A SINHALESE AND A TAMIL

BY

A. M. HETTIARACHCHI

THE TRAGEDY

OF

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE,

LOVE AND HATRED,

GUILE AND DECEIT,

HYPOCRISY AND SINCERITY,

AND THE FEARS AND ANXIETIES

AMONG THE

E AND THE TAMILS.

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WITH MALICE TO NONE

THE INCIDENTS REPORTED IN THIS BOOK ARE TRUE. BUT THE CHARACTERS ARE FICTITIOUS.

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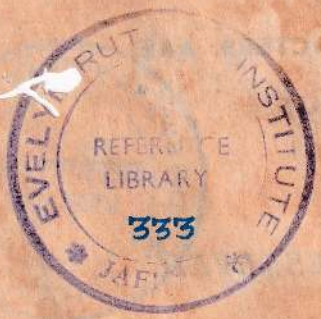

A SINHALESE AND A TAMIL

CHAPTER I

IT WAS MAY 1958

The people in the North Central Province, were leading their normal lives. The colonists, in their thousands, in different colonisation schemes and other cultivators worked very hard indeed to get, for themselves and their dependents, the rice and curry for each day. They had no time for other activities. They had no leisure as such, as the rich or the middle class have. They did not miss this leisure, so they did not feel that their life was just dull routine and a struggle for survival. They were quite happy and contented in their own way.

In a room by the railway track between Mineriya and Polonnaruwa, Rengan a Kangany in the Railway, lived with his family. Angamma, the wife, Thangamani the eighteen year old daughter, Somali twelve, her younger brother Weerasamy and the baby Veeramuni, shared their one roomed home, a part of the lines, which the British had constructed years ago, when the railway was being extended to Batticoloa. The eldest daughter Pakiamma, was married and lived with her husband and three children, on the outskirts of Polonnaruwa. He was a humble labourer working in a farm.

Rengan and his family had few neighbours. The other rooms in the line were not occupied. His closest neighbour and friend was Thomas Singho, who lived in a chena, some distance from the linerooms, with his wife and twenty year old son Sirisena. Rengan and his family were comfortable and happy, in their humble home. The Railway paid him enough to sustain his family.

Thomas Singho, had come years ago, from some where in the Southern Province and built a small hut, where his home was now. He had started on a chena. He knew the jungle well and later had taught his son, too, the peculiarities and ways of the wilds. He possessed a gun and with this there was a regular supply of meat, not only for Thomas Singho and his family but Rengan's too.

When Thomas Singho settled down in the neighbourhood, he had been a lonely man. But a few months later, Rengan was surprised to find a young lass going for water to the stream close by. He found that Thomas Singho had brought a bride home. Tikiri Menika was dark, but buxom and had all the finer qualities of womanhood. In those areas, few questions were asked, as no one wished to embarass the other man, more so a friend. It was entirely Thomas Singho's and Tikiri Menika's business, as to how they met or came to live with each other. When she saw Rengan, at the stream under the bridge, she smiled sweetly with him and after that addressed him as, 'Rengan Aiya.'

Rengan was used to the wild and unpredictable ways of the North Central Province. Men from different parts of the Island came up in search of fortunes. Some, probably had left their families down South. A few went back, but many remained behind. There were plenty of attractive young girls in the Rajarata who made quite good wives or mistresses and also asked no questions. Tney could cook and help in the chena and even take their turn at watching the crops against rampaging wild animals. In the evenings they bathed in the stream or the tank and dished out one's meals with a pleasant smile on their faces.

THIS WAS ABOUT TWENTY YEARS AGO.

In May 1958, Rengan and Thomas Singho and their families were very friendly. When Rengan got his wages, he would invariably bring home a bottle of arrack and invite his friend to share it. It was usual for Somali to carry the invitation, and it always happened, that she returned with some wild boar or venison to be fried, for the two men to munch, as 'taste' while they drank the arrack and recounted bygone incidents. As the night advanced, and the bottle got less, the children lay on their mats, till they dozed off to sleep, listening to the two men chatting of happy incidents.....of shooting trips..... of hard honest work in the Railway when the British were here and of their joys and their sorrows.

SO LIFE WENT ON.

One evening about the end of May, Rengan came home after work with a troubled look on his face. Thangamani noticed it has she gave her father the usual tumbler full of strong tea. He told them that he had been informed that there was trouble between the Sinhalese and the Tamils at Polonnaruwa. A number of rumours were about. The Sinhalese labourers had told him that there was a rumour that a Tamil army was marching from the East coast to Polonnaruwa and that another was converging on the area from the North.

"There could be no truth to such rumours," Rengan told Angamma and Thangamani, "But you know, the third man who hears a rumour, tells the fourth man that it is an established fact. A Sinhalese Doctor's child had been wrenched from its mother's arms and put into a barrrel of tar, at Chenkaladi, when the Doctor and his wife tried to escape from Batticaloa. They told me that it was a rumour but if it was found to be true, that every Tamil will be massacered."

"But no one could ever do such a thing," Angamma intercepted in a silly tone, "Why should anyone want to hurt a small child?"

These were all rumours, Rengan told her, impatiently. He added that it was also said that a Sinhalese gentleman had been shot at and killed at Eravur, when he was on his way to his estate. This gentleman was some important person in an uncountry town and that a person in a very high place had said over the radio that, he feared that the Tamils in the Sinhalese areas might be attacked. What should they do, Rengan asked his wife. There were Thangamani and the baby. Should they not flee from there to some place of safety, Rengan suggested.

Angamma reassured the old man. What had they to fear, when Thomas Singhos and his young son and also another Sinhala family were their neighbours. They could be expected to defend them against the Sinhalese themselves. Such a possibility was so remote as to appear to be absurd.

There was no reason for the Tamils and the Sinhalese to quarrel, she added. The Police will prevent that.

"I do not know that." Rengan, muttered in a very depressed tone, "You and the children can go to some place of safety. The train was attacked and wrecked at Polonnaruwa, while the Police looked on. If any Tamils were found in that train they would have been lynched."

"The government will protect us," Angamma soothed him, "Why? We have lived with the Sinhalese for so many years. Even as a small girl the Sinhalese were my friends, I could speak Sinhala like any one of them. Thomas Singho will bear witness to that. Don't you scare the children." But she added with a tremor of doubt, "If you think it is necessary, We can send the children to Thomas Singho's house or Pedirik's chena."

While the parents discussed these matters, Thangamani was preparing the night meal, and Somali was lulling the baby to sleep. Veerasamy who was playing with the pet monkey. in the garden, was delighted to hear of being out of home even for a couple of days. He ran up to his father and begged of him to be granted permission to go hunting with Sirisena Aiya. From her father's face, Thangamani, felt that they were in very grave danger. Her mother was old and feeble and inclined to be a little stupid. Her father was wise and good. He had toiled hard on the railway and after about twenty five years as a labourer, his conscientiousness, had won him a promotion to the grade of kangany. They had their night meal in silence and retired for the night. An air of despondency enveloped the whole family. Rengan in his camp cot in the little verandah. worried and tossed about. There were Thangamani and the baby.

The 26th of May, 1958, dawned like any other day in the NCP. It was a glorious dawn. The morning sun shone bright and hot on the railway, Angamma milked the cow and Thangamani took a large glass of tea to her father. Then Rengan left to another set of line - rooms some miles away, close to which the gang was working

that day. Some of the Sinhalese labourers were working and a couple of them threatened to kill him and lay his body across the track. The Tamil labourers had kept off. He had been a very kind and obliging kangany. How could they kill him he entreated. They all laughed in scorn and told him in no uncertain terms that all the Tamils, whether they were of the kind sort or not had to be destroyed. He looked out for the Spannerman, whose father was a Sinhalese and mother Tamil, but had been accepted as a Sinhalese as he was a bit of a thug. He too had not turned up fo wrork.

As Rengan hurried away from his gang, he could hear the contemptuous laughter of his men. He must get his family to safety, he thought as he almost broke into a double.

A short while after Rengan had left, Angamma, went to the house of Thomas Singho. She was greeted by a cold silence.

"Where is Thomas Aiya?" Angamma asked and after almost a minute of silence, Tikiri Menika told her that her husband had gone to Polonnaruwa as the Tamils were said to be murdering the Sinhalese.

"Can you believe such stories,"? asked Angamma in a conciliatory tone, "How can the Tamils and the Sinhalese ever fight after living together for so many years, just as we have done?"

After a momentary silence, Sirisena abruptly remarked, "I was told at Hingurakgoda that the Tamils want to destroy us and our language, When father comes we will burn the Tamils."

"Son, can you burn an old woman like me?" Angamma asked sheepishly as she left the house, feeling that her husband's fears were not unfounded and that she was not wanted any more among the Sinhalese.

A few minutes after Angamma came home crying, Rengan eame in, panting with fear in, his eyes. Rengan had more terrible news, which he had gathered from

some fleeing Tamils. A Tamil mother and her three children had been dumped into a well at Kaduruwela, and quite close to the Police Station too. This had been done, in retaliation, it was said, for the burning of a doctor's child in a barrel of tar. A crowd had caught the mother and her children on the streets in broad daylight and put the eldest child into the well. Then they put in the second child and forced the mother to watch the children drown. The mother in her horror and sorrow had jumped into the well with the infant in her arms. The crowd looked on and jeered while they struggled to their deaths. There was a rumour, Rengan told his awestruck family that the Police were not interfering when Tamils were attacked. There was a rumour that the Police had been instructed to support those who wanted to help destroy the Tamils.

Then Angamma told him of the reception she got at their neighbour's house. What should they do? They could all commit suicide, by jumping in the way of the next train, she wailed.

They will have to hide, Rengan told his family. The jungle was the most suitable. But little children could not remain for long in the jungle. He detailed, what he thought at the time, was the best plan for their safety.

Whilst this humble family was discussing about their safety and a place to hide in, communal passions had been roused. There was rape and murder on the paddy-lands and streets, not only in Polonnaruwa but in all parts of the North Central Province as well as in other parts of the country.

In Colombo, certain persons using their fluency of speech, which at the time happened to be so seductively charming to the masses of this land, roused the hatred of the ignorant Sinhala folk against the Tamil minority. Did the masses know that it was only to secure their own political positions? They hoped to continue in power, as the weak always hoped, by deceiving one section of the

population, to intimidate the other to subservience The masses took them to be, paragons of statesmanship and political rectitude. Little did they know that these men were not concerned with this country or its people, but with the ultimate gratification of their political ambitions.

This atmosphere was ideal not only for unscrupulous political parasites but to the loafer and the thug on the streets, waiting for some personal gain just as the incitors.

That young woman who was murdered along with her children, in that well in Polonnaruwa, after she had been forced to watch her children drown, was Rengan's eldest daughter. Her husband had been hacked to death on the streets. The record of the deaths of this woman and her children at the Polonnaruwa Police Station, states, "Suicide through panic,"

The Polonnaruwa Police Station was full of refugees, all Tamils. There were men without wives, children without their parents, wives looking for their husbands and mothers for their children. They were all waiting there in stark, mute fear, that they might, any time, be dragged out into the streets, and slaughtered. There were young women yet in their nakedness, after they had been stripped on the streets. They had escaped death, but not degradation. They did not feel any sense of shame, after their minds had been paralised at what they had experienced and witnessed. They stood or wandered about the camp like so many automatons, not feeling the gaze of strangers on them, or the rude remarks of perverted policemen, who were enjoying a grandstand view of what some of their sadistic minds had conjectured but never in reality beheld, until that day.

Those men who watched, clapped and hooted to express their sadistic pleasure, watching human suffering, even for the few minutes that passed for the bodies of that young woman and her children to disappear in the depths of that well, were out on the streets, reinforced by others, of their ilk, looking for more malicious joys.

CHAPTER II

What happened to this land, where the Tamils and the Sinhalese had lived in peace for centuries? Why were no attempts being made to prevent lawlessness? The Tamils felt that it was an attempt to intimidate them with the threat of what, the community in a majority, could do by way of reprisals. On the roads of Hingurakgoda, Polonnaruwa, Minneriya and other parts of the North Central Province, gangs of rowdies; claiming to be partriots, bent on nothing but looting, rape and murder, attacked men, women and children, whose only crime was that they happened to be Tamils.

Coercion, as a means of solving problems, created by a few ambitious, and self interested men, was being tested.

Diyabeduma Junction was full of armed men, one morning that May. They were discussing how best they could fight for the Sinhalese Language. One suggested that before attacking the Tamils they should offer poojas at the temple. They all converged on the temple, not carrying flowers but guns, katties, clubs and various types of other weapons.

An officer in the Irrigation Department at this very moment had sent his wife and child to Colombo. He was a Technical Assistant. The car in which the wife and child of that man were, passed the Diyabeduma Junction just when the crowd of men, who had gathered there had made their way to the temple. They came home safe to Moratuwa.

The woman's husband and two colleagues then started off with a servant. All four of them were Sinhalese and they were discussing among themselves, that they had nothing or little to fear from the Sinhala thugs, who were chiefly Irrigation and Land Developement Department labourers. It was as the car had started giving trouble, that this particular officer, had decided to send his wife and child in another car.

The four of them were soon approaching Diyabeduma Junction. They saw a crowd, and decided to drive past.

But as fate would have it, the car failed just at the junction itself. The crowd started to attack the car. Then the officer who had sent his wife ahead, had remarked to his friend, in English, that the car was being smashed up.

"We'll kill the English speaking rascals too," the rabble yelled as they attacked the occupants of the car. The servant jumped out and got away. As the man at the driving seat got out of the car, one of his arms was hacked off from the shoulder. Another man was cut and he fell. The third man got out from the rear of the car and ran, followed by the crowd. Meanwhile, the other two men lay seriously injured at the junction.

One set of patriots hurriedly tied up the two men who were alive yet, carried them pingowise into the compound of a building close by and after going through their pockets, burnt them.

The man who jumped off the rear seat of the car was chased and held at gun point by some of the party. He pleaded that he was a Sinhalese.

"Then recite a gatha", one of the patriots snapped out at him.

Although a Sinhalese and a Buddhist, he could not recite a gatha.

"May I recite a Sinhala couplet, instead of a gatha, to prove that I am a Sinhalese?" the man appealed.

"No, you recite a gatha or you'll be shot and burnt," the patriots yelled,

He was desperate. He had only a few more moments to live, he thought. Men do the most inexplicable things when faced with danger. In one last effort to save his life, he shoved the gun off and fled into the jungle on the other side of the road. They dared not follow him into the jungle.....these patriots.

He lived to testify at the Anuradhapura Courts sometime later, to the incidents that led to the brutal murders of two harmless men. On that occasion, people present in the Courthouse, stood stupefied in horror, when, they heard the wife of one of the dead officers, while giving evidence, cry out,

"Let me have even my husband's ashes, to console my orphaned child."

Incidentally, none of those men would even have been brought befor the Courts of Justice, had not, the father of one of the men, come in search of his son. about a year after the two men had been burnt at Diyabeduma junction, No one in the area, although several had witnessed the attack and the burnings, appeared to know anything about the two men. Someone who pitied the tottering old man, had pointed out what remained of his son's car. A burnt out portion of the vehicle was sticking out of the mud in a channel at Diyabeduma. Several men were prosecuted in connection with these two murders, Some of them were convicted and sentenced to be hanged. But they escaped receiving the wages of sin.

CHAPTER III

There was no sleep for Rengan and his family that night. Well before even the first streaks of dawn. Rengan took Somali, Weerasamy and the baby to the other Sinhalese neighbour's house, some distance from the linerooms. That humble family agreed to permit the three children to hide in the gingelly chena behind their home. Angamma and Thangamani went into the jungle behind the lines. Only Rengan remained behind.

They had nothing of value to hide or carry about except their few bits of clothing and some jewellery. These, the women had on them. Thangamani and her mother groped their way as far as they could into the jungle and waited there for dawn to break.

Light had fallen on the railway, when Rengan saw two men approaching the linerooms from the direction of Thomas singho's house. Rengan was standing on the threshold of his room. Even at some distance he recognised them. Thomas Singho was carrying his gun in one hand. They seemed to be coming along, with some predetermined purpose in them, Thomas Singho's manner, as he got closer and closer, made Rengan feel that an unbridgeable chasm had opened between his friend and himself. The gun in Thomas Singho's hand, which on any other occasion, would have meant nothing to him, on that fateful morning, had a premonition of grave and imminent danger. He wanted to run away. But he could not. He stood there, rooted to the threshold, of what was once his home. In terror he tried to force a smile, wondering what Thomas Singho was going to do to him or tell him. Probably he will abuse him for being a Tamil, he thought. Should he as he was wont to, in past years, and even a few days ago, ask him what success he had in the jungle last night. But he could not speak, although it was a matter of minutes, since he saw them coming.

When Thomas Singho was about ten yards from Rengan he heard him say, "There's the mahademala." That was the last human voice that Rengan heard and those were the last two human beings he saw that lovely morning in May. He saw the gun being raised. He saw Thomas Singho's son, hold on to his father's shoulder as if in protest.

In a matter of seconds, his body was only a contorted mass of flesh and bones, writhing out to the cool morning air, whatever warmth there was in it yet. After the shot the man rushed up and pressed his foot on Rengan's neck, as he would have done to a hare, which goes through a couple of minutes of convulsions after receiving a fatal shot. But Rengan's sorrows were over. There was none that he had to fear now.

Sirisena was horrified at the revolting sight he had just

witnessed. He had not for a moment thought that his father would shoot that old friend of his. The worst, he had expected him to do when he asked him to accompany him to the lines, was, that he would drive away Rengan and his family from the place. He stood there aghast for a while.

"The women have run away with the money and the jewellery," he heard his father say and then it occured to him that his father had said that the Tamils were out to destroy the Sinhalese. "Here take this gun. Find out where they have hidden and kill them," his father added.

He took the gun and turned away. That repulsive feeling that had arisen in him at what he had just witnessed was still in him. He turned away, not decided what he was going to do with the Tamil women and the children. He left his father with the dead man and walked away across the railway track and into the jungle where he thought Rengan's wife and children would have taken refuge.

Thomas Singho went through whatever was left of the belongings of Rengan. There was nothing of value. He dragged the body into the jungle and pushed it into a shallow stream. Then having washed the blood off his hands and legs, left the place to join the murderous crowds on the streets.

Somali, Weerasamy and the little baby were hiding in the gingelly chena owned by a humble Sinhalese family. Somali heard a gun shot, but it was quite a common sound in those areas, so it was not of any special significance to her. But the baby was hungry and crying. Somali herself was hungry and scared, though of what, she did not really know. The little boy sat whimpering by her among the gingelly. But there was nothing she could do, till her father came for them. He had promised to come. She began to console the infant and hugged it

closer to her, whispering, that mother and father will be coming soon with plenty of milk, when she heard loud shouts and calls whether any Tamils were hiding anywhere there She pressed her palm against the baby's mouth and whispered, "Keep still my fair little sister."

The din and the shouting grew louder and she clearly heard a woman, say, "We are Sinhalese and there are no Tamils anywhere about."

This was followed by the sound of blows being struck and shouts of threats to burn, if any Tamils were found there.

Although Somali had never had the good fortune to have been to a school, she felt that the Sinhalese man and his wife were being assaulted because they were hiding in the chena. Why should that be, she, thought to herself. Her father and mother had done no harm to anyone and why should anyone harm them, she argued in her simplicity and innocence. She got up with the baby in her arms and followed by her little brother, walked up towards the little house from where the shouts were coming.

There were three or four men with sticks in their hands, threatening the man and his wife, The woman's hair was dishevelled while the man with his hands clasped together, was pleading with the men. As she approached, the men turned towards her. One of them walked up and kicked Veerasamy, caught her by the hand and dragged her towards the railway track. She appealed to the man who was dragging her not to harm her or her brother and sister. They all began to laugh derisively amidst assurances of safety for all the Tamils. When they reached a bridge on the Railway track they stopped and discussed what they should do to her and her little sister. Suddenly one of the men snatched her baby sister from her and held the infant by her legs, She fell on her knees and begged them not to harm her, amidst the same derisive laughter from the men. Then the man struck the infant on the

girders of the bridge. Somali covered her eyes with her hands. She only heard the baby say, "ahah". She looked up and saw the man fling her little sister into the stream below. She was speechless. She saw the little body splash into the water and disappear. The mixed feelings of incalculable fear and horror, which she had just experienced that instant she saw the baby being struck against the girders of the bridge, and its bleeding body splashing into the stream, were replaced by a vague sense of helpless impassivity. She did not protest when the men took her down into the shrub under the bridge and stripped her of her clothes violently. She was impervious not only to the pain that was inflicted on her, but also, in her innocent ignorance, she felt no shame at the irreparable humiliation forced on her, even before she had attained maidenhood. It was only when one of the men shook her up roughly that she felt she was bleeding and in pain. What should they do with her? She heard them discussing among themselves. One suggested killing her and flingiing her body too, into the stream. She felt no fear. She, in fact, felt that she was already dead. They dragged her up the bridge and left her standing naked on the track and went away. Shivering in pain, Somali. aimlessly started to walk along the track till, a man who saw her, questioned her and took her to his house in a chena. There, a woman gave her, a rag to wear and a mat to sleep on.

From the moment they entered the jungle, Angamma and Thangamani made their way further and further in, till they heard a gunshot from the direction of the line-rooms. They were in thick scrub jungle. Angamma had hidden in her jacket a few pieces of jewellery and some money she had saved through the years. Their clothes were torn having been entangled in the thorny scrub. The old woman was tired and panting for breath. They sat down and waited for about an hour but there were no sounds except for the green pigeons whistling in the trees. Suddenly their attention was drawn to someone approaching them. It must be Rengan they both thought. He would

bring them news of the other children. He would take them to the linerooms and they could live in peace once again, they both hoped.

The approaching noise got closer and closer. The young woman straining her eyes towards the direction of the noise, saw a full grown bear coming towards them. Thangamani touched her mother and pointed at the animal and the old woman shrieked in terror at the sight of the bear. The bear stopped abruptly, looked at them and with a growl of disapproval at their presence, turned away into the jungle. For several hours the mother and daughter sat there, discussing in whispers, what they should do? What had happened to Rengan and the children? They heard a train pass and knew that they were not very far from the railway. Should they get back to the linerooms? It was the mother, who raised the question. Thangamani felt that if nothing was wrong, her father would come for them. Dusk was setting in, and in the NCP jungles, dusk sets in rather fast and quite abruptly. How could they spend the night in the jungle? They had never been in the jungle except to collect firewood. But that was during daylight. Now the night was on them. They were not hungry but quite thirsty and in fear of the unknown.

After a while, Anganmma said, "Let's get back and find out what has happened to father and the other children."

They decided to retrace their footsteps. They blundered on, the young woman leading the way. It was only after struggling along for about an hour or so, that they found that they were lost. Little did the two woman know that in the North Central Province even men well versed in the ways of the jungle, quite easily lose their way. The mother kept on wailing her appeals to Puleyar the god of the jungle, to help them find their way, back to the saftey of some human habitation, till the shades of night got thicker and thicker and they found themselves enveloped in utter sylvan desolation. They could not even see a few feet around them.

Mother and daughter sat close to each other. They were too tired and worn out to go any further although they were desperately anxious to get out of the gloom. They were afraid to call out. They had heard that wild animals, particularly leopards in search of prey came up when they heard human voices. Silenced by terror, chiefly caused by ignorance of the ways of the jungle, the two women sat listening to the strange sounds of the forest by night. They did not know that the jungle was a safer place than the village or the town, where murder and rape were marching along the roads.

While the two women sat huddled against each other, humble homes and stacks of paddy in the area and in most parts of the North Central Province were going up in flames. They all belonged to the Tamils. In the paddy lands and on the streets, innocent blood was being shed, with, a hitherto never experienced and gay abandon. Fear had driven away sleep, and speech. A short distance away they heard the belling of a deer. That they were both able to identify quite easily as almost every night, while in their cosy though humble lineroom they had heard the familiar belling of the deer. The one that was calling appeared to be lost. There it was again, closer to them. Then came an answering call, followed by the growling saw of a leopard. They did not know what that peculiar "sawing" sound was and which animal was making it. Suddenly, quite close to them, there was a stampede. An indescribable feeling of wretchedness seized them as they understood that the deer was being stalked by a leopard. The night was long and the wait for dawn uncertain and terrifying.

When dawn lit up the jungle, they both got up and with the younger woman supporting her mother, they started on again to find their way to the railway, They had not straggled along, a hundred yards when they came up to an oya. Thangamani was certain that this was the stream that passed under the railway bridge not very far

from their home. The railway employees living in those linerooms bathed and washed their clothes under that bridge. Thangamani thought of the evenings when she used to teach Somali and the kids how to swim in that shallow stream, while her mother washed the clothes always shouting at the children, that they had been long enough in the water. That stream, which was just a waterway passing under the bridge, at that moment brought her sweet memories of the years she had spent in their small home.

They both got into the water, ankle deep and drank and daubed their faces with the water. Then they started upstream to get to the bridge. They had not proceeded a few yards along the winding stream, when to their horror they saw the body of a man partly submerged. The moment mother and daughter saw the face, just below a few inches of water, they knew that it was that of Rengan's. Mother and daughter stood there in silence. Their grief was two great for tears and wailing. They knew the worst had happened. The silence was broken, only when Angamma cried out in a tone of terrible anguish, "He never harmed anyone. Oh God why should this have happened?"

The sound of the jungle insects and the ripple of the stream as it lapped over Rengan's body continued in one monotonous tone. There was not even an answering echo to Angamma's expression of sorrow. Who could have murdered this harmless man, was the unspoken question in both their minds. There was no one to ask or complain to, except the gods!

The mother and daughter walked on, leaving Rengan's body in the oya. It was surprising that the jackals had not found it. As the two women dragged themselves along a few more yards they saw the railway bridge. They went up the narrow footpath which led from the bathing place on to the rail track. It was deserted as far as they could see. This was not unusual on that lonely rail road, extending for miles and miles through forests. Except for railway labourers' linerooms and a few huts of adventurous

chena cultivators, who settle on Crown land, hoping to make a fortune out of sweat and soil, there were no other signs of life. Even the linerooms and huts are dotted by the railway track, long distances apart. The NCP sun, which took its toll of the sweat of men, glistened on the railway, as mother and daughter stood there wondering what they should do. Should they go up to their linerooms? Their minds were in a whirl. an ominous silence enveloped them both and seem to lay like some dark, inexplicably invisible mantle over the track and its surrounding jungles. The silence and their past experiences so despressed them both, that, almost instinctively, they turned back into the shelter of the jungle. The old woman was weak through hunger, fear, and sorrow. Thangamani was also hungry and frightened, but the thought that, like her father, her brother and sisters might have been murdered, made her forget both fear and hunger.

"Ammah", Thangamani said, "I'll go up to the linerooms and see what has happened. You wait here till I come back"

"It is too dangerous", her mother weakly protested, "for a young girl to go alone. I am too weak even to walk. Father is dead. The other children are in the hands of God. Don't leave me now".

The girl felt that something had to be done. She knew that they could not go on in the jungle for very long. She made up her mind to go back to Thomas Singho's wife and appeal to her to give them shelter, at least for her old mother's sake.

Before Thangamani could have turned round after deciding on her new course of action, the jungle was disturbed by a rough human voice. The young woman turned round and saw Sirisena, gun in hand, uttering threats, walk briskly up to them. He was cursing the Tamil race in general and the two woman in particular. The old woman got on her knees as Sirisena pointed the gun at the girl and with her hands clasped together, she prayed

for mercy. The younger woman stood speechless, as if rooted to the ground. Sirisena shoved the supplicating woman with his foot and she fell with a piteous wail. He looked at the young woman just for a few seconds, then lowered the gun and pulled Thangamani by the middle of her jacket. It tore apart. Thangamani hurriedly covered herself with the loose end of her saree and her face with her hands. She could not run away from this devil. Her mother was alone. Then Sirisena caught her by the waist and dragged her towards the railway track, while her mother protested feebly not to harm her child but to kill her. Thangamani did not protest. She was absolutely helpless and after she had been dragged along for a few yards, she went along. She could hear her mother's wailing grow fainter and fainter and soon the railtrack came into view.

Sirisena stopped abruptly, turned round and looked at her. She summed up sufficient courage in herself to look him in the face and ask him what he wanted to do with her and her mother. After all what could he do but humiliate her and kill her. He may kill her. But he was not going to humiliate her, easely, she thought.

"I am going to take you with me," Sirisena said curtly, "but about your mother there is nothing I could do. She can find her way back to the linerooms if she wishes to."

Then taking her by the hand, he led her, half dragged her through the jungle, on a track parallel to the railway. Thangamani did not offer any resistance. Physically, she could not and she also felt that, no purpose would be served by her attempting to run away or shout out for help. What help could she expect in that jungle or elsewhere, when everyone, even the gods were against the Tamils, she thought, as she meekly followed Sirisena. What intentions, Sirisena had, only he knew. But when he saw her a while before, with her hair dishevelled and looked into her sad, pretty face, some chord in his memory, some recollection of his childhood days, and, this girl whom he

had seen so often, but had noticed nothing in his feelings towards her, struck a note. This turned the hatred that had been engendered towards her community, into sympathy and affection. The base animal nature in him, too disappeared and the human instincts of pity and love flooded all his being. He stopped and clasped her to him and whispered to her not to be frightened. She, in her panic begged of him to let her go. He looked at her, pale and trembling, with a piteous entreaty in her eyes. The way he looked at her, Thangamani felt that she was not going to be harmed.....but she worried about her mother, even at that moment.

"Let's go," he said, "If the Sinhalese catch us, you and I will be tortured." Then as if sensing her thoughts, he added, "There's nothing we could do for your mother or the others. Once we get to safety, we will live somewhere, where you can be without fear."

He started off and she follwed him. He wandered where they could live, where she need not fear. Some where in the North would be the best and safest for her, he thought, as he hastened his pace.

CHAPTER 4

All over the NCP and for a matter of that, in almost all parts of the Island, communal passions had been fired. From the Padaviya Colonisation Scheme, a fairly large number of Irrigation and Land Development Departmeut workers, banded themselves together, got into Government vehicles and set out for Vauniya. A rumour had been spread that the Vauniya Police Station had been sacked by the Tamils and that all the Sinhalese policemen had been murdered. While the men at Padaviya were making preparations for their expedition, a Land Development Department official at Padaviya rushed to Vauniya and from there telephoned the Anuradhapura Police to send some policemen to prevent the labourers leaving Padaviya. This request for preventive action was ignored by the Anuradhapura Police. This band of men, with

guns, improvised bombs and other weapons went down to Vauniya. The Inspector of Police Vauniya, tactfully persuaded them to get back to Padaviya. No harm had been caused to life or property by these free 'rangers.'

The convoy started back and were between Madawachchi and Kebettigollawa (on their way to Padaviya) when a party from the Anuradhapura Police met them. The Police Gazette No. 5,444 of Wednesday 16th, July, 1958, says, "On the 30th, of May 1958, at about 4 p.m, a "motorised unit of about 600 thugs armed to the teeth were encountered by an Inspector and six men. The jeep was fired on and the party attacked by shot gun fire and sand bottles." Then the notification goes on to say that the Police party kept the "entire mob at bay with rifle fire", until rescued by a Police and Military patrol. The Gazette goes on, "In the capture of this armed convoy, II men were killed by fire in Police cum Military action whilst 26 others were injured. 393 rioters were taken into custody while about 200 escaped."

The imagination of men can conjecture even the atmosphere in hell or probably heaven, but only the police mind could have thought of this fantasy, ... the Gazette goes on, "The plan of this convoy as revealed by some of the prisoners, who were taken into custody, was as follows. They were to attack Anuradhapura by dark when they would be received by supporters in the Town who were ready to cut the power lines. Having destroyed the Police Station, they were next to destroy the Tamil refugees in the protective camp at the Kachcheri. There were over 3000 Tamil refugees at the time in Anuradhapura and a crowded refugee train. After a blood bath at Anuradhapura, they were next to proceed with added strength to Matale, where, after similar orgies they were finally to attack Kandy."

Everyone in the NCP, and, today even the Police highups as well as every constable know the truth of this story. What appears in the Police Gazette quoted above is just myth. It is a story which could vie with any of the legendary heroism in classical mythology. No incident

in the history of the Ceylon Police Force or for a matter of that, any Police Force in the world could ever have been or ever will be perverted to perpetrate an utter hoax on any country, than the Padaviya incident. Men who had abjectly surrendered and were unarmed at the time of the shooting, were murdered in cold blood. Someone had blundered. This subject is yet a joke among the Policemen who knew the truth and the cowardice. The Gazette notification will stand as a record of deceit and cowardice for which some of the Policemen of this land are notorious. It will be looked on by Policemen of future generations as something to be ashamed of, and, both the Sinhalese and Tamils are quite aware that such a crime could be perpetrated on any of their commnities only by policemen and that the powers that be, could be easily gulled to commend cheats.

The men who went on this "expedition" of course, had no right to do so. Their motives could have been sinister. But incidentally they did nothing. If they were, as the report says, coming to "attack Anuradhapura by dark", there was no reason for those men who knew the roads well, to turn off from Madawachchi, on to the Kebettigollawa Road, leading on to Padaviya. When these men were at Diulwewa, a Police party came up. The "convoy" stopped and explained to the Police that they had gone to Vauniya to help the Police but that since the Police there had assured them that there was no trouble, they were on their way back to their homes at Padaviya. While this discussion was going on, an army subaltern drove up in a jeep. He ordered all the men to get off the trucks and squat on either side of the road. Then he had all the guns and improvised bombs put into one large truck. About this time a strong detachment of the Army, along with a senior Government servant and a Police Officer turned up. A bren gun was set up to cover the men. Then a warrant officer weilding a baton, commenced striking some men who were squatting on a slab of rock. An old man shouted that he was being murdered. Some of the men stood up to see what was

happening. A trigger happy person shouted, "Fire" The bren opened out. No one orderd, "Stop." so the whole magazine emptied itself.

There was pandemonium. Eleven men died and twenty six men were admitted to the Anuradhapura Hospital. Of the 393 men who were locked up in the Anuradhapura jail, not one was charged in a Court of Law as they had not committed any offence except the fact that they were armed and could have been members of an unlawful assembly. Subsequently they were let off None of the Policemen or army personnel were injured. The jeep which was said to have been attacked was driven back to Anuradhapura and later in the night some policemen smashed it up in the volleyball court at the Police Station. Several persons saw this being done.

Many strange things happen during such periods of communal riots, but the strangest was the Padaviya shooting and the citation in the Police Gazette !

CHAPTER 5

Sirisena led her through pitiyas, patches of high jungle and thorny scrub. Thangamani was tired and hungry. It was evening. The green pigeons up on the trees whistled away as was their custom, ignorant of the terror in the streets and the turmoil in the heart of the girl. A jungle cock hurriedly, picking the last of what he could get before night set in, called out several times, challenging any others who dared, to come out and fight. Almost as twilight set in, Sirisena and Thangamani came up to the edge of a clearing in the middle of the jungle.

It was about a two acre, irregular plot, planted with ganja. About the middle of the chena there was a small watch - hut, like any of those that could be seen in any part of the N.C.P. Sirisena beckoned to the girl to stay where she was and walking up to the edge of the "jungle fence', called, "Who is in the pela?" Although he called out several times there was no answer.

Then turning to the girl, Sirisena called her, "Come Thangamani. That's Gampaha Aiya's ganja chena. He is not in."

Thangamani was reluctant to leave the safety of the jungle. Who was Gampaha Aiya? Almost as if sensing her thoughts, Sirisena assured her that the owner of the chena would have gone to Polonnaruwa or Hingurakgoda to attack the Tamils, after watering his chena in the morning. The girl visibly shuddered and Sirisena with a pained look in his face and a note of regret in his voice, for having uttered the truth, reassured her and putting his hand round her waist, took her for some distance round the perimeter of the chena fence, scanning the ground at every step. Suddenly he stopped and warned her to stand still.

"There, you find the maruwela of the trap gun that Gampaha Aiya has set for any Excise fellows who may decide to come poking their noses about," Sirisena told her as he carefully stepped into the jungle. He came back in a matter of a few minutes, trailing along a creeper and told her that, now she could safely get over. A few feet further was the entrance into the chena over a low stile. As he got over it, he helped the young woman too, saying that, they could rest in the hut for the night and leave before dawn. A footpath hardly discernible, led them to the hut in the middle of the chena.

Thangamani got into the hut and sat on the improvised cot. It was made of sticks and a gunny had been spread on it. He placed the gun by her and took two pots that were hanging from a rafter. From these, he fished out some sugar and tea leaves, neatly tied up in two packets. There were also a couple of badairingu bulbs and some dried ganja. Leaving these on the floor of the hut and taking one of the pots, Sirisena, went out of the chena, saying that he would fetch some water from the stream that was close by. Dusk had set in.

The young woman, left alone with her fears and her

thoughts, wondered as to what could have happened to her family. What had happened to her peaceful little world? It had come crashing down on her head. There was nothing that she could do now. Anything that could happen to her after this, would be the inevitable. What was this man intending to do with her? She was certain that he was not going to kill her. Now she was afraid to die, although, a few hours ago, she had felt that she did not dread to die. She felt exhausted. She was thirsty and wanted to rest. She wondered as to what had happened to Sirisena. Where had he gone to fetch water? Why had he left that gun by her? She knew that Sirisena was not afraid of the jungle or the dark. A half hour or a three quarters of an hour may have passed, but there were no signs of his return. He could have been attacked by a leopard or could his father have found out that he had not killed the Tamils? Had he followed him to wreak vengeance on his own son? The unknown fear of the jungle was begining to crawl upon her. Then, without the slightest sound, Sirisena bent himself into the hut.

Thangamani jumped up in terror, stifling a cry. In a low voice he told her that there was water for her to drink. Then he commenced to light a fire with a box of matches he retrieved after some groping about the roof of the hut.

She held out her cupped hands for him to pour the water and watched him light the fire. The little fire cast various grotesque shadows in the hut itself, and also the bit of clearing around it. She also watched him roast the two badairingu bulbs and took the one offered to her without a word. She ate it almost mechanically. The stuff was quite crisp and tasted good. She could hear Sirisena munch his one.

When the water began to boil, he brewed the tea in the pot itself. Then he fished out an old handleless enamel mug from some corner of the hut and handed over to the girl a full helping of tea. She held out her

open palm for him to slip a little sugar for her to sweeten her tongue with the tea. She sat still, while she sipped the hot strong brew, slowly.

A while later, leaving the fire to burn, he sat by her on the messa, suggesting that she should lie down and rest.

She stretched herself on the messa. It was quite comfortable. She was not afraid of this man, she had known since she was a little girl and he a mere brat of a boy. She liked his companyin her loneliness and misery. She even felt somewhere inside her, a lurking desire to have him beside her, or for a matter of that, any human being in that hut in the middle of the jungle, for company. The whole little world of hers had been so severely shaken, that she could not collect her thoughts to go through the day's terrible happenings. She lay there still, absolutely helpless. Her body and soul were quivering from the physical and emotional strain, which she had gone through that day. His presence there, by her, gave her some feeling of warmth and also, strength. The mosquitoes were droning about her ears and she could feel the occasional sting, on her exposed feet and face. She pulled the saree over, covering herself completely from head to feet.

She must have dozed off. She was awakened by a movement of Sirisena, who, too, was now, lying by her in the messa. His head was close to hers. She did not move off in protest. The darkness had melted into mellow moonlight. The dying embers of the fire cast a strange red glow about the hut. She could see him and feel him as he lay beside her. The night air was still but cool. She felt that Sirisena too was awake and thinking. But her own mind was still as the night air, which enshrouded them both, in that lonely hut in a chena in the middle of the jungle, somewhere in the North Central Province. Even the little insects of the night, appeared to her to be quiet. Everything around seemed so exquisitely at peace. She moved her head a little to a side and looked out at the portion of chena visible through the narrow opening of the watch

hut. The moon fell on the verdant jungle, reflecting little moonbeams between the shadows, cast by the over hanging branches of the larger trees. A single firefly flitted about the low roof of the hut. She watched it, as it glided erratically about the roof. It flitted down, went up again and then out through the opening into the moonlight, losing its luminosity. The shadow of a 'buckamoona' as it passed over the hut cast a momentary, fleeting blot of darkness, on the ground at the opening of the hut. She winced just for a few seconds, wondering what it could be. One lonely jungle insect shrilled out a strained single note.

A ground owl hooted once, twice and was silent. Another, probably its mate, from somewhere in the chena gave vent to a half choked hoot. She felt that the little owl was indeed happy. He had only to hunt for his food, and, when the dawn broke, to go to his perch and rest, hidden away from the sun.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the 'bells' of a deer. She had heard the deer and the sambhur call, while she lay on her mat in her father's line room. She thought of her mother. They had heard the deer that night too. To her, who had never heard a note on any instrument, there was music in that call, that night, although she did not know that there was the word, "music". Her thoughts began to wander with the deer, grazing peacefully in some pitiya close to the chena. She had heard from Sirisena's father that the deer did not eat ganja. The deer stopped belling Then the 'sawing growl' of another animal grated through the moonlight into her ears.

"That's a leopard," Sirisena whispered in her ear. She lay still and listened. The sawing stopped as abruptly as it had begun. A few minutes elapsed .....and again the deer called. It was quite close to the hut. The poor animal seemed to be alone..... like her..... In a while, it will find the herd, she thought to herself. There were now a series of calls from the deer. Suddenly it stopped.....

there was a crash and a cry as if in agony ..... a stampede, a struggle .. .. then growls, followed by the sawing growls from another side of the chena.

"The leopard has killed the deer and its mate is coming up to the kill," the man told her. She shuddered. She was sorry for the poor deer and more sorry for its mate, which would have fled with the rest of the herd. In a broken whisper, she asked him whether he was not moved by the fate which had befallen the deer. What if it had a young one? Will the orphan be able to survive?

"It is the law of the jungle," he whispered back in her ear, "Only those who are very fit and alert, can survive in the jungle. Forget that and get some sleep. We have a long way to go."

She could not sleep. She could hear the two leopards growling and tearing away the flesh of the hapless deer and crunching its bones. She remembered how her father used to relate stories of leopards attacking even fully grown buffaloes. But the buffalo always fought for his life, and, it had to be a very strong and young leopard that could kill a buffalo without getting injured. Her father never went out shooting. He had heard these stories from other workers on the railway or from Sirisena's father who was an expert jungleman.

"Can a leopard eat a whole deer?" she asked. She felt that her voice sounded loud and uncanny at that time in that lonely hut. She and Sirisena were intruders, she thought. The animals were moving about in their own domain. The two of them had no right to be there. But she also felt that although she was an intruder, she was also a fugitive, who had the assurance of at least temporary safety, from her own kind, onlyin that little hut in the jungle.

"The leopard cannot eat a whole deer in one night, Thangamani," the man answered after a while as if he

had sensed what she was thinking about and allowing her time for her thoughts. "He will leave a portion of the carcase and come back the next day or night if he is not disturbed by man. The leopard likes meat that's going bad. But sometimes a pack of jackals might steal what is left over".

There was silence again, except for the growls and crunching of the two leopards feasting on the deer. An owl hooted once. This was followed by an angry rasping growl as if the two animals even resented the owl's presence in the vicinity during their dinner. The noise made by the two eating leopards continued some time and ceased. Then quiet prevailed again in the moonlight.

Thangamani fell into a fitful sleep. The fear as to what the morrow had in store for her, did not allow her to rest as she should have, after, the ordeal she had undergone and the journey to the hut in the jungle. Both were thinking of the future. What had happened to them? He was anxious as to where he was to find shelter and security for his new found love. He was a Sinhalese and she a Tamil. Had they been allowed to live their normal lives by the railway, she would probably have been given in wedlock to a Tamil man. Sirisena would then have been a guest at the simple ceremony that would have followed. He and his father would have provided the venison for the luncheon for the bridal couple. The probability of their being married in the normal course of events would have been so very remote as to exclude even conjecture.

How could a Sinhalese and a Tamil ever be united in wedlock, was a question which the humble and simple folk of this country never asked themselves, as, the very suggestion seemed so absurd. Once in a way it happened among the more literate and sophisticated. But the result had been, that, the parents and relatives of both parties began their campaign, by first ostracizing them. During the next six months or so the question would be

the future of the offspring of that union. Finally, if it was found that both were getting on happily and were also in affluent circumstances, the very persons who condemned them will take them back to the fold. The Sinhalese and the Tamils had lived together and worked together for centuries, but, something kept them apart. None dared to raise any questions as to why there should be this gulf keeping them apart. Could it be quite, fear or hatred?

Some said that it was language that kept these two important sections in this country apart. The Sinhalese hated the conservativeness of the Tamils and misinterpreted the subconscious fear of the minority to be utter selfishness and a desire to be once more the rulers of this land as during the time of the Dravidian invasions of the past. The Tamils, wherever they were, gave enough provocation, may be unwittingly, to strengthem these beliefs. Where a Tamil was in a position to employ someone, preference was always given to another Tamil. In trains, the Tamils would spread their belongings or stretch out and tell other passengers, seeking seats, that the seats were "booked" or that the person stretched out, was ill. In Government offices, they always cliqued and spoke of other Tamls as being, "our men".

The Sinhalese on the other hand were jealous of each other and were always engaged in plotting the downfall of someone. They had an arrogance about them which the Tamils interpreted as that assumed by a ruling race. In fact, it is not arrogance at all, but a sort of nonchalance inherent in the race. Very few Sinhalese thought of themselves as belonging to a ruling race. They did not care a damn if every moment of their lives they were able to get one over the other man.

In this setup the unscrupulous politician thrived!

It could not be language that could seperate Sirisena and Thangamani. Sirisena could speak Tamil as fluently as Thangamani could converse in Sinhalese. In their homes

they conversed in their particular tongues. They ate the same types of food. One little difference was that Thangamani had a cow and her family drank milk every morning and noon, whereas, Sirisena's people did not care for milk. But customs and conventions are the solace of diehards in this land, where progress in any sphere, in actual fact, is slow, although glib tongued political upstarts and adventurers, masquerading as statesmen, talk of "vast progress".

CHAPTER 6

At the first signs of dawn, Sirisena, woke Thangamani from her fitful slumber and told her that it was time to leave the chena. The owner of the chena may come there and find her.

As they left, the green pigeons were whistling in the trees and the jungle cocks were answering each other in shrill ringing calls. When they got on to a jungle track formed by animals, Sirisena, stopped and took off the jewelled stud which adorned the nose of the woman. He tied it in a knot in the fold of her saree and started along the track again. She followed. For hours they walked on and on, till, by evening, they found that they were close to a road. The sound of motor vehicles was clear. They were both hungry and tired.

"Wait here, until I come back," he told her, as he looked for a suitable spot under a large tree for the woman to sit. It was quite dark in the jungle now.

"Please do not leave me alone here," the woman pleaded with him.

"You know, it will not be safe for you to be seen on a road," he told her, in a consoling tone, "I will go out there and find out what is happening. I will come back to you in a while".

"What have I done for anyone to do me any harm,?" Thangamani asked him, almost in tears.

"You need not have done anything," he answered sympathetically. "The fact that you are Tamil, is why it is dangerous, you fool."

She recoiled at his words and sat down where he had wanted her to be. He left the gun against a tree and in a few seconds disappeared in the undergrowth.

What was wrong in being a Tamil, she thought to herself? Why did God have Tamils and Sinhalese? That omnipotent, benevolent God, of whom her father used to speak, so often, could not have done this, she argued, in her simple mind. Something must have gone wrong, for this curse to have fallen on herself and her family, so like a thunderbolt. It was dark now. She heard the cracking of a dried up twig and she knew that Sirisena was approaching. She was now getting used to the sounds and their implications in the jungle.

"I am here," she called out as Sirisena came up to her, saying that, he almost passed the spot under the tree in the dark. Squatting by her on the parched up grass, he undid a small parcel and gave her a couple of rusks. There was hardly anything to eat, he told her, as the whole area had been looted and plundered by the Sinhalese, irrespective of whether the owners of boutiques were Sinhalese or Tamils. Thangamani was getting more and more confused. She thought that the Tamils and the Sinhalese were fighting each other, but now, Sirisena, tells her that even Sinhalese boutiques in the area had been looted. The roads were full of armed men, Sirisena continued to narrate, as he ate. They carried guns, knives, clubs, katties and all types of weapons. He had only a few cents and that was all he could get from the little that was available for sale. She should not be seen on the roads. What were they to do?

"What shall we do?" Thangamani too asked aloud. "Why should you suffer for a Tamil woman like me?"

But the man did not answer her. He was thinking of

how they could get to safety. He knew that anyone seeing that charming young woman, would know that she was a Tamil. There was no doubt of her being attacked and killed on the streets. If he found his way to a Police Station, they will take the girl and turn him out. Handing over such a young woman, who did not yet know the ways of men, particularly to the Ceylon Policemen, would be, a far worse tragedy than handing her over to a Sinhalese mob to be raped and killed on the streets, be thought. He could not part with this woman, even though she was a Tamil. He could not understand why he loved this Tamil woman so much. He had never loved a woman before this. He had not given her a second glance when she was in her father's house.

It was just that he could not understand that in love's pathway extremes of any sort, will meet and blend.

As they sat there in silence, a herd of elephants began to trumpet at a waterhole not far away. Thangamani was scared and edged closer to him.

"They are less harmful than those men on the streets," he told her in a reassuring tone, "They are not concerned about us. They just want to live".

They sat for sometime in silence, each with his and her thoughts. What could he do? Then it struck him. They will make their way to the Sacred City. Yes, Anuradhapura, the place where, one poson night, he went with his parents to worship. In the shadow of the Sacred Bo Tree and the massive Ruanveliseya Dagoba, there was bound to be peace and comfort. He too had joined his mother, observing sil the next morning. He remembered the white clad pilgrims, men, women and children, wending their way slowly, from the Sri Maha Bodhi to the Ruanveliseya Dagoba. The very thought of those sacred places, made him to feel that life too was sacred and precious. But, he yet wondered whether it was not just to destroy the Tamils. His father had said that an important person, had in a public speech, made out that the Tamils were the hereditary

enemies of the Sinhalese. Such men did not lie! Why should they? He argued to himself. But of course, he wanted Thangamani to be safe and also to be his wife. To him she was not a Tamil woman. She did not belong to any race or creed. She was just a woman and he a man. He could not understaned how it could be, but he felt certain that in their case, it was just that. He was determined to get her away from the danger that she was in at the moment.

CHAPTER 7

Meanwhile, law and order had completely broken down in the North Central Province The Tamils were fleeing in terror from those areas. Dozens were being shot down or hacked to death on the streets of Mineriya, Hinguragoda, Giritale and Polonnaruwa areas. The Police did nothing or very little to prevent innocent men, women and children being murdered. A few Sinhalese who revolted against what was happening, tried their best to save the Tamils being slaughtered. Stealthily, under cover of night they were taking away any Tamils they found and helping them to get to safety. One such was a rice mill owner.

As the night advanced, Sirisena brought Thangamani from the jungle on to the road, which was now more or less deserted. Even those who wanted to save as they alleged, the Sinhala language and the race, too, felt the strain and wanted some rest. They were either in their homes or in way side kiosks boasting about the atrocities that they had committed. Sirisena had left the gun in the jungle. A man carrying a gun was bound to attract unnecessary attention. As the two came on to the highway, probably it was providence that sent a lorry along that lonely stretch of road. It happened to be owned by the Rice Mill owner who was transporting Tamil refugees to the Polonnaruwa Police Station. Sirisena had got Thangamani to wear the saree like a cloth as she could have, in the darkness that

prevailed, pass off for a Sinhalese woman. He signalled the lorry to stop, taking a chance— as it could have been a lorry transporting thugs and murderers. But, when the lorry pulled up. his fears were allayed. In it there were a number of Tamil men, women and children. He explained to the driver that his wife was ill and requested a lift to the Polonnaruwa Hospital. When they got in, they saw there, a number of refugees in a semi demented state crouching in terror inside the lorry. No one spoke a word. They drove into Polonnaruwa town. Far away in the distance, could be seen sporadic red glows. They came from the houses, boutiques and paddy stacks that had been set on fire. The lorry pulled up close to the Polonnaruwa hospital. Sirisena and Thangamani got off into the darkness.

The driver warned them to be careful as there were a few stragglers about the streets. He had been a driver in the C. L. I., during the war and resented the treatment meted out to the Tamils. But he had no voice in these matters. To whom could he express his protests? He was only a driver, though a reasonable man. He knew that the young woman was a Tamil. He felt some sympathy for her when he saw the scared look on her face. She appeared to be like a hunted deer, in the Polonnaruwa area.

"You know," he said in a low voice to Sirisena, "You have to be careful about, not only hooligans, but also the Police and soldiers. Our soldiers have never heard a single shot being fired by an enemy of this country. The older men in the Army are somewhat better than the new men they have got for the armed forces. The younger men seem to think that this is an occupied land. They love to play at being soldiers of an army of occupation. They go about molesting women and assaulting all and sundry. Handing over a young woman to the Police is like entrusting a hen to a jackal."

Sirisena did not thank him for his advice, but made a noise in his throat signifying his appreciation of the advice given and also his kindness.

He led the girl towards Giritale and through some paddyfields into the jungle. He knew that the jungle was the safest place from the town rowdy. The jungle held many imaginary terrors for those not conversant with its peculiar ways. The two of them walked on and on, without the slightest notion as to the direction they were going. They were on a track, which he had hit on, quite by accident. It was darker in the jungle than on the paddy lands, they had traversed some time before. Those woods were infested with bear and leopard. There was also the possibility of their meeting some lone elephant, turned man-hater, due to the colonists emptying their guns into him to keep him off their cultivations. He knew that unless, they came slap - bang on to an elephant or a bear, frightening the animal to such an extent, as to make it feel that there was no chance of getting away from man, the possibility of being attacked was very remote. Animals did not come after men. They did their utmost to get away from them.

A shaded moon began to rise. Faintly they could see the path they were on. In a small moonlit pitiya, Sirisena stopped and pointed out to the girl, a bear and two cubs. One of the cubs, came towards them. The mother watched it for just a minute or so and decided to follow it with the other also running ahead. Had not Sirisena, clapped and shouted out, the mother may have attacked both of them. When she heard the clapping and shouting, she turned tail and ran off, followed by the two cubs. The girl did not know that the she - bear may have mauled them severely, had it not been for the clapping and shouting.

After walking on for about an hour or so, they fell on to a path, beaten out by buffaloes. This was broader than the one they had been on from the time they entered the jungle from the paddy fields. Sirisena knew that this track should lead to a tank or some remote little village in the jungle. It could also lead on to an abandoned tank, which could only be just a water hole not suitable

for drinking. He was thirsty and questioning the woman, found that she too was tired, hungry and thirsty. But they pressed on. The first signs of a bright day were already appearing through the leafy canopy over their path. A sambhur suddenly barked close to them, as they spend along, and crashed into the jungle across their path. Thangamani, in her fright, stumbled and fell. But before he could help her up, she got up, and stammered that she was alright. They went on for some distance and then he said that they should stop. Thangamani saw that they were at the edge of a large cleared patch in the jungle. He warned her that there may be elephants. It was a fairly large tank bed. Daylight was begining to fall, but yet, they could not see across the tank. He led her along the edge of the jungle and stopped, when they were well clear of the area which led into the track, from the tank bed. As the light spread across the tank, they saw that it was deserted except for a small herd of wild boar, a few sambhur and a couple of spotted deer straying about close to the edge of the water.

"Let's rest here for sometime," he suggested as he sat down on the dew spread grass, beckoning her too to do the same. "We are lost, my girl. I have no gun to shoot anything and there is nothing that we could eat in this jungle."

She sat down by him. She was too tired even to speak, and also hungry, and thirsty. They sat there in silence and watched the sambhur move away into safety. There were three of them. One of the does appeared suspicious and kept on turning her head round: pricking up one ear, then the other, while the other two stood still. Then they moved off into the track that led away from the tank. As the sun rose higher, the small herd of deer walked slowly towards the far side of the tank and entered the jungle, unobtrusively. The wild boar were yet in the tank. A few sucklings were squealing and running about the edge of the water, testing the toughness of their snouts on the soil. Then Thangamani heard a peculiar

sound. The herd of wild boar stampeded into the jungle, followed by the little ones. Sirisena stood up with a smile on his face.

"Did you hear the braying of an ass?" he asked her. There must be an avukuntikhai encampment somewhere close by. They will come for water. Then we can find out where we are and get some thing to eat. We will wait here till some one comes, as we may not be able to find their camp."

He sat down again by her and they waited.

Before long, two gypsy women came with water baskets to the tank. They both walked up to the two women and Sirisena explained that they were on their way to a village closeby and asked whether they could have some thing to eat. The two gypsy women spoke a peculiar dialect using Tamil and Sinhalese words. They did not express any surprise, although, both women, one of them quite young, looked Thangamani over. Yes, they could come along to their encampment, which was not far from the tank. As they filled their bags with water, one of the women remarked that they would have started off from their village in the night, for the two of them to have reached the tank so early in the morning. Thangamani and Sirisena did not reply. They did not explain their plight to these ignorant and simple folk. The two avukuntikhai women filled their bags, splashed their faces with water and started off. They followed them. To her, those two women were quite contended and appeared to be happy. They did not seem to have a care in the world. She wished, she too was a gypsy living with Sirisena out there in the jungle.

When they took a bend in the track a few hundred yards from the water, they saw the first hut in the gypsy encampment. As they approached it, the older of the two gypsies spoke out loud, and, in a while a pack of mongrels came up barking, followed by quite a number of

naked brats, whose ages ranged from about three years to twelve and thirteen. Two men came up and questioned the women about the two strangers. Sirisena explained to the men that there was blood shed in Polonnaruwa and Mineriya areas and that they were on their way to Anuradhapura. The gypsies had heard nothing about these troubles. They could not believe that such trouble could have started in this country. But why should the two strangers lie? They asked each other. Then more men gathered round and there was a conference. They too could be mistaken for Tamils. Sirisena heard one of the younger men say. Then there was a general discussion as to whether they were Tamils or Sinhalese. A few women too came up and joined in what was now an argument. Sirisena and Thangamani as they listened, understood their conversation except for a few words which were absolutely meaningless. One of the older gypsies claimed that he was a direct descendent of a relative of Parakramabahu. Incidentally, his great ancestor in the palace had been caught by the king himself when he was making advances to the king's chief and prettiest concubine. The enraged monarch had ordered that they both be stripped of their royal clothes and driven out into the jungle. They were not to be allowed to live in one place permanently. The royal decree was that they should lead a wandering life and here they were even today. But there was blue blood in his veins.

Then aonther, vehemently pointed out that the Sinhalese and the Tamils were mixed. He disagreed with his friend. In his case, he was certain that his great grand ancestors were nobles in the Court of Elara. When Elara was reigning at Anuradhapura, one particularly handsome and distinguished ancestor of his had been found to be having some clandestine affair with a Sinhala woman, who had been one of the mistresses of a Sinhala chieftain. Elara was a very fair king. Though he turned that noble ancestor of his, out of court, he allowed them to take their belongings and horses to ride away from his kingdom. They settled down far away from Anuradhapura. But when

Elara was defeated, the Sinhala chieftain who yet loved his unfaithful mistress came after them seeking vengeance. Then they ran away from the place they had hoped to make their home and started their life as wanderers.

Now for horses they had donkeys. The discussion went on and the sun became hotter and hotter. Then an old woman came out from one of the huts shouting out at the whole lot of them, that they were not going to have anything to eat for the next few days. Why were the men not out hunting yet? She screamed at them and the discussion ended quite abruptly, with the men looking for their clubs and hatchets and calling out to their dogs to start on their day's work.

The old hag came up and invited Sirisena and Thangamani into her hut. They were given hot rice and sambhur, boilt in chilly and salt. They sat down on the floor close to where a young woman, reclining on the dried pelt of a spotted deer was feeding a scraggy infant. It was indeed a satisfying and refreshing meal to the two refugees, after being hungry for so long and walked almost the whole night. There was strong hot tea in coconut shells. There was also sakkara to sweeten their tongues as they drank the tea. No one spoke to them or asked any embarassing questions. The old woman had given them to eat and left the little tent of palm leaves. The young woman put her baby to sleep and took out the two leaves on which the two of them had eaten. Thangamani walked up to where the young woman was washing some pots and pans and wanted to help. But with a smile she shook her head. She went back and sat inside the hut. There was very little noise in the encampment now, except for the bleating of goats. Two youths were trying to herd them out of the camp and Sirisena went up and helped them. As they started off, Sirisena came back to Thangamani and told her that he would go with the goatherds and ascertain where they were and how they could get back on their flight to Anuradhapura and safety. A few of the women too joined the goat

herds, while the others tidied up their little temporary homes. Some others went to the tank to bathe and wash whatever pieces of clothing they, had to cover themselves in their contented poverty.

It was after mid-day that Sirisena came back to the gypsy encampment. He found Thangamani fast asleep by the baby in the hut, She was stretched out partly on the spotted deer pelt and partly on the bare ground. There appeared to be a tinge of sorrow or bitterness in her face, which he noticed, Was it sorrow or bitterness? He could not define it even to himself. It was only a flash of a thought whether it was sorrow, but the next instant, it was replaced by anxiety as to what they were to do. How was he to take this young woman to safety? Could she stand the strain of walking through miles and miles of jungle? He went out of the hut and lay at the foot of a palu tree, covering his face with his arm to keep off the glare of the heat around. The gypsies were striking camp the next morning, he had been told. They were some distance from Anuradhapura. The gypsies had said that they were about ten hours travelling on foot from Anuradhapura. Could there be danger at Anuradhapura too? Surely, in the Sacred City, the Tamils could expect sanctuary, he thought, as he fell asleep.

CHAPTER 8

Close to the Twin Ponds at Anuradhapura, there was just one teakiosk open for business. About four or five men were seated inside, discussing the events of the last few days.

"The Tamils must be got rid of, once and for all," Wijepala, a swarthy big made man, said. "They have been our hereditary enemies and even the authorities have given instructions to the Police not to prosecute those who kill them. In Polonnaruwa, all the parademallu have been wiped out."

Wijepala was a well known character amidst the criminals in Anuradhapura. He was about 30 and had spent a fair number of years of his youth inside the Anuradhapura Prison.

"William Aiya and I have already done our bit for the cause of the Sinhala Language," continued Wijepala. "Two nights ago we caught some Tamils in the jungle in the Galakkara area. There were four of them, husband, wife and two children. They had run away to what they thought was a safe place and were cooking that night, by the Malwatu Oya. We stealthily walked up to about five fathoms of the lot and shot them down. One of the small Tamil fellows began to scream, but William Aiya, quickly sent him to hell by smashing his head with a stone."

"It was not worth our trouble, or, the two cartridges that Wije used," William Aiya added with a curse. "They had only about a measure of rice tied up in an old rag and the man had eighty three cents tied round his waist."

"They must have been the peasant cultivators in the Galakkaray area, who were paupers," Charlis, another man said. "I remember how some of those fellows used to come to me for fifty cents worth of 'cortal' every evening. I used to give them small doses of 'embalm' and they liked the stuff very much. You should have caught Rama Mudalali and his brother and you would have been the winner of a sweep."

"Rama Mudalali and his brother escaped with the aid of Sinhalese traitors," Wijepala replied in a tone of utter disgust. "We threw the bodies of the demallu into the Malwatu Oya, to be certain that some treacherous policeman will not have a chance to incriminate us."

In another boutique, in the New Town of Anuradhapura two constables were at a table discussing the troubled situation. PC Perera had been to a school in Galle but he had been compelled to give up his studies and seek

employment when his father died of a sudden illness, leaving him to look after the family. He was ambitious and wanted to be promoted as a sergeant so that he could get married with a little money and then give his younger sister in marriage. P.C. Sumanadasa, the other man had about 15 years service but he was just able to write out his signature. He had no ambitions. He knew that he will end up as a constable and was quite contented with his lot.

"Our Inspector is a fine man, no Ralahamy?" said PC Perera. "I was afraid that the Army fellows might have suspected that the refrigerator had been removed before the house of the Irrigation Engineer caught fire."

"What nonsense are you talking about?" replied PC Sumanadasa. "How do you think that Inspector came to be in that position, if he did not know how to please his superiors and 'polis tactics.? When we set fire to the house the 'prig' was already in the bungalow of the Inspector. The Irrigation Engineer and his wife were well that side of Vauniya and there was no one else about as we are enforcing the curfew very strictly. The radio and the books were also in the house when the Army men came to put out the fire, so they could not suspect anything."

"Taking the 'frig' is quite a different matter to stealing fowls of Tamils by the Police," PC Perera replied in a rather conciliatory tone. They had been warned that if anyone spoke about what the Police were doing, in Anuradhapura that person was bound to get it in the neck. "The danger, Ralahamy, is that the rich Tamil man whose fowls were robbed by our boys at Saliyapura may be having relatives who are senior Police Officers. He may complain to them even later on, after these troubles are over".

"You are a fool, putha," the older PC told him sympathetically. "The Tamils are finished. You have a lot to learn about the work in the Police. When we go for

inquiries, we take money from both the complainant and the accused party. From the complainant to file a plaint. From the accused not to file plaint. Then we wait till one party is killed and file plaint against the other. And what are fowls? We had a good feed and the Inspector took five Whiteleghorn hens and a cockbird for rearing at home. Where is the time to look after fowls? Can you imagine our Inspector reporting to the ASP that a large number of fowls, said to be costly, have been brought to the Police Station from the Tamil man's house? protecting private property does not mean fowls according to the ordinance, man."

PC Perera was stumped. To prevent further argument and also embrassing questions coming from PC Perera, Sumanadasa, in a superior tone advised his young colleague to wait till he was married and having children before he raised questions about police duties and such useless matters as fowls. That clinched, whatever may have led to further argument.

CHAPTER 9

The Agricultural Research Station at Maha Illuppalama was in the hands of the labour force. The Sinhala senior officers had either run away or locked themselves in their bungalows. Some of the Tamil officers who happened to be among the junior staff had sought shelter in the jungle. The wife of one of the clerical hands, a Tamil, heavy with child was hidden in the bathroom of a Sinhala Officer, who lived in the premises with his family.

Early in the morning about the end of that fateful month of May 1958, a number of armed men walked up to the bungalow of this particular officer, demanding any Tamils hidden in the house to be put out immediately. They were armed with guns, katties and clubs. The Officer came on to the verandah and explained to the rabble that there were no Tamils in his house. One of his labourers

poked a loaded gun into the pit of his stomach and held him against the wall, while the others set about searching the house. Then there was a general cry of exultation as a couple of men dragged out the terrified woman. It was quickly decided that the 'Tamil woman' should be shot forthwith. Then the wife of the Sinhalese Officer fell on her knees clutching the feet of the rabble leader, one of her husband's labourers, and pleaded that they could shoot her that instant, instead of the expectant mother. Even the hearts of the beasts who had gathered there were moved by this appeal. The man at whose feet the wife of that official was yet pleading on her knees, looked around, like a Roman conqueror deciding on the fate of a mighty but vanquished foe pleading for clemency. A few yelled out, "A life for a life. We'll shoot the Sinhala traitor, instead of the Tamil woman", meaning the official who had befriended her.

"You can do what you like with me, but why should you want to kill that harmless person?"

This remark from the officer who was yet against the wall with a loaded gun pressed into his stomach, made those men, who were pretending to hide their own degradation under a cloak of patriotism, squirm. They were Sinhalese without a semblance of manhood, without feelings but that of hate. The tone in which that remark was made, the subtle sarcasm and the utter indifference to the fact that in a split second he could be sent to eternity, shocked the pseudo patriots.

"Let us leave this pariah, to be dealt with by others," the man with the gun shouted out derisively, as he took the gun off the official, "It's a shame for the Sinhalese to shoot cowards like this dog, but if you love your wife and children, drive the Tamil woman out of the house," "he added as the rabble turned away, in search of new pastures and victims.

Darkness was falling on the grafted mango plants at Maha Illuppalama Farm, when the rabble now in charge of

the whole area and keeping a look out for the Tamil officers who had sought shelter in the jungle bordering the Farm, espied a man creeping out from the undergrowth. Several shots were fired at him and he fell into a drain. There were claps and jeers, when they saw him fall.

As it grew darker, they went from their ignoble business, to their quarters, to drink kassippu and recount the day's happenings and their own exploits. The expectant mother had been despatched to Anuradhapura in a passing car and the official who had given her shelter, was discussing with his wife, whether under cover of darkness, the men would return to his bungalow, to wreak vengeance on them. Suddenly, one of the Tamil officers of the Farm, rushed into the house bleeding from his face and head, pleading for water. They were so stupefied at the sight, that none of them moved to give the injured man water. Seeing a baby's bath tub full of water, the injured man, put his head in and drank the now blood stained water almost to the bottom of the tub. He hurriedly explained that he had been shot at and had been unconscious in a drain, where he had fallen. He was going to the Kekirawa Police Station.

Before anything could be done to restrain him against this foolish move, as Kekirawa was several miles away and the roads were not safe at all, he took the gun and cartridges, which the Sinhalese official had ready on his dining table and rushed out into the night. He lived to bear witness to most of the incidents at Maha Illuppalama, along with the Sinhalese officer and his wife at the Anuadhapura Courts, several months later,

The sober among the Sinhalese recoiled in horror at the atrocities that were being committed by men with depraved minds. But these very men, who glib tongued political upstarts tried to make out, were the masses, were at the time, pampered and spoilt. Only a minute fraction of those repsonsible for most of the atrocities were subsequently struck down by the relentless hands of this country's

Laws. Certain formalities which the Law prescribed, in the interests of the innocent, were made use of, to save some of these monsters who were masquerading in the guise of human beings.

That mystic, subtle power of the word 'religion' and the specious inferences that could be put over by the phrase 'our language', at the time, could turn normal men into fanatics, and, pseudo patriots, into raving cowdung Caesars, resorting to the most inconceivable behaviour.

CHAPTER 10

When Sirisena woke up and looked around, small scattered fires were aglow in the gypsy camp. Men, women and children in small groups, were seated, some round fires, others, at the entrances to their bivouacks. He walked up to where the girl had been resting and found her seated close to a small group of women listening to their chatter. From her attitude he knew that she was interested in what they were talking about and appeared to have forgotten the terrors and dangers they had passed through up to that moment. The gypsies were not concerned about the two strangers in their midst. No one took any notice of him as he went back to the foot of the palu tree and sat down there.

The gypsy camp was spread before him, like a picture. Right round, there was high jungle, and, the quiet strength and majesty of nature seemed to look serenely down on the end of a day of heartburns, sorrows and the struggles of man. The gypsies had come to the end of another day of existence. They were quite contented and appeared to be happy in their ignorance of so many pleasures and other diversions that urban society provided. The goatherds had brought the animals to their improvised pen for the night, the hunting party had returned with a deer and an anteater. The night meal was being prepared. The babies had been fed and put to sleep. In a semi circle by one fire a number of

men were drinking a special brew which the avukuntikhais improvise for arrack. The arrack in the taverns was too expensive and large quantities were required to make them feel happy. This "liquor" was quite easy to prepare. A bottle of methylated spirits, with a dash of lime juice was their speciality. They did not know that they were consuming poison. What did they care? Today they were. and as for tomorrow..... well that's another story, in the life of the gypsies of this country.

The food was being dished out and eaten. The old woman who had given them to eat earlier, sent Thangamani to bring Sirisena for dinner. They were given large helpings of venison with little rice. To the gypsies, rice was a very expensive item of food. It was rather cumbersome to carry about in their wanderings. They resorted to substitutes such as manioc and other yams. They did not feel much, the absence of rice. Wild meat was available in plenty in their nomadic lives, although they did not possess firearms. The mongrels which had trained themselves to chase the sambhur, deer, wild boar or iguana assisted their masters to kill or maim any animal they raised from cover. Quite often, the pack would drive a deer into a tank and the men would jump in and hold its head under water till it drowned.

As the night advanced, the men lay down where they were and fell asleep. The pack animals. the little donkeys, limped up, as close as they could, to their masters, forming a sort of outer perimeter to the camp. Whenever the gypsies pitch their camps they let loose their pack animals after tying the two hind legs of each animal together with rope or creepers, leaving just sufficient width between the two hind legs to permit them to limp about and feed. This saved them the trouble of looking for any pack animals that may stray far out of the camp area. The dogs sleep by their masters. No watch is maintained because they are far away from other men. If any prowling animal comes anywhere close to the camp, the dogs give the

alarm and the men are up in a trice with their clubs. There have been occasions when full grown leopards have been torn up and killed by a pack of mongrels belonging to gypsies.

After their meal, Thangamani followed Sirisena to the foot of the palu tree. There they sat close to each other, with their own thoughts. Those who were involved in an argument were fast asleep as most of the others were. As the night wore on, there was no sound in the camp except for the snoring of the sleepers and the low music of the lulling of a baby by its mother. Thangamani and Sirisena could see her through the open entrance to her little cot. A man, probably the infant's father lay stretched out by her. In a mellow voice, she sang. The air she chose was wild and sad. Her infant lay on her outstretched legs. She sang of the baby's father; of his prowess at the hunt; and of the little treasures, he would bring, for his sweet little baby, when he next went to town. A ground owl called twice and stopped abruptly, as if reluctant to disturb the little baby that her mother was lulling to sleep. She was now nodding and the sad wild air that she was softly singing, was fast turning into an incoherent hum. A sambhur barked. The baby shifted about, while, the mother turned it on its side and tenderly tapped on its upturned thigh. A dog growled. One of the men sat up. looked round towards the goat pen and went back to sleep.

The fires were just smouldering embers now. The mother with the infant was also stretched out in sleep, with the baby yet on her outstretched legs. Even in her sleep, one hand was holding the baby's feet and the other lay under her head for a pillow. An atmosphere of peace pervaded that scene in the jungle. It was difficult for Thangamani to imagine the horrors that she had come through. But she could not sleep yet.

Well after midnight, Sirisena and Thangamani fell asleep under the foot of the palu tree. They woke up when the gypsies were about to leave. They went to the tank and

washed themselves, yet wondering what they should do or where they could go to One of the gypsy women who had come along with them to the tank, told them that they were on their way to Tambuttegama. It occurred to Sirisena that from there they could get to Anuradhapura. But he wondered whether Thangamani who was well nigh exhausted could do such an arduous trek. As they stood, on the bund of that abandoned tank, yet undecided as to what they should do, they saw the gypsies go their way. The pack of mongrels led, followed by the herd of goats, prodded on by a couple of men and some boys. The women and children, almost mechanically, got into the middle of the caravan, while the men driving the pack animals took up the rear.

As they passed along without a word of farewel to Sirisena and Thangamani, they both felt that, although they had been befriended by that carefree band of vagabonds, they did not want strangers in their midst. Nor did they even wait for a word of thanks. from their two guests. That night they were given food and shelter that was available to them, but no questions had been asked. It was as if the gypsies felt that there was no time for, or, any purpose served, in worrying about the affairs of other men. There was no time for such matters in their lives.

The sounds of the bleating of the goats and the barking of the dogs had faded away. He told her that they must get away from there. But where could they go? Even in their own land they were refugees, with only one difference, they had, unlike others, no where to flee to.

CHAPTER II

In a large hotel in Colombo, two men were sipping their whisky and discussing, what at the time, was the only subject of interest.....the communal disturbances.

"I say, Larry," said one, "It is now believed that

there is an open rebellion in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The warehouses at Velvettiturai, are said to have been broken into and firearms, including, sub machine guns have been removed."

"What bunk have you been listening to, Kum?" the other asked, "You know that every little incident is being exaggerated and interpretations drawn, both by the Sinhalese and the Tamils to their own advantage. But what is sad is that persons, whom we considered as responsible and sincere men, have made use of this awful mess in the country to entrench themselves."

"But can you imagine that anyone with any sense of honour, will ever say that arms are being supplied to the North, by interested people in South India?" Remarked, Kum, who always thought in terms of honour and also that with honour there should be a dash of whisky. All these troubles could be settled he felt if men had honour and drank whisky. "You are also aware that the Polonnaruwa Courts Record room had been burgled and about 80 to 100 guns stolen".

"Can't you see anything strange in these two incidents and the manner their occurrence has been interpreted?" asked Larry in a rather sceptical tone. "When the Tamils break into the Velvettiturai warehouses and steal guns, they are traitors and rebels. But when Sinhalese criminals ransack the Polonnaruwa Courts record room, they are patriots. Why can't we say that the Tamils have stolen guns to defend themselves?"

"But the majority of people at Velvettiturai are said to be smugglers and dope pedlars," interjected Kum.

"That proves the truth of that incident", said Larry. "The rascals at Velvettiturai do not care a damn for language or community as long as they are in a position to ply their trade without interference. They are against the Excise and the Customs officers, whether they be Tamils, Sinhalese or Turks. The Sinhala criminals at Polonnaruwa

wanted those guns to rob and plunder their own and also kill any Tamils they could lay hold of. What do they care for their language or race?'"

"The Polonnaruwa incident is only hearsay," Kum said defensively. "A senior politician denied any knowledge of such a report."

"Come, come, my dear fellow," Larry answered sarcastically, "The fact that something is said not to have been reported, or that someone is not aware of such an incident does not mean that there was been no such incident. One has to accept the position that the statement made is truthful, as far as an official report is concerned. Take the case of the King of Nepal shooting a deer with the aid of the head lights of a jeep in the heart of the Wilpattu National Park. Was this not denied? But shortly after the denial, the royal visitor himself, sent a cable apologising for shooting that deer?"

"But Larry, don't you think that it's monstrous that the Tamils and the Sinhalese should be at each others throats, over these simple problems?" asked Kum, feeling more or less bored by the argument.

"Now the question is as to whether the parting of the ways has been reached by the Sinhalese and the Tamils," said Larry. "But who are the chosen Sinhalese to decide and who are the Tamil leaders? The majority of Sinhalese politicians in my humble opinion are utter hypocrites. They are only concerned with their own livlihood and politics is quite an easy means. The Sinhala masses could be swayed easily as there is yet nothing solid to promise except glibly to yell out about a '2000 year old civilisation, a culture, race and religion'. The ordinary Tamil on the other hand is only concerned with security in this country. Every move of the Sinhalese is feared and misinterpreted by Tamil politicians to mean that attempts were being made to suppress them. Through this fear, the Tamils keep on making, quite often, the most unreasonable of demands."

"I quite agree with you there, Larry," said Kum, with a certain amount of feeling. There is no doubt that most of the men who have taken to politics are adventurers and seekers of fortune, trying to don the garb of patriots and statesmen. How many of the Sinhala politicians will have the spunk to tell the Sinhalese masses that the Tamils too have a right to live in this land and how many Tamil leaders will dare to make the Tamils understand that there must be some sense of proportion in their demands for security?"

"Don't raise your voice for God's sake," whispered Larry. "That waiter has been listening to our conversation. He may be a CID fellow who could report that we are two 'incitors'. You know that, although I was defeated in '56, I am to get a place in the Senate. I spent for the election. Let's have one for the road and get away. These troubles will be taken advantage of at the next election.

They started off in their limousines, one to his estate bungalow about an hour's drive from Colombo, the other to his palatial home in Colombo 7. To them it was only a matter to be discussed over a drink and quickly forgotten.

CHAPTER 12

After the gypsy band had left their encampment, Sirisena and Thangamani waited for sometime, undecided, what they should do. The bund and the tank were deserted except for a few wild duck and some buffaloes in the water. Olu flowers were in bloom. A small flight of teal whistled down into the water and began frantically to dive down for grub. A couple of large watercrow sunned on a dried up log, half submerged in the water. Silhouetted against the rising sun, these birds with their wings spread out, looked like two eagles. A large white stork standing on one leg intently watched the water. It was soon joined by another at the water's edge. A pair of pelicans rowed

about majestically at the other end of the tank. A couple of sambhur, came warily one behind the other. As they approached the water's edge, the majestic antler, which was a few paces ahead of his mate, stood with its ears cocked and snout raised. He was suspicious. He turned his head round till the muzzle pointed in the direction of the two humans standing on the bund. Sirisena who was well used to the ways of the jungle stood as if frozen, motionless. Thangamani raised her hand to point out the buck. In a flash, with a note of warning to his mate; the sambhur darted back, followed by his mate into the safety of the jungle.

"Let's go away," Sirisena said. "The sambhur and the deer had security and food in the jungle, but we have no hope, nowhere to go to."

Without a word Thangamani followed him, down the bund and into the jungle. He struck out at a slow pace along a track beaten out by wild animals and buffaloes. On and on they went, sweating in the heat of the NCP sun. About mid day they came to a large pitiya in which were scattered a number of divul trees. Sirisena did not go out into the open, but squatted down, signalling Thangamani too, to do so. He held Thangamani by her hand and pointed out to, two elephants under a large satin tree almost on the track that they were following, but on the far end of the pitiya. They were standing with their heads close together and thier massive bodies apart, forming an angle. Their trunks or their tails did not make the slightest movement. Then a baby elephant emerged from between them and under the belly of the one closest to Thangamani and Sirisena. The young woman would have stood up with an exclamation of joy and surprise, had not Sirisena, as if he had a premonition of what Thangamani would do, restrained her

"If they see us we will be killed," he whispered to the shocked woman. That is the thumpathrala. The mother will attack at the slightest suspicion of danger to

her young one. We will not have a chance of escaping those two elephants".

Thangamani kept still. The little elephant, barely about three feet in height gambolled a few paces away from the two parents up to a divul tree and began toying with its trunk, one of the fruits that lay at the foot of the tree The mother moved its trunk slightly towards its offspring, sniffed and appeared to go back to sleep. The little fellow was not interested in an afternoon nap, but frisked about from one divul tree to another and in the process, getting closer and closer to where Sirisena and Thangamani were hiding. Sirisena began to edge back further into the track, compelling the girl to do the same. Then they crawled into the thick scrub jungle and watched the pitiya. They were wise to have got under cover, for in a few minutes, the mother, veered and came up to the baby, which was now almost about ten feet from where they had been squatting and watching the elephants a while earlier. She tried to herd the baby back into the shade. She seemed to feel that the sun was too hot yet for him to play. The baby began to dodge about, Then the mother curled its trunk in the shape of an U behind the little elephant's posterior and forced him back to the shade. Then she stood, in the same position she had been a while earlier, but on the other side of the father and went back to sleep. Again the young one came into the open. The mother followed him and gave a sharp whack with its trunk. This sent him squealing to the shade.

Sirisena and Thangamani, skirted the pitiya through the jungle and after some time got back to the track, which cut across the pitiya and ran through the jungle. After about another half hour's walk, they came to a clearing of of about two acres. It was obvious to Thangamani that man had been there earlier. Burnt out stumps of trees and a fence which had partly collapsed, showed her that man had made use of the land and left it. As Sirissena scouted about, looking for some sign of a path leading out of the

clearing, he remarked that it was an abandoned ganja chena. He added that there should be a human dwelling somwhere, but, would it be in the vicinity of the chena or far away? But Thangamani saw that there was a look of encouragement in Sirisena's face as he kept on looking for signs of a path. Then he found the path and told Thangamani that it will not be long before they could rest and may be get something to eat.

They had proceeded about a mile along the narrow footpath when they heard the bark of a dog, and, almost on hearing this, came to a small clearing, on which were scattered some plantain trees, a few badairingu and manioc plants, at a sort of improvised well close to a plantain grove, a woman was drawing water. They went up to her. In a surprised tone, she inquired as to where they were coming from and before they could answer her, she remarked that there was no village for miles around. Leving her question unanswered, Sirisena asked her for some water to drink. The woman motioend to him to use an old tin which was attached to a short length of rope. They both drank and sat down at the entrance to the little cottage which was a few feet from the well. Sirisena told her, that they were on their way to Anuradhapura. She looked suspiciously at Thangamani and enquired as to whether she was not a Tamil and he a Sinhalese. Sirisena explained what had happened and asked her whether she could not give them a little food and shelter for the night. They were footsore and tired.

The woman appeared to be perturbed. She was quite young, but whatever traces of charm she may have had, had faded away. Privations and suffering had taken their toll of this woman in that jungle hut. She would have been a few years older than Thangamani. There was a scraggy infant in an old saree strung from the roof. This served the purpose of a cot in addition to providing the facilty of swinging the infant to sleep, while the mother attended to her daily chores.

On hearing that Thangamani was a Tamil, she told the two of them that her husband who had gone out to shoot something for the pot might do some harm to the woman. She explained that her husband cultivated ganja for a Muslim mudalali. The mudalali had cheated them and not given them their share of the sale of the ganja. He had taken away several hundred pounds of ganja which she and her husband had looked after, watered daily and even dried and stacked safely for the mudalali to take away. The mudalali always spoke to her husband in Tamil so her husband had sworn vengeance on all those who spoke that language. Inspite of all that, the woman added,in a strange brutal manner that the jungle may have inculcated in her,that she saw no reason why a Sinhalese should marry a Tamil woman, when there were so many pretty Sinhalese girls about. Why should anyone help in mixing up the lion race with the Dravidians? She said this without even a trace of feeling for the woman who was seated by the man. It was more a statement than a question.

After her bit of advice and warning had been delivered without any sympathy, a little of which should have been in her at least because of her youth, Sirisena thought, she looked askance at the two of them. No one spoke for just a couple of minutes. She got up and went in and blew into the fire, on which there was a small pot of rice. She came back and once again squatted beside the two of them and began to relate her life's tale.

She had been a happy girl in her prosperous home in a village down South. Carolis, her husband was also from the same area. They met, at first at the well or when she was on her way to the temple. Later their clandestine meetings were not the simple boy and girl affair of whispering sweet nothings. He had seduced her. When she was three months pregnant, her father in a fit of shame and rage had turned her out of the house. She was the eldest and her mother was dead. Carolis and she came to Anuradhapura to seek a home and fortune. Some men

had deceived Carolis into the belief that they could get him employment as a labourer and she as an ayah. They had taken her into a brothel at Anuradhapura, but she had refused to spend even a few hours there. Then they had decided to leave Anuradhapura but they did not have even a few cents for two cups of tea. While they were wandering about the streets in the New Town, they were met by the mudalali, under whom Carolis was now growing ganja. Carolis had explained the predicament they were in and the old man had generously given them money and promised them a place for them to live, and, a job for Carolis in his estate That very evening he had brought them to his ganja chena and told them that he would have the little hut renovated before the next rains. It was that ganja chena. Every week he brought rice, a few coconuts, dhal, some dryfish and small quantities of currystuffs. It was almost over two years since they started on the ganja cultivations. Earlier the mudalali had given them reasonable amounts of money too, whenever the ganja was taken away, but after the last crop the mudalali had vanished. He had given Carolis a gun and regularly supplied him with cartridges for provding meat for themselves and occasionally for the mudalali and also to protect themselves from wild animals if the necessity arose. The Excise men did not come so far out.

They grew their own vegetables and eeked out an existence. She yet loved Carolis, although his love for her had waned somewhat. He distilled kassippu and drank it himself as there was no one closeby to whom he could sell the brew. Whenever he took too much of it, he assaulted her, but he did not leave her. Her husband had told her that if the mudalali did not give him his dues, for his labours, he would shoot him when he came to the chena next, to request him to start another cultivation. The closest road was about ten miles. She and Carolis were people from the other side of the Bentara river and were not prepared to brook any nonsense. Her first pregnancy had ended in a miscarriage. This infant now six months, had

to be fed on 'tinned milk' as she could not breast-feed the baby. Her husband was a man with a strong sense of gratitude, but he was angry with the mudalali. During the last two or three weeks her husband had not been able to shoot a wild boar or a deer. Even when he did so, he had to carry the flesh for about five or six miles, where the nearest village was, and then sell the meat, cheap, to men who came on bicycles, to take meat to a town. During the drought, it was difficult to track the deer or the wild boar. He had only a few cartridges left, so he was very careful not to miss a shot.

She got up and took the pot of rice off the fire and began questioning them again as to where they had come from and where they were bound to. Although Thangamani understood every word of what the woman had said and asked, she did not offer any explanations or comments. She was not used to protesting.

"Sister", Sirisena addressed her, "We have come all the way from Polonnaruwa area. Will you let us stay for the night and tell us how we could get to Anuradhapura?"

"We are close to Ambagaswewa," she answered him, "You will have to ask my husband, how you could get to Anuradhapura. He told me that there is a road through Ganewalpola, to Maradankadawela and on to Anuradhapura. But I do not know the exact distance, or, how you can get there. I have not been out of this dry place since we came here."

Sirisena himself did not know where they were. This area was strange to him. He worried about how this woman's husband would react when he found that Thangamani was a Tamil and fleeing from the Sinhalese with a Sinhalese. Sirisena also came from stock, which had, years ago, migrated from the other side of the Bentara river. But he did not know where his father's native village was. He felt confident that as long as the woman's husband was alone, there was nothing to fear. But he was armed.

Sirisena, although yet a youth, knew that the illiterate Sinhalese man, particularly from the towns, was quite bold when he was in company but an utter coward when alone. Yet he felt that cowards were the ones that had to be feared. He believed that from where Carolis was, he could not have heard much of what was happening in other parts of the NCP, although everyone knew that there was trouble between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

The Sinhalese excel in vieing with each other to be pseudo heroes and patriots. It was time that the Sinhalese realised that they could dare, sometimes, with impunity, human laws but not resist nature's ones

Since morning Thangamani and Sirisena had eaten nothing. They were both hungry, but Sirisena could not even force himself to ask for some food from this woman who was illnourished and in want. As for Thangamani, she felt that even if she died of starvation, she would not be able to ask for any food. She was not afraid of anything now. The worst had happened, she thought. Will she be able, even if she tried to speak to this woman, to formulate the words to give utterance to her thoughts? What had happened to everyone? She could not imagine that within a matter of days, such an amount of hatred could have been engendered in the hearts of people against others who had lived and worked together for so long. It was true that she was a Tamil and Sirisena was a Sinhalese. But she did not fear him. What did it matter what his community was? He was bold, tough and a good man. From her infant days she had not thought of any difference between the two families, living close to each other. As children, they had been quite happy, playing and running about together. Their parents too had been more like relatives than friendly neighbours. She thought of the nights when she lay on a mat in the linenroom, listening to her father and Sirisena's father, swopping anecdotes over a bottle of arrack. She fell asleep and quite often dreamt that one of the wild boar that Sirisena's father had shot at, was attacking her. Her father

always conversed with Sirisena's people in Sinhalese. She too was quite fluent in Sinhalese. It was a nice language and so was Tamil. In fact, during the few years she went to school, she had attended a Sinhalese school. She could not understand why that woman, she had seen for the first time in her life, had questioned Sirisena as to whether she was a Tamil woman. What did it matter whether she was a Tamil or Sinhalese or a gypsy woman? She had not in any way offended her. Her thoughts went back to the harrowing experience she had gone through within the last few days. Who had killed her father? What had happened to her sisters and her brother? The Gods will have to protect them. What would her mother have done, left alone in the jungle? She was too feble and old to find her way to some other place of safety. There was nothing she could have done about her mother. She did not feel any sorrow or pain now. Her feelings were more or less numbed. The flight in search of personal safety and the sufferings she had already gone through, had conferred on her earlier sensitive feelings, a vague sense of acceptance of everything that had happened, as being the inevitable. Why had Sirisena not done her any harm? She understood why, but could not explain it to herself. She liked him now. Although she was a Tamil and he a Sinhalese, and there was so much hatred between these two communities, she did not wish to be seperated from him now.

The day was well advanced. The woman had finished cooking the scanty noon meal. The infant began to cry and the woman brought it out to the compound and sitting in the shade of a plaintain grove began feeding it. There was no milk in her emaciated breasts and the infant continued to cry feebly. The woman came up to Thangamani and after placing the infant on her lap, went in and sugared some cold tea. Thangamani tried to soothe the baby as she had done her little sister, but the infant continued to moan in hunger. The woman came out with the tea in a black bottle to which was attached a teat, took the

infant and held the teat to its mouth. Then she told both of them to dish out some rice and eat it, but Sirisena and Thangamani sat where they were. Even though they were both tired and hungry, it was terribly embarassing to dish out for themselves, from what little there was for this woman and her husband. But they were famished.

When the infant fell asleep, the woman put her back in the improvised cradle, swung it a couple of times and set about dishing two plates of rice for Sirisena and Thangamani. There was brinjal and some bones which answered for dryfish, cooked into one curry to eat the rice with. While dishing out some for herself into a partly damaged chatty, she remarked that there was salt in a coconut-shell by the hearth and also that her husband may have shot something and gone to the village. There was hardly enough to go round. The three of them consumed their meals in silence. It was difficult for Thangamani to swallow the food, after the reception she had received from her hostess.

After the meal, Thangamani helped the woman to wash up and when the girl came back with a tin of water from the well, the woman, probably due to some long dead chord of sympathy striking a note in her breast, told her to rest, as she looked tired. She was now bereft of all illusion. Suffering seemed to have eaten into her soul. In her face there was a curious expression of sorrow and resignation. After the little chores were over, the two women sat close to where Sirisena was seated. There was no conversation.

Evening was setting in. They watched the hundreds of parrots which were screeching overhead from their feeding grounds to roost. Sirisena was seated opposite the two women and unobtrusively watched the stranger, comparing her in his mind's eye with Thangamani. The baby got up again and the woman brought it back, gave it one breast to suck, then the other. The baby howled as if in protest

that there was no milk forthcoming. A woman like Thangamani, with her full blown breasts will have plenty of milk, unlike this woman, Sirisena thought. Just then a parrot crashed in its flight against the branch of a dead tree, fell on the roof of the cottage and rolled down to the ground close to where the woman was seated desperately trying to lull the infant's hunger. No one moved or said anything. After about two minutes, the dazed and probably injured bird, stirred itself from its stupor, looked suspiciously around, and then, hopped into the shrub and what it thought was safety. A cat which had been dozing on a log in the compound was after the parrot in a trice. The parrot screeched twice, then there was silence. The baby continued its cries of hunger. Leaving it once again with Thangamani, the mother went in,sugared some water and taking the infant back, held the teat to its lips. In a while the little one was fast asleep.

Dusk was falling and the parrots had gone home to roost. A lonely ashdove was calling out in its sad plaintive note to its mate. The woman began to relate an old folk tale about the ashdove's call, which is oft retold by their elders to the little ones of the North Central Province. The ashdove had been delegated, by the god who looked after the humble people of the NCP, to see that, every morning a garland of flowers was kept on the top of a rock, for a beautiful princess. One evening the god had found that the ashdove had not carried out his orders. On being questioned, the ashdove had sworn on its offspring that, that morning no flowers had bloomed. When she went back to her nest she found the birdlings dead. From then on, the ashdove, every evening moaned out his plaintive wail, "Oh my golden children, the flowers have bloomed."

The settlers in the NCP have never had the necessities of life in abundance. They struggled for existence and the good earth provided them with enough to live.

The woman went in and lit a small bottle lamp and placed it on a box which served as a table and stood on

the threshold of the hut. A man clad in a pair of kakhi shorts and brown canvas shoes, which had seen better days, strode into the compound. In one hand he carried a single barrelled gun and in the other a bloodsoaked gunny bag. The woman appeared to be frightened and embarassed. Sirisena knew that this was her husband. There was about a week's growth of beard on his face. He had a hollow, lean look.

"Who are these people?" He enquired as he entered the house, and on the woman replying that they were from Polonnaruwa and on their way to Anuradhapura, he handed over the gunny to her and placed the gun in a corner.

After a few minutes he came out of the cottage. In the darkness, Sirisena could not see the man's face clearly but he noticed that he had changed into a sarong. The man sat on the log on which the cat had been dozing till the unfortunate parrot crashed down. Thangamani could see him seated on the log. She felt scared and the few minutes of ominous silence which followed since his question, about who they were and the time he took to change, gave her a feeling of a foreboding of evil.

"What's your name and are you both going to Anuradhapura?" the man broke the silence in a voice, as hollow as his looks.

"We have come from the Polonnaruwa area and want to get to Anuradhapura," Sirisena answered, "There is plenty of trouble and large numbers of people have been killed. Her father has been killed. Can you help me to take her to safety.?"

"Anuradhapura will not be safe at all," he remarked, "And if you were found with a Tamil woman you too will be killed."

He got up from the log and signalling to Sirisena to follow him, he went towards the neglected badairingu plot behind the house.

Thangamani sat where she had been for several hours. She felt that the man wanted to discuss with Sirisena something that he did not want her to overhear. She sat there thinking of what was going to happen to her. What did the man want to tell Sirisena? It could not be something pleasant or about her safety. Every word the man had uttered had an inflexion of evil to Thangamani. The woman had not come out of the house since the arrival of her husband. Will Sirisena join this man in doing her harm? Her emotions were disturbed as had never been, even when she saw her father, lying dead in the stream in the jungle that morning. Why should Sirisena have left her there, alone, and gone with that evil looking man? Was it an illusion that had made her to follow Sirisena to where she found herself that evening? The woman had warned them that her husband hated the Tamils. She wished that she knew in what way she had hurt the Sinhalese, for everyone to be against her. Even during the few years at school, she had not found any difference between Sinhalese and Tamil children. Had it not been for the small gold stud on her nose, the other children would never have known that she was a Tamil girl. Fearfully she felt the tip of her nose and then realised that, Sirisena had earlier removed it. Why should her father and mother have ever wanted her to wear an ornament and at that, on her nose? In terrible suspense she waited.

As soon as they were out of earshot, the man stopped and asked Sirisena about the Tamil woman. Sirisena explained to him in detail what had happened and what the situation had been when they left Polonnaruwa.

"You know, it will be safer for you to leave the girl with me in the jungle and go back home," he advised Sirisena.

When he found that Sirisena was, not agreeable to this suggestion, he proposed taking her into the jungle and shooting her. If he bid not wish to do so, he could trust

him to do the needful, with the Tamil wench, he persisted. The Tamils had been the hereditary enemies of the Sinhalese and the time had come to destroy them. Why should Sirisena be a traitor to the Lion Race?

"I do not know about their being enemies of the Sinhalese," Sirisena answered in a placating tone, "But there is no meaning in what our people are doing. The Tamils have lived with us from the time of our kings. In any case how can we kill this harmless girl?"

Although the man was taller than Sirisena, he was not as young and well nourished. He felt that if it came to a question of using force on him, he could handle him. But he had a gun and Sirisena felt that it would be indiscreet to be agressive or vehement in his opposition to doing any harm to Thangamani. He might go to the village some miles away and bring more men. Although the indigenous NCP peasant was not pretending to be against the Tamils, he could not be certain of the type of situation that could be created by this vile reject of life.

"Probably you want to have this woman as your wife?" The man asked, and, on Sirisena nodding the affirmative, he further queried, "What will happen to your children whose mother is a Tamil woman? Will you not be looked down upon? How could you ever go back to your village with a Tamil wife? My advice is that you leave her here with us."

Sirisena felt that the man was now more concerned with Thangamani not being a Tamil, but a woman. What did this vile runaway from life care about Sinhalese or Tamil?

"I have no village to go back to and I will not mind what any one else may have to say about her," Sirisena replied with a certain amount of firmness in his tone. "When all these troubles are over, she and I can work a chena and live together. Home is where one makes

it, you know? My father came from down South, somewhere, and made a home for himself, in the jungle by the railway."

"What nonsense are you talking, man?" The other asked, "There will not be a single Tamil, man, woman or child, left in our areas, alive, by the time our leaders interfere. The Tamils have to be destroyed. Even the Muslims, who speak Tamil have to be chased out from here or killed. Has there ever been such an upheaval against the Tamils before this? It is only at a juncture such as this that poor people like us can prove that we are also patriots and also that we love our language. This woman seems to have charmed you. Surely you have brains."

Sirisena felt that, no useful purpose could ever be served by continuing to reason out with this man. In his hollow wild eyes, Sirisena could see mirrored, his past. He had brought that young woman from the security of her home, in her father's village, to suffer in the wilderness. The jungle was a desolate place, particularly, the jungle in the North Central Province, to men who could not toil for their food.

Cultivating ganja was quite easy. It required little attention, except for the watering and weeding during the first few weeks. Very few animals broke into ganja chenas in the North Central Province. But, on the other hand, working a half acre of highland paddy, gingelly or mustard takes much out of a man.

There was silence between the two men for some minutes.

Sirisena was planning what, best, he could do in the circumstances. If there was a quarrel and he took Thangamani away at that time, into an area that he himself knew nothing about, the man could follow them and shoot them both. Even if he took such a risk, could Thangamani, without sufficient rest and on the scanty meal she had taken, continue walking the whole night through the jungle.

He was astute enough to realise the hopelessness of the situation, he and the young woman were in, but, too human, to give up hope of preserving her from the fate that had befallen her father.

The terrible anxiety to find a way out of this desperate situation and his incapability and helplessness at the moment, made him break into a cold sweat. Almost involuntarilly, he bent down and with the lower portion of his sarong wiped the sweat off his face. The thought also came to him that he could agree to take the girl into the jungle for the ostensible purpose of killing her. But, once in the jungle, he could turn on his mentor, snatch the gun and shoot the man down. But then, what would be the fate of that poor woman and her infant, he thought.

These few moments of suspense and torture for Sirisena were ended when the man, in a very casual tone remarked that, if he insisted on being under the spell of that wench. there was nothing that he could do. They could remain in his house for the night and at day break he would direct them how they could get to Ganewalpola, from where, if the Tamil woman could get away without being raped and murdered, they may be able to get on the road to Anuradhapura. There she will have no chance at all.

Then he walked towards the house. Sirisena followed him in silence. He felt relieved that the man had changed his mind.

Standing on the threshold, he called out, "Magilin what is there for these people to eat?"

"Nothing except the rice I left for you," the woman answered. "Can't you uproot a little manioc for all of us to eat?"

Sirisena walked up to Thangamani. He saw her seated in the dark and look up at him in bewilderment and fear. He forced himself to smile reassuringly and whispered to her not to fear.

"Can you hold this torch till I dig out some manioc?" The man asked, handing a torch to Sirisena and taking a mamoty, which was by the side of the wall of the house.

As the two men walked a little away from the house the woman called out to Thangamani to come inside the house. She walked in and sat on the edge of a mat that had been spread out on the floor. Thangamani saw that there was another small room leading off from where she had sat down, which she had not noticed earlier. The little house was bare of any furniture, except, for the box on which the bottle lamp was and a chair with the rattan off and some coir rope strung across the seat. In one corner was a campcot with the gunny hanging about a foot down at one end. In a corner, close to the box was the gun with three red cartridges by the bottle lamp on the box. Two or three calendars with gaudilly and crudely coloured pictures of women were nailed to the wattle and daub wall, from which lumps of daub had peeled off. An almanac, with a large bust of the Prime Minister, was stuck to the wall, just above the box, on which the bottle lamp and the cartridges were. On the left of the almanac was the photograph of a young man and woman. The man was in a coat and sarong and the woman was in saree, Thangamini inferred the photograph to be that of the man and woman taken when they decided to seek their fortune and their future in Anuradhpura. On a coir-rope line, drawn from one wall to another across the room, were slung a pair of kakhi shorts, a dirty sarong, a soiled towel in shreds and what appeared to be a saree. There was also a small tin trunk, almost at the entrance to the other room. By the hearth there were a few earthernware pots and pans.

The woman who was standing in the doorway, muttered that the two men were returning with the manioc. She seemed to be afraid of every movement of her husband, with whom she had earlier, as a girl, in her teens, decided to brave her father and the world.

The man flung the few yams on the ground and while placing the mamoty in its place, remarked, half to himself, that they were the last of the manioc chena. The wild boar had been active, when he was asleep. In the flickering beam of light, cast through the doorway, the shoots looked as if there had been nothing that mother earth could have done to help them fatten even a little more. The woman kept the lamp on the threshold and prepared the manioc for boiling. While the stuff was on the fire, she went into the garden and brought in some kochchi miris, which she ground with some salt, into a sambol. When the manioc was done, she dished out portions for herself, Sirisena and Thangamani. Her husband did not want any of the manioc, as his lunch of rice was yet on the box.

They were eating in silence. Once, during the meal, the man offered an apology for the quality of their food. He added that the mudalali had not paid him and the days were hard. If he caught the mudalali, he would flay the rascal alive. That day he had shot a red deer and sold some of the meat to the vendors, who came regularly to the village, some miles away. The little he brought home for them to eat, could not be prepared as there was no coconut or chilly. Magilin could dry the stuff in the sun the dext day. With the money, he had taken some kassippu.

He finished his meal and left the plate on the box for his wife to wash. Sirisena and Thangamani, after their meal followed the woman to the well and helped her wash the few pots, including the two pans that they had eaten in. After that, Sirisena came back and stood opposite the doorway, watching the man fish out a cigar. He undid a couple of folds of tobacco and placed some dried ganja between them, rolled the cigar up and lit it from a fire-brand. Then he walked up to the log in the garden and sat down on it. Sirisena followed him and squatted close to the log, refusing a 'pull' off the ganja cigar, which the man proffered.

The baby woke up and began to cry. Her husband ignored the mother's restrained grumbling that the baby had no milk. He seemed to be watching her swing the little fellow to sleep, while 'pulling' avidly at the cigar. For about a couple of minutes he was silent.

"Have you not hunted in Polonnaruwa?" He asked Sirisena in a dreamy tone, adding, "I have not been very lucky these days. Animals seem to be scarce. Only the elephant is easy to shoot at, if one dared to get close enough to the beast. But if you could only get a tusker it is worth it. You can sell the ivory to the Muslims who come to the village over there."

"Why don't you do some cultivations during the rains?" Sirisena queried.

"I haven't the patience to wait for months, and, who is going to break rest, watching? Magilin cannot help me as she has to look after the baby, draw the water and cook. It would have been far better if I could have sold kassippu in a town," The man said in a frustrated tone.

"Then why don't you take her and the baby away to a town and get a job where you can earn enough for you to live in some sort of comfort?" Sirisena queried.

"What is the job I can get? I have never done a job in all my life. Even when I took her away from her home, I was not working. What is the job we can get in a town except to be a natami?" he added hopelessly." It is far better to shoot a pig or a deer and sell the meat."

Sirisena told him that he had done some shooting while he was at home. The torch cells appeared to be rather weak, but they could try to get something that night if he was prepared to go out in the jungle.

"I am too tired to go out to night," the man replied. "If you like, you can take the gun and cartridges and try to shoot something. You have to be careful as there is a

lone elephant which haunts the tank about a quarter mile from here. He had been shot at several times by me but from too long a range, so that whenever he sees the light of a torch, he comes for you."

Sirisena told him that he too was tired and would prefer to sleep unless his host wanted meat urgently.

Without answering Sirisena, the man got up, walked into the house and lay down on the cot. The woman gave Sirisena, a gunny and told him to sleep on the platform which was an improvised verandah under the eaves. She pointed out to Thangamani, a sun dried sambhur pelt in the other room and closing the makeshift door, put off the lamp.

It must have been several hours after Thangamani had fallen asleep when she woke up with a start. She could faintly see someone seated on the pelt by her. She pushed the person violently and sat up. But before she could call out for help or shout, a rough hand seized her by the throat and she heard, in a hissed out whisper in her ear, the threat that if she made the slightest noise, she would be murdered. It all came back to her in flash. It was the woman's husband. She did not struggle. The man began whispering various passionate phrases ..... "love"..... "runaway, leaving Magilin ..... " "shoot the man ....."

Thangamani started to struggle and push wildly. Suddenly the hold on her neck was released and she got a blow on the side of the head. She felt dizzy.

" Here. There is some noise in the room, in which the girl is sleeping," Thangamani faintly heard the woman say, " Where are you ? Light the lamp."

" Don't make a noise. I was about to throttle this Tamil bitch.....you sleep". He said this and walked out of the room to where his wife was. She heard the woman ask him not to harm the 'helpless Tamil girl'. He was muttering something under his breath. The effect of the ganja cigar he had smoked was yet on his

brain. The woman appeared to have believed what her husband had told her, about his attempting to throttle Thangamani, and, for a few minutes she heard them whispering to each other. Then they were silent. But she could not sleep.

CHAPTER 13

Polonnaruwa was like a town where there had been street fighting between some invading force and its defenders. The streets were more or less deserted, except for a few army or police vehicles. Close to the Parakrama Samudra, the remains of a man who had been tied with wire to a tree and burnt, were being pecked on by crows. He had been burnt alive. Not fifty yards away from the tree to which he had been tied was the gruesome spectacle of a woman with her abdomen ripped open and a fully formed foetus partly exposed. The Land Development and Irrigation Department labourers had joined with the local patriots in giving vent to their ecstasy of hatred. A few stragglers were close to the Police Station and planning how they could get their hands on the partly demented refugees inside the Station. In a matter of minutes a fair sized crowd collected and were vociferously demanding that the Tamils be thrown out from the temporary refugee camp. A senior Police Officer, a couple of Inspectors and some constables came out of the Police Station. They were armed and stood across the entrance to the Station. The senior Police Officer warned the crowd to disperse. This warning was greeted by hoots and jeers. One of the leaders of the mob was shouting out that they were determined to break into the Police Station. The Police Officer yelled back that he will shoot anyone who dared. The leader raised his sarong, exposing his person, challenging them to shoot! A tall Inspector, with one shot, killed him on the spot. Several other shots were fired. For a few minutes there was absolute confusion. The crowd of thugs ran helter skelter from the place chased by the Police. They left five dead. A little while later a number of army

trucks drove into Polonnaruwa Town to reinforce the platoon of men who had been sent there earlier and who proved to be utterly ineffective in their show of force to prevent murder, rape and arson. The army men set fire to all the houses between Giritale and Polonnaruwa without asking questions.

A state of emergency, rather late, of course, had been declared.

Anuradhapura too was in a state of turmoil. Close to the Public Market, in the New Town, a large boutique owned by a Tamil was fired. A Sub Inspector and three constables came on the scene in a jeep. They got off their vehicle and watched the flames roaring up, while bags of rice, flour and other stuff were being loaded into lorries and taken away. They were armed, but did nothing.. ... not even did they whimper their protests. The shop that was burnt was one of a row of Local Government owned buildings. The flames began to spread as the sun got hotter and a dry breeze began to blow. Those who had set fire to the shop and were yet watching, saw, that the adjoining Sinhalese owned shops were in danger. Within about half an hour, the flames were put out. The Sinhala traders did not want their own boutiques razed to the ground, so other Tamil boutiques escaped being burnt. But their contents were all looted. Lorry loads of loot were transported in broad daylight to various places. Most of the Tamil people in the New Town had fled, as they were able to get transport. But those some distance away from Anuradhapura Town, were stranded.

The Maha Willachchiya Colonisation Scheme is about 20 miles from Anuradhapura. Legend has it, that, Saliya with his bride sought refuge at Maha Willachchiya and turned it into a flourishing city. During the harvesting season, the elders in the humble villages close to Maha Willachchiya, yet narrate, that when the threshed paddy was stacked in a heap, Saliya in nostalgic mood used to

get to the top and view the Ruanveliseya Dagoba, till his chandala bride called him back into her arms and comforted him. A number of Tamil officers took refuge in the jungle off the Maha Willachchiya Tank. The Irrigation and Land Development labourers broke open the stores and took away a number of guns and quite a large quantity of dynamite. The Irrigation Engineer in charge of the Scheme was a Sinhalese, but he was absolutely helpless. His assistant who was a Tamil hid in the ceiling of his bungalow. About 9.00 p.m. one evening a large number of men came up to the bungalow and demanded the immediate handing over of the assistant. The engineer told them that his assistant was not in, but they forcibly searched the house and not finding their quarry, threatened the servants. Meanwhile, the assistant was listening to the conversation that was going on down below. The man who was most vociferous in demanding the 'Tamil man' was his former servant, whom, he had placed in employment in the Department, as a token of gratitude for his services as a domestic help.

After the search and the questioning the men left. They barricaded the only exit from the Scheme and maintained a watch, to prevent anyone leaving the scheme. The Engineer knew that, if help was not forthcoming all the Tamil officers and their families were certain of being brutally murdered. He decided to risk breaking out of the camp by night to get assistance. His two servants were faithful young men from his home down South, in Dadalla. He sent one of them to fetch the jeep, but it was found that the jeep had been immobilised. It was about 10.00 p.m. or 11.00 p.m. He thought of the headclerk's wife and infant in the jungle with the others who had fled across the tankbed. They had not had any food for almost 24 hours. His servants reported that although the time was about midnight, there were two men at the barriers watching, yet. In addition to the barriers across the only exit, a large log had been placed across the road. But the Engineer was determined to get out and bring assistance from Anuradha-

pura. About 3.00 am, the servants reported that the two men who had been watching, had also taken more than their fair share of kassippu and were fast asleep on the grass by the edge of the road. He sent the two servants back to shift the log and move the barrier, just enough for him to manoeuvre his Fiat 1100 out. This done he took one of his servants with him and as quietly as he possibly could, drove the car out of the Maha Willachchiya Irrigation Camp. As the car, with difficulty cleared the narrow passage opened out by the two servants, one of the sleeping men woke up. But the Engineer was well away from any form of pursuit. The fearstriken and starving refugees had given up hope.

He reached Anuradhapura just at dawn. At the Police Station he explained the situation. The Police told him that they could do nothing about those in danger of their lives. They had other work. Then the Engineer drove to a friend of his, who was also a Sinhalese. This friend took him to the Army unit commader at Anuradhapura. There was nothing that he could do either. The Police had to rescue the Tamils trapped at Maha Willachchiya. Back the Engineer and his friend went to a senior Police Officer and appealed to him.

"You will have to get help from the Army", they were unceremoniously told. Who was there to appeal to now?

Incidentally, the senior Police Officer as well as the Army Unit Commander, a major at the time, were both associates of the Engineer's frend. But they were not prepared to save the Tamil officers and their families at Maha Willachchiya. They had too much of work in the town itself, they claimed!

What was to be done now? In desperation, the Engineer's friend suggested that they should go to the District Judge and appeal to him. The Judge, a Tamil himself, replied that there was nothing that he could do about the rescue. It was the responsibility of the Police and the Army.

The situation appeared to be absolutely hopeless.

"Then Sir, there is nothing else to be done, except to take a party of civilian volunteers, armed with shot guns," the friend, submissively told the Judge.

"You cannot do that," the Judge remarked. But added, "Well, I'll ring up the Police and find out whether nothing can be done."

The person who answered the telephone was the same senior Police Officer who had earlier said that he could not do anything. To the Judge's query he readily vlounteered to take a party, to rescue the Tamils in danger at Maha Willachchiya.

A section of men, with one NCO armed with a bren gun went ahead in a large army truck. The Police Officer with a fair number of constables armed to the teeth followed in a jeep. About three miles from the Maha Willachchiya Colonisation Scheme, by accident or device, it is not known to this day, there was a three ton Irrigation Department lorry across the road. The driver's excuse was that he had came for water to the stream there. But after a little show of force, by the sergeant getting down from the truck with the bren and the Police Officer pointing a revolver, the lorry was pulled to a side and the rescue party allowed to proceed to Maha Willachchiya.

When the Police and Army personnel arrived at Maha Willachchiya and went in search of the Tamils hiding in the jungle, away from the tank, they fled further in. How could the men, women and children hiding in terror of their lives, know whether those calling out, were friends, or foes? The Assistant Engineer was rescued from his hiding place in the ceiling. He had been so cramped up, and, for so long, that for some time, he could not walk. After some difficulty the others were also brought back to Anuradhapura and the next morning despatched to "that side of Vauniya" in open trucks.

The Irrigation Engineer of the Maha Willachchiya Scheme did not get a gallantry medal!

CHAPTER 14

Etaweeragollawa is a small roadside hamlet between Madawachchi and Kebettigollawa, on the road to the Padaviya Colonisation Scheme. The only Tamil boutique there had been looted and razed to the ground. The Tamils are said to have fled across the paddy fields to safety or to their deaths. The men from Padaviya, except for those eleven who were shot dead on the spot and the few who managed to escape, were locked up safely in the Anuradhapura Prison.

It was about 4.30 or 5.00 in the evening. Mr. Perera a surveyor and Mr. Lal Bodidasa, the village school master were seated at a small table in the Surveyor's tent at Ettaweeragollawa. Today, as was their custom, they were having a drink and a chat.

Mr. Perera came from down South. He had, had his education at one of the leading schools in Galle. His father was a retired Government Servant and came from respectable stock in Galle. Mr. Lal Bodidasa came from a small village off Rambukkana. He belonged to, what, the Sinhalese said, was a lower caste, than the govigama. For generations his people had been eking out an existance doing odd jobs or working as poorly paid labourers, men women and even children, in estates close to their homes. Mr. Bodidasa was one of those who was by the sudden political upheaval of 1956, swept, into what he himself felt, but never expressed, a position of some importance in the life of the community. After a number of years at his village school, he had passed the SSC and taught for a paltry salary in that same school. In his own little way, he had worked hard, to defeat, the political set up that was, prior to 1956. Today he was known and respected as the 'Iscola Mahathmaya' at Etaweeragollawa. He did not want the village folk to know the village he came from, or his father's name. The peasantry of Etaweera-

gollawa claimed that they were Kandyans and very 'high caste' too. He wore, what came later to be contemptuously known, as the 'wavula suit', by those who looked down on school teachers and vedamahathmayas, who adopted a swagger, and, 'national dress,' by those who felt, that it bestowed on the wearer, a sort of social distinction above the masses, these very teachers and vedamahathmayas had indirectly helped, emancipate from bureaucratic thraldom.

"I am glad that the Sinhalese have at last made up their minds to think of their race, culture and language," remarked Mr. Bodidasa, after knocking down his third drink. "Why should this Aryan race tolerate these damned Dravidians in our country?"

"Aryan? No race on the face of this earth is pure," Mr. Perera, the Surveyor remarked, in a casual tone, "We must live and let live, Master."

"What Mr Perera," Mr. Bodidasa queried with some vehemence, "Are you not a Sinhalese? Do you not feel for your country? Are we not pure Aryans? Have you not read the history of our race?"

The Surveyor was not a man who could be moved by this type of talk. He had an imperturbable disposition. In school he had done Virgil for his Senior Cambridge. His father had wanted him to study Law, but he had been unwise, in his youth, so he thought now, and married early. Now he had a child. His family was at his parental home in Galle. He was a little frustrated now, because he felt that a career as a Surveyor, was not for him. But there was nothing he could do. He could not get back to his missed vocation. So he spent his leisure with a bottle of arrack, particularly when he was camped out.

"Most of History is just damned myth," Mr. Perera said, as if addressing his tumbler of soda and arrack. "The Sinhalese are living in a world of illusions. Where do you find an Aryan race? We are the most hybird race

in the world! Did the Arabs, Persians, Chinese, the Portuguese, Dutch and the British bring their wives when they landed on our coasts? They chose wives from this land."

Mr. Bodidasa was stumped. What little knowledge he had about what he himself termed 'history' had made no mention of this aspect of life.

"But, Sir," Mr. Bodidasa said, trying to hide his ignorance, prejudice and pride, "The Tamils are our enemies. They have no right to this country."

"How can one substantiate that statement?" The Surveyor asked with somnolent indifference, to the greatness of the Aryans. "I feel that thousands of years ago, Ceylon was a part of the Indian sub-continent and the people who would have inhabited this part would have been South Indians. Then a set of North Indian bandits who were chased out of their country came along with Vijaya, the so called leader and settled here. They would have married the women here. We are their offspring, master. Later on, as the centuries passed we got more and more mixed with almost all the seafaring nations, till today, when we are trying to make out, that we are Aryans."

Mr. Bodidasa appeared to be mildly shocked, inspite of the quantity of arrack he had imbibed. But this argument withered him in a flash as does an old satin tree in the North Central Province, when struck by lightning. He was a man who saw portents and signs in the most trivial coincidences, but he could not understand, how this man, seated there with him, could be bereft of all ideals of the importance of his own country, his people, their culture and their greatness.

There was silence between the two of them for a while. Dusk was falling and the Surveyor's personal servant placed a lamp on a table on which were a number of plans and other documents. Only the dregs remained in the bottle. Mr. Bodidasa, with a forced smile as the attitude of the

Surveyor had eaten into his soul, said that it was time for him to go back to his quarters. They could continue the discussion the next day, he added as he said ayubovan. The Surveyor had his dinner, early as usual and retired to bed.

CHAPTER 15

After the man had left her, Thangamani sat up on the mat wondering what she should do. Should she call out to Sirisena? If she did so, there was bound to be trouble between the two men. She decided to wait till dawn.

Sirisena, oblivious of all that had taken place slept on. When he woke up, the jungle cocks were calling out from the edge of the clearing. An ashdove on the branch of a dead tree, was 'pooing' her plaintive note. He got up, folded the gunny, placed it by the wall and went to the well.

Thangamani who had been awake, since her adventure with the man, also walked up to the well and asked him when they were leaving that place.

"Have you been crying my girl?" Sirisena asked her, wondering, what could have moved her to tears.

"Let's go away from this dreadful place to any where," she whispered, "Nothing is wrong."

"Wash your face pattiya and we will go away," he replied, while drawing a tin of water for her,

Even when the man came out of the house and was giving directions to him, how they could get on to the Ganewalpola road, Sirisena did not notice that anything unusual had taken place in the night. Nor did the man show any venom, when Thangamani went up to the entrance to the house to thank the woman for the kindness she had shown her. There was nothing to indicate that his advances on the chastity of this Tamil girl, he wanted killed, had been violently rejected. But now Thangamani knew that he was a hypocrite.

When they were out of earshot of the dwellers in that little cottage in the jungle, Sirisena remarked that, they were fortunate to have escaped from that man. Thangamani just answered, "yes."

The sun had not got hot yet and although Sirisena realised that the going was difficult for the girl, he pressed on. As they entered a pitiya, they startled two antlered bucks in combat, watched by a herd of about ten to fifteen deer. The herd dashed into the jungle. The combatants stopped for a while, looked around and seeing Thangamani and Sirisena walking across, spurted helter-skelter in two different directions into the jungle. On they went, passing abandoned tanks and jungle chenas, till the track broadened into a path on which carts had passed. Then suddenly, a couple of hundred yards ahead, they saw a gravel road

"Now we have to be careful," Sirisena warned her as they continued. They got on to the road and found that it was quite deserted, as gravel roads passing through villages usually were at that time of the day. They had not walked a mile when they saw some goats, cattle and a dog about the road, sure signs of a human habitation closeby. After another hundred yards or so, they came upon the first house in a Muslim settlement. A little further away they saw some more houses and a small mosque. Sirisena felt that there could not be any danger in that village. He went up to the doorstep and called out in Tamil whether there was anyone in the house. A woman came up. But on seeing Thangamani, she did not try to cover her face hurriedly, with the fold of her saree, as most Muslim women are wont to do. She spoke to Thangamani in Tamil. To Sirisena's query, she pointed out a boutique some distance from the house. They could get tea there. The men had gone to work in their chenas. There was no trouble about the Tamils in that village. Where were they going? Was she married to the Sinhalese man? There was a girl who had run away with a Sinhalese man from the village. No one knew their

whereabouts even up to that date, nor did anyone care to ascertain where they had gone. She was bound to regret that step ere long. The woman was quite young and she went on speaking without allowing the girl or Sirisena to utter a word. Incidentally, the Muslim women in the remoter areas of the North Central Province get an opportunity of speaking to strangers only when their menfolk were away at work. They craved to be free of these inhibitions. When they are about, they have to be in purdah and also inside their houses. Their place was in the house, so the men thought and ruled.

Thangamani found that Sirisena stood there even after the woman had pointed out where the boutique was. It was probably a woman's inexplicable intuition, which made her without asking questions, to unloosen that little knot in her cloth and give him the nosestud He had no money even to purchase tea for both of them. After handing over her nosestud, she made, as if to remove her two earrings, but Sirisena shook his head. Then in Sinhalese, she told him that she will wait for him there.

The Muslim woman who knew to speak Sinhalese well, then began questioning her in Sinhalese. Yes, she was a Tamil and she was married to that man. She had heard her husband and the other men discussing about the troubles between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. She understood their predicament. Did sister want some milk? Why were the Sinhalese against the Tamils?

Without waiting for Thangamani to answer her, she went in and brought a mug of goat's milk. It was not sugared, but was quite refreshing. The woman invited her to sit on the mat in the little verandah of her house and gave her a kurakkan rotti. A little girl with the mother's features clearly defined in her, toddled up and sat on the woman's lap, as she sat down on the same mat opposite Thangamani and watched her eat.

The boutique was an unpretentious little village kade, but its shelves were well stocked with everything that anyone would want. The mudalali was a young man in a sarong and banian, in appearance, more like a Sinhalese than a follower of Islam. The number of bags of paddy, stacked against the wall, leaving hardly any room, for even a few persons to enjoy their tea, at the only table in the kiosk, confirmed Sirisena's impression that the mudalali was quite prosperous. He asked for a cup of tea and sat on the bench placed under the eaves of the kade. After drinking it, Sirisena began fumbling about his waist, as if looking for money to pay up, while the mudalali looked on with some suspicion.

"You seem to be a stranger to this place. I have never seen you before this. Where have you come from?" the mudalali asked.

When Sirisena looked up, the eyes of the man were scrutinising him and his dirty, shably clothes, with a look of utter, skepticism on his face, as to the genuineness of the search that Sirisena was making to pay for the cup of tea. Under the gaze of that shrewd man, Sirisena had the feeling that he was being considered a vagrant and petty liar. Why should he not tell this man the truth, he thought.

"I have come from Polonnaruwa with my wife, a Tamil," Sirisena told him, "We have eaten nothing since morning. My wife is in one of the houses in the village. I have no money, mudalali, but, I have this gold stud. Can you take this and give me what you think it is worth?"

Saying this he held out the stud, which the mudalali took without any show of even the slightest surprise.

"It is not soverign gold, but how much do you want for it? I want to help you," the mudalali remarked casually, while polishing the stud on his stomach.

"I do not know its value," Sirisena answered him, "Give me what you think it is worth."

He thought of their hopeless position. They had yet some distance to go. There was no place where he could even work, to earn sufficient, for Thangamani and himself to subsist. If the trader refused to accept the jewel, there was nothing for them but starvation, as, unlike in outlandish jungle villages, the people who live in small hamlets or in towns, were not prepared to give anyone a meal. They had no clothes, except for what they had on, at the moment. It was a fact that Sirisena did not know the value of that stud. It was pure gold and there was a gem on it. He did not know that the Tamils, however poor and humble they may be, seldom or never, allowed their womenfolk to wear cheap baubles. He was prepared to accept anything that the mudalali offered for that, as he wanted some money for food for both of them.

"I will give you Rs. 10/- for this, although it is not worth so much," the mudalali said in a careless manner, handing back the jewel to Sirisena. "I hope it is not stolen. I only want to help you as you say you are stranded."

"Please, Sir, you can have it," Sirisena said, quite satisfied with the price. He felt that the man could have offered very much less. In any case he had been prepared to accept even a couple of rupees.

The mudalali went in and came out with Rs 9/90 cts., and handed the money to Sirisena. He bought some buns and then asked for an empty bottle to take some tea for his wife. The trader charged him fifty cents for the empty aerated-water bottle. With his purchases he went back to Thangamani.

After she had eaten, they left the Muslim woman's home and set off again along the gravel road. Sirisena told her that he had sold her nosestud for Rs. 10/-, but assured her that when he started to work and earn, he would buy her a more valuable one. He felt sad he had to sell the nosestud. He had seen her with that on since, she was just a kid.

"What's the use of gold, when we have no place to rest?" Thangamani told him, as they went along that dusty gravel road.

They however felt refreshed and full of hope. There were no signs of unrest or danger. On either side of the road there was jungle. After they had proceeded a mile or so, they met a man driving a pair of buffaloes and on enquiries, they were told that they were not far from Habarana. Sirisena then found that according to the man with the buffaloes, they were not on the correct route. He decided to enter the jungle and follow the directions given by the man they had met. The jungle was safe, more than ever, during the day.

It was almost mid-day. They stopped at a small tank and decided to rest for a while. They sat under the shade of a large kumbuk, after he and Thangamani had washed the dirt and grime off their bodies. Except for a solitary kingfisher, intently looking out for small fish, from a branch which overhung the tank, there were no other signs of life. Nature seemed to be at peace, here, in the wilderness, in comparison with the turmoil going on all over the country, where man lived.

After about an hour, they set off again, through the jungle. It was evening when they reached a level crossing. This was Palugaswewa. Discreet inquiries revealed that Ganewalpola was about five miles away and Maradankadawela also about five to six miles distant. A man driving a bullock cart offered them a lift and Sirisena accepted the generous gesture with some trepidation. There was a slight drizzle and dusk was falling fast when they reached Maradankadawela. In the failing light, Sirisena could dimly see a few burnt out remains of, what, he was certain, must have been boutiques owned by Tamils. They got out of the cart and walked up to a small kade. It was owned by an oldish Muslim.

When he explained their situation, the mudalali was

quite sympathetic and agreed to give them food. But he warned Sirisena that Anuradhapura was not quite a safe place for any Tamil. The road from Maradankadawela, particularly between Tirappane and Galkulama was dangerous, he added. Maradankadawela too had, had its share of violence. They were lucky to have got into the boutique, without being observed by the rowdies of the area. If they found out that Thangamani was a Tamil and that she was being harboured in the boutique, his botuique too would be destroyed. The Army and Police personnel were only rushing about in jeeps along roads. Where was the young woman going to sleep? He was a man with a very large family. His wife and children were at Akurana. Almost all the peasantry in the area were indebted to him. Their paddy, even prior to sowing, was mortgaged to him. Many people in Maradankadawela would like to set fire to his boutique and even kill him to escape settling their debts, but they had not been able to find an excuse, yet. He could give them some string hoppers and curry. But where were they to sleep? Rumours were rife that the Police ignored attacks on Tamil people, so there was no purpose in asking for their protection, the old man said, somewhat sorrowfully.

Sirisena felt some pity for the old man, even though they had no one to pity them.

"Then wrap up some string-hoppers for us to take," Sirisena told him. "We will go away under cover of night."

The old mudalali's face brightened up, as he yelled out an order to his one and only waiter cum assistant, a youth of about fifteen years of age. He parcelled up some string hoppers with sambol. He put in a few pieces of curried tank fish into a condensed milk tin and at Sirisena's request, handed him a box of matches and a piece of soap. When Sirisena proffered some money, the mudalali said that he would charge him only for the cake of soap. He also told them that Tirappane was not far away and that Anuradhapura was about 22 miles from

Maradankadawela. It was not safe in Anuradhapura. Tamil refugees were being taken to Vauniya, he had been told. She could get to Vauniya and Sirisena could stay on in Anuradhapura, he advised. When Sirisena and Thangamani were about to leave from the rear of the boutique, the old trader in one last act of sympathy, gave Sirisena a small flashlight and suggested that they should go through jungle but hugging the road.

It was quite dark and they kept on to the road. Sirisena told her that their immediate problem was to find some place to sleep in, for the night. He had only about Rs. 6/00 left from the Rs. 10/- he had got for the nosestud.

"You can sell my earrings too," Thangamani assured him. "You know, father got that nose stud made for Rs. 80/-".

"What's the use of money or gold, my girl, when we can't get even a mat to sleep on," Sirisena told her affectionately.

He switched on the torch and kept to the edge of the road. On either side was fairly dense undergrowth. To him the jungle was as good as home. In fact he was happier in the forest, breathing its untainted air. During his poaching trips, out from his father's house, if night fell and he was determind to take back some game home, the fork of a tree was good enough for him to sit astride and sleep for a few hours. But this girl could not do that, he mused to himself. He wanted to make her as comfortable as he possibly could.

Suddenly they saw the headlights of a vehicle in the distance and he hurriedly, dragged her by her hand into the jungle. It passed with some men in it, singing boisterously. It was an Army vehicle. They got back to the road. Almost as they stepped on to a small bridge, they heard a crashing noise in the jungle and Sirisena whispered, "Elephants". She clutched at Sirisena's hand.

She felt, she could not walk any further. Her knees were knocking against each other, in her terror. She broke out into a sweat.

"Don't be scared, baby" he whispered to her. "If we do not disturb them, they will not harm us."

He led her off the road, and some yards into the jungle. A few more paces and they came to a tank. To Thangamani, at first sight, in the dark, it appeared to be a large clearing. Sirisena wet his thumb with his tongue and held it up for a while, then, saying that they should go against the wind, led her on with the aid of the torch. Thangamani could hear the elephants trumpeting. They were on a tank bed, which had been sown with paddy and harvested the dried up left over portions of stalk were pricking their bare feet. The elephants were now in the tank, splashing themselves. Thangamani was yet scared, but Siriesena assured her that the elephants were not aware of their presence although they were so close to where they were taking a dip.

There should be a watch-hut at least on one of the trees, Sirisena, thought to himself. Those who sowed tank beds with paddy, in the jungle, did not construct huts on the ground, particularly, when the tank was in the midst of heavy jungle. Watch-huts were constructed on trees and served a dual purpose. The watcher was quite safe and it also served as a shooting box. One had only to flash a torch right round, and, if any animal was found in the paddy or even in the jungle within range, take a sitting shot. Sirisena began flashing the beam on the tops of trees and Thangamani wondered whether he was trying to charm away the elephants or scare them off from their bath. She had heard of such charms to scare away elephants.

In a few minutes, with a sigh of relief, he hurried Thangamani to the foot of one tree, and from underneath its mass of foliage he flashed the torch on to a little makeshift hut, tied up among the branches. There were a

few cadjans which had fallen at the foot of the tree, and while treading on them, he muttered that, the hut would have served for two seasons. A ladder which had been used to get up to the hut, lay at the foot of the tree, partly broken. Sirisena tore away some creepers and tied the thing up together. With difficulty he helped Thangamani to clamber up to the hut and he followed. Some of the cadjans on the roof had been blown off. The floor of the hut was laid up with several layers of straw over thick jungle poles He jerked the small hut several times and told her that it could bear their weight.

"Let us eat and rest for sometime," he told her. "Are you thirsty?" Without waiting for an answer, he climbed down and fetched some water in a gourd, which he found at the foot of the tree. While Sirisena was opening up their parcel of string hoppers, Thangamani, looked around and seeing a branch, which had been conveniently utilised as a beam and additional support to strengthen the messa, stretched herself and held it. She immediately, let it off with a shriek, that would have disturbed the animals for several hundred yards around. She almost fell off the messa. Sirisena, held her and enquired what was wrong. She could not talk. He flashed the torch on to the roof of their temporary home and there, stretched on the branch which the girl had held, was a four to five foot mapila He struck the reptile with the torch and it fell wriggling on to the floor of the messa, causing more confusion. He struck it another blow and kicked it off the messa, holding on to Thangamani, who nearly fell with it. Thangamani's touching it or the activity going on below the mapila had not disturbed it. While he cleared the pieces of glass from the damaged flashlight, she for the first time, after the last few horror stricken days, laughed at herself, telling him that she did not now fear elephants so much as snakes.

Then with her unkempt hair, falling over her shoulders, she sat down and ate her share of the dinner. It was

indeed a feast for the two fugitives, after the ordeal they had gone through. The curry of tank fish was delicious, she told him.

While they cleaned up their temporary home, after their meal, the moon began to rise. It turned the tank, studded with olu flowers, into a beautiful sheet of shimmering silk, fit only for some ethereal being to wear. Through the shreded roof, the moon pierced itself in streaks and fell on the straw covered floor of the messa, on which Sirisena and Thangamani were sitting, making it look like a golden mat. They were looking out across the tank, into the jungle fringe, across and away. There was just sufficient room for the two of them at the entrance. As they sat there, the scene before them, seemed to find and mark a future for these two souls. No one spoke.

The youthful hunter, saw through the leafy openings among the trees and across the moon reflected waters of the tank, the vision of a little house, in the middle of a large forest surrounded chena. It transformed him into a dreamer. In the chena he saw, paddy, vegetables, plantains and manioc, thriving luxuriously. In the little garden, opposite the door of their little cot, he saw, Thangamani after a bath in the tank closeby, seated on a bench. Her hair was loose and she had a smiling infant on her lap. His adventurous soul was enraptured with that vision. The infant was not crying in hunger. Thangamani was a well nourished and happy mother, unlike the woman in the ganja chena. He was living through what the years could bring for both of them. The sorrows of the oppressed did not reach that chena. In her deep soft eyes he could see the present and the future. The past was forgotten. The starving, squalid and evil towns were so far away.

For some time he lived, through, what the years could bring, until she wishpered to him that a large dark animal entered the water, close to their tree house. Was it an elephant ?

Yes, it was an elephant. With a start, his glorious vision vanished. Two, three, followed. They could see the massive beasts quite clearly. There was a young one too. One animal, which would have been the mo her, shoved the other beasts off, when they came too close to the baby. The young woman was not afraid, now of the elephants. She felt quite safe and secure in the messa on the tree.

They sported themselves in the water, their bulky bodies, glistening a dark brown in the moonlight. Sirisena pointed out to the girl, a tusker, his ivory showing clearly in the moonlight. He stood up to his belly in the water, not even splashing himself with his trunk. One was rolling over. The two silent watchers could clearly hear the various types of sounds the elephants were making.

"They must be speaking to each other?" Thangamani asked.

"They are making sounds that have special meanings which we do not understand," he replied. "It may be another language."

Then the mother and baby left the water, followed by the rest of the small herd. In a few minutes they were passing under their messa and moving off, probably to some fresh foraging grounds. As they ambled leisurely along, Sirisena thought of what would have happened, had the paddy not beem harvested. After the herd had passed along, the two of them stretched out their weary limbs to sleep. There was peace, for miles round their sylvan house.

The moon was high and the scent of the wild flowers, that bloom in their abundance, in the North Central Province, when the weather is not too unkind, filled the air. The mosquitoes were there in there myriads, and, after a short spell of sleep, the man woke up. He sat up quietly, so as not to disturb her. He could see her face and figure as she lay in heavy slumber. The scent of the jungle

blossoms seemed to encompass that unsophisticated girl now, just as the terrible disaster, had engulfed her life and family.

In the towns men were fighting each other..... for what? Few, in fact knew. The Sinhalese were butchering the Tamils. They hated each other. What was the difference between the Tamils and the Sinhalese in this country? He wondered. This Tamil girl, fast asleep, by his side was like any Sinhalese woman. He tried not to think of what had happened. Knowing his own helplessness to prevent what was happning, he felt that he bitterly hated his own race. He squirmed at the thought of the boasts about the burnings and other atrocities in the Polonnaruwa area. He loathed to think of the blood that had already been spilt on the streets and the paddy fields of Mineriya, Polonnaruwa and Hingurakgoda. A feeling of sudden sympathy for Thangamani and her whole race came over him. He laid himself beside her once again and closed his eyes trying to force sleep on himself.

Towards dawn, a chilly wind began to blow, but they slept on till the warm sun woke them. They got down from their shelter and went to the tank.

"Why don't you bathe?" Sirisena invited the girl, "Till I wash these clothes. They will dry up quickly."

She was reluctant to, although, the water was inviting and she felt that a bath would refresh her.

"You must not wash my clothes," she said as she slipped into the water. "You know, it is a sin for a woman to get clothes washed by her husband." Seeing a smile on his face, she corrected herself, "I mean by a man. It is a woman's duty to wash clothes.

"Those are conventions, which do not apply in the circumstances you and I are in," he told her and set about

washing the clothes she had discarded as she went gingerly, up to her neck into the water. He washed his too and spread them out to dry and waded into the water.

A flight of teal, which came whistling down, swerved their formation and retreated in perfect order on seeing the two intruders in their favourite feeding area. A pair of pelicans at the other end of the tank stopped paddling about and cautiously watched the two bathers. A peafowl called out raucously, warning its mate to beware and sailed majestically over the tank and into the vast canopy of treetops. As the sun rose higher, a few semi-wild buffaloes, came into the water close to the two pelicans. They stood for several minutes, watching those two in the water. It seemed as if, as the minutes passed, the buffaloes were studying the ways of the two other beings in the tank and determining to themselves, whether there was any danger to be feared. Then being satisfied they entered the water, first up to their flanks then till only their snouts were visible.

The young woman seemed to revel in the quiet stillness of that lonely abandoned tank, disturbed only by the shrill cries of the snippets feeding in the mud. She enjoyed the cool water amidst nature's silent immensity in the heart of the jungle. She seemed to have forgotten for the moment, the terrible blows of sorrow, which had been struck her and her family and driven her with this man into the unknown and unpredictable future. Thangamani, submerged up to her shoulders, looked on for a while at the buffaloes. A new arrival was standing silhouetted against the sylvan landscape. The others were now, only submerged up to their flanks, meditatively chewing the cud. Sirisena was in the water scrubbing himself and watching her. She was not a clever girl, as the city girls went, nor did she want or know to use devious methods to trap men. But all that was womanly was personified in her simplicity and charm.

"There's a crocodile behind," shattered her peace. Sirisena shouted out the warning, but, although she had seen crocodiles more than once during her childhood days she was petrified into utter helplessness. She did not even turn round to face the danger that was gliding towards her, from near a half submerged rotting tree, which was about twentyfive to thirty feet from where they were bathing.

With a loud yell, and splashing his hands in the water, Sirisena rushed up to her and dragged her to the safety of the bank. The reptile which had been only a few feet from the girl, when she was pulled off, seeing its prey snatched almost from its jaws, swung round and made off again towards the dead tree trunk, while, panting the two of them watched him.

"The majority of crocodiles in these tanks do not attack human beings," Sirisena told her, "but this one must have found that you were more tasty than others," he added, laughing loud.

She laughed and thanked him for saving her and hurriedly went into a seating position in the shallower part of the tank. She could just see the tip of the crocodile's snout. The rest of the body was well camouflaged and appeared like a portion of the rotting tree trunk.

Except for this brief, dangerous interlude, Nature, seemed to be at peace, in all its exquisiteness, round this quiet jungle surrounded tank.

Although the clothes were not quite dry yet, they put them on.

"Where are we going to from here?" she asked in a voice in which there seemed to be some tinge of regret that they should after all, leave those idyllic surroundings. Life's happy moments always appear too short, it was said.

"We can't stay here for ever, my girl," he answered her. He too felt some remorse that they should have to go.

There was momentary peace and bliss for these two lonely souls in the heart of the jungle. But could they stay there ?

"We will have to find our way out," he told her, "And that's going to be rather difficult, as I do not know how far we came off the road last night".

They entered the jungle and he led her through the interminable openings of the sylvan maze. Sirisena, the man, experienced in the ways of the jungle, saw signs and directions in the most trivial objects and marks on the foliage and the ground. They hit a cart track and reached a village, which they were told was named Payrimaduwa. From there they got a lift in a timber lorry, to Galkulama, and by evening reached the outskirts of Anuradhapura. At Kalatawa they found out that the refugee camps for both the Sinhalese, from the North and the Tamils from other areas in the North Central Province were at the New Town Secretariat. There was a curfew on, they were further informed, and the Army men were assaulting people without asking any questions. Sirisena decided that Thangamani should get into the Tamil refugee camp at the Secretariat. They started off along the Nuwarawewa bund to get into the New Town.

CHAPTER 16

The temporary camp organised for the Tamil refugees consisted of a number of garages with a fairly large rectangle in the middle by the New Town Secretariat and opposite the Police Station. The whole area was surrounded by a wall which enclosed the kachcheri premises. Herded togehter in this were, among senior Government Servants, doctors, engineers, their wives and children, clerks, businessmen and scavenging labourers and their wives and children. Thangamani managed to get into this camp just as dusk was falling. No one asked questions. Each one was interested only in the present and the morrow. There were no

chairs or benches or even mats. They all sat in various postures on the bare ground. There was no water or food or any place from where even those who had the money, could purchase at least a cup of tea. The administration in Anuradhapura Town had completely broken down.

A senior employee of the Shell company and a friend, both Sinhalese, with much difficulty, got permission from the constable on guard duty at the entrance to enter this camp. They knew most of those who were forced into this camp. Almost everyone was asking for some water to drink. The children were crying out in their thirst and hunger. One low powered bulb hung on a pillar enshrouding the whole area in an ominous twilight.

These two persons went to the Police Station and requested the Reserve Seargeant to telephone the authorities to release water into the single tap available in those garages. The Police could not do anything about it. The authority responsible for the supply of water, when spoken to over the telephone, wanted " direct instructions " from the Government Agent, Anuradhapura.

"This is the Government Agent, Anuradhapura, speaking," the friend of the Shell Company man said, taking over the receiver from the Reserve Sergeant, "You damn well release the water to he Kachcheri garages immediately, or..... ..."

"I will do it myself, Sir," the voice at the other end answered even before the threat could be uttered.

"But you are not the Government Agent. He is at Polonnaruwa," the Reserve Sergeant said aghast, at what he felt, was brazen presumption or in Police terminology, impersonation. "This is a very serious matter," he added taking his pen as if to note down a complaint on his own and probably made by himself.

"Well, did'nt you know that I am acting for the fellow?" the man remarked most impudently, while walking out of the Police Station along with the other man.

When the two of them went back to the refugee camp, water was flowing through that single tap and a large number of women and children were drinking. The men were standing around for them to finish. There was no food, for them in the camp. Nor was there any food in substantial quantity to be purchased from the bazaar. The humbler of the refugees had formed a group of their own and kept their distance from those who had been in better positions prior to their entering this camp. Here and there, children, exhausted through hunger were sleeping on clothes spread on the bare ground. There was hardly any conversation among the grown ups. They sat there moodily waiting for the morrow and what destiny would bring with it.

The Sinhalese refugees were in the spacious hall which was the canteen of the New Town Secretariat. Here conditions were better. They were chiefly from Jaffna, Chava kachcheri, Killinochchi and the Paranthan areas. Some were traders, others, colonists and adventurers from down South who had gone beyond the North Central Province in search of fortune. There were women and children too. They spoke bitterly of their lost possessions, and were swearing vengeance on the Tamils. A very few pessimistically remarked that the politicians as a whole were responsible for what was taking place. Such remarks were being exchanged in undertones. But they were free to go about the town.

"I tell you," said Jamis Perera, a prosperous trader, who had lived for over 20 years at Killinochchi, "We the Sinhalese have suffered more losses than the accursed Tamils. A crowd came into my compound and asked me to get out of my shop, pulled out my furniture and belongings and after stacking them in the compound set fire to everything. I was only able to take out the money I had."

"The whole trouble has been that rumours have been spread, most of them absolutely unfounded, that the Sinhalese had, in Colombo area branded SRI in Sinhala

on the bare back of a Tamil politician's daughter," replied his companion, William Appuhamy, also from down South, a bakery owner in Jaffna Town. "You know, mudalali, even the worm turns at some stage. In the Jaffna area there was not a single murder of a Sinhalese, unlike in the Polonnaruwa area, where hundreds of poor Tamil people were killed. At Panadura, a harmless Tamil man is said to have been burnt, and in broad daylight too in the heart of the Town. We were lucky that they did not kill us." This time" I hope the Tamils will be annihilated," Jamis Perera replied. "They have been our enemies from times immemorial What do they think of the Sinhalese ? What's wrong with the letter SRI, I would like to know from those Tamil bastards."

"What happened to your wife and the two children?" William Appuhamy queried almost laconically.

The question annoyed and hurt Jamis Perera, although William Appuhamy did not mean to. By wife, William Appuhamy was referring to his friend's Tamil mistress and the two children she had borne him. Jamis was married and was the father of five children. The family was at Weligama and they knew nothing of the young Tamil girl that Jamis was living with at Killinochchi. She was the daughter of a Tamil cultivator. She spoke Sinhala quite fluently and looked after and supervised sales in his sundry boutique whenever the man went down to Colombo or his home. On a number of occasions, Jamis had taken her to Jaffna with the two children and they had lunch at William Appuhamy's bakery. He used to accompany her to the kovil on festival days.

"I have somtimes been a fool and not thought of the greatness of our race," Jamis replied signifying both annoyance and regret in his tone. "I really wanted her to cook for me, but the girl, sort of forced herself on me. She wanted to come with me, but those Tamil bastards did not

allow her to do so. Let them do anything with her and the two children. I don't care a damn, but for god's sake don't let my people at home know about this."

"The Tamils and we have lived for thousands of years together in this country," William Appuhamy pointed out, "And I feel that we could yet continue to live as in the past. All these troubles have been created by these opportunist politicians, who are bankrupt of ideas. We should have the right to carry on our trades in Jaffna and the Tamils should be free to set up in business at Dondra.

"You have got these foolish ideas, due to your having been in Jaffna from your infancy," Jamis Perera said in a tone suggestive of utter disgust. "If we give in to them, we will be driven out of this country. Where could we go to? The Tamil bastards could at least go to India."

"My dear friend," said William, "My father took me to Jaffna when I was a little boy and two weeks after my mother's death. I know the Jaffna Tamil well ..... I mean the common man. They are as good as the Sinhalese. In their homes they treat us well and are very sincere and loyal friends. The Tamil Government Servants are bad, I hear. They band together and try to get in their relatives and friends into jobs. The ordinary man in Jaffna has nothing against the Sinhalese. He only wants to live. He has no land as we have. The little land that he has got, is difficult to make productive. I have seen how men sweat on a perch of land to force out of it, what only sweat could."

"The Jaffna fellow is shrewd and will work to make money," countered Jamis. "I cannot see any reason in their being against the letter SRI being put on number plates. What do they want? Probably they will ask that we should speak only in Tamil in our own land."

"What purpose has that letter served, than to injure and draw blood from a healing wound?" asked William.

"What have the Sinhalese got from that letter? Our politicians are not trying to devise ways and means of making this country rich, but just inventing empty methods which in the end help only to exacerbate the already injured feelings of some community or creed in this country. Then, when a minority protests, the majority, that is we the Sinhalese are incensed to insist on continuing the tyranny. These troubles and squabbles between two communities, help our political opportunists, to divert the minds of people from the obviousness of their incompetency and send them fighting shadows. These diversions among the people, prolong the political lives of every upstart who finds his way into the highest legislature of our land."

"But what's wrong with the letter SRI?" Jamis persisted.

"Tell me friend, "William Appuhamy asked. "By this letter being put on the number plates of cars and lorries, has there been an iota of change for the better in any imaginable sphere of life in our country? It has only created violence between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. The time will come when their very names stink like the urulava."

"Aiya, what has happened to this country?" lamented Jamis, "All what I earned at Killinochchi is lost. Curse the jackals who are creating troubles for me and may they be struck by lightning."

As Jamis mudalali, in utter desperation and rage began a tirade of cursing at his personal losses and got sick too, of hearing his companion's arguments, it was announced that the train going down towards Colombo had come and they were to get into lorries to be taken to the Railway Station. He got up with his bundle of belongings. He felt awfully miserable, that he should in a matter of a couple of hours or so, be back with his people in the village. How much he missed the warmth and affection of

Mano, his young Tamil mistress, whom he was leaving behind at Killinochchi. Only Jamis mudalali knew !

CHAPTER 17

The lorries to transport the Tamil refugees to, what at the time, was said, "that side of Vauniya", were drawn up in the Secretariat compound. Who decided on "that side of Vauniya", without enforcing law and order in the country will have to be found out by historians. The future generations will agree with the judgement passed by the present, that it was one of the most disgraceful incidents in the chequered history of this country. Was the rape of Lanka complete ? No specious arguments will ever convince the Sinhalese or the Tamils that any reasonable person or persons could have resorted to such a monstrous method of quelling an internecine row.

As the men, women and children hurried out and clambered into the vehicles, Thangamani hung on, looking out for Sirisena He was standing close to the porch of the Secretariat. As she came up he whispered to her to get into an open Land Development Department lorry. He chose that as the most suitable for his plans, as a number of scavenging labourers were already in it and the others shunned it. He got in and helped the girl to drag herself up He had no idea as to what was being done or the direction the lorry would take. How could he go to "that side of Vauniya" with this Tamil girl, he thought to himself. A chasm had opened up between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Even if he wanted to, the Tamils would not have let him, even make an attempt to fit in, he felt. Then the convoy started off. A large truck with a bren gun mounted on top led, while a jeep full of armed men brought up the rear. There was silence in all the vehicles as they passed through the town and got on to the Anuradhapura – Madawachchi – Jaffna road.

It was the most degrading spectacle that ever could

have been witnessed in the streets of Anuradhapura.

The Sinhalese were ineradicably shamed!

In the lorries and trucks were men, women and children, the majority of them, friends of the Sinhalese in Anuradhapura. Most of the men hung their heads in sorrow, for, just a few days prior to this disgraceful caravan being formed they were serving the people of Anuradhapura in different spheres of public activity. What crime had they committed?

Ask that question from the silent sentinels of stone which are found scattered all over the ancient City, the City that speaks of a culture and a civilisation buried in the dust of centuries. Dutugemunu had once regimented the most courageous and noblest of the Sinhalese in Anuradhapura, to fight for the freedom of Lanka. That warrior and statesman would not have known what chivalry meant, as it is understood today. But it is on record, that, by royal decree, even the place where his vanquished foe was laid to rest, was venerated and preserved. His body was not tied to the wheels of a chariot and dragged in the blood soaked dust of that ancient City, as the Romans did to their defeated foes.

The men women and children who passed that day in that ignoble caravan, through the streets of Anuradhapura were not prisoners of war. The Jews who went to their deaths in the Nazi cattle trucks were certain of the fate awaiting them. They did not live to feel the pangs of shameful humiliation that the men, women and children in those trucks that dreadful day, were to suffer. Their souls were being dragged along the streets of the ancient City of Anuradhapura.

Thangamani did not feel any shame as she passed in that open truck and saw the spectators watch the nauseating convoy of vehicles pass like a funeral procession. She was wondering where she was being taken to and what plans Sirisena had for her.

It was a novel experience. In the open truck, no one spoke to her or to Sirisena She had never been in Anuradhapura before that, but she had heard of Anuradhapura, from Sirisena's mother. She saw the pinnacles of the Ruanveliseya, Jethawanarama and the Bayagiri Dagobas. Of course she did not know them by name, but she knew they were dagobas built by the ancient kings of Lanka..... so she had heard. There was one of brick with a part of the pinnacle damaged. She felt an urge to ask Sirisena how that could have been damaged and what its name was, but she suppressed that feeling, consoling, herself that, when Sirisena and she had settled down, she will ask him to bring her to Anuradhapura.

Again the thought came to her, as to where she was being taken. The convoy had stopped opposite the New Town Public Market and an Army Sergeant, with a sten gun slung across one shoulder was shouting out orders to the drivers. The convoy started to move on. She had no home among the Tamils, she thought to herself. She was born in a railway lineroom. Her mother had told her that she was delivered by a Sinhalese midwife. Her mother had given her that name, Thangamani, because of her complexion.

Some of the men were looking at her, she noticed, as the convoy gathered some speed, after they had passed a a junction and got on to a straight stretch of road. She did not use any methods which feminine ingenuity invented to attract men.

At Madawachchi, the convoy was halted and the drivers and army men entered the one kiosk that was open for business. Although the refugees had been instructed not to get off the vehicles, Sirisena whispered to her to get down. Slipping off the truck they crept into a building which appeared to be unoccupied. It was by the road and the truck had halted just opposite. It was a church. They had entered from a narrow door in the rear of the church as all the other doors were closed. Through fear they crept into what was like a table covered on three sides

and hid there. It was an altar, but Sirisena and Thangamani had never been inside a church. They had only heard that the Christians believed in an all powerful being called, God. There were a number of images and they both felt those images must be those of the Christian God. They were afraid that the others in the truck might have informed the escort.

They need not have entertained any fears on this score. The others were preoccupied about their own future and their fate, to care about others. They hid behind the altar, till the sounds of the convoy starting and driving off faded away. Then they came out from their cramped hideout to explore what this church was like.

All doors, except the one they had entered through were locked from the inside. There was no furniture except for a few benches. There were pictures of a man carrying a cross, hung on the walls. There was a crucifix on the altar. It was gloomy inside as the sun had to penetrate into the church through some skylights only. Sirisena told the girl to get back to their hiding place, till he brought something for them to eat. They had not had anything for dinner, nor even some tea for breakfast.

The small Madawachchi bazaar was deserted except for a few stragglers who paid no heed to him. Occasionally a jeep or a truck full of armed soldiers or policemen rushed along the road towards Anuradhapura or Vauniya. He walked up to the kiosk that the drivers had earlier gone to have tea, when the convoy stopped. The Muslim trader had only 'roastphans' and tank-fish curried. He sat on a chair inside the boutique and atarted a conversation with the trader. He wanted to find out how far it was to Mannar and whether there was trouble there too.

Thangamani went back behind the altar and looked about. There was a large picture of Mary carrying an infant, which she had not noticed earlier. It had been

taken down and placed against the wall behind the altar. She had never been inside a church, leave alone a Roman Catholic church. She looked hard at the picture. She had heard of Mary but she had not bothered to find out anything about her. In the picture she was quite nice, in fact beautiful, Thangamani thought. The Christians must be a peculiar people. But they were Sinhalese and Tamils. She had been told that it was the religion of the whitemen. To her religion meant going to the kovil dressed in her best clothes, and, according to what she understood about religion, to the Buddhists, it was a matter of going to the temple and offering flowers, and, to the Muslims, praying aloud in the mosque. Her father never went to the kovil, but he was not a bad man. To her Buddhism and Hinduism were synonymous with the two races, Sinhalese and Tamils. But she had also heard that all religions wanted people to do good and avoid evil. She had also heard that all Sinhalese should be good Buddhists. It had been the religion of their great kings and also their ancestors.

The door moved and Sirisena entered with a small parcel. There was tea, but no sugar, he told Thangamani. They sat on a large coir mat behind the altar and commenced their meal, while Sirisena recounted the conversation he had with the mudalali. The best for them would be to get to Mannar and try to make a home for themselves, there, he told her. They will have to leave the church only, well after dusk. They will have to risk being caught violating the curfew. Thangamani was silent, right through her meal. They finished the 'roastphans' and sat there wondering what the future held in store for them. It was Sirisena who broke the silence.

"If we get to a safe place, will you marry me?" he posed the question suddenly.

"But what will happen to our children?" Thangamani asked, "and what of ourselves? You are a Sinhalese and I a Tamil woman. You a Buddhist and I a Hindu. How could

we marry? You will have to go to the temple and I to to the kovil, so that we will never be able to go together."

Sirisena could not offer her an explanation although he felt that there was no bar to their being married and rearing a family.

"We need not worry about those simple matters," he tried to put off the real issue, that the girl had raised. "Haven't we been together right through our journey here? Now that you are getting closer to your people, you do not want me. You are talking of kovils and temples."

"No..... no..... I'll want you always. But I was thinking of religion", she smiled at him, "I am prepared to do anything you want me to", she added feeling sad that she had probably hurt him.

Then conversation lapsed and they sat there in silence waiting for the night.

CHAPTER 18

At the Nuwarawewa resthouse, a young subaltern and an oldish warrant officer were sipping beer. It was about 4.00 p.m. The verandah of the resthouse was cool, with a soft breeze blowing from the vast expanse of water that lay just, over the bund and below, on the other side. The subaltern had returned from Sandhurst about six months ago His waxed moustache ends were more pointed than the bayonets that his men in the jeep, in the resthouse compound were having on their rifles. He twirled them a little nervously, wondering whether he, in actual fact, had a commanding appearance, as officers of the army should have. The warrant officer, looked as if he was about to jump to attention and rush out, to carry out any order given by his superior officer. He was an old soldier, in the sense that he had served in one of the armed units during the last great war. Although he had joined in 1939, when demobilisation commenced about 1946, he had, after being

very servile managed to get up only to the rank of lance corporal. But he had stayed on in the army, and in the new set up of what they termed the Ceylon Army, he had risen up very fast. It looked as if there was a war on in Lanka and he felt happy and proud that he was drinking with an officer just returned from Sandhurst. The conversation was about the various exploits of the Ceylon Army in various parts of the country during the past few days.

About 5.30 p.m. or so, a car drove up to the rest-house and a wealthy and portly looking man in cloth, coat and slippers, sporting a small konde, came in hurriedly calling out for something to drink. The two army men looked up and heard the wealthy mudalali order his drinks.

"Gosh. The beggar is drinking whisky," remarked the Sandhurst trained officer. "We are fighting for the country but have to be satisfied with arrow or beer."

"Exactly, Sir," the Sergeant Major commented. "We will get even with him if he leaves the resthouse after 6 p.m."

The new comer gulped down several whiskies and then requested the waiter to give some dinner to his driver. At about 6.10 p.m. he got into his car and drove out of the resthouse.

The Sandhurst trained officer twirled his moustache a couple of times, shouted for the bill and got up.

"Sergeant Major, we'll give the kondaya a hammering," he remarked with an air of satisfaction. 'Hurry up".

"Very well, Sir," the sergeant major answered draining down the dregs in his tumbler and walking briskly up to the jeep.

The army jeep overtook the car of the mudalali opposite the New Town Market and the sergeant major jumped

off and flagged it to a stop. The driver stopped the car and got off.

"Why have you broken the curfew, yakko?" the warrant officer demanded, following the question up with a resounding slap.

The mudalali, on seeing his driver being struck, came running up with his hands raised in protest. Two men armed with rifles had got down from the jeep, while some others in the jeep were laughing.

"Sir, we are on our way to the Police Station to get a curfew pass. My family is at Polgahawela. I have been told my child is seriously ill. ! ."

Before the man could finish the explanation, the young subaltern came up to him and kicked him in the groin. The man bent in two. He got another kick on his face. The driver dared not intervene. The slap had been followed by kicks and blows with a baton. The third a karate blow alighted on the portly mudalali's neck and he fell forward. But he was protesting weakly and mumbling some more excuses as to why they had "broken" the curfew. He wanted to be pardoned ..... his child was ill .....

"Put this beggar in the jeep," the subaltern ordered, looking at his men as if he had just been intimated that he was to be awarded the Victoria Cross for gallantry in the field. Then turning to the driver, who was cowering between the car and the jeep, "Dog, follow the jeep to the Police Station".

The two men were locked up at the Police Station to be prosecuted for breaking the curfew. It was indeed a very serious offence at the time.

About this identical time, two other army officers, a major and a captain, were also having a drink at the Madawachchi resthouse. They were discussing the latest news. There was no one else at the resthouse that evening.

"Where will this end Christie?" asked the major of his second in command, "Do you think that the curfew or the declaration of the emergency will solve anything.?"

"To blazes, if I know where we are heading for, Colin," the captain replied. "Already, some of your younger officers have permitted and even participated in excesses, in the Jaffna, Batticolea areas and even here."

"The trouble with the Ceylon Army is, that none of the men in it have seen actual service against an enemy. Our chaps, particularly, when left in charge of the podians who have just been to Sandhurst and played toy soldiers, want to feel that they are real tough fighters," remarked Colin, "and to make matters worse, we have got an awful set of NCOs who are spoiling for assaults on people. They set upon unarmed men and thrash them. There have been several cases of rape, in the Jaffna area, although for the sake of the name of our unit we have camouflaged everything."

"There is nothing that can be done when we have politicians who have no other aims, but the advancement of their own interests," sneered Christie," "and if we try to bring about discipline among the rabble we get today as recruits, some acquaintance or sycophant of some Minister will have us turned out of the Army. What they want us to understand as loyalty is the suppresing of the Tamils expressing their grievances. They may be imaginary or not..... but that is their business. It is not for the Army to help browbeat any section of the community."

Major Colin, had been commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1939 in the Ceylon Light Infantry, when the war broke out. He had left college and spent several years in the UK, studying Law, before he joined the Army. In 1946 he was demobilised and tried his prowess at the bar. He had joined the volunteers and when the communal disturbances broke out he was mobilised again. He had his own ideas of soldiering.

Christie had sought a Commission in the same unit, but due to his physical statistics, it had been refused. Then he had joined the ranks of the CLI and risen to the rank of lieutenant, by the time demobilisation orders came during the middle of 1946. He too was a volunteer and they had been friends since the Japanese raid on Trincomalee. They themselves had not seen active service, but both were men with sober and independent views. They were trained in the traditions of the British Army, where all officers were considered to be gentlemen, whose courage and honour were guided by conservative codes of conduct. They had not been to Sandhurst, where the recruit officers of the army of Independent Ceylon were going for training. They were too old for Sandhurst - the powers that be laid down.

"Ceylon is in for a hell of time, if religion and language are warped to get votes," said Colin. "It is the fashion today. One political party vies with the other, cooking up methods of fooling our people."

"But will this last? Some day the people of this country will brand them as the hypocrites they are," Christie interjected.

"The most vissciously evil crime ever perpetrated on this country for the degradation of its people, is this cry for Sinhala only to be effected in 24 hours," Colin continued with some feeling. "The country must have one official language it is true and by all the powers of Cerebus, let them damn well have it. But what is this anxious urgency? To placate a section of the voters, who scheming politicians felt, were in a position to help them upstairs, they have created an unbridgeable chasm of hatred and suspicion between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. A friendship which had survived the passing of centuries, has been shattered with one stroke of the pen".

"And the humiliation that one section of the population is made to suffer," added Christie, "will eat up into its

soul and a hard crust of frustration and fear will envelope them."

"Nemesis will remove from our midst the perpetrators of all these troubles, Christie. I am confident, the people of this land will reach the stage when they will march to the polls, bereft of illusions of religion and language", remarked Colin.

During their discourse the two men had consumed quite a lot of liquor and Christie who claimed, of course, after some liquor, that he had graduated in the streets, always thought of home and was inclined to be a little poetic. That was his failing..... he drank a "little too much." But his friends knew the signs, when he reached the state, when alcohol was in his blood in much strength. He wanted to sing and recite for their amusment. He was in such a mood now, when his friend suggested that they have dinner and take a look round to see that there was no further trouble.

"Thinking of these troubles, Colin," he said, standing up and stretching himself, "whenever my elder brother struck me and I refused to sit for dinner with him, my dad used to take me to his desk and from some book, read to me....

'Forgive and forget..... why the world would be lonely,

The garden a wilderness ..... left to deform. -

If the flowers but remembered the chilling winds only,

And the fields gave no verdure for fear of the storm'.

"He never told me who the author of those lines, was, but I never forgot them. I am certain that these days will be forgiven and forgotten."

After dinner they were on the Jaffna road in their jeep till the early hours of the morning.

CHAPTER 19

About the time that the lorries were starting off, from Anuradhapura to dump a section of the population on "that side of Vauniya", a young Government official was going round with an escort of army men and Police, looking for other Tamils who were in Anuradhapura. The "order" had come, it was said that all the Tamils should be "evacuated".

In a part of Anuradhapura, known as Mawadi, there were a number of Tamils who had been in the area for generations. They had no relatives or contacts in the North. Close on mid-day, this party of officials who were looking out for Tamils to be 'evacuated' came to Mawadi. They searched a house occupied by an Indian businessman, who had been in Ceylon for about 30 years. He lived with his family in a house close to the Brazen Palace. They found two bottles of sand and the gun belonging to the man. He explained that, his son, just a youth must have had the sand bottles, fearing that rowdies might attack the house, where there were a large number of womenfolk. He hims if knew nothing about them. That explanation was not accepted and all the inmates were made to kneel on the public road in the burning mid-day sun for several hours.

Meanwhile, on hearing the Police were looking for him, Mr. Tillaraja, who at the time had been supervising his paddy lands being ploughed, came home. When he was arbitrarily ordered to get into the lorry by the young Goverment official, to be taken to "that side of Vauniya", he protested that Anuradhapura was his home and that his people had been there for almost four centuries. Where could he go to with his aged father and mother?

An Army Sergeant came up to him and struck him a blow with the butt of his rifle. Tillaraja enquired as to why he was struck. The reply was another blow, which felled him to the ground. Everyone looked on. Then

Tillaraja, his mother who could hardly walk due to senile decay and the other Tamils were bundled into a lorry and taken to the camp at the Secretariat, to be transported the next morning.

A few days of lawlessness had transformed petty officials into positions of great power, and, with armed units behind them, the most fiendishly evil acts were committed to degrade human beings. Earlier it was inconceivable that responsible men holding positions in Goverment service could have behaved like mediaeval tyrants.

CHAPTER 20

Sirisena and Thangamani were yet in the little church at Madawachchi when the sun went down, fast, as usual in the North Central Province, amidst the large trees in the jungle of the far side of the tank, showing in silhouette the calm serenity of nature. It seemed unaffected by the horrors which were being perpetrated on innocent humans. As the sun slipped down into the heart of the jungle leaving to those in this planet only, to love, hate and live, the two lonely souls waiting for its disappearance, became tense with anticipation of the immediate future. Although there was light outside, it was quite dark inside the church. The streaks of soft light from outside tried to pierce in, through cracks in the doors of that little church. Sirisena peeped out and came back to the girl.

"It is time for us to go," he told her, with his lips almost touching her ear. It was quite dark now.

They slipped out of their hiding place into the night. They hurried on. Due to the curfew, there was no one on the street. At the junction, Sirisena turned left. It was the Mannar road. After about a mile, they saw a red light. They approached it cautiously. It was the railway gate at the level crossing. As they got closer, they heard people conversing. Sirisena listened awhile. The conversation was among a number of men. It was loud and bawdy. It came from a building close to the railgate. He told Thangamani

to wait at the edge of the jungle by the road and stealthily walked up, till he saw several men seated round a table and playing cards. It appeared to be a boutique and through the one plank that was open, a hurricane lantern, hanging from the roof cast a narrow beam of light on to the road and across to the compound of another small building. He got to a few feet of the entrance, keeping to the dark. The men were playing 'baby' He heard them betting, "twentyfive cents, hitting", "this fifty cents asking".

"Give me the bottle, Charlieaiya", he heard one man say.

They were drinking kassippu, Sirisena thought to himself He could not mistake that peculiar odour, which hung about in the night air.

"Simo, close that plank," another man said, with a curse, "if the army men come round we will be assaulted. Oh, those hungry loafers. They think no end of themselves running about in jeeps."

"It is too hot inside, even with that plank open brother", another commented, "the military men are not much worried about the Mannar road. They are riding about on the Jaffna road and having quite a good time escorting the Tamil dames. Don't you think so machan?"

Sirisena, as stealthily as he had come, retraced his footsteps to where Thangamani was standing.

"There are some men in the kade," he told her, "I feel that if they find us, they might attack us to rob us. What shall we do?"

"I do not know," she said in a voice poignant with fear, "but can we go back?",

There was no going back!

He too felt a presentiment of danger. He peered into her face, but could not see her eyes. It was quite dark. His face had a curious expression of affection and fear and though she could not see him, she almost felt it.

Waiting there in suspense was unendurable. "Let's go, my girl," he said, walking on to the road.

They passed that narrow beam of light. They could hear the men laughing at their own obscene jokes. They were both confident that the immediate danger of being spotted and attacked by those men was past.

On their left the lights at the Madawachchi Railway Station platform twinkled forlornly and sporadically. Instinctively they hurried across the railway crossing. A gruff voice shouted out, who they were. They stopped dead, where they were. Before Sirisena could decide, whether, they should run into the building that was on his left or into the jungle on the other side of the road, several men came running towards them, flashing a torch. They were surrounded and being questioned as to who they were once again.

"I am a Sinhalese and this is my wife," Sirisena told them. "We are on our way to Mannar. Please help us to get there."

"Ha.....ha haa," one of the men burst out in mirthless laughter, the others joining him. "So while the Sinhalese are trying to save the country from the bastard Tamils, you have stolen a young Tamil bit and are running away with her somewhere. What a Sinhalese you are? You dog."

"Is she not a Tamil woman?" another asked, holding the light directly on the girl's face. "There you see the hole on her nose".

"And how could a damn Tamil woman be so pretty, yakko?" another asked derisively.

"We will kill this traitor and take away this bit," another suggested.

From the time the torch was flashed on her face, Thangamani had been covering her face with her hands.

"So you are ashamed to show your lucky face to us, you whore?" the man holding the torch scornfully queried. "This Sinhalese traitor is good for you to run away with. What is wrong with us? So we are dark..... ah?"

There was general laughter at this quip. Thangamani could feel the hot stench of their kassippu sodden breath on her face and shoulders. She knew that at that moment these men ruled their destiny. She was baffled by their ribald jokes and questions. She thought of Sirisena..... ... her father dead in the stream..... her mother, alone in the jungle..... what could she do? She stood there motionless and absolutely helpless.

"Will you leave her with us and go away or not, you pariah?" one asked.

Sirisena did not fear that set of scum, the dregs of life, that nature permitted to inhabit this land. He wanted to explain ..... to protest that she was his wife, but he could not give utterance to his feelings.

He saw Thangamani fall on the highway, as she was struck on the head with a club. He went down on his knees, protecting her being struck any more blows with his own body. She was just a heap on the road. It was a matter of seconds. He only heard their wild, derisive laughter once again, for, as he bent over her prostrate body, his skull was smashed and portions of his brain spattered over the lifeless body of Thangamani.

They dragged the two bodies off the road into the scrub jungle. They tore away the two earstuds off the girl and took the few rupees which were left from the sale of Thangamani's nose-stud, in the dead man's waist.

While they were robbing the dead, an army jeep, with its headlamps, illuminating the road, for a while, dashed past the Madawachchi railway crossing.

Then the men walked through cover of the jungle and washed the blood off their clothes and hands at the Madawachchi tank.

Two days later, the bodies of Sirisena and Thangamani were found and buried where they lay in the lungle. No questions were asked and no postmortems were held during the days of the rape of Lanka.