

University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), Sri Lanka

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15 Years After Rajani:

The Continuing Cost of Dissent

[Shrivelled Entities](#)

[The Chequered Story of Tamil Dissent](#)

[The Role of LTTE Disinformation and Terror](#)

[Rajani's Choice](#)

[Condemned to Absolute Predictability](#)

The United Nations General Assembly declared 21st September the International Day of Peace - to be observed as a day of global ceasefire and non-violence. It is a remarkable irony that Rajani Thiranagama was killed on September 21st 1989 by a violent force, for which the current peace process has served only as means to fasten its grip over its people, and use them as hostages to attain its declared goal of Eelam.

If we really want to esteem this occasion as a day of Peace in the Sri Lankan context, it is appropriate to reflect on the sacrifices of Rajani and others who withstood the terror and challenged the fascist notion of "peace", in a bid to rekindle life into the benumbed Tamil community. We must oppose the system that made them pay with their lives for offering a vision of life, not death, as the future for Tamils in Sri Lanka today.

This would enable us to go beyond mere ritual and challenge prevalent notions of peace in this country, which are not only blind to the actual plight of the people, but also fortify an anti peace ideology and its entrenchment by terror. [\[Top\]](#)

Shrivelled Entities

The twin tragedies we are now witnessing, the LTTE's murder of Tamil dissidents and its unyielding conscription of children, evoke an atmosphere reminiscent of Jaffna when the LTTE cut short Rajani's Thiranagama's life on 21st September 1989. In both instances, the LTTE's actions were a symptom of weakness, mistaken by others for strength. Indeed, it has a fortune invested in five continents, a substantial fleet of vessels plying the oceans on legal as well as covert pursuits. But yet it feels vulnerable to mere individuals who question its political goals and means. It fears they will eventually rekindle life in the community and threaten their grip. Against this reality, it is also the fickleness of the Southern polity that sustains the LTTE.

As we have seen, in both 1990 and today the Sinhalese polity could have prevented bloodshed and anarchy, had it challenged the LTTE by conceding the legitimate rights of the Tamil people without reserve and through practical measures. Instead, it appeased the LTTE, talked

grudgingly about Tamil grievances and treated the fate of Tamil dissent with frivolous disregard.

During the past two years the concept of a Sri Lankan State and nation, has shrivelled to a point where Sri Lanka's leaders no longer even pretend to be take responsibility for the island's North-Eastern citizens. Instead they downplay abuses against them, talking and acting as though the LTTE's killing of Tamil dissidents and the crude and brutal conscription of rural Tamil children 'are no obstacle to the peace process'.

Civil society has been another casualty. 15 years ago Tamils who cared about democracy and human rights found common cause with groups in the South, a number of them with real grassroots contacts, which had been through a bloody insurgency themselves. By 2000, most of these groups were rooted in Colombo, had aligned themselves with their international donors, and were caught up in appeasing the LTTE along with the international community. The prevailing attitude among Colombo's NGOs was that democracy was a luxury Sri Lanka's Tamils could not afford. In consequence Tamil dissent became doubly imperilled and its voices silenced throughout the island.

Although the LTTE is weak, the leaders of the two main parties, lacking direction or conviction, are almost entirely preoccupied with tripping each other. They therefore see dealings with the LTTE largely within this framework, and courted the LTTE-controlled Tamil National Alliance, oblivious even to the short-term dangers. Meanwhile, the LTTE lobbies scored points by drawing attention to the Southern polity's inability to move on federalism, language rights or even to pay compensation to the long-suffering victims of the 1977 and 1983 communal violence. Any prospect of the Government or anyone else of influence lobbying on behalf of the people of Sri Lanka seemed to become ever more remote.

Tamil democrats have had few allies they could consistently rely on. A few courageous individuals in the South have continued to actively support those resisting the menace of child conscription, and have spoken out on unpalatable truths through the media. However, Tamils striving for democracy and human rights for their community, will be for sometime constrained by their own resources. This is a lesson that should have been learnt in 1990.[\[Top\]](#)

The Chequered Story of Tamil Dissent

To be identified as a Tamil dissident against fascist terror is not a mark of sainthood. And attempting to make such an attribution does the recipient a disservice, since once the LTTE murders its critics (and often even before the death sentence is carried out), its lobbies attack them precisely for not being saints. It is a red herring designed to distract attention from the real achievements of dissidents.

In fact all Tamil dissidents are products of the same rotten society that gave birth to the LTTE and its bloodstained politics. The worst elements are not those who handled a gun, but those who took vicarious pleasure in murder and justified it. How many in this society did not find some quiet satisfaction in the 1985 Anuradhapura massacre of Buddhist pilgrims? There were of course good souls among the ordinary folk who were horrified and had no illusions about what the agent of the deed would ultimately do to Tamils themselves.

Dissidents were often persons who had flirted with the mainstream of a decadent Tamil nationalism, and had their hands dirtied in its cause. Others, whose political convictions gave them far greater clarity about the malign trends in Tamil nationalism, dirtied their hands protecting themselves from the LTTE's murderous wrath. Through experience and crises in their lives, many of them came to a point where they were horrified with what they had been associated with. Where they had opportunity and time for reflection, they put themselves on the line and took the position that the Tamil people could regain their freedom and dignity only through a commitment to the higher values of democracy and human rights. Rajani was one in a long line of such persons.

For hundreds of these dissidents there was no turning back, even when death was staring them in the face. How hard it was, and what enormous resources of character and conviction it demanded is seen vividly in the dreadful transformation the LTTE wrought on several of the dissidents' colleagues.

The LTTE realised in the late 1990s that to convince sympathetic sections of the international community to back its claim to be the sole representatives of the people, it had to go beyond simply killing off its opponents. It had to transform and co-opt them -- at least for the time being. The transformation the LTTE achieved through terror took advantage of the Tamil community's weakness, and the crass villainy and cowardice that lurked beneath the gloss of Tamil nationalism. The Tamil National Alliance, which the LTTE forged as its parliamentary arm brought together the rumps of a number of groups, including the TULF, whose ranks had been thinned over the years by the steady attrition of LTTE assassinations. Even more astounding is the inglorious flip of the TELO led by Addaikkalanathan and the faction of the EPRLF led by Suresh Premachandran.

The LTTE massacred their TELO and EPRLF colleagues by the hundreds from 1986. Today Suresh Premachandran and Addaikkalanathan are running units tasked by the LTTE to spot and target dissidents, most of all their former associates. Those who receive warning as potential targets are encouraged to save their lives by becoming agents of the LTTE, aiding the targeting other dissidents whose trust and confidence they enjoy. This is the quintessence of fascism, which must break all trust and cherished values in a community to accomplish its vision of 'liberation'. As LTTE leaders have said in the past, the LTTE intelligence wing must ultimately encompass every man, woman and child. Only such a terrified society can yield to child conscription and suicide bombers without protest.

The virulence of this phenomenon cannot be overstated, nor its danger to civilized order. By keeping people in a constant state of acute anxiety, the LTTE has eroded the collective sanity of an entire society. This is the perspective against which the achievement of those who were steadfast in defying this phenomenon should be judged.

Ironically it is just those persons valued for their exceptional decency who after being killed by the LTTE have been singled out for character assassination by its lobbies. Again those in the forefront of character assassination are friends, journalists and intellectuals, transformed after being trembling and shivering LTTE targets.

A recent instance concerns T. Subathiran (Robert), a senior leader of the EPRLF(V) assassinated in 2003. The whispering campaign against him concerns the bad patch his party went through, when cornered by LTTE terror to operate alongside the Indian Army in the late 1980s. If there were any meanness in the man, it would have been aired during the six years

before his death when he walked the streets of Jaffna as a vulnerable, unarmed party activist. During this period he was, even by his enemies, respected as an exemplary democrat and a decent human being. A vocally extremist TNA politician was moved to remark upon his assassination, “*He was a good boy, but why was he in the EPRLF*”!

On 16th August, Balanadarajah Iyer, a pioneer figure in Tamil student agitation, and a leading figure in his own right, was gunned down by the LTTE in Colombo. Iyer had been a leading member of EROS, which shared a common origin with the EPRLF and EPDP. Many EROS members were unhappy when its leader Balakumar turned the party into an LTTE stooge. Circumstances helped Iyer to come out, and though he could have left the country, he chose to work on the editorial board of EPDP publications instead. Among his contributions was to search out good English articles not available to a Tamil readership, and provide translations.

In reporting the killing the same day, *TamilNet*, which reflects the LTTE line, made no attempt to dissemble. It stated in English that Iyer was EPDP spokesman, a member of its editorial board and added that ‘according to the EPDP, Iyer was killed by the LTTE’. On the other hand the LTTE expatriate e-journal *Nitharsanam* alleged in Tamil that the gunmen who killed Iyer were from the EPDP. It further stated that Iyer was an LTTE informant and played a leading role in the miscarried suicide bomber attack on the EPDP leader Devananda during July. Those who knew Iyer from the early days of the struggle instantly saw this LTTE ploy as a piece of mischief calculated to cheapen the victim’s character and sow confusion about his murder. A further clear indication of the LTTE’s role in the murder came when it sent EROS leader Balakumar to represent it at the Oslo Tamil Sangam, 13 days after the murder of his former deputy. He delivered a formula speech praising the LTTE as brave and intelligent soldiers who defeated in effect a ‘multinational force’.

Balakumar was a weak leader who believed once that the LTTE boss Prabhakaran, of whom he took a dim view, would blunder himself into extinction, thus giving him clear field. In 1990, he lost faith in his prophecy and surrendered to the LTTE lock, stock and barrel. In Oslo Balakumar did not utter a word about his lately deceased friend and deputy. Balakumar’s mission was to demonstrate to EROS’s support base abroad that Iyer’s murder made no difference to his serving the LTTE. Back in the late 1970s and early 1980s EROS was the first group to build a support base among the expatriate elite.

The Role of LTTE Disinformation and Terror

When the LTTE killed Rajani, it arranged the circumstances so that the Indian Army, or rival Tamil groups, would be blamed. When people saw through the deception and started talking about it, the LTTE issued a statement of denial in Jaffna two months later, threatening anti-national elements who cast aspersions on their noble cause. An effort at character assassination against Rajani (for which there was no room locally) took the form of a whisper campaign abroad. But it had very limited success.

Today, the LTTE’s capacity for disinformation is far stronger, and is conducted through several channels. The international community too became complicit, following its identification of the LTTE as the key component of the peace process and became cornered into appeasing and protecting it. By early this year it too had become party to its abuses (our Bulletin No.36.)

The LTTE's already significant control over the Tamil media (including BBC Tamil Service for good measure) was strengthened further when LTTE hit squads were given a free run of Colombo by the terms of the ceasefire. This also meant that many journalists representing the Tamil media (seen as that of a discriminated people) in international agencies dedicated to 'media freedom,' are virtual LTTE nominees.

The rebellion by the LTTE's Eastern strong man Karuna last March coincided with an upsurge in Tamil opposition to the LTTE, particularly among expatriates. This was followed by internecine killings between the Karuna and Prabhakaran (Vanni) factions of the LTTE. While public appeals to end killing of civilians largely worked with the Karuna faction, the Vanni faction saw the internecine fight as a pretext to attack Tamil opposition in general.

LTTE hit teams targeted unarmed political opponents throughout the country while the Government kept repeating that these killings were no threat to the peace process, and did nothing. Meanwhile Western embassies sent delegations to the Vanni to talk to the LTTE into restarting the peace talks. The LTTE went on pounding them and the SLMM with the message that they were being attacked by anti-peace "paramilitary" elements supported by the Sri Lankan forces. There are indications that this line met with significant success. The SLMM had already set precedents by inventing a third force (pointing absurdly to other Tamil groups) to avoid pointing a finger at the LTTE for particular violations.

On 21st July LTTE gunmen shot dead an unarmed civilian Velayutham Raveendran at a bus stop in Akkaraipattu. Raveendran was the head of the EPDP-controlled local council, whose predecessor too had suffered the same fate. His death came at the height of the LTTE's campaign to brand all political opponents, especially the EPDP, as "paramilitary" elements. The EPDP was no doubt a prime target because it had managed to secure a place in Parliament in spite of LTTE-terror. It was a clever ploy. If the LTTE could sow seeds of doubt among its potential critics in the international community, suggesting by its use of the term "paramilitary" that the EPDP was engaged in armed activity, sympathy for its murdered party members would evaporate, as would diplomatic engagement with the LTTE's rivals.

Now the LTTE's use of the "paramilitary" label has been disingenuously extended to all Tamils everywhere who challenge its politics. This is no more than the LTTE's latest effort to distract attention from its murderous campaigns. The LTTE wants to be sole representative and it will continue to kill "traitors" to achieve that goal. But it is a diversionary tactic that hits a nerve, because almost every Sri Lankan Tamil capable of serious political discussion today was politicised during 1970-1986 when Tamil youth agitation gathered momentum. Many youth joined armed movements. Those with a people-centred political vision, even if they joined the LTTE, left it in disgust. Persons with such backgrounds form the core of the dissident movement today.

A group, including such persons, runs the London-based Tamil Broadcasting Corporation (TBC), whose broadcasts were relayed to local audiences by the government owned SLBC. By pummeling the TBC with the label 'paramilitary,' the LTTE stopped the Government from relaying its broadcasts. To seal the lips of all those whom the LTTE calls 'paramilitaries' would be to condemn the Tamils to a political Stone Age sans hope.

Few options are available to any one living under the terror of LTTE to fight for human values and rights. How will human rights advocates deal with the issues arising? Will they look to the individual victims' histories and affiliations, or will they acknowledge the over-all

picture of the LTTE's terror and control, and its implication for the community within and without Sri Lanka?

We list some of the achievements of LTTE disinformation backed by terror:

1. It has sent out a virtual ultimatum that it would not be possible to carry forward the 'peace process' without crushing all dissent.
2. Through its control of nearly all outlets for opinion, it has to a significant extent turned the issue of its murder of political dissidents into gossip about individuals.
3. It has sown enough confusion about events, issues and individuals to make even seasoned advocates of human rights question their judgment.

The European Union (EU) did issue a strong statement in August condemning the LTTE's killings. But this came after several months of the EU, mistakenly, abetting the LTTE's terror (see Bulletin No.36). An EU delegation called on the LTTE last February to talk about North-East development in the wake of a spate of LTTE killings in the North, including of a family of three with their 8 months-old infant. Up to and including the conclusion of the April parliamentary elections, Norway and the EU covered up for the LTTE's abuses on behalf of its puppet, the TNA, and facilitated the wholesale theft of votes. The Election Commissioner's refusal to entertain complaints by election monitors is almost certainly a reflection of donor pressure. The EU report deemed the North-East results unrepresentative only after conscientious international monitors exposed the blatant abuse.

Thus the Tamils have their TNA representatives in parliament, not even pretending that they are the people's choice. They come trailing as their staff entourages of killers and spies, adding to that menace which haunts dissidents in Colombo like the plague. Regrets from the West came after enormous damage was done and after the LTTE had been given ample opportunity target meticulously several key democratic opponents.

The new thinking from the West and the direction of its funding agencies became evident in the wake of the 1999 presidential elections. The National Alliance for Peace in its leading questions to the candidates clearly pushed for appeasement of the LTTE. Not remarkably, the UNP candidate Ranil Wickremasinghe adopted the same line, ridiculing the search for a political solution. Given the array of external lobbies and their local 'partners' supporting Wickremasinghe, President Kumaratunge's attempt to frame a political solution in 2000 was doomed, and Wickremasinghe was rewarded with power in December 2001. Unfortunately for him and his cohorts, the LTTE knew him, but not he the LTTE.

Convincing Western agencies to be mindful of the human and democratic rights of people in the North-East at this time was like penetrating a stone wall. After the signing of the MoU in February 2002, which committed the LTTE to respect international law, the LTTE carefully began testing the ground. From February to April 2002, we reported one abduction by the LTTE in the East and about four abductees who escaped, all from the EPRLF(V). About half a dozen mysterious murders were reported in Jaffna soon after the LTTE set up office in April, which then stopped.

Organised attacks on Muslims in the East commenced in June 2002. In September 2002 two persons without any political connections were abducted in Jaffna and allowed to escape. The

same month the LTTE attacked the Hartley College Principal and also members of the Socialist Equality Party in Jaffna. All the while child conscription running into the thousands was going on unimpeded. By this time the LTTE had got a clear message that its abuses would not be challenged, whether by the international community, the SLMM or the Government of Sri Lanka. From early December 2002, soon after the LTTE in Oslo committed itself to democratic federalism, it set about eliminating dissidents steadily. By mid-December 2002 the LTTE had abducted 3 senior members of the EPDP in Batticaloa, now presumed dead, and chopped to death Alahathurai, a respected member of the EPRLF(V) in Mandur.

On 23rd April 2003, the LTTE murdered Maclan Atputharajah of Chavakacheri, Jaffna, a leading local figure and prospective parliamentary candidate for the EPRLF(V). It fell to Subathiran to visit the family in his own home area to console them, and to challenge the regional press for not publishing the statement by the family as agreed. Less than eight weeks hence, he too had fallen. Since February 2002 (mainly from December 2002) about 140 EPDP members have been killed, among the latest being C. Arulthas, former chairman of the Pt. Pedro local council, and Bawan, parliamentary candidate for Jaffna.[\[Top\]](#)

Rajani's Choice

Rajani was deeply partisan, the consequences of which made many uncomfortable. She, by choice, emotionally and politically identified with the suffering and aspirations of the ordinary folk, who in the context of conflict came lowest in the hierarchy of interests ruling their lives. Every middle class gravitates towards a stable niche in the global hierarchy where their symbols and dull aspirations are guaranteed. It is easy to become insensitive to the institutional oppression which maintains that order. Those brought up in the Tamil middle class in the 1940s and 50s with its cosy atmosphere of uncles, aunts and family friends, would not have doubted its essential goodness. Its capacity for evil became evident when a combination of discrimination and communal violence threatened its stability and cohesion.

The vacillating dalliance of this middle class with the LTTE has tended towards support when it appeared to hold out prospects for that old stability, notwithstanding child-conscription and murder. The victims of the latter were as a rule from the lowest strata of non-people. This middle class' disgust with the LTTE too comes periodically, such as during the 1995 exodus, when it shows itself intrinsically incapable of any kind of order.

Further up the hierarchy, the West (and also the Colombo elite glued to it) has shown a similar pattern in its perceptions of the LTTE. The LTTE would like to sell itself off as a group that would accept its assigned place in a Western dominated world order. But then its ideological pretensions requiring violent excesses and its entrenchment in global terror networks make the West nervous.

Those with Rajani's Marxist worldview rose above such vacillations. For the lowest in society and especially women, whether it was the inbuilt violence of their society, the brutality of state forces, the LTTE killing family men and women, and youth, as traitors; conscripting their children; or the unbridled forces of capitalism that peace may bring; options may change, but violence and oppression would remain.

Rajani did not waste time discussing or speculating about Vellupillai Prabhakaran at length. One could explore Prabhakaran's childhood experiences that left in him an enormous craving

for absolute power over others, but politically he is a creature of circumstance; of the clash between the Sinhalese and Tamil elite, and the humiliation experienced by the latter. Rajani saw Prabhakaran's violence as ultimately receiving sanction and glorification from the ideology of the Tamil elite.

Rajani's political journey was one involving enormous trauma. In the atmosphere in Jaffna in the early 1980s, it was natural for idealistic youth to become attracted to the militant groups. Her personal connections led her to the LTTE. Her husband Dayapala Thirangama, an early political influence, and Southern leftist of immense courage well above the narrowness of his times, had grave reservations. Through their exchanges, Rajani also came to question the assumptions of Tamil nationalism and became conscious of other struggles, especially those in the South.

In January 1982, an LTTE assassin carrying out Prabhakaran's order, 'Put off the Main Switch', killed his unsuspecting leading rival Sundaram of PLOTE. Dayapala warned that unless this trend was checked, the LTTE would plunge the Tamil community into utter disaster. It took Rajani, who was moved by the urgency of the Tamil struggle in the aftermath of 1977, a few more years, while she was on a doctoral programme in Britain, to see LTTE for what it was.

Rajani could have chosen escape through a career in the West. She could also have found fame talking about liberation from a theoretical standpoint. Disregarding warnings from friends, she returned to the University of Jaffna at the end of 1986. She believed this was the only honest option for her. Her objective was not instant solution or instant liberation, but to work with those of all classes with a social conscience to 'create space'.

Conflict transformation as advocated by peacemakers assumes residual rationality on both sides to assess what is attainable and sustainable, and some real opportunity for people's initiatives. Unless there is any space within society itself for such initiatives, any agreement is bound to be fragile.

Any illusions about the LTTE, for Rajani and others close to her, were dissipated by events from May 1986 to November 1987. During this period it first launched bloody massacres of other Tamil groups. Despite being militarily weak, it refused to engage with a political settlement President Jayewardene was made to offer by India. The Government declared a unilateral ceasefire in April 1987, which the LTTE rejected through once more massacring Buddhist pilgrims and exploding a car bomb in Colombo's main bus stand, provoking heavy government reprisals in Jaffna. When India intervened to save the LTTE from ignominy and to offer it preponderant control over the North-East, it contrived war with India by massacring hundreds of Sinhalese civilians. At war with India, the LTTE played to clockwork perfection, deliberately ensuring maximum destruction and maximum civilian deaths at every stage. As the Indian Army started restoring order, it sent its hit teams to kill as traitors even civilian representatives trying to secure basic amenities. Rajani wrote in the *Broken Palmyra* (Ch.6, uthr.org):

“When the children were dying with diseases, they threatened those who cared for them, ordering them not to issue Indian drugs. Did they offer alternatives, so that we could eat Tiger food and give our children Tiger drugs?”

Rajani's judgment of the LTTE and its prospects were penned in the following words written for the *Broken Palmyra* in early 1988:

“The Tigers' history, their theoretical vacuum, lack of political creativity, intolerance and fanatical dedication will be the ultimate cause of their own break up. The legendary Tigers will go to their demise with their legends smeared with the blood and tears of victims of their own misdoings. A new Tiger will not emerge from their ashes. Only by breaking with this whole history and its dominant ideology, can a new liberating outlook be born.”

The last sentence describes succinctly what she viewed as the painful way out, and formed the basis of her intense work in the UTHR(J), the University and in the wider community, especially among traumatised women. What she wrote about the LTTE was not a wish or a hope, it was the incontrovertible knowledge of an insider.

Rajani was very careful in what she wrote for the book, as she was with what her co-authors wrote. She was concerned about the tone of the book and was averse to middle-class complacencies to which some of us were prone. Finally it was decided that the different authors would have a certain leeway, while all would take joint responsibility for the book as a whole.

In her work with the UTHR(J) and in discussions with her students, Rajani tried to shift the question of violent death away from a propaganda recital of frequently exaggerated numbers killed by state forces to an examination of individual tragedies of all victims, whether ideologically convenient or not. What kind of liberation can a force offer, which dignifies only its dead as martyrs to glorify the Leader, while insulting all others who died as ciphers; which drives individuals and sections of society into working against it for sheer survival, and then kills them off as traitors? Just before the passage quoted above, she said of the massive death imposed on civilians in October 1987:

“...regardless of any future consequence, they pushed India to the wall when they started butchering the Sinhalese civilians in a fit of petulant anger. Therefore, in reality it was not only India's failure as a guarantor, but also the L.T.T.E.'s failure as a leader that triggered off the war in this way.”

The LTTE killed her upon the announcement of the Indian Army's withdrawal, after President Premadasa in the course of secret talks with the LTTE had promised it virtual unchecked control of the North-East. It was a precursor to the present 'peace process'. It was about this time that we began hearing hints from Western peace activists, who were otherwise sympathetic, that we were partisan or extreme. They were happy with an arrangement that saw India leave, and for the LTTE and the Premadasa government to assume their places under Western patronage.

What followed was a nightmare reminiscent of the situation today. Many with dissident associations thought the LTTE had got what it wanted and had no further need to kill, and so remained in North-East. They were carried off to concentration camps and killed by the thousands, as the LTTE returned to war with the Government in June 1990. The war was triggered off in a provocative series of massacres by the LTTE calculated to bring about severe reprisals against Tamils. [\[Top\]](#)

Condemned to Absolute Predictability

Prabhakaran must be pondering another dreaded anniversary, his 50th birthday, which falls in November, and what he has achieved. When he began his career 32 years ago, the Tamil nationalist dream was for a homeland, prosperous and self-contained, where its excellent educational system would tower to new heights. Today this homeland is the place Tamils least want to be in. Much of its arable lands are strewn with landmines or are taken up by High Security Zones of both the government forces and the LTTE. Colombo and a number of cities in the West have overtaken Jaffna, Trincomalee and Batticaloa as centres of Tamil culture.

The North-East which once had a surfeit of doctors and technical personnel is now in need of Sinhalese professionals to run its services. Often for specialist services, those in the North-East must go to Colombo to see Sinhalese, or the few remaining Tamil, specialists. Even LTTE sympathisers with feeling for the people readily admit that should there be another round of war, no one will be left to rebuild the North-East.

Prabhakaran's hubris has resulted in the inevitable breakup of the LTTE. Should the LTTE persist in its present course, it stands to lose the entire East. What good has 33 months of peace and the lifting of restrictions done to the long suffering people who have borne the brunt of LTTE extortion, child-conscription and wholesale theft of representation? The Northern farmer, managing with minimum government support, was traditionally self-sufficient. We recently had reports (perhaps suppressed earlier) of a significant incidence of suicide among Vanni farmers unable to make ends meet. The failure of reconstruction in the last 33 months cannot be blamed entirely on the Government. It has much to do with the LTTE's total obsession with military preparations and military advantage as its clash with Gurunagar fishermen on 30th August revealed, and organisations involved in development well know.

While development professionals strike a balance between need and feasibility, the TRO (the LTTE's development arm) has other priorities. There have been instances where a development agency started reconstruction work in a village only to have it burnt down by TRO officials. Agencies drawing up reconstruction priorities, have, to their disbelief, been taken by TRO officials past several uninhabited villages to a remote one having no neighbours, public transport or market. The reason – it is near an army camp!

The inherent destructiveness of the LTTE on the basis of which Rajani made her prediction about its future, has, since her murder, been carried to draconian limits. Her murder was itself a signal of that intention.

Child recruitment, which was a burning issue in the last three years of Rajini's life, is today one of child conscription and abduction on a grand scale.

Rajani observed that the LTTE's suicide cult was the symptom of a political vacuum mistakenly dubbed 'ultimate sacrifice', when its cadres, as instructed, swallow cyanide rather than face the responsibility of keeping faith under capture. She added:

“Given some imagined aspirations and needs, this state of the psyche, through a process of rationalisation, led increasingly to annihilatory ends.”

The 'increasingly annihilatory' ends she anticipated, came with full-blown Black Tiger units in the early 1990s, sworn to obliterate themselves on a personal oath to the Leader, as to a god, at his bidding. The Leader cheapened these victims to the price of a bullet when he

dispatched one to kill Neelan Thiruchelvam, a harmless democrat. More Orwellian are the Leader's Red Blossomed Garden childrens' homes. We know of cases of children forcibly taken from war affected distraught parents. These children are raised in daily religious veneration of the Leader and streamed according to their abilities to fit various slots in the organisation.

The last speaks most eloquently of the LTTE's prospects of stabilising itself in a federal unit or even in a separate state that allows some token dissent. It is cruel arrogance to ignore this reality and sacrifice people to the shallow wishful thinking of peacemakers. Prediction is tricky business, but there is nothing marvellous about Rajani having been so depressingly right about the LTTE.

Creating Space for the People

Where a people has even marginal democratic choice to change its rulers or even the way they act, prediction, especially long term, is hazardous. But when the leader is utterly intolerant of allowing the people any choice, presides over material and social catastrophe, and a disappearing and increasingly suffocated population, his prospects are trivially predictable.

The LTTE's every move has been to tighten the screws of repression. It imposes itself as an insatiable parasite on the shrinking resources of the people unable to bear it; and compensates for declining real strength by abducting children and unleashing brain washed youth as human bombs. For such a force there is nothing, no end point, between total success and utter failure. The LTTE would either break itself, be broken, or would perform its office of destruction to the last suicide bomber in its armoury. That is what Rajini said, and its attitude towards the current peace process confirms it. Many ordinary villagers with their instinctive grasp of reality have said this said all along. It is the others who must be creative in dealing with the LTTE, and the Sinhalese polity and Sri Lankan governments have been singularly destructive.

Rajani's work on the ground was to create space for the people. This was undermined, and her death, and that of many others, was precipitated by President Premadasa's cynical appeasement of the LTTE to the point of aiding it to round up its opponents.

It is not war that we have advocated and we do not see war as the way out of the present impasse. War was always imposed on the people who never wanted it. What we have advocated as a decisive means of opening up space is a political settlement. It is this that would once and for all remove the main weapon in the LTTE's arsenal: the belief that the Sinhalese would never give the Tamils a just solution and would never treat them as equals. The LTTE has continued to propagate this negative picture of the Sinhalese, while on the one hand declining to engage on a political settlement, and on the other constantly driving a wedge between the main parties in the South.

One cannot blame the West entirely for the current MoU and its LTTE bias, considering that the Sinhalese polity, even in the 11 years after 1990, seemed more prepared to break up the country than to offer a political settlement. Of course President Kumaratunge tried to deliver one. Ranil Wickremasinghe was determined to block it as he thought it fatal to his ambitions. Upon finding a constitutional settlement blocked, President Kumaratunge could have taken recourse to the 13th Amendment and the North-East Provincial Council as an interim measure, to demonstrate her commitment to devolution. But she did not.

Despite the transient relief of no-war, most Tamils were never impressed with appeasement, whether Premadasa's or Wickremasinghe's. Both these were accompanied by the sinister rumble of low-key violence whose implications were hard to ignore. There may be a strong temptation today for the Sinhalese polity to do nothing, as long as it is a process of Tamils destroying Tamils. No one has destroyed Tamil nationalist aspirations to nationhood more thoroughly than Prabhakaran and his outfit. Rajani wrote:

"...the Tamil nationalist struggle under the L.T.T.E. leadership had gone on a path of internal destruction and terror, alienating and cleaving the community. It was failing in its objective by not conceptualising the needs of a struggle whose primary objective was creating a self-sufficient, autonomous state (as far as possible) out of an inextricably linked Sri Lanka."

Encouraging Prabhakaran may be seen as the ultimate success of Sinhalese chauvinist aspirations. But that would be like stabbing the heart to spite a finger. What after all is Sri Lanka today? There can be no democracy, dignity or protection of the law for the Sinhalese while denying these to the Tamils. Cynicism on such matters creates habits of mind and heart pregnant with devastating consequences. That was the most powerful lesson of President Jeyawardene's career. Every time one sees a eulogy for him as a great statesman, one is reminded that the nation is divided and sick.

There should be no further sacrifice of Tamils who came forward to challenge fascism. We showed that the LTTE became bold about killing only after testing the ground through much of 2002 and finding that the international community would pay little attention. That must now be reversed decisively.