

Sri Lanka: murder

The murder of Tamil United Liberation Front leaders A. Amirthalingam and V. Yogeswaran in Colombo on July 13 has cast grave doubts on the willingness of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to give up arms and coexist with other political parties in a democratic environment. The bullets have also illustrated the extent to which violence has overtaken rational debate as the method to settle political issues on the island.



FOR the moderate politicians of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), staying alive in the face of death threats from the Tamil militant groups had become as much of a challenge as trying to maintain political credibility as members of the only unarmed, democratic Tamil political party.

When A. Amirthalingam and M. Sivasithamparam decided to return to Sri Lanka after five years of exile in India, one of their main concerns was to find a home in Colombo where they would be safe from both the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which had imposed a "ban" on their middle-of-the-road politics, and the Sinhalese extremists. V. Yogeswaran, Neelan Thiruchelvam and P. Soosaithasan, the only senior TULF representatives in Colombo, spent many months trying to find a landlord who was willing to rent a house to the top TULF leaders and also arrange security for them. The TULF decided that it would erode its political credibility if it was to accept a house which the Sri Lankan Government had offered informally. Eventually, when Amirthalingam and Sivasithamparam returned to Colombo, they stayed at the Government-owned Taprobane Hotel, guarded by the Sri Lankan police.

It was only early this year that the search for a residence finally ended, when they rented a large, high-walled house on Bullers Road, in one of Colombo's more desirable residential areas. Four TULF leaders shared the sprawling bungalow — Amirthalingam, Yogeswaran, Sivasithamparam and M. Senathiraja, a former leader of the Front's youth wing.

Plainclothes policemen stood behind the high black gate of the house, but visitors often noticed that they were not searched, either physically or with a metal detector. Despite this, the securitymen were apparently dedicated and conscientious, and the TULF leaders had mentioned that they were happy with the protection they were getting.

By all accounts, on the day of the fateful encounter between Amirthalingam, Yogeswaran and Siva-

Appapillai Amirthalingam (1927-1989); (facing page) in Jaffna, homage to the TULF leaders.... tragic lapse in security.

V. Hamamoorthi

politics

sithamparam and the LTTE delegation, there were appalling lapses in security. The meeting had been arranged by Yogeswaran, who was perhaps the TULF leader most acceptable to the LTTE. In Jaffna, the LTTE had kept Yogeswaran under virtual house arrest and had made it clear to him that he would be killed if he ever reentered active politics. Despite this, he maintained contacts with the LTTE, and was trying to build bridges between it and the other groups. Yogeswaran was still convalescing from two heart attacks earlier in the year, but had resumed active political work.

Amirthalingam was the most "unacceptable" TULF politician as far as the LTTE was concerned. There had been a long record of animosity between the two, which had worsened recently after Amirthalingam made a speech in Parliament arguing that the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) should not be withdrawn in a hurry from the North and the East of Sri Lanka. This was directly against the LTTE's

position that the IPKF should be withdrawn immediately. Yogeswaran was apparently trying to patch up things between the LTTE and Amirthalingam, and arranged the meeting. Amirthalingam was reluctant, and it was only around 5 p.m. on July 13 that he apparently agreed to the meeting at 7 p.m. At 8 p.m. Amirthalingam was due to attend a dinner hosted by B. G. Deshmukh, Rajiv Gandhi's special emissary.

The three LTTE men, who were later identified as Visu, Aloysius, and Vignan, arrived at the residence around 6-45 p.m., and the guards at the gate had begun to search them when Yogeswaran appeared on his first floor balcony and asked them to allow the visitors inside. Visu had visited Yogeswaran on earlier occasions, which probably gave the TULF member a false sense of security. This was a tragic lapse. If the three LTTE men had been searched, Yogeswaran and Amirthalingam might have been alive today.

Visu and Aloysius went upstairs to Yogeswaran's apartment, while the third man stayed at the gate. Amirthalingam and Sivasithamparam joined the group, and Yogeswaran's wife served tea. Meanwhile, the guards got suspicious and searched the third man, and found ammunition in his pockets. One of the policemen went upstairs to check that all was well, and as he reached the room where they were meeting, the two LTTE men began firing at the TULF leaders with pistols. The policeman saw the assassins, who came running out of the room, and shot them dead as they tried to run down the staircase. The third man was shot at the gate and died in hospital. Yogeswaran was shot several times in the chest, while Amirthalingam died of a bullet that passed through his forehead. Sivasithamparam escaped with injuries to his collar bone, and was able to give a detailed statement from his hospital bed.

The testimony of key witnesses before Additional Magistrate M. M. A. Gaffoor provides the details. Said Yogeswaran's widow, Sarojini: "On Thursday morning, my husband told me two persons known as Visu and Aloysius have informed that they are coming to see him. He wanted me to prepare some sandwiches and cool drinks. Aloysius had spoken to my husband on the phone once in the morning



K. Gajendran

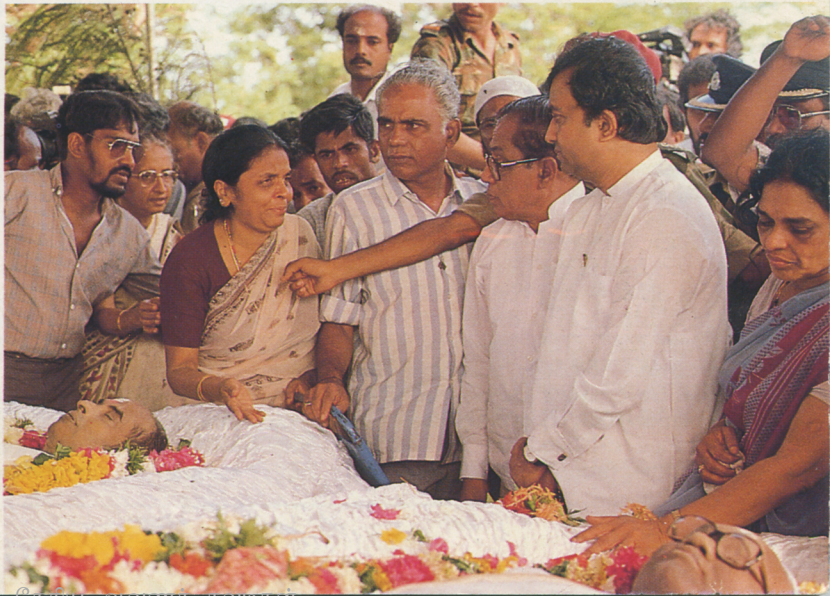


(Clockwise from above) At the Jaffna Central College Grounds, where the funeral took place; bodies of the two leaders being brought by IAF helicopter from Moolai; to the S.J.V. Chelvanayagam Memorial Stupa; arriving for the funeral, Chief Minister of the North-Eastern Province A. Varadarajaperumal, Sri Lankan Minister for Plantation Industries Gamini Dissanayake, Minister of State for External Affairs K. Natwar Singh and Indian High Commissioner L. L. Mehrotra; words of solace; near the bodies, Mangaiarkarasi Amirthalingam and Sarojini Yogeswaran; Amirthalingam's sons (right) performing the last rites; an inconsolable wife.





Pictures:
K. Gajendran



and later in the afternoon. He also said he was expecting the visitors between 6-30 p.m. and 7 p.m. The same persons had visited my husband on four occasions during the past month.

..... At about 6-30 p.m. he came downstairs to watch the TV news (Tamil). The visitors arrived and he went upstairs. They were talking for about 15 minutes when Amirthalingam and Sivasithamparam joined them to commence discussions.

"My husband asked for two glasses of passion fruit juice and a cup of tea and also told me not to disturb them. From the pantry where I was preparing tea, I heard them laughing and talking...."

"All of a sudden I heard several gun shots...."

Amirthalingam's wife Mangaiarkarasi told the magistrate that her husband was watching the TV news with her when their servant handed him a letter saying that Yogeswaran wanted him and also Sivasithamparam upstairs. He went upstairs saying that he would be back in a short time. "I continued to watch television. After about 10-15 minutes I heard several gunshots."

She said she was not aware of the reason why her husband wanted to meet Yogeswaran. And she did not know why these visitors were not checked, while normally anyone who came to meet Amirthalingam was checked.

Sub-Inspector Kandiah, who was in charge of the TULF leader's security, said: "Around 4 p.m. Yogeswaran told me that a person named Aloysius would be coming to see him but (asked us) not to check him. On earlier occasions persons belonging to the LTTE had come, carrying walkie talkies and weapons. I have warned him on several occasions that it was not advisable to let members of the organisation to enter with weapons."

The officer said Yogeswaran had told him that Amirthalingam and Sivasithamparam knew these persons and it was not necessary to search them.

The cold-blooded murder of the two leaders, who were still respected members of the Tamil community despite all the criticism that had been levelled against them for vacillating at critical times, has shocked civilised opinion in Sri Lanka and India. It has also cast grave doubts on the LTTE's willingness to give up arms and coexist with other political parties in a democratic environment. The LTTE's assertions that it had ceased hostilities against the Sri Lankan Government and all other Tamil groups now look hollow, and the crude intolerance exhibited in the past towards other groups or individuals who

threatened its quest for dominance in Sri Lanka's Tamil politics has surfaced once again.

The LTTE has denied involvement in the killings, and has blamed "diabolical forces at work to disrupt the ongoing peace talks (between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government)."

The opinion in Sri Lanka is no longer as favourable as it was towards the Government's peace talks with the LTTE. President R. Premadasa has been extremely optimistic about the talks, but others within the Government, the ruling party and the armed services are still wary about talking to the militants they battled for seven years. One effect of the killings could be the strengthening of this school of thought.

Besides being brutal and barbaric, the killings also appear to be singularly inept politically. They have occurred at a time when the LTTE is trying to convince India and the militant groups which have allied with India that they

have nothing to fear from the Tigers. LTTE spokesmen have been keen to convey the message that the Tigers' main goal is peace, and that they are willing to give up their demand for a separate state and lay down arms and take part in elections in the interests of peace. Whatever credibility these assertions might have had has now been lost.

The killings are also another illustration of the extent to which violence and the law of the gun have overtaken discussion and rational debate as the main method of settling political questions. Both in the Sinhala and Tamil areas, moderate voices have been snuffed out by extremists. The list of those who have been shot dead for their beliefs or for their refusal to be cowed down by terror includes the actor-politician Vijaya Kumaranatunge in the south and respected lawyer and social worker K. Kanthasamy in the north. □

THOMAS ABRAHAM
in Madras

A man and a mission

The bullets which felled Amirthalingam, a staunch advocate of non-violence, snapped the only major link between the early struggle of the Tamils since Sri Lankan independence and its current phase. A tribute to the intrepid fighter and his colleague, Yogeswaran, another victim of violence.

THE high-profile Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leader, A. Amirthalingam, gunned down in Colombo on July 13, relentlessly worked in the background till his last for one cause: the unity of the Sri Lankan Tamil groups.

An incident typifies his commitment to the cause. During the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in Bangalore in November 1986 when Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) leader V. Prabhakaran was flown to Bangalore for discussions with Indian officials, the other militant groups complained to

Amirthalingam about the pre-eminence given to the LTTE. His reaction was typical. Quoting a Tamil proverb, he asked: "Does it matter who pounds, if there will be rice?"

At Thimpu in July and August 1985, when all the Tamil groups acted in unison at the talks with the Sri Lankan official delegation, his hopes rose. But later fratricidal clashes between the groups saddened him and he remarked, "If only we had remained united, we would have hoisted the Eelam flag long ago." He was happy when the Eelam National Liberation Front, an umbrella group consisting of the LTTE, the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front was formed, and was equally disheartened when it split.

A staunch advocate of a non-violent struggle to achieve the Tamils' rights, he was deeply influenced by India's freedom struggle. With a phenomenal memory, he could recall the exact date of Mahatma Gandhi's fast against the Naokhali riots or hartal against the Rowlatt Act in 1919. He once said, "The Tamil people are in a minority on this island. Placed as we are in this situation, we fear that the unarmed Tamil people can only struggle in a non-violent way and win our legitimate rights. Ours is a non-violent struggle. If the youth feel otherwise, we have no quarrel with them. We cannot follow them.

While Mahatma Gandhi espoused non-violence, Subhas Chandra Bose was forming an army and fighting. Only historians can say whether it was the non-violent struggle or violence, or whether a combination of both factors that won won independence for India."

Through his 40-year struggle for the cause, Amirthalingam took part in a number of fasts and satyagrahas. He was the only major link between the early struggle of the Tamils and its current phase. Indeed, his career is entwined with the history of the Tamil struggle since Sri Lankan independence in 1948.

The All-Ceylon Tamil Congress split in 1948 over Colombo passing the Citizenship Act to make one million plantation Tamils stateless. The father-figure of the Tamils, S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, who was the vice-president of the Congress, differed from G. G. Ponnambalam and formed the "Ilangai Tamil Arasu Katchi," the Federal Party, and 21-year-old Amirthalingam was one of its founders. Amirthalingam was elected to Parliament in 1956 and he continued to be an MP till 1970. He and TULF president M. Sivasithamparam, formed a superb duo of debaters in Parliament. He lost the elections that year.

In 1971, when the Left Front Government under Sirimavo Bandaranaike adopted a new Republican Constitution and the Tamil MPs' amendments relating to the Tamil language were rejected by the Constituent Assembly (into which Parliament had constituted itself), the Tamil parties walked out. As Amirthalingam said in April 1986, "It became clear that the new Republican Constitution will take away even the few safeguards against discriminate legislation that were enshrined in Article 29 of the Solbury Constitution and would make the Sinhala language the only official language by a constitutional provision and also give foremost place to the Buddhist religion."

Chelvanayagam convened a meeting of Tamil political parties, trade unions and youth organisations in Trincomalee on May 14, 1972 and the Tamil United Front (TUF) was born. The TUF urged the Tamil members to boycott the final meeting of the Constituent Assembly on May 22, 1972, convened to adopt the Constitution, and called for three days of mourning on May 22, 23, and 24 in the Tamil areas. On the final day, its members burnt copies of the Constitution. Hundreds of youth were arrested and the agitation against the Constitution was on, with Amirthalingam in the forefront.

On October 2, 1972, Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, Chelvanayagam resigned from Parliament, challenging the Government to field a candidate



K. Gajendran

Victims of treachery: when violence and the law of the gun overtook discussion and rational debate.

against him in an election to see whether the Tamils had accepted or rejected the Constitution. But the Government put off the byelection for more than two years and when it was held in January 1975, he had a resounding victory from Kankasanturai. He termed the victory a mandate for the "restoration" of the Tamil State, which was conquered by the Portuguese in 1670. The first convention of the TUF on May 14, 1976 at Vannagam in Vaddukottai adopted the achievement of Tamil Eelam as its objective. And the TUF became the TULF. Chelvanayagam, Ponnambalam and S. Thondaman (the Ceylon Workers' Congress leader) were elected joint presidents. Sivasithamparam and Amirthalingam became joint secretaries.

When the resolution calling for achievement of Eelam was passed, Colombo responded by imposing emergency regulations. The Tamils defied the ban. Copies of the resolution were openly distributed on May 22, 1976, the Sri Lankan Republic Day. Amirthalingam and three others were charged with sedition. After a sensational trial, Amirthalingam was acquitted.

Later, the TULF received two severe setbacks when Chelvanayagam and Ponnambalam died. In the 1977 parliamentary elections, the TULF contested 24 seats and won overwhelmingly in 18 seats when it put forward a mandate for Eelam. It lost only one Tamil-majority seat by 500 votes and also five Muslim-majority seats. The United National Party led by J. R. Jayewardene rode to power and the TULF became

the largest Opposition party. Amirthalingam became the Leader of the Opposition. In an unprecedented move, Parliament passed a no-confidence motion against him on July 24, 1981.

After the July 1983 massacre of Tamils on the island, Amirthalingam, Sivasithamparam, V. Yogeswaran and R. Sampanthan took up residence in Madras. Amirthalingam's room in the Government Guest House at Chepauk, Madras, became the beehive of Tamil activity. He was always accessible to fellow-Tamils and also reporters. Tamil refugees would endlessly call on him for help. He played a silent role in getting admission to Tamil refugee-students in schools, colleges and polytechnics in Tamil Nadu. After the July 1983 riots, he lobbied with the Tamil Nadu Government to give admission in medical colleges to MBBS students from Jaffna, who had to flee to Madras. Again, after the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement was signed on July 29, 1987, when the Government of India asked Tamil refugee students to get back to Sri Lanka midway through their studies, Amirthalingam took up the matter with New Delhi and the order was reversed.

As Dr. T. R. Janarthanam, president of the World Tamil Youth Federation, who had known Amirthalingam for 20 years recalled, "He was never an opportunistic politician. He would never hesitate to speak out his mind or call a spade a spade. When somebody came to him for help, he never gave them false promises."

Amirthalingam could recite hundreds

of songs of Subramania Bharathi and had deeply studied them. He once said his long periods of imprisonment in 1958, 1959, 1961 and 1976 gave him a lot of leisure and that was when he learnt Bharathi's songs.

He loved Tamil, and often regretted that students in Tamil Nadu did not speak chaste Tamil and wondered whether the teaching of the language in Tamil Nadu was up to the mark.

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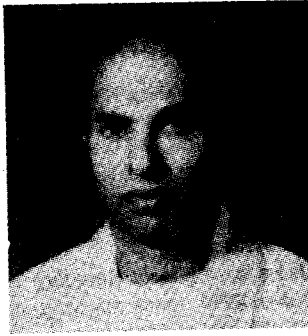
He was the key negotiator on the Tamil side, be it at the All-Party Conference through 1984, the Thimpu talks in 1985 or the TULF's talks with the Sri Lankan Government in July-August, 1986 or with Union Ministers P. Chidambaram and K. Natwar Singh. He hit it off very well with G. Parthasarathy, Indira Gandhi's special envoy to Colombo in 1983 and 1984. He had a very good working relationship with "G.P."

Though Amirthalingam was committed to Eelam, he never made it a fetish or struck rigid, dogmatic stances. He was prepared to accept a rational alternative to Eelam within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. In the TULF's negotiations with Colombo from 1983 to 1987, he concentrated on the unit and substance of devolution of power, be it the regional councils, district development councils or the provincial councils. His mastery of detail, especially when it came to areas such as finance, law and order and land and land settlement was stupendous. His knowledge of the Tamil struggle and his legal background stood him in good stead.

He continued to press both India and Sri Lanka for more devolution of powers to the North-Eastern Provincial Council after the Agreement was signed.

He steered the TULF without identifying it with any particular militant group. As Janarthanam said, when Prabakaran approached Amirthalingam when the LTTE was a fledgling and requested that the TULF support it, he declined to do so. All groups were close to him and their members would often visit him in Madras. But LTTE members seldom did so. Before the Thimpu talks, the LTTE had called him a "traitor" and there were reports much earlier that it had passed a death sentence on him.

The relationship between the LTTE and the TULF became obviously strained after the confrontation between the LTTE and the Indian Peace-Keeping Force began on October 10, 1987. (Earlier, in September 1987, the LTTE had agreed to give three seats out of 12 to the TULF in the interim administrative council.) In the last few weeks, with the TULF taking a stand



V. Yogeswaran..... a pursuit that failed.

that the IPKF should continue on the island and the LTTE demanding that it should pull out, there was obviously no meeting point between the LTTE and the TULF.

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Yogeswaran, who was killed along with Amirthalingam, was a gregarious person and had a deep interest in cricket. In 1977, he was elected TULF MP from Jaffna by a big margin. In 1981, when the anti-Tamil riots broke out all over the island, the Sinhala police and army burnt down his house in Jaffna town. After the 1983 riots against the Tamils, Yogeswaran and his wife came to live in Madras.

His health deteriorated after the 1983 riots and he recently suffered two heart attacks in Colombo. He had planned to

come to Madras for a check-up.

When a friend once told him that he (friend) had some pain in the chest, Yogeswaran advised him to consult a doctor. But when the friend said he had "a double lifeline" on his palm and so would not die early, Yogeswaran pointed out that a relative of his, a doctor in the Jaffna General Hospital, sometimes checked the palm of young boys who had died. "Many of them had a double lifeline on their right palm."

Yogeswaran had a good equation with all the groups and members of all the militant groups used to drop in to have a chat with him.

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It was an emotional and touching farewell the people of the Jaffna peninsula paid to Amirthalingam and Yogeswaran. Their bodies were cremated with full state honours at the Jaffna Central College ground around 7 p.m. on July 17. While the pyre of Amirthalingam was lit by his eldest son, Kandeepan, that of Yogeswaran was lit by his sister's husband, Dr. Ramdass. Earlier, their bodies were kept near the S.J.V. Chelvanayagam memorial stupa to enable the people to pay their homage.

The peninsula observed a hartal. As is the custom, there were plantain trees tied to lamp-posts as a mark of grief. Thousands of mourners went past the bodies. □

T. S. SUBRAMANIAN
in Jaffna

Amirthalingam: impressions

When he spoke, there was not a word out of place, hardly a redundant phrase. And there was the intellectual grasp of political complexity, the perspective of reason and moderation and an ability to conjure back to life particular historical moments with precise details. Remembering Appapillai Amirthalingam.

I FIRST met Appapillai Amirthalingam one late-October morning in 1984. As a greenhorn writer on Sri Lanka attempting to make sense of the latest twists in what had come to be known as the island's ethnic crisis, I arrived at his suite in the Tamil Nadu State Guest House weighed down not only by notepad and tape-recorder but also by a sense of my own ignorance. There was a security guard at what was to become the familiar door on the first floor; I was asked to wait a moment on the verandah, with its view of compound trees, the bustling Wallajah Road and, beyond, the gaunt concrete mass of the Chepauk cricket stadium, a mere bat-stroke or two away. Then into the sitting-room of the suite made available to Amirthalingam and his political-

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ly attuned wife, Mangaiarkarasi, by the Tamil Nadu Government following the anti-Tamil violence of July-August 1983 and the decision of the top TULF leadership to go into exile.

What exactly Amirthalingam was doing as I entered that first morning is now lost to memory; nor can I recall our words of introduction. But certain qualities quickly made themselves apparent: the geniality, the correct, almost old-fashioned politeness (after several years of friendship, he would still avoid the presumptiveness of first name terms, preferring to address people as Mr. and Mrs.), the precise and musical deployment of the English language. And, as I learnt that morning, the ability to transform what could have been a prosaic, routine interview into a lesson in history: for Amirthalingam's intellectual grasp of political complexity was matched only by his willingness to guide the less-than-knowledgeable enquirer through Sri Lanka's tangled recent evolution.

That particular morning, a handful of mornings away from the one that would bring violent death to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (a politician with whom Amirthalingam had a special affinity), a couple of months away from the demise of President Jayewardene's ill-fated Colombo all-party conference, found Amirthalingam unhopeful about the immediate prospects for peace. "I think we have come to the end of the road as far as negotiations and a negotiated settlement are concerned," he told me. Then, stepping back in time to the start of that long and convoluted road, he proceeded to lay before me, in the space of perhaps an hour, the salient features of Sri Lanka's post-independence experience, viewed from the perspective of a Tamil of reason and moderation.

I made notes while the tape-recorder captured the cadences of the TULF leader's voice and his systematic reconstruction of past events (the word "thereafter" was one I remember him using frequently to separate one event from its successor). When I came to transcribe the tape a few hours later, I found not a word out of place, hardly a redundant phrase; the interview literally wrote itself. What also impressed, as I ran through the tape, was the mastery of detail; here was an individual who, peering back into events of 30 or even 40 years ago, could summon names, dates, figures; who, perhaps helped by his legal training, could conjure back to life particular historical moments. There was, for example, that June day — June 5, to be Amirthalingam-precise — in 1956 when the notorious Sinhala Only Bill was placed before Parliament. Then a parliamentarian of the Federal

Party (a predecessor of the TULF), the young Amirthalingam and his colleagues performed satyagraha outside the legislature in protest; Sinhalese thugs were unleashed on the volunteers and Amirthalingam was dealt a couple of cracking blows on the head. "I went into Parliament that evening, my dress fully soaked in blood, and Bandaranaike, referring to my condition, said, 'Honourable wounds of war' — that is how he tried to belittle the effect of our campaign."

However, in Amirthalingam's assessment, the real turning-point in Sri Lankan Tamil fortunes — the watershed — came later; this was the killing, in 1974, of nine participants of the World Tamil Research Conference in Jaffna by the Sri Lankan police. This was how he characterised the event that seemed to separate older, milder strategies from the new militancy, from forces that, once unleashed, were not to be easily contained:

This was the period that marked the emergence of youth violence among Tamils. This was actually a reaction to the violence by the police and armed forces in the Tamil areas which had been stepped up since 1971-72. It was in this climate, when even a cultural meeting of the Tamils was disrupted by the Sinhala armed forces and people were massacred, that a feeling grew among the Tamil people that we could no longer live with the Sinhalese. And that was the situation that led to the adoption of the demand for the restoration of the separate state that the Tamils had prior to the Portuguese conquest of the maritime areas of the island.

That October meeting back in 1984 was the first of a series of occasions on which I would turn to Amirthalingam for an understanding of events across the Palk Straits. He always made it a point to be accessible, agreeing promptly to requests for briefings or interviews, welcoming the visitor with that patient and

disarming courtesy while Mangaiarkarasi seized a moment from answering phone calls or handling other political work to order tea or perhaps chat about family matters or a film she was planning to see.

The last time I met Amirthalingam was in early June 1989, far from his Chepauk sanctuary. Towards the end of 1988, he and his wife, together with other TULF leaders, had made the wager of returning to Colombo and to direct participation in national life, aware of the physical risks involved in such a course. The occasion was a dinner in the Colombo home of a Sri Lankan Tamil friend, a beautiful home of mirrored walls and crystal. Perhaps it was the play of light upon glass that imparted a palpable radiance to Amirthalingam as he sat in his armchair talking to fellow guests. Or perhaps the reason lay elsewhere: in his recent return to Parliament after a long spell of banishment; in the whetting of old debating skills; in the sense of once again being in the thick of events, of being in a position to leave an imprint on the future.

At the end of the evening, the couple drove off into the Colombo night, disappearing into a city whose surface calm and verdant physical beauty had already struck me, the visitor, as inadequate disguise for profound internal unease. In the back of my mind there began to take shape the idea of asking Amirthalingam to write down the history stored in his head; to seize odd moments to chronicle and document and piece together the Sri Lankan Tamil story as only he could; to apply the thoroughness, historical depth and cogency that belonged, perhaps, only to him. But it was only the seed of an idea; and I was never able to make the request. □

SUSAN RAM

A perilous posture: Page 118