

# Tamil Eelam Struggle and its Lessons

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By Ravindran

ON 18th May 2009, the President of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapakshe declared that the three decades of war against the LTTE has come to an end. He declared that the Sri Lankan army won a final victory against the Tigers. The Sri Lankan army and the government also claimed that the LTTE leader, Prabhakaran, and many of his lieutenants were killed in the battle and showed the photographs of the dead body of Prabhakaran in the electronic and print media. On 20th, the Sri Lankan government declared a national holiday to 'celebrate' this 'victory'. The timing of this declaration created suspicion amongst the people who are closely watching the developments in Sri Lanka, in India and all over the world. It appears that the Sri Lankan government deliberately spread this news after the announcement of parliament election results in India. While the Sri Lankan government and the UPA government led by the Congress party celebrated this, millions of sympathizers/supporters of Tigers and Eelam struggle all over the world were shocked in disbelief that the struggle for a separate Tamil Eelam would come to such an end. Within 24 hours, the Tigers rubbished the Sri Lankan government's claim and published that the Tiger's chief and many leaders of the LTTE are safe and the struggle for Tamil Eelam would continue until realizing its goal of achieving a separate homeland for the Eelam people.

Tamils, all over the world held protest demonstrations and in Tamil Nadu (TN), some violent incidents also took place. Although the claim by the Sri Lankan government that they have achieved a conclusive victory over the LTTE and the armed struggle for a separate homeland for Eelam can be disputed, at least for the present, there is no doubt that the Sri Lankan army achieved a major military victory over the LTTE. How could one of the most powerful guerrilla forces, the LTTE, have faced such a defeat and how was the Sri Lankan army able to inflict such a defeat? With this defeat, whether the three and half decades of armed struggle for self-determination come to an end? Whether the Sri Lankan government will fulfill the genuine national aspirations of the Eelam people? Whether the Tamil people in Sri Lanka can live as equal citizens along with the Sinhalese? What will be the future of Tamils in Sri Lanka? These are the important questions for all those who fight for freedom, national liberation and for people's democracy and those who genuinely support the cause of Tamil Eelam. To understand the struggle for Tamil Eelam it is necessary to look into its origin and its growth.

## Origin of the demand for separate Tamil Eelam

The Sinhalese people trace their origins in the island to the arrival of Prince Vijaya from India, around 500 B.C. Before the arrival of prince Vijaya the Tamils were already living in the Island. According to Sinhala historian and Cambridge scholar, Paul Peiris

*“..it stands to reason that a country which was only thirty miles from India and which would have been seen by Indian fisherman every morning as they sailed out to catch their fish, would have been occupied as soon as the continent was peopled by men who understood how to sail... Long before the arrival of Prince Vijaya, there were in Sri Lanka five recognized Isvarams of Siva which claimed and received the adoration of all India. These were Tiruketeeswaram near Mahatitha; Munneswaram dominating Salawatte and the pearl fishery; Tondeswaram near Mantota; Tirkoneswaram near the great bay of Kottiyar and Nakuleswaram near Kankesanturai”.* (Paul E. Pieris: Nagadipa and Buddhist Remains in Jaffna : Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch Vol.28)

By the time the Portuguese colonialists arrived in the Island in 1505 there were three kingdoms, namely one Tamil-based in Jaffna, and two Sinhalese-based in Kotte and the third at Kandy. In 1619, the Portuguese defeated the Tamil king and annexed the Jaffna kingdom. In 1656, the Dutch arrived and later in 1796, the British conquered the Island. In 1802, Ceylon becomes a Crown colony. In 1833, the whole of Ceylon for the first time was brought under a single administration by the British. Around the same period, the British started to bring the laborers from TN [Tamil Nadu—a state in SE India] to work in the tea, coffee and coconut plantations.

About one fifth of the island’s populations, of 17 million, are Tamils and somewhat less than three quarters are Sinhalese. The Tamils reside largely in the north and the east and on the plantations in the central hills, whilst the Sinhalese reside in the south, west and in the centre as well. The area of the Tamil homeland in the north-east is around 7,500 square miles or 19,509 sq. Kms.

In 1919, the Ceylon National Congress, comprising both Tamils and the Sinhalese, was formed under the leadership of Arunachalam Ponnambalam, a Tamil. Later, in 1921, he quit the CNC accusing that it represents only the Sinhalese. In 1947, the Soulbury Constitution was enacted which emphasized the unitary state under colonial rule. In 1948, the British left Ceylon handing over power to the Sinhala compradors. The Sinhala ruling classes regarded the island of Sri Lanka as the exclusive home of the Sinhalese and the Tamil people as ‘outsiders’ who were to be subjugated and assimilated within the confines of a unitary Sinhala Buddhist state.

Immediately after assuming power in 1949, the Sinhalese ruling classes disenfranchised the plantation workers from TN. The passage of the Citizenship Act 1949 made more than a million Tamil plantation workers of Indian origin disenfranchised and stateless. In 1949, the Tamil Federal Party (FP) under the leadership of S. J. V. Chelvanayagam, who is regarded as the father of the Eelam nation, was formed. Its First convention was held in 1951 declaring its intention to campaign for a federal structure of governance, and for regional autonomy for Tamils living in the North and East. In 1956, Solomon Bandaranaike was elected on a wave of Sinhalese nationalism. Sinhala was proclaimed as the sole official language of Ceylon and other measures were introduced by the government to bolster Sinhalese and Buddhist chauvinism. J.R. Jayawardane, who became Sri Lanka’s President in the 1980s, openly incited Sinhala chauvinism *“...The time has come for the whole Sinhala race which has existed for 2500 years, zealously safeguarding their language and religion, to fight without giving any quarter to save their*

*birthright... I will lead the campaign...*” (J.R.Jayawardene, Sinhala Opposition Leader reported in Sri Lanka Tribune: 30th August 1957)

In 1958, Bandaranaike and Tamil leader Cheluvanayagam signed a pact (B-C Pact) on a federal solution, devolving wide ranging powers to Tamils in North and east of Ceylon. But, within a week after signing the pact the government under pressure from the Sinhalese and Buddhist chauvinists unilaterally abrogated it. In protest against this, a peaceful disobedience movement was launched by the FP. The government reacted by sending police and military forces to crush the movement and unleashed anti-Tamil riots in Sinhalese dominated areas. More than 200 Tamils died and thousands were displaced.

After a Buddhist monk killed Solomon Bandaranaike in 1959, his wife Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the world's first woman PM came to power. She continued the Sinhalese chauvinistic measures. In 1972, Ceylon was renamed as Sri Lanka and Buddhism given primary status as the country's religion. These measures further antagonized and alienated the Tamils in the Island. In 1964, the Sirimavo-Sastri pact was signed for the repatriation of stateless plantation workers to India. In 1965, the Dudley-Cheluva agreement, which is a diluted version of the B-C pact, was signed. The agreement was abandoned without being implemented due to opposition from the Sinhalese chauvinists and Buddhist clergy. In protest, FP's Tiruchelvam, Minister of Local Government, resigned from the cabinet.

In 1972 Ceylon became a Republic on May 22nd and was officially renamed the Republic of Sri Lanka. The United Front government enacted a Sinhalese-supremacist “Republican Constitution” for the country, which makes Buddhism the de facto state religion pushing Tamils, of both Eelam and plantation labourers, into second grade citizen.

Threatened by the growing state sponsored chauvinism Tamil parties formed the Tamil United Front (TUF) comprising the FP, Tamil Congress (TC) led by G. G. Ponnambalam, and Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) led by Thondaman, which was renamed as TULF in 1976. A small group of youths formed a militant organization named the Tamil New Tigers (TNT); later in 1976 the name was changed into the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Jaffna peninsula to fight for Tamils rights led by a 17-year-old Velupillai Prabhakaran.

In 1974, the Sinhalese chauvinists in collusion with the Sinhalese police attacked the attendees of the prestigious International Tamil Cultural Conference in Jaffna killing nine Tamils and injuring many. State discrimination against Tamils reached its peak with the introduction of “standardization” denying equal opportunities for Tamil students in admission to universities. This measure has not only denied higher education and employment for Tamils but also aimed at gradually eliminating the Tamils from holding posts in the state administration, police and army. In 1976 the TULF passed the “*Vaddukoddai Resolution*” to establish a “*free, sovereign, secular, socialist State of Tamil Eelam based on the right to self-determination*” to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil nation in Sri Lanka. In the 1977 general elections, TULF contested the elections with the slogan of separate a Tamil Eelam State. The Tamils overwhelmingly, more than 90%, voted for a separate Eelam. It was nothing but a referendum for the aspirations and right to self-determination of Tamils in a peaceful manner. But the Sinhalese-Buddhist chauvinists refused to recognize the rights and aspirations of Tamils; instead more state sponsored

violence was unleashed to trample their genuine rights. In an attempt to crush down the Tamil identity and their history, the Jaffna Public Library, which contained many rare collection of books, over 95,000 volumes, including many irreplaceable and culturally important manuscripts in Tamil was burnt down by the Sri Lankan armed forces, under the direction of two ministers, Gamini Dissanayake and Cyril Mathew.

In the pre-liberation war period, in 1983 July, (which is called “*Black July*”) the anti-Tamil pogroms, which were executed in a very planned way, was the most cruel and wide-spread massacre. It took place not only in the north and east of Sri Lanka, where the Tamils are in a majority, but also throughout the country. More than 4000 people were killed and thousands rendered homeless. Their properties were either looted or destroyed, thereby wiping out their means of livelihood. Even in the jails, Tamil prisoners were brutally killed and their eyes gouged out. More than 1,50,000 people fled Sri Lanka as refugees to India and western countries. Directly inciting the riots, President Jayawardane said “*I am not worried about the opinion of the Tamil people... now we cannot think of them, not about their lives or their opinion... the more you put pressure in the north, the happier the Sinhala people will be here... Really if I starve the Tamils out, the Sinhala people will be happy.*” (President J.R.Jayawardene, Daily Telegraph, 11th July 1983)

This incident was the turning point in the struggle for self-determination by the Tamil Eelam people. The Tamil people lost their faith in the ‘parliamentary democracy’ of Sri Lanka, which sought to consolidate Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony over the island, through a series of legislative and administrative acts such as disenfranchisement, state sponsored colonization of the Tamil homeland through the systematic settlement of Sinhalese in the North and East, discriminatory language and employment policies and ‘standardization’ of University admissions.

The struggle transformed from a non-violent, peaceful one into an armed struggle. Thousands of youths joined various militant organizations. They were initially trained militarily in India with the support of the Indian government as the Indian expansionists (then under the domination of Soviet social imperialism) wanted to utilize the issue to pressurize the Sri Lankan government (then under US domination) to fall in line with its expansionists demands. The people realized that the parliamentary and peaceful methods have not only eroded their dignity and rights but also their right to live a decent life. Hence, they rejected the parliamentary politicians and whole heartedly supported the armed struggle. Hiding these facts the Indian government and the media, particularly the English newspapers and TV channels, have been making a big hue and cry about the armed struggle, using their terminology ‘*terrorism*’, deliberately distorting and propagating lies about the history of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. From then onwards, the LTTE, within a few years, became the most prominent organization representing the struggle for separate Eelam; in the process they violently crushing the other organizations, as almost all of them had become agents of, either the Indian or the Sri Lankan governments.

## The Civil War and Peace Talks

In July 1983, the LTTE launched an attack on the military in the North of the country, killing 13 soldiers. Whipping up chauvinistic sentiments the Sri Lanka government organized massacres and pogroms in Colombo and other parts of the country. About 4,000 Tamils were killed, and thousands fled Sinhalese-majority areas. This marked the beginning of the civil war or *Eelam War I*.

After the commencement of the civil war in 1983, till the recent defeat of the LTTE, there were four wars and four peace talks were conducted. The first peace process started under the intervention of the Indian expansionists in 1985 at Thimpu, the capital of Bhutan. The LTTE and other militant groups participated in the talks by dropping the demand for a separate sovereign state for the Tamils and put forward the demands that the Tamils must be recognized as a nationality; the north and eastern region of Sri Lanka must be considered as a single entity and the homeland of Eelam Tamil's right to self-determination, including right to secede, must be recognized. The talks failed due to the refusal of the Sri Lankan government to meet the genuine aspirations of the Tamils.

But the Indian and Sri Lankan governments signed the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord on 29th of July 1987, without any representation or participation of the people of Eelam or the militants who were waging the national liberation war. Instead, the Indian expansionists, who allowed the militant groups to set up their bases in TN and provided them arms, ammunition and military training, imposed the accord on them. The Sri Lankan government brought forward the 13th amendment to the Constitution, providing devolution of powers to Tamils. The LTTE and the people of Eelam rejected the Accord as it had provisions only for a Provincial Council under the unitary state of the Sinhala government, which was far from meeting their genuine demand for self-determination. Moreover, to implement the Accord, the Indian government sent a 140,000 strong 'peace keeping' force to the Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka, as the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord did secure India its strategic interests. The Sri Lankan government agreed to India that *"Trincomalee or any other ports in Sri Lanka will not be made available for military use by any country in a manner prejudicial to India's interests"*.

The role played by the Indian government created suspicion in the minds of those who were genuinely fighting for national liberation. They felt that the Indian government betrayed and back-stabbed them. The relationship between India and the LTTE worsened further when the peace talks were still continuing. On 4th October 1988, the Sri Lankan navy captured a boat and arrested seventeen LTTE men, including top ranking leaders Pulendran and Kumarappa at Point Pedro. The LTTE asked the Indian government to intervene and get them released. Protesting against the dubious role played by India, the leader of the LTTE's political wing, Lt. Col Thileepan began a hunger strike and subsequently died. But the Indian government tacitly supported the Sri Lankan government which began shifting the detainees to Colombo. Subsequently, all LTTE cadres in jail committed mass suicide, which sparked protests and clashes. The peace talks broke down and the civil war started again. The Sri Lankan government asked the IPKF to put down the rebellion. On 9th October 1988, the IPKF started an offensive against the LTTE code named *"operation pawan"*.

They expected to complete the whole operation in a few weeks. Contrary to their expectations the IPKF got bogged down in the war losing more than 1700 troops with thousands more either injured or maimed. Finally they were forced to withdraw ignominiously in March 1990.

The election to the north eastern provincial council was imposed at gun point jointly by the Indian and Sri Lankan governments. While the LTTE boycotted the elections, other militant groups like the EPRLF which became stooges of the Indian expansionists, participated in it. Even today the Indian government and its trumpeters are clamoring for a so-called political solution to the 'ethnic conflict' centering around the same 'solution' imposed by the Indian expansionists in 1987. Of course, the Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinists opposed even this nominal 'devolution of power' to the Tamils. Later, the Sri Lankan Supreme Court struck down the 13th Amendment as 'unconstitutional'.

Opposition to the accord and the presence of the Indian armed forces in Sri Lanka gathered momentum among the Sinhalese also. The Premadasa government even supplied arms to their arch adversaries, the LTTE, to fight the Indian armed forces. Sensing the danger to their power, the Premadasa government asked the IPKF to withdraw. With the defeat of Rajiv Gandhi in the 1989 general elections and the pressure from TN, the V.P. Singh government ordered the withdrawal of the IPKF in March 1990. After the withdrawal of the IPKF a temporary truce was maintained between the LTTE and Colombo. But the war once again broke out in June 1990. Thus began the *Eelam War II*.

After the withdrawal of the IPKF, the LTTE consolidated its position in the northern and eastern areas. After Chandrika Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA) was elected to power with slogan of peace with the LTTE, a ceasefire agreement was signed in January 1995 and negotiations begun. But it too failed due to intransigent attitude of the Srilankan government. *Eelam War III* broke out in April 1995. The military onslaught by the Srilankan government turned more gruesome with the Lankan Air force jets bombing St. Peter's church at Navali killing 125 civilians and wounding 150 others. After seven weeks of intense fighting, the government troops succeeded in bringing Jaffna under its control for the first time in nearly a decade. As a mark of 'victory', Sri Lankan Defense Minister, Anirudda Ratwatte, raised the national flag inside the Jaffna Fort on December 5, 1995. The government estimated that approximately 2,500 soldiers and rebels were killed in the offensive, and an estimated 7,000 wounded.

The LTTE launched its counteroffensive in 1999 with "*Operation Unceasing Waves*" and 17 other attacks on the enemy recapturing all the lost territories. In that single operation, conducted for less than three days, the LTTE killed more than 1200 Srilankan soldiers. It was as though two nations were fighting a conventional war. It also successfully captured the Elephant Pass (*Operation Frog*) cutting all land and sea supply lines of the Sri Lankan armed forces in the town of Kilinochchi and surrounding areas. On April 22, 2000 the Elephant Pass military complex, which had separated the Jaffna peninsula from the Vanni mainland for 17 years, completely fell into the hands of the LTTE. About 40,000 Sri Lankan troops in Jaffna were surrounded by the LTTE and were in a dire situation, and there was no other way for them but to surrender or get annihilated. It was only through the intervention of the Indian and US governments that this was prevented. The Vajpayee government openly threatened the LTTE not to advance further, or to face serious consequences. It even sent its naval ships to save the Sri Lankan soldiers. Not ready to defy the threats from the US and the Indian governments the LTTE did not move forward.

With the inability of the Sri Lankan ruling classes to impose a military solution to the national question of the Tamil people, the Ranil Wickramasinghe's United National Front contested and swept the 2001 elections on peace platform. With the mediation from Norway a peace process was started again in December 2001. After announcing a ceasefire for 30 days by the LTTE and reciprocated by the Sri Lankan government, a formal MoU [Memorandum of Understanding] was signed on 22nd February 2002 and a permanent ceasefire agreement, CFA, was formalized. To monitor the ceasefire an expert committee, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, was also constituted with Norway and other Nordic countries. The first peace talks were held at Phuket, Thailand on 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2002, and this was followed by many rounds of talks. The LTTE agreed for a federal solution for the Eelam question, compromising from its earlier stand for a separate Tamil Eelam and put forward its proposal for an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA). The government also on its part, for the first time, agreed to a federal solution, beyond the minimal devolution of power to the Tamils. The Tigers proposed that the ISGA would be fully controlled by the LTTE and would wield power in the north eastern region. The Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinists in southern Srilanka raised a big hue and cry, saying that Wickramasinghe was handing over the north eastern region to the LTTE, and pressurized the government not to formalize the peace agreement.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga opposed the ISGA and declared a state of Emergency. The Indian expansionists and their boot lickers like The Hindu, N. Ram, Subramanya Swamy etc. hiding the facts and truth (that the LTTE was even willing to compromise) from the Indian people, shouted from the roof top that the LTTE is a 'terrorist' organization only interested in subversive activities and not for any negotiated settlement. This fourth estate of Indian democracy really acted as the agents of the Indian big bourgeoisie and the Srilankan chauvinists in moulding public opinion against the genuine rights of the people of Tamil Eelam and their just armed struggle being waged by the LTTE. Despite not being able to arrive at any solution to the national problem, and though no headway was made in the peace talks, the ceasefire continued till July, 2006.

Mahinda Rajapakshe, who entered into an electoral alliance with the overtly chauvinist JVP, came to power defeating Wickramasinghe in 2004. Rajapakshe, who openly opposed the peace process planned for a big offensive against the LTTE. Taking lessons from its earlier defeats he concentrated on mustering necessary support, economic, military and political, from its friendly countries, particularly India and China, and prepared its forces for a final assault. It also unleashed a diplomatic offensive against the LTTE, particularly in the western countries, where the LTTE has strong support among the Tamil diasporas. In addition, the government engineered a split in the LTTE and won over the traitor to the Eelam people, Karuna, to its side. This had not only weakened the LTTE in the eastern region considerably but many military secrets of the LTTE, hitherto not known to the government, also got exposed.

The *Eelam War IV* began with the Sri Lankan Air force launching an offensive on 26th July, 2006 on the pretext of opening the sluice gates of Mavil Aru, which had been closed by the LTTE. This was supposedly for supplying irrigation water to more than 15,000 villages in the east, under government

control. The Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission persuaded the LTTE to open the gates. But the Sri Lankan government declined to stop the offensive stating that “the utilities cannot be used as bargaining tools”. The SLMM condemned the attacks and observed that “it is quite obvious they (government) are not interested in water. They are interested in something else.”

From 2006 onwards the government forces gradually but steadily advanced and captured areas one after the other controlled by the LTTE. First it concentrated on the east gaining total control by July 2007. After winning militarily it consolidated politically by conducting an election farce and installed the traitor Karuna’s party, the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Puligal (TMVP), in power. Then, in September 2007, it focused on the north, first capturing Mannar and then other areas leading ultimately to capturing all areas controlled by the LTTE.

After the commencement of the civil war, in the last twenty five years, the territory controlled by the LTTE has either increased or decreased in accordance with the development of the war. But, until its defeat in the recent war, it always maintained some territory under its control. Within its territory the LTTE administered a parallel government. It had structures like the judiciary, police, revenue, TV and radio stations, finance and banking, immigration, businesses, agriculture etc. Militarily, the LTTE had grown from a 30 member guerrilla force in 1983 to a conventional standing army having thousands of troops. It had infantry brigades, women’s brigades, commando units and specialized divisions for laying mines, sniping, firing mortars and artillery, resisting tanks and armoured cars, etc. The Tigers also had a naval wing known as the Sea Tigers and it is the only guerrilla force in the world that had an air wing called the Air Tigers. The LTTE had many marine vessels and a limited number of small aircraft.

## **The role of Indian Expansionists**

Since the beginning, the Indian government always intervened in Sri Lanka keeping its expansionist interests in mind. While paying lip service to the plight of Tamils the Indian government extended tacit support to the Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinist ruling classes. In 1949, after the Sinhalese ruling classes assumed power, it colluded with them in disenfranchising the plantation workers of Indian origin and agreed to promulgate the Citizenship Act 1949 that made more than a million Tamil plantation workers stateless. In 1971, when the Sirimao Bandaranaike government was in imminent threat from the JVP uprising, the Indian government provided all help to quell that rebellion because it did not want to lose its prominent status to China in Sri Lanka. Again in 1974, for the same reason, it ceded Katchattivu, a fishing island port of Tamilnadu from time immemorial, to Sri Lanka, brushing aside opposition from the people of TN and the state government. Today, as a result of this, more than four hundred fishermen from TN were killed and thousands were arrested and tortured and their fishing boats, nets and other equipments worth millions of rupees were destroyed by the Sri Lankan navy. Hundreds of protests and strikes by the Tamil fishing community and appeals from different sections of the people and all political parties to take necessary steps to protect the fishermen were simply ignored by the Indian government on the pretext that these fishermen are conduits for the LTTE.



In order to serve its expansionist interests the Indian government sought either to appease the Sri Lankan chauvinists or to pressurize them through the Tamil issue. In 1983, when anti-Tamil riots broke out in Sri Lanka, the Indian government, which was waiting for an opportunity to intervene, immediately stepped into the scene and provided arms to the LTTE and set up training camps in India. In 1985, on the pretext of opposing the bombing of Tamils in northern Sri Lanka, Indian Air Force jets entered Sri Lankan territory and dropped food and medicines violating all international law and norms.

The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord 1987 was signed between the Indian and the Sri Lankan governments not to bring a solution or give some succor to the oppressed Tamils, but to bring the whole of Sri Lanka under its influence. It literally threatened all Tamil groups to fall in line. When the LTTE and the people of Tamil Eelam opposed the Accord, it launched military operations, to crush their genuine national aspirations. Of course, it failed to impose its will on the people who were determined to endure any hardship in the struggle to achieve national liberation, and they returned after a humiliating defeat. In order to weaken the national liberation movement and convert it into an instrument in pushing its expansionist ambitions the Indian government, through its intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), conspired to split and infiltrate the LTTE. It also converted the other militant groups like EPRLF, ENDLF as its stooges, providing all protection to them while opposing the struggle for a separate Eelam. It made many attempts to assassinate the LTTE chief Prabhakaran and other top ranking leaders through its agents like Mahendraraja Mahthaiyah, who was second in command in the LTTE. But all such attempts by the Indian rulers were ruthlessly crushed by the LTTE.

The Indian government actually took full part in the genocidal war against the Tamil people by providing all military help to the Sinhala government. It not only provided sophisticated weaponry, radar and other war machines to Sri Lanka but also sent its military personnel to Sri Lanka to train them, and on some occasions, provided 'on the field training'. When people of TN and some revolutionary and nationalist organizations accused its connivance in the crime, the government tried to distort the facts. But ultimately it was forced to accept that it supplied arms, supposedly only for 'defensive purpose'. It banned the LTTE in India on the pretext of the killing Rajiv Gandhi, thereby curbing the democratic rights of people in India, particularly in TN, to extend their support to the legitimate struggle for Tamil Eelam. It pressurized the state government to arrest those extending support to the Eelam struggle. Scores of Tamil nationalists and revolutionaries were arrested under the NSA and other draconian laws for their support to the struggle. It engaged its navy and coast guards to conduct surveillance in search for LTTE speedboats or other supply vessels. On many occasions it tipped off the Srilankan navy, causing enormous damage to the Eelam struggle. Fishermen from TN were arrested by the Indian coast guards on flimsy grounds, such as they were supplying beedis, lungies, battery cells etc to the LTTE. It also unleashed a slander campaign against the struggle for national liberation, particularly against the LTTE, through its embassies and also through its agents like the Brahminical Subramanyam Swamy and (anti) 'national' newspaper *The Hindu*.

Officially it is estimated that over 70,000 people have been listed as killed in the war since 1983. However, an independent study performed by the University of Washington and Harvard Medical School, states the estimate may be as high as 338,000 killed. When the genocidal war reached its peak between October 2008 and May 2009, killing more than 50,000 people and injuring double that, the Indian government did not even utter a word of condemnation against these gory killings. According to some

reports the Indian government assured the LTTE Political chief Nadesan and another top ranking leader Pulidevan to lay down their arms, and asked them to surrender to the Sri Lankan army and said that it has already spoken to the Sri Lankan President who has also agreed to provide amnesty for them. Trusting the assurance given by India, they came out raising a white flag to surrender before the army, only to get shot at point blank range. The wife of Nadesan, who was a Sinhalese by origin, unarmed and resisted this dreadful crime, was also shot dead cruelly. The day when the Sri Lankan government claimed to have killed the LTTE chief Prabhakaran, it is reported that about twenty thousand civilians were killed in just two days.

It was also reported that the news of the killing of Prabhakaran was floated intentionally to divert the world's attention from these gory killings. Outrageous atrocities like raping dead women Tigers was videotaped and circulated on the internet by the bloodthirsty Sri Lankan army together with the selling of human parts of the dead women Tigers, like meat in the market place. None of this evoked any indignation from the rulers of the so-called biggest democratic countries in the world. On the contrary, the National Security Advisor K.N Narayanan admired the Sri Lankan butcher Army Chief Sarath Fonseka as the "*world's greatest Army Chief*". In the last six months not even once did the UPA government in Delhi ask Colombo to stop the killing of civilians. All it has done was to 'appeal' to the neo-Nazis to 'provide' more 'no fire zones' or NFZs for the civilians to take shelter, when the mercenary army was anyhow bombing the so-called NFZs, killing thousands of women, children and the aged. It was nothing but a fraudulent act aimed at deceiving the people. The role played by the Indian government was very well acknowledged by the fascist Mahinda Rajapakshe when he said "*the help and support extended by the Indian government is very much satisfactory*". After the Sri Lankan government declared that the war was over, we can find posters in Colombo hailing the Indian government for its support to crush the liberation struggle. Even after the conclusion of the genocidal war, the Indian government dispatched its military personnel to clear the mines laid by the LTTE. Disregarding the support extended to the Eelam struggle by the people of TN and their age-old ethnic/umbilical relation with the Eelam Tamils, the Indian rulers executed their expansionist designs. There is no exaggeration to say that it was a war conducted by the Sri Lankan government in collusion with the Indian government.

A decade back, in 1998, J.N. Dixit who served as Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka between 1985-89 made no secret of the Indian government's interests in the Tamil issue in Sri Lanka when he openly declared that:

*"...Tamil militancy received (India's) support as a response to (Sri Lanka's) concrete and expanded military and intelligence cooperation with the United States, Israel and Pakistan. The assessment was that these presences would pose a strategic threat to India..."* Repeating the same opinion the external affairs minister Pranab Mukherjee in March 2009 told the parliament "*in our anxiety we should not forget the strategic importance of that island, and it is not only their security, it is closely connected with our security..... Surely, we would not like to have international players in our backyard*".

The Indian intervention in Sri Lanka is not just due to its geo-political importance. In their rapacious greed they are also interested to loot the whole of Lanka. Between 1990 to 1996 exports from India to Sri Lanka increased by 556%. In 1998 the Indo-Lanka Bilateral Free Trade Agreement (ILBFTA) was signed

between India and Sri Lanka granting full tax exemption for the goods imported from India and business with Sri Lanka took a leap following this agreement. Indian compradors invested heavily in Sri Lanka. CEAT India, Asian Paints, L&T, Ashok Leyland, Taj Group Hotels, Tata Tea, ACC, Ultra-Tech & Ambuja Cements, RAMCO group of industries, Indian Oil Corporation, Mahindra & Mahindra, CADILA Drug company, Exide Batteries, TVS, Britannia, Ansal real estate company, Jet Airways, Sahara and Indian Airlines, ICICI, UTI, LIC, Arvind Mills, Airtel and many more big bourgeois houses started their business in Sri Lanka. India's investments, which ranked 16th place in 2000 moved up to 4th place by 2005. In 2002, India thwarted Colombo's move to bring the Chinese Petroleum giant, Sinopec, into Sri Lanka and pressurized it to handover the Trincomalee bulk petroleum storage to Indian Oil Corporation and signed an agreement to invest about \$75 million for 35 years to set up more than 100 petrol bunkers. In return it agreed to provide all military assistance to Lanka in its war against the LTTE. It also helped the Lankan navy in its surveillance of Sea Tigers movements in the Indian Ocean region and supply intelligence inputs.

Now, the vultures are already vying for the booty in the 'reconstruction' of northern and eastern Sri Lanka. A MoU will be signed soon between India and Sri Lanka for laying under sea power lines to connect the power network in the two countries at a cost of Rs. 2,292 crores.

The Tamil Eelam issue (whether 'support' or opposition) was only a tool for India to use it against Sri Lanka. Before 1987 it played the role of 'helping' the Eelam struggle against the chauvinistic Sri Lankan to increase its influence there. Once it gained control the 'saviour' turned into its opposite helped the Sri Lankan rulers to defeat the LTTE, which was the main organization waging an uncompromising struggle for a separate homeland for the Tamils. Wiping out the LTTE not only helps to maintain 'peace' in Sri Lanka but also in TN as national sentiments is always inimical to India, the prison of nationalities. It is always apprehensive about the nationality movement erupting in TN. Any development of the national movement in any form, not necessarily armed struggle, necessarily faces ruthless repression from the rulers in Delhi. National movements in Kashmir, Punjab, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Gorkhaland etc. in the last fifty two years are a testimony to this.

## **The role played by the so-called International Community**

Sri Lanka is situated in a very strategically significant location in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean has 47 countries and several islands around it. China and the US/ India are the countries mainly competing to gain control over this region. The US has a naval and air base in Diego Garcia. India, apart from its own areas around the Indian Ocean, also has considerable influence over the Maldives. China has a base in the Coco islands near Myanmar.

The Indian Ocean is a vital waterway in which half of the world's containerized cargo, one thirds of bulk cargo and two thirds of oil shipments pass through. Its waters carry heavy traffic of petroleum products.

The US signed a ten year Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) with Sri Lanka on 5 March 2007 which provides, along with other things, logistics supplies and refueling facilities. The US already has Voice of America installation at Trincomalee, which can be used for surveillance.

As already mentioned, India got an assurance, as part of the Indo-Srilanka Accord 1987, that “*Sri Lanka’s agreement with foreign broadcasting organizations will be reviewed to ensure that any facilities set up by them in Sri Lanka are used solely as public broadcasting facilities and not for any military or intelligence purposes*” and that “*Trincomalee or any other ports in Sri Lanka will not be made available for military use by any country in a manner prejudicial to India’s interests.*” Of course, this was a time when US-Soviet conflict was at a peak, with India on the Soviet side. Since then, international equations have changed and India is today acting as the main stooge of the US in this region.

China, which has been a net oil importer since 1993 is the world’s No: 2 oil consumer after the United States. China accounts for as much as 40% of the world’s crude oil demand growth during the period 2000 to 2004. Access to energy resources is a very critical factor for continued Chinese economic growth. Hence, China has stepped up efforts to secure sea lanes and transport routes that are vital for its oil supplies. After the 2005 Tsunami disaster, China gave \$4 million additional ‘aid’ to reconstruct Galle, where its arms supplier Noringo’s arms godown is situated. When it closed down this godown in 2007 it agreed to supply more advanced weapons, from Poly Technologies, at a cheaper price. Subsequently, in April 2007, Poly Technologies supplied \$36.5 million arms to Srilanka. A \$150 million contract was given to China’s Huawei, which has close links with the Chinese intelligence wing MSS, to build a country-wide infrastructure for communications. Also China finalized an agreement with Sri Lanka to build a port project at Hambantota on the island’s south coast which can be used to ensure safety of its oil tankers. Recently, in June 2009, after the conclusion of *Eelam War IV* it signed an agreement for the \$ 891 million Norochchilai Coal Power project. The Chinese companies were granted an Economic Zone and an agreement was signed for 33 years. Huichen Investments Holdings Limited is to invest \$28 million in next three years in the Mirigama Zone. For the first time a specific area was given to a foreign country; that too near Colombo. China is making major inroads into Srilanka causing much concern in the US-India Axis.

These are the major countries which have approached the Tamil national question in Sri Lanka in accordance with their strategic geo-political and economic interests in mind. The US imperialists made a big hue and cry about killing of ‘innocents’ and a ‘humanitarian crisis’ when the Sri Lankan army was about to finish the war. It never made any affirmative action to bring the war to an end when the genocidal war was taking place from September 2008 onwards which witnessed more than 50,000 civilians being killed. It’s howling about human rights violations and shedding crocodile tears for the ‘plight’ of ‘innocents’, which is only a veiled threat that the Sri Lankan government should not do anything prejudicial to its interests — i.e., keep China at bay. But with China making big inroads into Sri Lanka the US is mounting its pressure. Already an American lawyer, who once worked as an advisor to the Sri Lankan President, Mahinda Rajapakshe, (now disassociated), is preparing to file a suit of war crimes by Sri Lanka in a US court. Interestingly Mahinda Rajapakshe’s brother and Srilankan Defense Secretary Gottebaya Rajapakshe and the army chief Sarath Fonseka are both having US citizenship. The

US can, at anytime, make use of this to pressurize the Srilankan government, in its contention with China in Sri Lanka.

China not only supplied sophisticated weaponry and aids to the neo-Nazis but also scuttled the efforts even to pass a UN Security Council resolution condemning Sri Lanka on the killing of thousands of civilians. India also played the same role by not only opposing the resolution but also lobbied some other countries to vote against it.

The UN which has sent its observer, Vijay Nambiar, to investigate the conditions of the civilian in the NFZs, gave almost a clean chit to the Srilankan government. It is not out of place to point out that his brother Satish Nambiar is an advisor on defense related matters to the Srilankan government. One brother advises how to crush the national liberation war ruthlessly while the other brother oversees for any violation of 'human rights'. There were also serious accusations on the UN Secretary General, who also visited Sri Lanka soon after the genocide, to 'monitor' the plight of civilians. He actually covered up the killing of innocents and other war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan military fascists. In fact the UN passed a resolution hailing the Sri Lankan government's victory over the LTTE 'terrorists'. The UN de facto sanctioned the genocide of Tamils even when millions of people, particularly the Tamils, were protesting all over the world condemning the killings and demanding an end to this genocidal war. Even after fourteen Tamils, including a Tamil from Eelam committed self-immolation in front of the UN in Geneva, they could not be bothered.

Disregarding the protests and peoples opinion all over the world, these reactionaries are united in carrying out gruesome massacres of innocent people, displaying outright contempt for all democratic norms of civilized society in crushing the struggle for freedom and for a rightful separate homeland for the Eelam people who have been undergoing a systematic ethnic cleansing programme for many decades. The same type of massacres have been committed and are being committed by these reactionaries in Iraq, Afghanistan and now in the Swat region in Pakistan which is testimony to what extent these butchers will commit heinous crimes to serve their predatory interests. Whatever differences that may be visible, it is apparently only on how to gain a strategic upper hand in the region to pursue their imperialist/expansionist interests.

## **Defeat of the LTTE and its Lessons**

The LTTE which conducted the national liberation war successfully for more than three decades was not only defeated in the *Eelam War IV* but also lost all its bases and thousands of its soldiers were killed, injured and arrested. It will take quite considerable time for them to recoup and continue their struggle for a separate homeland. The war led by the LTTE was an inspiration for all those who are fighting against exploitation, injustice and oppression, particularly those waging armed struggle. The defeat of the LTTE is not only a great loss for the people of Tamil Eelam but also for all those who are waging armed struggle against the oppressors. It is but natural that the defeat of such a powerful militant force may create certain amount of despair among the people who have been supporting/sympathizing with this

struggle. Therefore, to understand the reasons for its defeat is very necessary to take lessons for all nationality movements worldwide and also for the forces waging armed struggle in India and South Asia.

The following could be the main points for consideration:

a) The LTTE has been a militant organization leading the national liberation war for more than three decades. Throughout this period it has faced many ups and downs and now it has lost all its bases. But it has never compromised its goal of a separate “*Tamil Eelam*”, even in the most trying circumstances. Nevertheless, its ideology and class basis is bourgeois in nature. Due to this, it was not able to distinguish between the friends and enemies of its cherished goal of Tamil Eelam. Its approach towards — its own people, i.e. Eelam Tamils, Muslims living in north-eastern Sri Lanka who are also part of Tamil Eelam, Tamils living in the plantations in the central part of Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese people, Tamils in India, who extended all types of support to the cause of Tamil Eelam, the bourgeois parties in TN, the Indian government and the imperialists — all these varied forces were tainted with a bourgeois outlook. It did not take the class differences between the ruling classes and the oppressed masses into consideration when it dealt with Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism and targeted even the Sinhala toiling masses. This provided ample opportunities for the Sri Lankan ruling classes, which is already thriving on chauvinism, to incite anti-Tamil pogroms and commit any type of atrocities over the Tamils in the guise of ‘protecting’ the Sinhala nation and divert the Sinhalese masses from their real problems. Although it may not be possible to win over the sympathy of the Sinhalese masses in their struggle for a separate homeland, due to the domination of chauvinistic sentiments, it should have avoided the killing of innocent people. Moreover, when organizations like the Lanka Sama Samaj Party (LSSP) upheld the Eelam people’s right of self-determination, including the right to secede, there was a possibility of waging a united struggle against the Srilankan ruling classes, however feeble it may be. But due its bourgeois nationalist outlook, the LTTE did not take these aspects into consideration while evolving its tactics. Even in its relations with its own people, it did not take the class differences into account. To be precise, it took the stand of supporting the bourgeoisie when there was a conflict between the working people and the bourgeoisie. Similarly, it concentrated more on getting the support of the bourgeoisie and its parties in TN than striving to get the support of the broad masses. The broad masses — workers, peasants, students, youths, petty-bourgeoisie and the intellectuals — extended their support voluntarily due to Tamil national sentiments, and upholding the just cause of a separate homeland for Tamils. The people of TN, the revolutionaries and other democratic forces, extended their unflinching support to the Eelam struggle, including the LTTE. But the LTTE even instructed its cadres strictly not to have any connections with the Maoist organizations in India. It is the same story even at the international level. The LTTE has built a strong network amongst the Tamil diaspora all over the world. But it did not make any serious attempts either to build close relationship with the struggling people or organizations or get their support. Rather it concentrated on securing the support of the imperialist governments or of influential people in the government. It was not just a national exclusivist attitude but more than that it was a class outlook which emphasised more on the bourgeoisie than on the people.

Ideologically the LTTE was very clear that MLM is inimical to its interests. Once, it gave the slogan for a “Socialist Tamil Eelam”. But within a short period it withdrew it as it was against its class interests.

b) The LTTE started the armed struggle for national liberation as a guerrilla force with only a handful of committed activists. During the “Black July”, a large scale anti-Tamil pogrom in 1983, its strength was merely 30, and at the beginning of Eelam War IV it is estimated at between 30,000-40,000. The Sri Lankan military officially announced that about 22,000 LTTE guerrillas were killed and 10,000 more wounded, arrested and surrendered during the last phase of the war. Any organization which fights for the seizure of political power must seize territory from the enemy and establish it’s/people’s rule. Therefore the war will transform from a guerrilla war into positional warfare and the army will transform from a guerrilla army into regular/conventional army. Before the commencement of Eelam War IV in July 2006, the LTTE held 16,000 sq.kms of territory in the north and eastern Sri Lanka under its control and ran its own civil and military administration in these areas. From this, it gradually started to lose control over the territory over a period of nearly three years. After one year, by July 2007, it completely lost its control over Trincomalee in the eastern province after its defeat in Thoppigala. The government immediately conducted the election farce and installed its agent and renegade Karuna’s party in the provincial government. After capturing the eastern province the Sri Lankan army concentrated its attack in the Northern Province. From September 2007 onwards the LTTE started to lose its territories one by one to the Sri Lankan army. In this whole period the LTTE clung to the positional warfare style despite losing territory and being further weakened and more vulnerable to enemy attacks. Even then it did not change its positional warfare method back to guerrilla warfare. The principle of positional warfare is that by retaining or capturing a position the victory in the war is achieved. Once you lose that advantage it is futile to continue the same thereby providing more opportunity to the enemy to concentrate his attack on the remaining positions. Instead of expanding the area of operation and adopting guerrilla methods, when the enemy is focusing his attack, it withdrew its forces along with the people to a lesser and lesser area. This tactic was suicidal because you don’t have sufficient area for maneuver. The flexibility in changing from one form of warfare into another, in accordance with the condition and the needs of the war, was not adopted by the LTTE, despite it having developed the war from scratch to the highest level. With vast experience of waging different forms of warfare — guerrilla warfare, mobile warfare and positional warfare — why did it falter? It expected that with the growing civilian casualties the world community, say imperialists and Indian governments, would force the Sri Lankan government to stop the genocidal war. But all these reactionaries, as we have seen earlier, were interested more in achieving their own interests and none of them were really concerned about the sufferings of the people or helping them to achieve an honourable settlement against national oppression. The LTTE Chief Prabhakaran once said in 1993 that *“Every country in this world advances its own interests. It is economic and trade interests that determine the order of the present world, not the moral law of justice nor the rights of people. International relations and diplomacy between countries are determined by such interests. Therefore we cannot expect an immediate recognition of the moral legitimacy of our cause by the international community. ... In reality, the success of our struggle depends on us, not on the world. Our success depends on our own efforts, on our own strength, on our own determination...”* Despite having a reasonably correct understanding on the imperialist and reactionary powers, the LTTE failed to put that into practice.

c) The LTTE has been waging a national liberation struggle uncompromisingly against the Sri Lankan government for the last three decades. Although this struggle was directed against the comprador ruling classes in Sri Lanka, objectively it was also directed against imperialism. But the LTTE never had

any anti-imperialist orientation or programme in this struggle for national liberation. Its programme for an independent, self-reliant Tamil Eelam was aimed at achieving a separate state from the comprador ruling classes and not from imperialist exploitation and oppression. Not only that, it considered the imperialist governments as the friends of Tamil Eelam and always tried to get their support for their struggle. Even in the recent war it expected US imperialism, the number one enemy of the world people and the leader of all counter-revolutionary ruling classes throughout the world including Sri Lanka, would come to their rescue, till the last moment. This had blunted the anti-imperialist consciousness among the people of Tamil Eelam and the guerrillas.

d) As the Eelam liberation war transformed from guerrilla warfare into positional warfare its dependence on modern and sophisticated weapons increased tremendously. It mainly depended for its supply from imperialist countries and the international arms market. Hence, it lobbied with those in the echelons of power in these countries. Realizing this, the Srilankan President Rajapakshe successfully used his diplomatic channels to stop the arms supplies. Similarly it also curbed the funds to the Eelam struggle from the expatriates living in Europe and North America. This dependence from imperialist countries harmed the LTTE when these countries helped the fascist Rajapakshe in the 'war on terror'. Self-reliance, not only in economic and political affairs but also in military supplies is most important for the guerrillas fighting against the reactionary ruling classes.

e) It had a faulty approach on the question of the united front. It failed to unify all the forces that could be united against the common enemy. In fact its approach was against uniting all those forces fighting against the Sri Lankan army. In its struggle for domination and leadership position it not only eliminated other petty-bourgeois militant groups, most of them became agents of the Sri Lankan or Indian government, but also genuine forces fighting for separate Tamil Eelam. Revolutionary forces like the National Liberation Front of Tamil Eelam (NLFT), People's Liberation Front of Tamil Eelam (PLFT), Proletarian Vanguard Organization (PrOVO) with MLM ideology and a New Democratic Programme were not allowed to function in Tamil areas. Either they were asked to stop their activities or summarily killed.

f) The regional differences between the three regions of Tamil Eelam namely, Jaffna, Wannai and the Eastern region, particularly between the north and the east, were not taken into consideration. This enabled traitors like Karuna to utilize this sentiment and turn the people of the Eastern region against the LTTE.

g) Due to the wrong handling of Muslims it antagonized the Muslim community, which is a part and parcel of Tamil Eelam. The forcible eviction of 28,000 Muslims from Jaffna, leaving all their belongings, in October 1990, seriously affected the struggle for Tamil Eelam. The ruling classes, always waiting for an opportunity to divide the people, utilized it and created a permanent cleavage between the Tamils and Muslims. The elites among the Muslims compromised with the Sri Lankan ruling classes and weaned away a considerable section of the Muslim population from the struggle.

h) The LTTE's approach is that "Heroes create history" instead of the Maoist dictum of "People create history". Following from this they adopted bourgeois methods of developing the war instead of the



Maoist method of developing People's War. For example, in the national liberation war against the mighty superpower, US imperialism and its puppet regime, the great Vietnamese people led by the Communist Party drowned their enemy in the "ocean of armed people". Whereas in the Eelam liberation war the people only supported the war waged by the LTTE. In a typical bourgeois outlook the LTTE did not arm the people in the war against the Sri Lankan army despite the masses enduring the horrors of three and half decades of civil war. It failed to assimilate the historic truth and experiences of the struggling people all over the world that it is people and people alone who are the real creators of history and any struggle, however militant and protracted; deviating from this will inevitably face defeat.

## **Conclusion**

Even with all these mistakes and limitations the LTTE fought uncompromisingly till now. It had sacrificed thousands of its cadres and leaders for this cause and set a glorious tradition. Undoubtedly the defeat of the LTTE in the recent war is a setback in their long struggle. But three decades of armed struggle and the genuine aspirations of people of the Tamil Eelam for a separate homeland and their sacrifices will not go in vain. Although the Sri Lankan government scored a major victory and was able to weaken the LTTE, and thereby the national liberation movement, the conditions for the growth of such movements still continues to exist even more seriously. Besides, they fought valiantly to the very end not cowering down before the enemy or surrendering to them. This will inspire a new generation of revolutionaries to pick up the gun, learning from the mistakes of the past.

Even two months after the conclusion of the war more than 300,000 Tamil people are still languishing in the NFZs, which are worse than Nazi concentration camps. Even today neither independent media persons nor international aid agencies are allowed to visit these camps. The news leaking from these camps narrates the horrible condition in which the Tamils are forced to suffer. Young men and women are systematically separated from their family members and become untraceable. Their repeated demand to be sent back to their homes is still not accepted. Food, water, sanitation and other basic amenities are not provided to the people. The Rajapakse government is planning to convert Tamil areas into Sinhalese settlements, on the lines of the Zionists in Palestine. The Sri Lankan Army Chief, Sarath Fonseka, openly declared that the Tamils should be ready to live as second class citizens in Lanka.

The Tamils, learning from their mistakes, are bound to fight until they achieve their goal of liberating themselves from not only national oppression and persecution, but also from class exploitation and oppression. All progressive, democratic and revolutionary people in India and worldwide will continue to support the just struggle of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka for a separate homeland.