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Pirapaharan, Chapter 28

By T. Sabaratnam

(Volume 2)

The First Interview

On the Cover Page

Sunday, India's leading news magazine in 1984, created a sensation in India and Sri Lanka by featuring Pirapaharan's first media interview in its 11-17 March issue. The cover carried a colour photograph of a wide-eyed, chubby -cheeked Pirapaharan in combat fatigues, sitting behind a desk, with a gun and a tape recorder by his side. The cover carried a blurb from the interview, "If Jayewardene was a true Buddhist, I would not be carrying a gun."

The interview created a sensation in India because of Pirapaharan's caustic comments about New Delhi's policies, the role played by the TULF and his firm commitment to the separate state of Tamil Eelam. It caused a sensation in Sri Lanka because *Sunday's* cover photograph was the first picture of Pirapaharan Sri Lankan intelligence and the police had ever received. Until then the Sri Lankan police had been searching for its most wanted man with the aid of a childhood photograph they had obtained from the family album. The police copied the *Sunday* photograph and distributed it to their stations countrywide.

Pirapaharan's first interview was obtained by 25-year-old Anita Prathap, a Malayalee from Kottayam, Kerala who was then working for the Calcutta-based news magazine *Sunday* and its sister daily publication, *The Telegraph*. Anita, who schooled in Calcutta where her father worked and graduated from Delhi, was based in Chennai from 1981 and covered Sri Lankan events, concentrating on the ethnic conflict. She was a regular visitor to the offices of Tamil militant groups in Chennai. She had interviewed all the militant leaders, except Pirapaharan.



Pratap admits she attempted to get an appointment with the elusive LTTE chief, but her requests were turned down by the LTTE political office, saying that their leader did not believe in media interviews. "He relies on action for publicity," she was told. In fact, Pirapaharan had told his cadres, "We do not need propaganda. Our attacks are the best form of propaganda for us."

Pratap, an enterprising reporter, had earned a name for herself by the beginning of 1984, when she started pestering Balasingham and other seniors at the LTTE's political office at Adayar for an interview with Pirapaharan. She states in her book, *Island of Blood*, that she singled out Pirapaharan for attention.

Pratap had visited Sri Lanka twice, in February 1983 on a holiday with her husband and then in July the same year to cover the riots. She interviewed President Jayewardene during the February visit. "I did not expect President Jayewardene to agree to my request for an interview. I was then an inexperienced young girl and I was shocked when the President agreed to grant the interview," she recalled when she visited Colombo to launch her book in 2001.

The Director of Information at that time, Manel Abeyratne, told me that President Jayewardene readily agreed to give the interview because he wanted to reach Indian leaders through the Indian press. He was in urgent need to explain the situation in Jaffna. In Jaffna thousands of university and school students, priests, workers and public were demonstrating, calling for the release of the priests and professionals arrested by the army under the oppressive Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Political parties and student groups were demanding the repeal of the PTA and militants had stepped up their attacks on the police and the army. In a daring landmine attack, the LTTE had killed Police Inspector Wijewardene and his driver Rajapakse. Jayewardene wanted to explain to the Indians and the world the tough stand he had taken.

Pratap was, naturally, surprised when President Jayewardene welcomed her with folded hands and the Information Department photographed her welcome. Lake House newspapers were ordered to carry prominently her photograph and the interview. The *Daily News* carried the interview on page one and the photograph inside. Anita obtained a copy of the photograph from the Information Department and carried it in her handbag when she came down to Colombo to cover the July riots.

Her coverage of the July riots won for her Pirapaharan's consent for the interview. Pirapaharan told that



தமிழ்த் தேசிய ஆவணச் சுவடிகள்

to Anita in a subsequent interview. He told her that he admired her courage, especially the way she reported the 1983 riots. She quotes Pirapaharan as saying, "We are guerilla fighters, we have chosen a path of danger, so it's normal for us to face such difficult situations. But you as a journalist didn't have to risk your life, or actually be in the conflict zone, for the sake of reporting the truth. It was your reports that internationalized the Tamil problem and for that Tamil people will always be grateful to you."

Pratap came to Colombo to report the riots on her own initiative. She telephoned M. J. Akbar, editor of *The Telegraph* and obtained his reluctant permission to travel to Colombo. Akbar was hesitant to expose a young girl to the danger of reporting a ferocious racial riot. She travelled to Colombo on Thursday, 28 July, the fourth day of the disturbance. She landed at Katunayake Airport during the night curfew without even booking a hotel room. The BBC's Mark Tully who travelled in the same plane helped her. He took her to the Galle Face Hotel. The next morning, the dangerous Tiger Friday that turned Colombo into a panic-stricken city, she walked from the hotel to Kollupitiya police station to obtain a curfew pass.

With the curfew pass tucked away safely in her handbag, Pratap began her dangerous mission of discovering the truth. Her mission was not free of the perils Akbar feared. She walked from street to street taking notes and photographs of the evidence of the carnage: burnt-out hulks of buildings, bonfires of cars, motorcycles and other vehicles belonging to Tamils, deserted streets, streets scattered with broken bottles and half-burnt furniture, curling smoke rising from smoldering shops and houses, mounds of garbage that symbolized the grinding to a halt of the nation.

At one point two policemen with raised rifles shouted and snatched her camera and ordered her to march to the police station. She stuttered that she was a student of architecture and she was only taking pictures of buildings. The policemen did not believe her. They checked her bag. In it, they found the photograph the Information Department had taken when she met President Jayewardene in February. The policemen returned her camera after removing the film roll with the warning that she should not take any more photographs.

Bringing home with her the notes and the photographs she had taken during the five days she spent in Colombo also needed ingenuity. She smuggled the notes in the shoes she wore and the film rolls through another Indian passenger.

Reports of Riots

Pratap's account of the riots, which were carried on the front page of *The Telegraph*, created a gigantic impact in India and the world. In India legislators raised the matter in Parliament and demanded Indian intervention. To the world, it told clearly and loudly that what happened in Sri Lanka was a systematic, pre-planned, well-organized attack on Tamils and their economic base.

Pratap told the story effectively through her descriptive sketches of the scenes she saw and through the accounts victims told her.

"Armed with voters' lists, the gangs came in empty trucks in which they carried away the goods looted from Tamil homes - television sets, radios, refrigerators, music systems, jewellery, clocks, clothes. They not only knew where the Tamils lived but seemed to have a list of their belongings as well," she wrote.

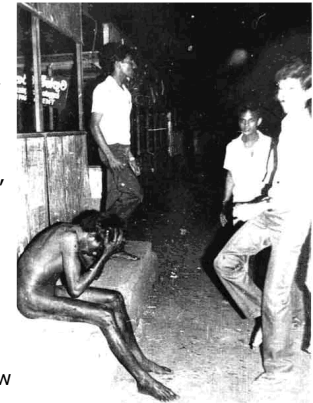
Pratap related the story through several Indians. Omana, the wife of the Indian High Commission official Mohan Chandran, was one of them. On the evening of July 26th, 1983 Omana heard the window panes of her living room shatter. She ran to the front and saw half a dozen men pelting stones at their house. As she watched they stormed in, armed with sticks, knives and iron rods. They ordered her to get out and began plundering and slashing furniture. Carrying her five-month-old infant and dragging her crying five-year-old daughter, Omana ran out of the house and into a neighbour's home. They were Sinhalese but they let them in," wrote Anita.

All the belongings of Mohan Chandran were looted. Anita quoted Omana saying, "We have nothing. We are beggars now."

Through another Indian victim, she narrated still more sordid details. Trilok Singh and her husband lived in a first-floor apartment. She heard people breaking into the apartment below where a sixty-year-old Tamil woman lived. Her furniture were stolen and she was raped. The attackers stormed into the Tamil house next door and cut off the man's hand. He died the next day. Trilok Singh ran out and a fleeing Tamil couple thrust their seven-year-old son Sudarshan Ratnarajah on him. The boy was looked after by the Singhs.

Anita's heart-rending observation: "I met many parents in the refugee camps where rich, middle-class and poor Tamils are now huddled. Anguished mothers recounted how they have lost their children in the mad melee as they fled their homes. In other camps, lost children cried out for their mothers."

Pratap portrayed the appalling conditions in the refugee camps. An example of what she reported: The conditions in the refugee camps were awful. For five days, there was no food. On the sixth day, thirty food packets arrived for a thousand starving people. The hygiene in the camps was deteriorating fast. There was no water, so the bathrooms were locked up. The refugees had to go to one corner of the compound to shit and urinate. In a few days, the whole place was stinking. The tropical heat converted the camp into a germ charnel. Flies feasted on the filth. They droned in different colours and shapes - ordinary grey houseflies, bulbous blue-bottomed ones, shiny bottle-green flies, tiny ones, swollen ones, flat and



broad ones. Diseases spread. Refugees vomited, adding to the stink. Snot blocked, phlegm choked throats. Eyes became bloodshot with fever. Lips cracked with dehydration. Bottoms became sore with diarrhea."

Pratap added pathos to her reports through the stories of the refugees. Three such stories stand out. Sachchithananthan was an elderly man. A mob invaded his first floor apartment, looted the goods and set fire to the house. One attacker caught him and held him in a hammerlock. Three others did the same to his son. They were held on the veranda of his apartment. Then they threw the son onto his Morris Minor car which was burning below. They forced the father to watch his son being roasted alive.

Sivanathan jumped off the fourth floor of a burning building. Both his legs were fractured. Like several other Tamils, he had been turned away from the Colombo General Hospital.

Mercy Morais was a 29-year law graduate. She took charge of the administration of one of the refugee camps. At the conclusion of a lengthy meeting with her, Anita asked her about her husband. Morais broke down and started crying. "I don't know. I had been told he had been shot," she sobbed.

Anita's reports etched for her a place in the hearts of every Tamil who read or heard about them. Pirapaharan showed her his gratitude by granting her his first interview.

Naan thaan Pirapaharan

For Pirapaharan it was his first meeting with a journalist. For Anita it was big scoop. The interview brought fame for both the interviewer and the interviewee.

Anita went to the Chennai safe house, a modest first floor apartment near the sea beach at Besant Nagar, to do her historic interview. She was admitted into a room with cushionless settees, a few cane chairs, a Formica-topped dining table with six chairs and a colour television set. Shortly after she was seated, LTTE cadres switched on the TV and played video cassettes about their movement. The film depicted the LTTE as the disciplined national army of a proud nation - Tamil Eelam. Pirapaharan was seen inspecting the guard of honour.

Anita waited for two hours and a 'short, stocky and ordinary' man walked in. Anita says she did not take notice of him because he was 'indistinguishable from a million Tamil men' and waited for a 'six-foot tall warrior'. "Several minutes later," Anita records about the moment she met Pirapaharan in her book *Island of Blood*, a soft voice said in Tamil: *Naan thaan Pirapaharan*. (Refer to the Chapter 'From Thambi to Annai,' Page 67).

Anita continues:

The man was smiling, almost apologetically. I scrutinized his face and realized with astonishment that it was indeed Pirapaharan.

He was dressed in grey trousers and a sky-blue bush shirt that couldn't quite hide the first signs of an expanding waistline.

I tried to camouflage my disbelief and disappointment, but I am a journalist, not an actress. I didn't succeed. Fortunately, it only amused Pirapaharan. He smiled a boyish, lopsided smile.

Anita also records her impression of Pirapaharan:

It (the interview) lasted two-hours and at the end of the first meeting, I realized that he was one of the most remarkable person I had ever met, and was ever likely to meet, in the course of my life. I was not surprised when within a decade he became a legendary guerilla leader.

Pirapaharan came across as a ruthless, cunning and brutal, but he was also clearly a master tactician and a brilliant strategist. There were no cobwebs in his mind. It was sharp, clear and incisive. No doubts, no fears, no worries clouded his vision. His foresight is amazing as well. He could see today what his opponents would do years later. He would have made a brilliant chess player.

Fantastic foresight

As proof of Pirapaharan's amazing foresight and clear vision Anita, in *Island of Blood* (Page 68), quoted a conversation she had with him during the interview. She had omitted it in her report of the interview that was printed in *Sunday*, as it was not part of the question and answer.

I will quote that portion dealing with the conversation in full because of its importance:

In the course of our meeting he told me, 'Eventually I will have to battle India.' This was years before the Indian troops were sent to Sri Lanka, even before Rajiv Gandhi became prime minister. It was the time RAW (Research and Analysis Wing), India's intelligence agency, was training, arming and funding the LTTE.

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I was shocked and told him so. How could he bite the hand that fed him? Not only was it ungrateful, wouldn't it be suicidal?

'Even more than Sri Lanka, India will not allow us to create Tamil Eelam because of its own fifty-five million Tamils in the Tamil Nadu state,' he replied.

Then why was he taking India's help? 'Right now I am small. I need India's help to grow.'

Apart from this off-the-record conversation, Anita's report of the interview itself provides ample proof of Pirapaharan's foresight. As her final question Anita asked, "In your estimate how long will it take to achieve this Eelam?" Pirapaharan's reply was, "There cannot be a blueprint or a time limit for a freedom struggle. Everything depends on the situation in our homeland and happenings on the international scene." Won't one say, "How true!" considering the current phase of the struggle.

And Pirapaharan forecast that Tamils would never be safe until they establish an independent state of Tamil Eelam with a powerful patriotic army to protect their life and property.

He forecast in the first week of March 1984, when the All Party Conference was moving smoothly, that it would fail because Jayewardene was not keen to work out a permanent political settlement to the Tamil issue. "Our view is based on the experience of several decades," he said and added, "The Sinhala leaders never made a sincere attempt to resolve the Tamil issue. The present negotiations will also meet the same fate. All the major Sinhala parties and the Buddhist organizations are opposed to granting any form of regional autonomy to the Tamils. They are even opposed to giving minor concessions. Hence nothing substantial will emerge from this conference. "His prediction proved true.

Pirapaharan added: I do not think that the Sinhala racist government will utilize India's offer to resolve the problems of the Tamils."

He foretold that Sinhala leaders would only make use of conferences of political parties and peace talks to weaken the Tamils and destroy them. It proved true not only with Jayewardene but also with Premadasa and Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Anita questioned Pirapaharan about the role India could play. I am quoting the questions and answers in the interview because they are prophetic.

Q: *Ideally, what should India do in such a situation to help the Tamils?*

A: I think that the government of India should recognize the fair and legitimate demands of our people and accept our right to self-determination.

Q: *Would you suggest military intervention?*

A: We have the courage, confidence and determination to fight and win our freedom. We should fight and free ourselves. But we do need India's support and sympathy.

India had a different agenda. She assessed that her national interest required keeping Sri Lanka within her orbit of influence. For that purpose, she tried to make use of the Tamils to bring the Sri Lankan government under her influence. Today, India is trying to make use of the Sinhala fear of the Tamils to keep the Sri Lankan government under her influence.

Pirapaharan was certain that Jayewardene was the evil mind behind the riots and the scheme to destroy the Tamils. He dismissed Anita's suggestion that Jayewardene was a prisoner in the hands of the hawks in the cabinet.

Anita asked: Is President Jayewardene a prisoner in the hands of the hawks in his cabinet or is he acting on his own? Is he being pressurized by the Buddhist clergy?"

Pirapaharan's reply was: Jayewardene is acting on his own. He has supreme powers. The hawks in the cabinet and the Buddhist clergy are behind him."

Jayewardene had cleverly planted that image to show the country and the world that he was a good man who was in the midst of evil persons and was struggling to do good. Cyril Mathew was his creation. When Jayewardene dismissed Mathew he vanished into oblivion. Gamini Dissanayake and Lalith Athulathmudali also were made use of to do the things Jayewardene wanted them to do.

Like Pirapaharan, Anita, too, saw through the ploys of Jayewardene. In a piece she wrote for the 8 August 1985 issue of the Chennai Tamil weekly *Kalki*, Anita referred to a conversation she had had with Jayewardene. She asked Jayewardene what difficulties he had in finding a just solution to the Tamil problem. Jayewardene told her he was anxious to work out a just solution to the Tamil problem. "I am doing my utmost. But I am finding it difficult to do it. I am surrounded by anti-Tamil ministers."

Anita wrote in her piece that she found this difficult to believe and she commented thus: Film actors have taken to politics. Politicians had produced films. It is only in Sri Lanka a politician who is not connected to the film world had excelled in acting. President Jayewardene is a good actor. It is doubtful whether there is any other politician in the world who could act as excellently as President Jayewardene. He can be awarded Oscar Award for acting."

Pirapaharan saw through the strategy of the Sinhala leaders. He built a national liberation army to counter their strategy.

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Therein lies his greatness.

Nicknames

In the closing months of 1984 the Jaffna public acknowledged that the LTTE was in the forefront of the Tamil freedom struggle. The nicknames they gave to the five main militant movements bears this out. They gave the militants the titles of the Tamil films popular during that period. They gave the Tigers the nickname **Alaigal Oyvathillai**, meaning 'Waves never cease.' They gave the LTTE that nickname because Tiger guerrillas continuously attacked the police and army and kept them on pins and needles. People signified their approval of the battery of attacks and the accompanying military feats. They needed a hero to fight the Sinhala army and Pirapaharan fitted that role.

TELO, the next militant movement that attracted the public eye, was called **Thooral Ninrupochchu**, meaning 'the Drizzle has stopped.' TELO launched occasional attacks and then kept silent for long periods. PLOTE was called **Vidiyumvarai Kaththiru** meaning 'Wait till it Dawns.' PLOTE with its Marxist approach spoke of a revolution rather than a freedom struggle. It said the people must be prepared for a revolution and the revolution should be done with the support of the Sinhala left forces. EPRLF was given the nickname **Payanankal Mudivathillai**, meaning 'Endless Journey.' In the public's eyes EPRLF attacked the same targets repeatedly. EPRLF was Marxist and staged occasional attacks at some selected targets. EROS was called **Thoorathu Idimulakkam**, meaning 'Thunder Far Away.' EROS confined its attention to exploding bombs in distant Colombo.

People, through the choice of nicknames, indicated their preference. They considered Pirapaharan their hero and the LTTE their favored group. Pirapaharan and the LTTE etched their places in the hearts of the Tamil people through their military prowess, technique and decision-making.

Anita interviewed Pirapaharan several times and she was the only one who have done so. Pirapaharan has never given more than two interviews to any other journalist. Anita asked Pirapaharan in the late nineties what he had learned over two decades as a guerrilla fighter. He answered: He who dares, wins."

The proof that he was winning began to emerge in 1985, the year in which Tamils gave form to their aspirations: nationhood, homeland, right of self-determination and franchise. In 1985 Tamil militants, under the leadership of the LTTE, pushed the army into their barracks and kept them pinned down there.

Next

Chapter 29: JR's Trap for Rajiv

To be posted December 17

Annexure

Tamil National Leader Hon. V. Pirapaharan's Interview

Velupillai Pirapaharan, leader of the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam, tells Anita Pratap.

Q: *What made you opt out of a conventional system and spearhead a liberation movement which you knew would be outlawed?*

A: The democratic parliamentary system, or what you refer to as the conventional political system in Sri Lanka, has always tried to impose the will of the majority on the minority. This system not only failed to solve the basic problems of our people but, in fact, aggravated our plight. For decades, the repression by the state has made the life of our people miserable. The non-violent democratic struggles of our people were met with military repression. Our just demands were totally ignored, and the oppression continued on such a scale as to threaten the very survival of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. It was these circumstances which led me to form our liberation movement. I felt that an armed struggle was the only alternative left to our people, not only to ensure our survival but ultimately to free ourselves from the Sinhala oppression. I have always been aware that our movement would be outlawed. It is for this reason that we organized our movement as a clandestine underground structure from its inception.

Q: *Could you elaborate on some of your personal experiences that compelled you to believe that an armed struggle was the only solution for the Tamils of Sri Lanka? Were you, your family members and friends, directly victimized by the discriminatory policy of the Sri Lankan government?*

A: The shocking events of the 1958 racial riots had a profound impact on me when I was a schoolboy. I heard of horrifying incidents of how our people had been mercilessly and brutally put to death by Sinhala racists. Once I met a widowed mother, a friend of my family, who related to me her agonizing personal experience of this racial holocaust. During the riots, a Sinhala mob attacked her house in Colombo. The rioters set fire to the house and murdered her husband. She and her children escaped with severe burn injuries. I was deeply shocked when I saw the scars on her body. I also heard stories of how young babies were roasted alive in boiling tar. When I heard such stories of cruelty, I felt a deep sense of sympathy and love for my people. A great passion overwhelmed me to redeem my people from this racist system. I strongly felt that armed struggle was the only way to confront a system which employs armed might against unarmed,



innocent people.

Q: *At what point of time did you lose faith in the parliamentary system? What precipitated this disillusionment?*

A: I entered politics at a time-in the early Seventies-when the younger generation had already lost faith in parliamentary politics. I entered politics as an armed revolutionary. What precipitated the disillusionment in parliamentary politics was the total disregard and callousness of the successive governments towards the pathetic plight of our people.

Q: *How did you come to start the Liberation Tiger movement?*

A: I originally formed the movement with a group of dedicated youths who sincerely believed that armed struggle was the only way to liberate our people.

Q: *What was the reason for identifying yourselves as 'Tigers'?*

A: I named the movement 'Liberation Tigers' since the tiger emblem had deep roots in the political history of the Tamils, symbolizing Tamil patriotic resurgence. The tiger symbol also depicts the mode of our guerrilla warfare.

Q: *When you decided to form the 'Liberation Tigers', what was the reaction of your family members and those close to you?*

A: As soon as the Tiger movement was formed, I went underground and lost contact with my family.

Q: *When did you last meet your family members? Are they reconciled to your outlawed existence?*

A: I have not seen my family members for the last 11 years. I do not think they regard me as an ordinary person leading an ordinary life. They are reconciled to my existence as a guerrilla fighter.

Q: *After 14 years of struggle, do you think you are any closer to achieving your goal?*

A: After all these years of struggle I feel that we are advancing towards our goal. The '83 July holocaust has united all sections of the Tamil masses. There is a massive support for the armed liberation program of our movement. This is certainly a step towards our goal.

Q: *On what way have the experiences of the past 12 years changed you as a person?*

A: These years of struggle have strengthened my determination and sharpened my vision.

Q: *Till now what has been your most rewarding experiences?*

A: It is difficult for me to identify a particular experience as rewarding. The life of a guerrilla fighter is full of experience: experiences of sorrow, happiness, frustration: each of which brings its own rewards.

"Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide."

Q: *The experience over the years must have changed your outlook. What are some of the dominant impressions and convictions that you gained by virtue of this experience? Moreover, your experiences would have convinced you of the inefficacy of certain principles and theories in practical situations, while at the same time bringing home the validity of yet others. Can you pinpoint some of them?*

A: Twelve years of experience has convinced me beyond doubt that the armed revolutionary path we undertook was the correct one. The other liberation groups who criticized our armed strategy as terrorism have now realized that armed struggle is the only way out for the emancipation of our oppressed people. Moreover, the guerrilla warfare has been an effective form of struggle. Several successful guerrilla raids have convinced our people that the Sinhala forces can be defeated and freedom can be won.

Q: *Who is your friend, philosopher, and guide?*

A: Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide.

Q: *How does it feel to be the most wanted man in Sri Lanka today?*

A: An Irish leader once remarked that when the British indict a person as a terrorist it implied that he was a true Irish patriot. Similarly, when the Sri Lanka government refers to me as the most wanted man it means that I am a true Tamil patriot. Hence, I feel proud to be indicted as a wanted man.

Q: *Which was your most frustrating moment of your life?*

A: I cannot pinpoint such a moment in my life. But the most frustrating aspect has been the betrayal of some of my trusted friends: those who pretended to be sincere to the cause. But turned out to be self-seeking opportunists.

Q: *How did the split between you and Uma Maheshwaran come about?*

A: I do not approve the formulation of the question In fact, the issue should not be viewed as a conflict or split between me and Uma Maheshwaran. It was a problem between an individual and the Tiger movement. I am in no way responsible for the problem. It was Maheshwaran who created the issue. A leader of a revolutionary movement should commit himself totally to the discipline of the organization. If a leader violates the basic rules and principles then there will be chaos and

the organization will crumble. Uma Maheshwaran violated the rules of our movement and as a disciplinary action he was expelled by the central committee. Being the founder of the movement and the person who appointed Maheshwaran as the chairman, I had no other alternative but to uphold the decision of the central committee.

Q: *Today one finds that there are several Eelam liberation groups. Invariably they work at cross-purposes. When the goal is the same, should not there be a unification process? After all, there is more to be gained by using your combined strength against the common enemy. In principle, are you opposed to the rival groups uniting?*

A: I have clearly and explicitly stated that I am in favor of such unity moves. I even wrote to these groups on 5 September 1982 welcoming the idea and suggested that we all be prepared to form a united front of all other liberation groups, shed our differences and work out a common program of action. But, unfortunately, these groups failed to formulate a common working program. Instead, at every unity meeting they fought against each other and fell apart. The tragedy is that these groups have no sincere intentions to unite and there is a wide gap between their words and their deeds. I sincerely feel that these groups should set an example by forging unity among themselves rather than blaming the Tigers for their disunity. Once they unite, we are prepared to join hands with them.

"I am not alone. I lead a powerful national movement and a wide section of the Tamil masses support me."

Q: *Spokesmen of rival groups have told me that all except you are open to the idea of uniting. Is this true?*

A: This is absolutely untrue. It is only a propaganda by other groups to undermine our movement.

Q: *Are you alone in the struggle?*

A: I am not alone. I lead a powerful national movement and a wide section of the Tamil masses support me.

Q: *Do you experience moments of loneliness? And if you do, how do you combat it?*

A: I have never felt lonely at any point of time. Loneliness is only a problem with those who are buried in their own individual egos. A true revolutionary transcends individuality and develops a collective, social consciousness. I live and struggle for a common collective cause.

Q: *Do you have any regrets about not leading a normal life?*

A: There are millions who, as you put it, lead a normal, ordinary existence. But we are fighting for a cause, for a noble ideal which gives us a profound spiritual satisfaction.

Q: *Are you worried over the fact that most Tamil youths face a bleak future in Sri Lanka?*

A: The youths are fighting a battle for freedom. I foresee a bright future for them.

Q: *Is it true that more and more Tamil youths are taking part in the liberation struggle?*

A: Yes, more and more youths are joining the revolution under our leadership since they have realized that armed struggle is the only way to redeem themselves and their society.

Q: *How would you defend your movement from being called a "separatist" one. and that you all are not freedom fighters but "terrorists"?*

A: It is wrong to call our movement "separatist". We are fighting for independence based on the right to national self-determination of our people. Our struggle is for self-determination, for the restoration of our sovereignty in our homeland. We are not fighting for a division or separation of a country but rather, we are fighting to uphold the sacred right to live in freedom and dignity. In this sense, we are freedom fighters not terrorists.

Q: *Would you rather die than be caught by the Sinhalese army?*

A: I would prefer to die in honour rather than being caught alive by the enemy.

Q: *The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) staged the 23 July 1983 ambush in which 13 Sinhalese soldiers were killed. The ambush was allegedly the reason for the Sinhalese retaliation on innocent Tamils. Did you expect such a massive retaliation?*

A: The July violence should not be assessed simply as a Sinhala retaliation for the guerrilla ambush. This view is a gross oversimplification of the event. The island has been plagued with anti-Tamil racial violence which erupts periodically over the years. There were violent racial holocausts even before the emergence of our movement. Violent riots erupted in Trincomalee a couple of weeks before the ambush. Therefore, the phenomenon of anti-Tamil racial violence cannot be traced to a single event. We are engaged in a protracted guerrilla warfare. There have been several guerrilla raids, several ambushes, and we have killed several Sinhala soldiers and policemen. The July ambush was only a part of the warfare we are engaged in. It is incorrect to assume that one particular military operation has precipitated the entire violence. The July riots, you would have certainly observed, was not only aimed at the physical extermination of our people but it was also aimed the destruction of the economic power base of the Tamils in Colombo. Our view is that the July holocaust was a pre-planned, well-orchestrated genocidal pogrom against the Tamils, carried out by the racial elements of the ruling party. Initially, these racist elements did attempt to put the whole blame on the Tiger. Then, suddenly they blamed the left parties for the riots. But in actual fact, it is the racist leaders of the present government who should be held responsible for this tragic loss of life and property of our people.

Q: *Why did you stage the July ambush? There are various versions afloat. According to some, it was an act of reprisal as four Tamil women had been raped. Based on my investigations I felt that, you had to prove a point to the Sinhalese army who were jubilant over the death of your close associate, Charles Anthony, leader of the military wing on 15 July. The point I guess that you had to assert was that the LTTE despite the loss of one of its ablest leaders was still strong and capable of taking on the Sinhalese army. Is this theory correct?*

A: There is an element of truth your findings about **Charles Anthony** and the ambush. The attack was partly a retaliation, a punishment of the Sinhala army. But still we feel that the lives of 13 soldiers cannot compensate the life of a great revolutionary and freedom fighter like Charles. The ambush was also a part of the guerrilla warfare directed against the enemy.

Q: *Do you think that the round table negotiations will lead to the formulation of a permanent settlement?*

A: I am of the opinion that the round table conferences will not bring about a permanent settlement to the Tamil issue. Our view is based on the experience of several decades. The Sinhala leaders never made a sincere attempt to resolve the Tamil issue. The present negotiations will also meet the same fate. All the major Sinhala parties and the Buddhist organisations are opposed to granting any form of regional autonomy to the Tamils. They are even opposed to giving minor concessions. Hence nothing substantial will emerge from this conference.

Q: *Do you hold the TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front) leaders responsible for retarding the liberation struggle? Do you view them as betrayers?*

A: It is true that the opportunistic politics of the TULF are retarding the liberation struggle. They have never taken any concrete steps to further the struggle. On the contrary, they give false hopes, create illusions, and try to keep our people in perpetual bondage. They entered politics only to further their selfish ends. They never had any sincere intentions to liberate our oppressed people, nor did they ever put forward any concrete programme of political action. They never expected that they would be caught in the storm of a liberation struggle. The flame of a revolution is fast spreading all over Tamil Eelam. But the TULF leaders are trying their best to smother the fire. In this sense you can term the TULF leaders as betrayers.

"I think that the government of India should recognise the fair and legitimate demands of our people and accept our right to self determination."

Q: *Is it true that the TULF leaders are afraid to go to their hometown and stay there not because of the Sinhalese but because of the Tigers?*

A: They are frightened not of the Tigers, but of the fury of the people who voted them to power on the promise of an independent state for the Tamils.

Q: *Do you think that India's good offices will result in anything tangible?*

A: India's efforts have given a positive hope to our people. But I do not think that the Sinhala racist government will utilize India's offer to resolve the problems of the Tamils.

Q: *Ideally, what should India do in such a situation to help the Tamils?*

A: I think that the government of India should recognize the fair and legitimate demands of our people and accept our right to self-determination.

Q: *Would you suggest military intervention?*

A: We have the courage, confidence and determination to fight and win our freedom. We should fight and free ourselves. But we do need India's support and sympathy.

Q: *What is your personal assessment of President Jayewardene?*

A: If Jayewardene was a true Buddhist, I would not be carrying a gun.

Q: *What do you think is Jayewardene's intention behind holding these negotiations? Is he buying time?*

A: There are several reasons behind holding these peace negotiations. Firstly, Jayewardene wants to appease the Indians. Secondly, he wants to restore the colossal damage the riots have done to the image of the country. Thirdly, it would help him to seek financial aid from western agencies. Fourthly, the President wants to buy time to build up the Sinhala military machine.

Q: *Is President Jayewardene a prisoner in the hands of the hawks in his cabinet or is he acting on his own? Is he being pressurized by the Buddhist clergy?*

A: Jayewardene is acting on his own. He has supreme powers. The hawks in the cabinet and the Buddhist clergy are behind him.

Q: *What is the role of the Buddhist clergy in Sri Lanka?*

A: The Buddhist clergy has played a dominant role in shaping the political trends in Sri Lanka. They have played a crucial role in whipping up anti-Tamil feelings among the Sinhala people.

Q: *Do you think that the Buddhist clergy is well on its way to establishing Sri Lanka as a Sinhala Buddhist nation?*

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A: Sri Lanka is already a Sinhala Buddhist nation and the Buddhist clergy has contributed a lot for this cause.

Q: *Is it the result of the Buddhist clergy's chauvinism or is it the result of a natural alignment following the Catholic clergy's association with the Tamil?*

A: The Buddhist clergy's chauvinism has played a significant role in the establishment of a racist state system. Sections of the Tamil Catholic clergy has sympathies with the Tamil cause but the Sinhala Catholic clergy displays strong Sinhala national chauvinism and is opposed to the Tamil demands.

Q: *Do you have ties with other liberation movements of the world? Which are the organizations who provide training and arms to the LTTE?*

A: We have ties with other world liberation movements. I cannot answer the second part of your question.

Q: *Which country in the world has proved to be most sympathetic to your cause?*

A: I do not wish to comment on this matter.

Q: *What is your ideological commitment?*

A: Revolutionary socialism.

Q: *Do you expect attacks on the Tamils in the future?*

A: Yes, I do. The forces of racism and fascism are actively working against the Tamils in Trincomalee and Vavuniya. Tamils will never be safe until they establish an independent state of Tamil Eelam with a powerful patriotic army to protect their life and property.

Q: *Is it true that Israelis are training Sinhalese army men on the techniques of anti-guerrilla warfare?*

A: So far, we haven't got any confirmed reports about the presence of Israeli military experts in Sri Lanka. If the reports are true, I won't be surprised. Sri Lanka is turning into a base for US imperialism and its agents. Whoever the trainers are or whatever their expertise maybe, the Sinhala army cannot crush the will and determination of the Tigers. We have a great moral power, a supreme sense of sacrifice, and a noble cause.

Q: *What is your reaction to the alleged heavy induction of arms and ammunition from the United States to Sri Lanka?*

A: Induction of US arms is not only a threat to the Tamil freedom movement but also to India's national security. America's objective, as you will certainly be aware, is not simply confined to helping the Sri Lankan army to crush the Tamil liberation struggle. Their ultimate aim is to secure a naval base at Trincomalee. Such a happening will convert the Indian Ocean into a war zone, and will increase the tension prevalent in the region.

Q: *If and when Eelam is achieved what sort of a nation do you conceive it to be?*

A: Tamil Eelam will be a socialist state. By socialism I mean an egalitarian society where human freedom and individual liberties will be guaranteed, where all forms of oppression and exploitation will be abolished. It will be a free society where our people will have maximum opportunity to develop their economy and promote their culture. Tamil Eelam will be a neutral state, committed to non-alignment and friendly to India, respecting her regional policies, particularly the policy of making the Indian Ocean a zone of peace.

Q: *In your estimate how long will it take to achieve this Eelam?*

A: There cannot be a blueprint or a time limit for a freedom struggle. Everything depends on the situation in our homeland and happenings on the international scene.

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