like a warrior". Accordingly, he shaped his life also. He shared the pressures and sorrows of the society which he belonged to and overcame them.

"The Broken Palmyra" (page 92) has recorded with great appreciation S.M. Gopalaratnam's service to journalism, characterized by hard-hitting editorials, political analyses and fearless publication of news items, which earned him the name of an intrepid journalist.

Beginning his career as a proof reader in "The Veerakesari" in 1953, he rose to become its Assistant Editor. Due to the strike in 1960, he left "Veerakesari" and joined 'Eezhanadu' as News Editor.

Today, four dailies are published from Jaffna; but we can boldly say that 'Eezhanadu' was their pioneer and model. 'Eezhanadu' proved that a daily could be successfully published from outside Colombo. The consequences of the implementation of Bandaranaike's "Sinhalese only Act" and the 'Siriththiran' periodical are two of those.

Respected literary and cultural critic and scholar A.J. Kanakarathne had dedicated his collection of essays to the "Sinhala only Act".

'Eezhanadu' began to be published as a weekly in Feb 1959 from Jaffna. Established with the intention of being published as a daily by the late K.C. Thangaraja, 'Eezhanadu' became a daily in Feb 1961. It is to be noted that the 1961 'satyagraha' served to establish 'Eezhanadu' as a popular daily among the people of the Jaffna peninsula. As the satyagraha took place in Jaffna, news of it reached the public immediately in the form of special editions. This not only popularized the newspaper, but served to bring down the sale of newspapers published from Colombo. S.M.G recalled how by the time the protestors covered the distance from the District Administrative Office in Jaffna to the Bus Terminal there, news of what happened at the District Office reached the public through 'Eezhanadu', and the public read it with wonder.

S.M. Gopalaratnam, who joined 'Eezhanadu' as News Editor, Later served it as Editor for twenty long years so sincerely, that he became synonymous with it. Though he retired on health ground from 'Eezhanadu' in 1981, S.M. Gopalaratnam could not retire from journalism as such.

In 1982, S.M.G. became the editor of the weekly, "Kaalaiikkadhir". Due to financial constraints, its publication was stopped after six months. In 1985, he took up the editorship of "Seidhikkadhir", a periodical published by Sai Baba Advertishing. This may be considered as a novel journal published in Eezham. Around the same time, he assumed the responsibility of being the editor of "Eezhamurasu". This period is the most significant of his journalistic career. Just as the Sri Lankan army disgraced itself by torching the Jaffna library, the Indian army which came to 'keep peace' demonstrated the 'greatness' of a popular daily.

Though the printing section of the 'Eezhamurasu' was bombed and destroyed on 10th October 1987, S.M.G succeeded in publishing the 'Eezhamurasu' daily from Jaffna (remaining underground) which was under the control of the Indian army. This may be considered as a great achievement in the life of a journalist.

S.M.G has recorded his experiences after he was arrested on 25th November 1987 and imprisoned by the IPKF, in the book "An Indian Jail on Eezham Soil". This was published as a serial (for six months) by 'Junior Vikatan', a Chennai-based weekly. It is noteworthy that when he was arrested, many of the periodicals from Colombo chose to remain silent, thus 'safeguarding' their work ethics.

Even before the Indian Army left Sri Lanka in February 1990, the editor of 'Eezhanaadham', despite being unable to continue in his post due to ill health, wrote an editorial, "Chalo, Chalo, Delhi Chalo" which was a reflection of the Tamils' views.

S.M.G who is worried that "these days my hands are rather shaky", is engaged in compiling his earlier writing.

K.P. Aravindan
Paris





