

*Theoretical Organ of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party*

**Marxist Leninist**

# **New Democracy**

**January 2017**

**61**

**Casteism and Social Justice**

**Ezuka Thamiz:**

**Bankruptcy of Politics of Sentiment**

**Travails of a War-torn People**

**Climate Change:**

**What is Installed for Our Future?**

**Indian Dalit Politics: a Left Turn?**

**Notes from Correspondents**

*Poetry: Tito Meza, Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd*

# FIDEL: YOU ARE THE PEOPLE

Tito Meza

Fidel, who came down from the Sierra Maestra  
accompanied by the song of the goldfinches  
with your warrior's gun on your shoulder.

To plant the seeds of love was always your day's work.  
You light up every corner of  
your island, surrounded by palm trees,  
like a star.

You came down from the Sierra,  
and were each of your warriors.  
You were the discriminated black man,  
you were the exploited worker,  
you were the hard pressed student,  
you were the people.

You came down from the Sierra victorious  
The flag of the revolution  
blazed in Latin America.

You came down from the Sierra  
with your warriors erect with courage  
planting seeds of love in every one of your people.

You were Lumumba in Africa,  
you were Farabundo in El Salvador,  
you were Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam.

Fidel you were the people,  
you lived so that they could live  
The excluded poor of America.

You were the excluded blacks of Harlem,  
the exploited miners of Appalachia,  
you were love and revolution.

Fidel, who came down from the Sierra,  
commander, a blacksmith forging the new man.  
You light up like a star  
The path of liberty of our Latin America!

(Courtesy: Ray O' Light Newsletter, January-February 2017, No.100)

If there is anything significant in the current political situation in Sri Lanka on which there is public consensus, the most eligible item will be the performance of the “Good Governance” regime which has disappointed its supporters to the glee of the opposition.

The alliance forming the government comprises primarily the UNP and a significant section of the SLFP as well as warring groups such as the Sinhala Buddhist extremist Jathika Hela Urumaya, Muslim nationalists and Hill Country Tamil nationalist parties. It is reminiscent of the seven-party coalition regime of 1965 but with less political credibility.

What mobilized public support — that of the minority nationalities in particular— for its election was the detestable track record of the Mahinda Chinthanaya regime of 2005–2015, especially the post-war conduct of the ruling Mahinda Rajapaksa family since re-election in 2010.

There was build-up of public feeling that not only the President but also the executive presidential system should go. The idea of a common candidate came up and, with the prospect of a UNP victory doubtful, a scheme was hatched whereby Maithripala Sirisena parted company with Rajapaksa to contest as the “common candidate”. The UNP planned it as a way to control the government with an absolute parliamentary majority and a captive president isolated from his SLFP mass base. It succeeded— but not as well as it wished for.

Things began to fall apart even as the new government comprising the UNP and defectors from the SLFP was formed under President Sirisena in January 2015. A few of the pledges with mass appeal in the election manifesto of Presidential candidate Sirisena were hastily acted upon so as to win the parliamentary election. Having won the election, although not convincingly enough, the next agenda item was to go back on each promise and dismantle anything with a semblance of public interest.

The retreat of the government from its pledges had two aspects to it: one comprising items that were never intended to be fulfilled, such as

investment in education and improving medical services to the public, and the other matters which were outside the control of the government owing to internal feuding as well as unforeseen external factors. This included disagreement on constitutional reforms and changes to the electoral system. A key item of the UNP agenda, namely the annulment of 'dubious Chinese funded projects' — a task much spoken of during the election campaigns — was ditched because of economic realities confronting the "Good Governance" regime to the frustration of the pro-West lobby of the UNP as well as its Tamil allies who would have preferred a bigger role for India in the country.

Corruption was another much discussed pre-election theme. But shady deals under "Good Governance" picked up fast enough to match corruption under Mahinda Chintanaya. While there are a few redeeming features the relative freedom of the media and the small reduction in military presence in the North, underlying structures that will inevitably undermine democracy and support repression remain intact. The pledge to be rid of the Prevention of Terrorism Act has proved to be hypocritical as the Act is likely to be replaced by a more draconian Counter Terrorism Act which could be used to suppress all dissent.

The proposal to hold referenda on the various aspects of the new constitution or constitutional reforms sounds ominous, as it could serve as a cynical device to prevent or water down any legislation to address the national question. Judged on the basis of the record of the regime thus far, there is little room for optimism on the response of the Government to seemingly positive recommendations of the six sub-committees of the Constitutional Assembly. The danger is real that seriously addressing the national question will yield to debates on foreign intervention.

Budget 2017 has been most revealing of government intentions as has the reaction of the government been to mass opposition. Thus the Left should not be distracted by the present pseudo-democratic theatre by reactionary forces with no answer to the impending economic crisis. It should concentrate on educating the public on the awaiting danger of fascism and evolve means to defend democracy.

# Casteism and Social Justice

*Comrade SK Senthivel*

*[Text of Santasilan Kadirgamar Memorial Lecture delivered by Comrade S. K. Senthivel, General Secretary of the Marxist-Leninist New-Democratic Party at the Trimmer Hall, Jaffna on July 16, 2016. English translation by S. Sivasegaram]*

I was asked to deliver this address in memory of the late Silan Kadirgamar; and I agreed wholeheartedly since I believe that it is a matter of pride to deliver this address in memory of the late Silan Kadirgamar who was a person of great social value, a great intellectual, a great educationist, and above all one who received leftist ideas and made them an integral part of his conduct.

In the social context of Sri Lanka, the socio-political environment of the Jaffna Peninsula in particular, Silan Kadirgamar firmly adopted a bold leftist line — a Marxist line and ideas inherent to it — and lived as one who not merely accepted them in his mind but made it his practice and acted organisationally on their basis.

At a time when intellectuals joined hands with the community, outside the confines of academia, to carry forward a movement for justice and equality, he was a participant, in fact a very active participant, in that movement. At the time I did not have the opportunity to work with him. But since his student Mrs Somesasundry Krishnakumar chairing this meeting has placed before you many more matters than I could say, I would proceed on this occasion to honour his memory to deliver my address titled “Casteism and Social Justice” in memory of Silan Kadirgamar who, as I said then, lived as a person of social worth.

Untouchability which is connected with caste and tightly bonded to casteism has existed in our social environment for very long. We can see

that casteism has been able to make people unequal and divide them. We also see that casteism has developed to become unyielding. We know from history that the caste system, which could be said to be the basic structure of Indian social relations, has lasted on that landscape for more than 2000 years. There have continued to be all manner of debate and analysis about its origins.

## **Indus Valley Civilization**

On the one hand, there is the view that it was something that the Aryans brought from the north to south. But the view of researchers who have studied society based on historical materialism is that caste is not something that was unique to Aryans and that the roots of the caste system could be found in the period of the Indus Valley Civilization, the Dravidian civilization which preceded the arrival of the Aryans. Thus historians hold that the four-Varna distinction or the Varnasrama concept of four Varnas combined with class distinctions in the Indus Valley civilization gave rise to the caste system.

We can also see that at the time when class differences and class contradictions developed in society, caste developed as an inalienable aspect of Hinduism, guided by Hinduism. The development of the caste system occurred through the merging of class and colour (Varna). Whether we consider the Manu Smriti, the Hindu legal text or the sacred text of Bagavad Gita, they either justify the casteist Varna concept or emphasize the caste based duties of an individual; and have nowhere rejected it.

History has shown us how the number of castes within this caste structure has proliferated to reach several hundreds. In this pyramidal structured caste hierarchy, the Brahmin occupied the heist positions followed by the Kshatriya followed by Vaishya followed by Sudra, comprising respectively the four Varnas. Within it lay several hundred castes located in their respective levels. Another feature of this caste structure, where castes are located one below the other, is that it has created a mind-set in which a lowly placed caste derives satisfaction from there being a caste below it.

## **Interests of the depressed castes**

History shows that the number of castes has proliferated to reach many hundreds. The cast system has a pyramidal structure with the Brahmin at the apex, followed by the Kshatriya, then the Vaishya and then the Sudra, representing the four Varnas (meaning colour). Within them are hundreds of castes, again located hierarchically. What could be further noticed about this caste hierarchy is that since the castes are layered one below another, it has created a mind-set where a caste located low in this hierarchy seeks solace in there being another caste below it. In the context of this caste hierarchy, the Indian government set up the Mandel Commission to address the interests of the depressed castes.

The investigative study by the Mandel Commission reported that there were 3,750 castes in India. We know the reality that this caste structure is, however, not confined to the borders of India, and has spread to several South Asian countries. The caste system, which as I said earlier emerged from primitive class distinctions, developed alongside Hinduism to assimilate the very cruel, uncivilised practice of untouchability. Manu Smriti (the laws of Manu) occupies an important place among tools that linked untouchability with caste and thereby reinforced it.

The caste system which spread to the rest of South Asia had also well entrenched itself in Lanka. There has been a caste system among the Sinhalese as well. Likewise there has been one among Tamils. The caste system has been adopted as an important structure defining society in Lanka, especially in the north of the country, and more specifically in the Jaffna Peninsula. We can see that the caste system which came about well before the feudal stage of Indian society was fortified under a feudal hierarchy based on land ownership.

## **Caste structure in Sinhala society**

Nationalists — Tamil nationalists — usually pride themselves that the Chola period was a golden age. It was in that Chola golden age that the caste system was consolidated in Tamil country. History informs us that the Chola regime constituted a well-defined structure in which the duties

of and the conditions controlling each caste were defined. The caste system in Lanka has been seen to have been relatively mellow. Especially, the practice of untouchability is known to be minimal. Yet the caste system exists among the Sinhalese. We can see the Govigama caste located at the peak of the caste structure in the Sinhala society in much the same way as the Vellala caste is in the Tamil society; and there are several castes arranged below it.

There are Sinhalese friends here who will vouch for the existence of caste among Sinhalese. There still are people among Sinhalese who can identify the caste of a person from his name. However, perhaps because they are adherents of Buddhism, untouchability and caste oppression are much less or at a very low level among the Sinhalese. There is, however, a paradox. It was against the Brahmins who headed the caste hierarchy that the Buddha established the Dhamma. We learn from history that those oppressed by the caste system took to Buddhism and that enabled the spread of Buddhism and that Buddhism was opposed to Brahmanism and the caste system. We also see that the same Buddhism, somehow, assimilated the caste system here.

When the Hill Country Tamils were brought to the island by the British nearly eighty percent of them belonged to the depressed castes. Fifteen percent of them belonged to the high castes, who led them or assisted the British to subject them to exploitation. As the majority of the Hill Country Tamils belonged to depressed communities, untouchability as an institution remained weak. In the North, however, we find that the caste system remained firm and based on oppression. In the caste system as seen in Jaffna, about a third of the population comprised people depressed by caste, also referred to as the Pancama. In other words it can be said that a third of the Lankan Tamil population can be said to have been depressed by caste. Some analysts and commentators have sought to explain the term Pancama as members of five specific castes. But it does not mean five castes but refers a fifth Varna which lay outside the four identified Varnas, comprising toiling people, a people who were effectively slaves. Researchers have established that this is the true meaning of Pancama.



We learn that, historically, these depressed Pancama people have been subjected to severe oppression, treated as untouchable and seen as contaminated. Sir P Ramanathan and Sir P Arunachalam — two strongly nationalist leaders from the North — who emerged as leaders from among the people of the Jaffna Peninsula early in the last century, have sought to defend the caste system.

### **Donoughmore Commission**

We find that Sir P. Ramanathan had been the leader of the Tamil elite and the guardian of the caste system and untouchability. For instance, in 1931, when the Donoughmore Commission considered granting universal franchise to all persons — male and female — above the age of 21 years, Sir P. Ramanathan raised objection to it. He has the distinction of mobilizing seventy nine village headmen to plead with the Governor of Ceylon that people of depressed castes should not be given the franchise.

Besides, when the railway service from Colombo to Jaffna was introduced, it was Sir P. Ramanathan who argued that separate carriages should be allocated for people of depressed castes. It is from such elitist leaders that Tamil nationalism sprouted.

Thus Tamil nationalism became reactionary. It was because it firmly upheld casteism at its social base that it was placed at the fore. That is now presented as the Tamil national history. But that Tamil nationalism never went in a progressive direction, because, as we can see, Tamil nationalism started its journey with utterly reactionary feudal thinking and feudal ideology. It was when such Tamil nationalism had its beginnings in this fashion, there emerged in Jaffna a commendable and contrasting form of Tamil nationalism, a progressive Tamil nationalism, in the form of the Jaffna Youth Congress referred to earlier. We see the Jaffna Students' Congress which started early in the 1920's advancing to become the Jaffna Youth Congress in 1924. We need to view the First Congress of the Jaffna Youth Congress held in 1924 in historical perspective. In a context where we had reactionary Tamil nationalism on the one hand and the Youth Congress on the other, the latter in its First

Congress in 1924 adopted a statement denouncing untouchability as its third resolution.

We remember with much appreciation the courage with which the Jaffna Youth Congress adopted the resolution, in the context of the prevalent practice of untouchability at the time. Amid this what is important to note is that the Jaffna Youth Congress was founded not as a left organisation but as what could be considered a nationalist, national freedom organisation. Yet we witnessed its establishing what comprised features of progressive nationalism.

### **Relentless struggle by educationalists**

We find that the Youth Congress then, with Handy Perinpanayagam, MC Subramaniam and others at the fore, at each of its Congresses expressed its opposition to untouchability. Delegates from India, left-wing delegates, and leaders who participated in the independence campaign of the Indian National Congress have addressed the sessions of the Jaffna Youth Congress. The well documented book authored by Silan Kadirgamar on the Jaffna Youth Congress carries a clear and detailed historical record of the relentless struggle by educationalists — young educationalists especially — and university graduates.

It was because of such initiative of the Youth Congress that an organisation for the depressed community was founded in 1925. A society called the Tamil Workers Association was founded with Joel Paul, a member of the depressed community as its leader. Others with a Christian background joined to found this organisation against casteism. Nevins Selvadurai, a Christian, an educationist, a progressive and an opponent of casteism became President of the Tamil Workers Association founded for the people of the depressed community. What we need to note here is the ability of this educationalist belonging to the elevated castes to stand together with members of both the depressed community and the elevated castes.

It was they who then opposed in 1930's the caste-based differential seating and differential serving of food at schools to launch a successful

campaign for seating and serving of food on an equal basis and made the government accept it. It was only as a result of the uncompromising struggle on that issue by the Jaffna Youth Congress, the Tamil Workers Association and other progressive Christians that the first egalitarian event, namely seating and serving of food on an equal basis, occurred in the Tamil society of Jaffna. The historical tragedy, however, is that the Jaffna Youth Congress which was founded in the 1920's was within ten years defeated by reactionary Tamil nationalist leaders. After the Youth Congress successfully achieved its boycott of elections to four seats to the proposed State Council in 1931, the reactionary Tamil nationalist leadership reversed the earlier position and contested those seats in elections held in 1934.

Following the demise of the elitist leader Sir P Ramanathan, his place was taken by another elitist leader GG Ponnambalam, who declared that boycotting the elections was lacking in foresight. He proceeded to plead for elections to be held for the four seats, and contested the elections held in 1934 to be elected to the State Council. In the context in which the Youth Congress was done away with, the left movement of the North moved in to carry out its activities, thereby filling the socio-political space that was occupied by the Youth Congress. The Lanka Samasamaja Party set foot in Jaffna in 1937. An important personality in the LSSP then was Comrade Tharmakulasingam, also known as Jeyam.

When, after much strife, the remains of a member of the depressed community was cremated at the Villunri crematorium, shots were fired at those who were there during the night, and Mudali Sinnaththamby, a member of the depressed community, was killed on the spot. When his murder came up before the courts, no lawyer from the upper castes was willing to plead for the interests of the deceased. In this cruelly unjustly situation, Comrade Tharmakulasingam (Jeyam), although a member of the upper castes, defied all resistance to plead for the deceased. Following that incident, youth of the depressed community realised that, without a separate organisation for the depressed communities, it was not possible to overcome caste-based untouchability. Thus an organisation named Minority Tamils Congress was founded in 1943.

## **Depressed community**

Following that event the Communist Party was founded in the North under the leadership of Comrade M Karthigesan. The Party worked hard among the depressed community based on class as they constituted toiling exploited people. Despite the hard work of the left, the situation persisted under the Jaffna caste structure, in which the people of the depressed communities could not have tea or food or go to the temple or move about in public places as equals to others. It was only after the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna government led by SWRD Bandaranaike came to power in 1957, that there was some progressive change in the struggles as well as the social life of the depressed communities.

The introduction of the Prevention of Social Disabilities Act of 1957 had only a marginal impact on casteism. Since 1958, the Minority Tamils Congress launched for the first time the struggle to access certain restaurants. The struggle was launched at the larger restaurants. A situation conducive to such equality existed in restaurants such as Subash Cafe and SeKu owned by friendly members of the Malayali community. It was here that it was clear that the Tamil nationalists, who boast that Tamils are the most ancient community, had on no occasion opened their businesses on an equal basis to members of the depressed community.

It was this that we pointed out to the Tamils then. Two kinds of Tamil people existed then. One was the elevated kind; and the other was the depressed kind. One can recognise the two kinds if one stood opposite a tea boutique. On one side will be those whose tea is served in properly made cups or brass beakers; and on the other side will be those who have it in empty soda bottles, and low grade cans. This duality could be changed only in a few restaurants in 1958. But nothing significant happened across the northern region.

## **Tamil society**

It was against this historical background at the time that left comrades launched the upsurge of October 1966, led by the Party comprising Marxist Leninists. It was a mass upsurge under the red flag bearing the slogan "Let the Caste System Fall Apart! Let Egalitarian Justice Arise!"

The forthcoming 21<sup>st</sup> October marks fifty years since that event. The upsurge of 21<sup>st</sup> October 1966 was a vigorous upsurge against caste-based untouchability in which over a thousand youth took part, and was the most important upsurge in the Tamil society of the time.

The struggle initiated by that upsurge enabled the building up of a broad-based front in the Tamil society called the “Mass Movement for the Eradication of Untouchability”. There were not only members of the depressed community. Members of the upper castes, leftists, communists, revolutionaries, democrats, progressives among people of various description participated in the struggle. That was why the campaign, besides developing into a broad-based campaign, facilitated struggles for equality in other matters as well.

The young generation of today will not know of a struggle that took place fifty years ago. But they should know how arduous and inspiring a struggle it was and how it mobilized a large army of youth who would sacrifice their lives for the cause.

The history of the struggle tells us that it was during the period of this mass movement that the members of the depressed community dared to confront violence unleashed against them with violence — within limits — by taking up arms. Thus, we can see that the members of the depressed community secured their rights because armed action played an important role in the struggle.

During the struggle that lasted five years fifteen members of the depressed community were shot dead by fanatical casteists. The youth of the depressed community and the Communist Party did not tolerate it. They used revolutionary violence to put down in matching numbers fifteen fanatical casteists. Thus we can see it as a major struggle which put at stake the lives of fifteen members of the depressed community to achieve some form of equality that the depressed communities enjoy today — be it in tea boutiques or in the temples — and make a major impact on casteism.

Then the ordinary oppressed people — toilers and dwellers in huts — used weapons at their disposal to struggle against fanatical casteists and

caste-based oppression. In the village of Nichchaamam in Chankaanai, the campaign for entering tea boutiques lasted three years.

A poet who arrived from Batticaloa at the time wrote:

*“Whatever time of night that the enemy may enter  
Eyes of Nichchaamam will throw fire and burn to ashes.*

....

*I admire the anger that resides in little huts.*

*The soil of Chankaanai, I salute thee”*

for it was the day on which a life was sacrificed. It was through such struggle that equality was won. I dare say that it was because the struggle of the time fought against untouchability that today’s community enjoys a degree of equality.

It was because of such struggles that the Tamil youth were drawn into subsequent Tamil nationalist struggles. But the extent to which the struggles for Tamil Eelam ideologically overcame casteism remains an important issue that needs to be researched. The question of the extent to which the struggle for Tamil Eelam overcame casteism needs to be debated at ideological as well as theoretical levels.

## **Expatriate communities**

There is a view prevailing that today, seven years after the end of the thirty-year war, that a variety of events on various fronts indicate that casteism is once again quietly in action. The practice of inequality in the form of untouchability sometimes occurs in the open. Thus casteism is still asserting itself in practice in our society.

Dr Ambedkar stressed that there is that caste exists in society and that there is the restriction that one can only marry within one’s caste. This practice persists not only here but also among the expatriate communities. Casteist oppression could manifest itself as explicit oppression or as other forms of inequality. A situation has come in which every progressive and leftist should rise bravely to struggle on a social basis against the oppression faced by people of oppressed castes. That struggle needs to one for social justice.

What I wish to tell the youth of today is that they should look closely at human relations and social inequalities in our society. They should learn everything and learn from everything. What I wish to urge at this moment is that there should be a mobilisation of youth capable of fighting against social injustice.

Tamil nationalism which was born of reaction developed into reactionary nationalism and remains reactionary to this day. Even in national politics it is taking a most reactionary route. We remind ourselves that we need to smash this reactionary Tamil nationalism, identify the progressive nationalist forces who would emerge from it, and create a new environment in which they could develop into leftists.

Then, at the time when the Youth Congress was crippled, we see that progressive nationalists, such as P Nagalingam, P Kandiah and Tharmakulasingam, advanced from being Tamil nationalists to become leftists. What I wish to emphasise in my Santasilan Kadirgamar Commemoration Lecture is that good Tamil nationalists should also be good leftists.

In the environment prevailing then, people who were oppressed by casteism and untouchability and class and exploitation of labour advanced from among the depressed community through struggle. We think that time has come, as a continuation of that step, for revolutionaries who are Tamil progressives, to mobilise as leftists to constitute a new socio-political front, in the post-war context, to understand the current social inequalities and initiate a new form of politics to confront them. We witness four kinds of oppression in Sri Lanka—based on class, nationality, caste and gender. We have the duty to create true champions of social justice from among the classes and social sections who are oppressed at these levels. I conclude my talk by urging this matter.

\*\*\*\*\*

# Ezuka Thamiz: Bankruptcy of Politics of Sentiment

*Imayavaramban*

## **Historical Background**

The “Ezuka Thamiz” rally of 24<sup>th</sup> September was more theatre than politics. As will be explained later, the phrase itself is a play on words in the fashion of “Pongu Thamiz” (2001–2008). Identifying language with race, nationality and people is strong in Tamil politics, in both Tamilnadu and the North and East of Sri Lanka, partly in response to what was seen as oppression and domination by another community. Tamil linguistic nationalism has metamorphosed over the past few centuries. In Tamilnadu resistance to Sanskritization of Tamil early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century transformed into opposing Hindi in independent India. In Sri Lanka, ethnic rivalry within an elite group for positions of influence under colonial rule became the Language Problem in 1956 with the expressed concern that Sinhala as official language threatened the survival of Tamil. While Tamil nationalists sought to protect Tamil from Hindi and Sinhala, the real threat posed by the domination of English was mostly ignored.

While making Hindi the official language of India met with strong mass protest in Tamilnadu, the Kannadigas and Bengalis, who too had strong feelings on the subject, responded by asserting the use of their languages for key purposes in their respective states. Despite the arousal of Tamil sentiment by the politically ambitious demand and the violent protest, the opponents of Hindi were readily appeased by the assurance that English will continue as official languages as long as non-Hindi speakers want it. However, anti-Hindi sentiments craftily coupled with



anti-Aryan theories (in essence anti-Brahmin in the Tamil context) paid dividends and the DMK was an unstoppable political force from 1962.

Politics of sentiment remains strong in Tamilnadu and has in the past few decades been used to stir feelings against Malayalis, Kannadigas and to a less extent Telugus, who along with Tamils were part of the Dravidanadu (Dravidian state) project which fell by the wayside even before the DMK found excuses to formally dump it, based on the anti-secessionist legislation (the Sixteenth Amendment) introduced by the Nehru regime in 1963 following the Sino-Indian border war. By the 1970's the DMK — which in post-independence India represented the interests of the Tamil upper and upper middle class elite and had a strong middle class following — despite its assertion of Tamil autonomy readily compromised with the caste and class elite controlling the Indian state. A succession of state governments of Tamilnadu (headed by the DMK and its clone the AIADMK) have since — notably except during the notorious Emergency 1975–77 under Indira Gandhi when the DMK regime dared to defy the Centre — been effectively reined in whenever they rebelled, with a mere hint of action on their various shady deals.

I will avoid going deeper into the politics of emotion in Tamilnadu, and it would suffice to say that the principled idealism of EV Ramasamy (Periyar) — founder of the rationalist movement which he transformed into the Dravidian movement, and a genuine champion of the rights of women and victims of caste oppression — was a matter of the past for the successors to the Dravidian movement. Blending sentiment with deceit, they excelled in electoral politics, compounded by large scale corruption.

The Dravidian movement had echoes in Sri Lankan Tamil politics from the late 1930's but, except in the Hill Country, the Dravidic Mantra Kazagam (founded in 1947) had greater appeal than the more radical Dravida Kazagam of Periyar. The DMK, until it became a major force in the electoral politics of Tamilnadu in the 1960's, had an atheistic identity and hints of residual leftist populism inherited from the DK, neither of which appealed to the leadership of the ACTC or FP. The leaders were

particularly wary of the atheistic, anti-Hindu and anti-Brahmin identity of the DMK which lasted, at least nominally, into the 1960's. The emotive language and theatrical public address which characterized DMK propaganda, however, appealed to many of the younger generation of public speakers of the FP, who were also influenced by the Tamil cinema— with a strong DMK presence in the 1950's and early 1960's.

Except for the short-lived Jaffna Youth Congress, idealism based on social justice was weak in Tamil nationalist politics. Emotion, a later dimension, was not noticed in the politics of the North and East even when the Hill Country Tamils were deprived of their citizenship and the right to vote. Except for the principled stand on that issue by the Ilankai Tamilarasuk Katchi (Federal Party, FP) which parted company with the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) based on that matter, there was little evidence of concern for social justice in Tamil nationalist politics after the FP supported the Hartal of 1953.

Whatever sentiment there was to Tamil nationalism was based on a strong feeling for language and culture, but not so much religion as in the South where Sinhala nationalism had all along a strong Sinhala Buddhist undercurrent. Caste-based Hindu (rather Saiva) conservative identity of the elite yielded to language-based identity in 1956, when the prospect of Sinhala becoming the sole national language of the country stirred Tamil emotion. While planned settlement of Sinhalese in the Eastern Province and later the Northern Province posed a bigger threat to Tamil national identity, little political work was done in that respect until the 1970's, but again not by parliamentary politicians. The FP, the main Tamil nationalist party since 1956, concentrated on the language issue until 1965, when it joined the government led by the Sinhala nationalist UNP.

The FP's call for protest against the Sinhala Only Act and its demand for parity of status for Tamil and Sinhala were well received by Tamils across the country. But the FP was mainly interested in parliamentary strength, based on support in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. There was, however, mobilization of Tamils on an unprecedented scale since

1956 until the collapse of the Satyagraha campaign of 1961, based on the language issue. The FP, like its weakened Tamil nationalist rival the ACTC earlier, was intent omits bargaining power in parliament and opted for issues with mass appeal, often based on sentiment. Its political bankruptcy became clear in 1965 when it accepted a cabinet portfolio in the UNP-led coalition, something about which it constantly taunted the ACTC since 1949, the year of founding of the FP. Having achieved nothing tangible on the language question or the long awaited devolution of power on a district basis, the FP was desperate after the defeat of the UNP at the hands of the SLFP-led People's Alliance (PA) coalition in 1970.

The PA government, out of bitterness towards the FP for its role in bring down the SLFP-LSSP government in 1964 and joining the UNP-led government in 1965, seriously erred in its responses to the grievances of the Tamils; and in the process provided a basis for the FP to recover. The FP, meantime, having failed in its pledge to secure parity of status for Tamil — let alone anything like the federal state that it stood for — by parliamentary and peaceful struggles, needed a fresh electoral strategy.

By 1974 the FP consolidated its parliamentary base by founding the Tamil United Liberation Front comprising mainly the FP and much of the ACTC. The call by the TULF in 1976 to work towards the separate state of "Tamil Eelam" worked well to return a large number of TULF MPs in 1977. But the TULF had neither intention nor plan to achieve its declared goal; and that made the Tamil youth openly question the credibility of the TULF as a Tamil nationalist party.

What followed the return of the UNP to power in 1977 with a massive mandate was a complex sequence of events leading to a civil war. Although the armed conflict ended with the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) — who monopolized the Tamil nationalist project of Tamil Eelam from around the mid-1980's — worse followed for the innocent victims of war. Even more depressing is the total lack of

interest of Tamil nationalists of all shades to understand what went wrong with the struggle of the Tamil nationality for its legitimate rights.

While vote gathering had high priority in Tamil electoral politics, militant politics was about military superiority over rivals and control of a docile population. Interestingly, in both modes, politics of sentiment played a key role. Thus seven years after the defeat of the LTTE, there is still reluctance to address real issues facing the Tamil nationality; and the space available for free expression is used not for serious critical analysis of the failed armed struggle or the futile parliamentary approach that preceded it, but to play once again to the sentiments of the Tamil public.

### **Tamil Nationalist Politics under UPFA**

Having forfeited the name TULF to Anandasangaree, its former leader, other leaders regrouped as the Tamil National Alliance to successfully contest the General Election in 2001 with the blessings of the LTTE. The TNA then had to exclude PLOTE — which had links to the armed forces at the time — and other Tamil nationalist factions seen as hostile to the LTTE; and India punished the TNA for this show of ‘disloyalty’ by humiliating its leaders at every turn. The TNA, eventually, made up with India after the fall of the LTTE in May 2009, by yielding to the condition that anyone suspected of LTTE loyalties would be kept out. The ACTC leader and his pro-LTTE allies were thus denied TNA nomination for the General Election in 2010, forcing the ACTC to restructure itself as Tamil People’s National Front (TPNF) to contest the elections, but unsuccessfully. Despite outright rejection by the Indian establishment, the TPNF has still been reluctant to take a stand on issues like poaching by Indian trawlers in the Northern waters and the now-abandoned coal power plant in Sampur on the East, because its allies in Tamilnadu would dare not fall foul of the Indian establishment.

Since 2010 the TPNF has adopted a seemingly militant posture; and its erstwhile allies, the Trotskyite Nava Samasamaja Party (NSSP) and the Colombo-based Tamil nationalist Western People’s Front (renamed

Democratic People's Front) warmed up to the TNA— and the UNP on pretext of defending democracy. Desperate for allies, the TPNF briefly sought after left and progressive forces in the North to take up issues concerning victims of war. However, pressure from its Tamil diaspora sponsors prevailed and the TPNF quickly distanced itself from the left to adopt a strong Tamil nationalist line. The true colours of the TPNF showed soon after when it sought to hijack a joint protest by associations of Northern fishers against poaching by Indian trawlers to promote its narrow Tamil nationalist agenda, thereby wrecking the protest.

The TPNF strategy has been to rouse Tamil separatism, but without reference to the Tamil Eelam project in order to avoid identification with the prohibited LTTE. Thus it simplifies the national question as an issue between the “Sinhala and Tamil nations” avoiding reference to problems faced by the Muslims or Hill Country Tamils, in contrast to the TNA, which too does not accept Muslims and Hill Country Tamils as distinct nationalities, but realizes its inability to represent them and has learned to deal with Muslim leaders on a more equal footing. (More recently TNA MP Sumanthiran dared to cross the “red line” by appealing to the Tamils to apologise to the Muslims for their expulsion from the North in 1990, only to face the wrath of Tamil extremists and sections of the Tamil media loyal to the TPNF.)

The TNA was never politically united, and the personality clashes that haunted it go way back to its TULF days. When the UPFA government finally yielded to external pressure to hold elections for the Northern Province Council in 2013, rivalry for nominations threatened to rip apart the TNA. Amid this, CV Wigneswaran, a former Supreme Court Judge with a good public image and no party affiliation, was brought in as Chief Ministerial candidate mainly to quell bickering among leading members of constituent parties vying for the post of Chief Minister.

Chief Minister Wigneswaran with other ideas about his role, was soon in conflict with the leaders of the TNA, especially those of the dominant the FP. The TPNF saw its opening in this rift and backed Wigneswaran

whenever he aired his differences. Wigneswaran has, however, thus far avoided denouncing the TNA leadership or endorsing the TPNF.

### **Tamil Nationalists and “Good Governance”**

Wigneswaran has been a failure as Chief Minister of the NPC. He and the NPC led by him have done little to address the problems of the suffering majority. Meeting after meeting, the NPC would pass a series of resolutions on the national question but sidestep issues that concern the people, and even side with their oppressor on occasion. The NPC had nothing concrete to offer on the national question, and merely prayed to the International Community to intervene on behalf of the Tamils.

Feeling isolated and insecure with the TNA, Wigneswaran gradually warmed up to the TPNF ahead of the parliamentary election of 2015 and effectively supported the TPNF candidates by declaring “neutrality”. But voter rejection of the TPNF was even stronger than in 2010. That slowed his drift towards the TPNF, until opportunity knocked again when Tamil disillusion with the “Good Governance” regime found expression in the form of protests on various issues.

With differences sharpening between him and the TNA leadership, Chief Minister Wigneswaran — initially conciliatory towards the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) regime and critical of sections of the diaspora dabbling in local issues — turned out to be more antagonistic towards the new regime of “Good Governance” and especially Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, whom the TNA has been wooing for long. This was when the Tamil population of the North and East had hope that the new regime will address their problems.

Opening up of the democratic space in the North and East was seen a positive aspect of the “Good Governance” regime by the public, who used the democratic space to express protest on many issues to force the government to pledge action— even to reverse occasionally its stand on key issues, like the setting up of a coal power plant in Sampur in the Trincomalee District recently. The TNA chose to play down the national

question to avoid embarrassing the regime in its now fading hope that the regime will give it a helping hand in the proposed new constitution, only to be left high and dry by the government as well as the International Community, which would not risk its client regime losing power. The TPNF, however, failed to transform TNA's misfortune into its gain, mainly for lack of a credible alternative policy.

Thus what has been going on in the North since the change of government is effectively theatre without an audience. The war weary people — who are, on the one hand, bitter towards the defeated UPFA regime for escalating the war to cause much destruction and loss of life and, on the other, growingly disillusioned with the new order — are least interested in the idle talk of secession promoted by sections of the Tamil diaspora or in the Tamil isolationist line of the TPNF and now Wigneswaran. The TNA, with no plans either, has a weaker support base among the diaspora but good electoral support at home, mostly by default, from a community still not free of Tamil nationalist sentiment, as none of its nationalist rivals has a credible alternative to offer.

The Tamil People's Congress emerged in the wake of failed moves to bring all Tamil nationalist parties under an umbrella organization named "Tamil National Congress", which failed to take off since the TNA was deeply suspicious of the motives of its potential founding partners, namely the TPNF and the Tamil Civil Society Forum with some affinity for the TPNF. Following the failure of this project with some hope for a strong comeback, the TPNF went ahead to set up the Tamil People's Congress (TPC). Wigneswaran, now much in the bad books of the TNA leadership despite its polite words for him, and having dissipated most of the mass enthusiasm for him when he was chief ministerial candidate by his poor performance as Chief Minister, chose to throw his weight behind the TPNF without declaring so. The TPNF enabled it by making him leader of its proxy organization, the TPC, which also includes disgruntled members of the TNA with an axe to grind against the leadership. The TNA is, however, playing down this new cold war waged by the TPNF.

## **The Run-up to Ezuga Thamiz**

The Tamil public is bitter about the failure of the “Good Governance” regime to address issues of importance to it, such as the prolonged detention of LTTE suspects without inquiry or charges, rehabilitation of former detainees and ongoing occupation of land by the armed forces, which could have been attended to without letting extreme Sinhala chauvinism make political capital of it. A section of the TNA, the FP especially, still hopes that something could be redeemed from the deteriorating situation by cooperating with the government. Also, they fear the prospect of the return of Mahinda Rajapaksa to power. The TNA is highly concerned that the regime is unlikely to fulfil its expectations on devolution of power by daring to implement the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, let alone transcending it. Having persuaded Tamil voters to support Maithripala Sirisena’s bid for presidency and later the UNP-led alliance in regions outside the North and East, the TNA, is desperate.

Meanwhile the TNPF, aided by its proxies, the TCSF and the TPC, intensified its narrow nationalist sloganeering to create a niche for itself in a political sphere dominated by the TNA. It has no plans except trying to enhance its performance in elections to come, and sees its opportunity in the likely loss of support for the TNA owing to goodwill gestures — including support the recent anti-people Annual Budget 2017 — towards a government which is fast losing the trust of the minorities, as well as the majority for altogether different reasons.

In the process, the TNPF indirectly promotes affinity for the LTTE and its slain leader V Pirapakaran to reactivate secessionist reactionary Tamil nationalism. They target the urban middle class youth, with a poor understanding of the conflict, and capitalize on a surviving tendency to romanticize the LTTE and its leader. The group, while hinting at the prospect of secession if various issues are not addressed, is cautious, however, to avoid creating an impression in the South that they are LTTE loyalists or have a separatist agenda. The Ezuga Thamiz rally of 24<sup>th</sup> September was part of a process of having it both ways.



## Similarities with Forerunners

Significantly, the Ezuga Thamiz campaign had stark resemblance to earlier mass mobilizations by the FP such as the “Anti-Sri Campaign” of 1958 and the failed Satyagraha of 1961 in their lack of planning. Like the FP then, the TNPF-TCSF-TPC trio had nothing beyond mass mobilization in mind. The FP succeeded in bringing the people to the streets, but had not the foggiest idea of its next move. The Ezuga Thamiz narrative is little different. The trio could organize a few more events in this fashion, depending on how things turn out in the coming months, but no more.

A deceptive feature of the Ezuga Thamiz event concerns its name. Translated correctly, Ezuga Thamiz (literally “Let Tamil arise”) means a salutation to the language, but implicit in it is a call to the Tamils to rise. It was to the latter that many (but not as many as anticipated by the organizers and supportive sections of the Tamil media) responded. Interestingly, the participants hardly knew what they were to rise for. Ezuga Thamiz 2016 was thus a cheap edition of the Pongu Thamiz event started in January 2001 by university students of Jaffna to protest alleged disappearances, mass graves and other abuses under military rule in the North. That event was peaceful. The title Pongu Thamiz was a play on words— suggesting a surge of the language linked with the annual Thai Pongal festival (usually around 14<sup>th</sup> January), ‘pongal’ being ceremonial boiling of rice. But ‘pongu’ could also refer to rising in anger. The phrase was probably inspired by the popular emotive line “*Pongu Thamizarukku innal nernthaal sangaaram nisamenru sange muzangu*”— roughly translating as “If there be harm to the surging Tamil folk, annihilation is certain, declare thee sea-shell trumpet (conch)” — by the brilliant progressive Tamil (earlier Dravidian) nationalist poet Bharathidasan.

The ambiguity at the time was understandable, since an explicit statement of anger would have earned the wrath of the armed forces and police who were in firm control of the Jaffna Peninsula. The authorities nevertheless banned the event which attracted between 4000 and 5000 defiant students in Jaffna amid open threats from the state machinery. In

2003, the event was held again — amid hope aroused by the Norwegian facilitated Peace Talks and less control by the state — to attract over 150,000 people, and became an annual event in LTTE held areas until 2008. (Since 2008, when the fortunes of the LTTE in the battlefield ebbed fast, sections of Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora adopted the idea to make it a nostalgic annual event in the countries where they reside.)

Side-shows like the celebration of the birthday of Pirapakaran on 26<sup>th</sup> November and Heroes' Day (Maaveerar Thinam) on 27<sup>th</sup> November have become annual events like remembrance of war victims at Mullivaaikkal — partly as genuine expression of grief and homage to the dead by the public and partly as a play on emotion to keep alive the dream for Tamil Eelam. The TNA leadership was smart enough to take part in the Heroes' Day events, endorse the celebration of Pirapakaran's birthday by university students, and even defend CV Wigneswaran's speech at the Ezuga Thamiz rally against criticism by Sinhala extremists, so that Tamil sentiment was not hijacked wholesale by the rival TPNF.

## **The Players in Ezuga Thamiz**

The event itself was only an outpour of emotion which was not witnessed very much in Sri Lanka after the fall of the LTTE. Thus to expect any better than from Pongu Thamiz is futile. Besides, the intended ambiguity in "Ezuga Tamil" is far less witty than that in "Pongu Thamiz".

The LTTE and its proxies at home and abroad have used emotion as a key factor in fund raising exercises. The anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 and the civil war that followed drove several hundred thousand Tamils to seek refuge abroad, mainly in India, Europe and Canada. The European and Canadian diaspora have been the main known sources of public funding for Tamil nationalist projects (monopolized by the LTTE in course of time). As the diaspora included many victims of the civil war, who had lost their homes, family or close relatives and property during the conflict, its view of Sri Lankan events, driven by emotion, lacked objectivity and showed ignorance of conditions in Sri Lanka because of

reliance on restricted sources of information, so much so that sizeable sections of the European Tamil diaspora could be misled to believe that the LTTE was winning the war, even days before its final defeat, and that the West was ready with a rescue plan to protect the LTTE leaders. Opportunists cynically exploited such gullibility by spreading the myth that the leader of the LTTE was alive, for many months after May 2009.

Several Tamil elite groups enhanced their fundraising potential among the diaspora by creating the impression that they had influence with the governments of EEC countries, Canada and the US and could secure support to establish an independent Tamil Eelam, the way Kosovo and South Sudan were 'liberated' and made independent countries. They played that card before the defeat of the LTTE and now push the line that the International Community can be persuaded to punish Sri Lanka for war crimes. Sadly, such confidence tricksters were and still are paymasters of several Tamil political parties and groups in Sri Lanka. They need clients, desirably with good electoral performance, to keep funds rolling in: the TNA has, and the TPNF is trying.

Against this background, one can see that the electorally weak TPNF needed Ezuga Thamiz to retain its modest support base and bait a section of the supporters of the TNA which is slowly losing ground, partly owing to the failure of the NPC to deliver on not just the election promises but also on what it could have done for the people of the North using its powers and resources, however limited. The TPNF did not capitalize on this failing of the TNA, for its aim is to benefit from TNA's internal conflicts — which really concern position in the TNA and posts in Parliament and NPC — and the TPNF needs Wigneswaran who is still somewhat popular despite his dismal record as Chief Minister NPC.

Even if the initiation of the TPC project, supposedly above party rivalry but without reference to the TNA leadership, is acceptable, its bringing in only elements of dissent within the TNA makes its political neutrality questionable. The TNA has kept a careful distance from the TPC thus far without denouncing it, to avoid charges of parochialism.

Likewise, the TNA did not officially endorse Ezuga Thamiz, and had no stated official position on it. Public responses by leading figures (other than the few supportive dissidents who joined the TPC) varied from a criticism of its timing by TNA MP Sumanthiran in a BBC interview to a strong defence of NPC Chief Minister Wigneswaran's speech by the TNA President Sampanthan in Parliament.

The differences were more explicit in the Tamil media of the north: the pro-FP newspaper *Uthayan* was openly hostile to the event, while others were supportive to differing degrees. There were also complaints that important participants had been side-lined so the limelight was on leaders of the TPNF and EPRLF in an event in which several organizations participated. It was also observed that minimal publicity was given to statements of support, however misguided, from left and liberal political parties of the South.

The aim seems to be to highlight salient aspects of the national question. But publicity achieves nothing if purpose is unclear. The TPC has offered no plan or programme beyond mobilizing a large crowd, confirming suspicions that the aim is on the one hand to impress overseas sponsors and on the other to build a support base for elections to come.

## **The Narrow Outlook**

A worrying aspect of Tamil nationalist political activism, militant or not, has been its inability to look at problems holistically. Little attention is paid to how other stakeholders, especially members of other nationalities, would respond. Two aspects matter most: addressing genuine concerns of others about Tamil nationalist demands; and addressing the interests of parties with other agenda. The first includes understandable worries of the Sinhalese and Muslims. The consistent inability of identity politics to view problems from another's perspective has to be overcome to ease if not eliminate undue concerns. The second includes chauvinistic political forces, politicized sections of the armed forces and the police. Appeasing them is hard — if not impossible — in the immediate context. But their influence on the Sinhalese can be weakened or even neutered through

effective political work. The post-war climate has shown considerable softening of attitudes among the Sinhalese — but not the media or major political parties — since the Sinhalese who saw the war as one against terrorism are inclined to feel that since terrorism is over it is time for reconciliation and addressing of genuine grievances.

In this context “Ezuga Thamiz” is likely to have a negative impact. However, its scale of success seems inadequate to stir fresh concerns in the South. A lack of understanding of the political situation in the North and East and of the agendas of various political forces was a contributory factor to the surge of Sinhala chauvinism. Equally “over correction” by some left and liberal political forces in the past encouraged wrong tendencies as well as weakened their own credibility. Uncritical support for the LTTE by the N SSP and its leader Dr Vikramabahu Karunaratne is notable in this respect. While many Tamils were impressed with Dr Karunaratne, his failure to criticize the LTTE for several of its misdeeds against ordinary Sinhalese hurt his credibility among the Sinhalese; thus his support for the just cause of the Tamils had no impact where it mattered, namely among the Sinhalese. The support expressed by the N SSP and United Socialist Party (USP) for Ezuga Thamiz appears to be a result of confusing the just grievances of the Tamil people with the abuse of the grievances to promote a reactionary agenda by a group reputed for its pro-imperialist stand and parochial attitudes.

The leader of the EPRLF addressing the rally went as far as to claim that Ezuga Thamiz was a continuation of the LTTE’s project. The leader of the TPNF threatened to take the Ezuga Thamiz beyond the shores to India and among the Tamil diaspora. Whether one takes such utterances seriously is one matter but the kind of appeal that they generate is another. Wigneswaran's address, although more sober, drew attention to various grievances of the Tamil people. His utterances on the history of Buddhism in the North were, however, designed to assert a somewhat erroneous historical Tamil–Hindu identity of the North. There was also no consideration of the views of the Muslims. Interestingly he drew

attention to the problems caused by Sinhalese fishers to Tamil fishers, while ignoring the big issue, namely poaching by Indian trawlers.

The understanding of the national question by the TPNF and its proxies may be summed up as: the Tamils and only the Tamils have a problem, namely the national question or simply the Sinhalese–Tamils problem, which only the International Community can resolve with facilitation by the Tamil diaspora, as long as the Tamils remain united and await instruction from the leaders. Thus any bid for militancy by the TPNF is only pretence, for buyers among the diaspora, with some of the Tamil media nursing sympathy for the LTTE.

### **Real Issues and Parochial Responses**

Several real issues faced by the people of the North have been highlighted in the Ezuga Thamiz event.

**Military Presence:** Although the conduct of military personnel in the North is far better than in the past, it is still an impediment to normal life. Besides, the activities of the armed forces appear to be designed to impose a strong Sinhala Buddhist cultural and demographic identity on the region. This makes the people further resent military presence in the North. This is not an argument to make the North free of military presence, but to say that an unduly strong presence after the decisive defeat of the LTTE cannot be justified and troop levels should only be comparable with those in other parts of the country.

**Seizure of Land:** Large tracts of land taken over by the armed forces remain in their hands and need to be returned to the people. There is also the need to address in this context the questions of resettlement and landlessness; the latter further hurts the poor by denying them post-war housing relief.

**Release of Long Term Political Detainees:** This has been an issue which should have been resolved soon after the end of the war. Detaining people without inquiry or trial is a violation of human rights, but permissible under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). The prolonged

detention reflects vindictiveness and lack of political will on the part of the government. Detention has continued despite the pledge in early 2016 by the President that all un-convicted detainees will be released. The solution to the issue should thus be comprehensive to include the immediate release of detainees, socio-economic rehabilitation of those released, repeal of the PTA without replacing it with another piece of repressive legislation, and scrapping all state mechanisms associated with repressive legislation.

**Missing Persons:** The state should seriously deal with the question of disappearances, mainly at the hands of the armed forces, the police and paramilitary organizations. A proper inquiry should be conducted to deal with all cases reported of persons missing during the war, including those outside the war theatre.

**Centralization of Power:** The existing majoritarian centralised state and undemocratic practices by those wielding power are responsible for the aggravation of the national question, which needs to be addressed through devolution of power, which will go as far as to allow the exercise of power at community level to address matters of community interest, including education, local industry and economic development and policing among others.

**A flawed approach:** The manner in which Ezuga Thamiz faces these issues is worrying. Matters such as the reduction of military presence, let alone total withdrawal, require convincing not just the government but also the public as a whole, since the armed forces are more assertive now than before the war in the affairs of the country. Mass political pressure is needed not just to reduce military presence in the North but for an overall reduction in defence personnel and defence spending.

The Ezuga Thamiz campaign paid most of its attention to matters which it could present to its local and foreign sponsors as issues of oppression of the Tamil nation by the Sinhala nation. Thus whatever surge was intended did not concern the most oppressed sections of Tamil nationality. The slogans raised and the emotive speeches at the rally were

characteristic of an elite group which had not the least interest in the plight of the victims. That will in part explain why Ezuga Thamiz badly failed to inspire the Tamils living in the Vanni, who faced the brunt of the repressive war.

State repression now hurts the toiling masses of all nationalities and is bound to intensify as the flawed economic policy of the government heaps burdens on the people. Ezuga Thamiz has judiciously avoided reference to the sufferings common to the toiling masses of all nationalities. Its failure to refer to the plight of the Muslims expelled from the North in 1990 was no mistake or accident.

The TPNF is fearful of the prospect of people of all nationalities joining hands in common struggle against the state, and does what comes to it naturally, namely politically isolating the Tamil polity to develop it as its own preserve and in the process aggravate the national contradiction.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The TPNF is not mindful of the reality that mobilization of Tamil people for Ezuga Thamiz was not the consequence of its political work, but the result of the courage that the people built through mass struggle covering a range of issues, mostly affecting their day to day life and their living environment. Sustained protests were held on issues affecting whole communities, including the ones for the recovery of army-occupied land in Valikamam North, against water contamination in Chunnakam in 2015, calling for the termination of the coal proposed power plant in Sampur and, in February this year, against the ADB backed desalination project for Jaffna. Protests against sexual abuse of women and children demanding police are among specific issues where whole communities mobilized for the rights of the vulnerable.

Such struggles inspire others to struggle for justice. What is important is that these struggles, however limited in scope, have well defined purpose and a programme of action. More than success or failure of struggles, what matters is the spirit to struggle for justice. The Tamil



nationality has a just cause to struggle for. But the cause has been packaged by Tamil nationalists in ways that isolate the Tamil people and thereby weaken the struggle. There has been no critical analysis of any of the failed struggles of the Tamil nationalists, be it parliamentary wrangling of the ACTC and the FP, the peaceful campaigns of the FP, the armed struggle of the youth movements— the LTTE especially.

The Ezuga Thamiz has not been the political success for the TPNF that it was intended to be. There is no immediate prospect of the TPNF dislodging the TNA as the main Tamil nationalist party. But much depends on how well the national question will be addressed by the government in the proposed constitutional reforms. The question is whether the TPNF and its proxies will ever have a credible programme of struggle, holistic or otherwise, to carry forward the struggle of the people.

Organizations like the Mothers' Front in the 1980s and more recently the Mass Movement for Social Rights have motivated people to take to the streets. Irrespectively of whether they succeeded or failed, they stood by the people to the bitter end. This is in sharp contrast with the Tamil nationalists bringing people to the street without a programme of action, only to abandon the people on the street.

Tamil people have been led the up the garden path by reactionary Tamil nationalists for too long and the Ezuga Thamiz drama is yet another. While the likelihood of its sustained restaging is poor, the left and progressive forces cannot idly watch such pathetic repetition of Tamil nationalist history. It is time now for a progressive alternative.

\*\*\*\*\*

# Travails of a War-torn People

*Ahilan Kadirgamar*

*The Northern Provincial Council, which came to power three years ago, has been an abysmal failure. And Colombo has descended to business as usual.*

On September 21, 2013, tens of thousands of Tamils living in Sri Lanka's heavily-militarised North decisively voted in the long-delayed provincial elections. They had waited for two and a half decades to make their voices heard and elect their own government.

Despite the promise of development and election hand-outs from then President Mahinda Rajapaksa, they gave the TNA a massive mandate, with CV Wigneswaran becoming the Chief Minister.

## **Expectations and Disappointments**

It is three years since the Northern Provincial Council (NPC) came to power and it has been an abysmal failure. The NPC is yet to put forward a vision for economic development and has hardly legislated the statutes needed to move the wheels of its administration.

It has merely been a talk shop with resolutions and statements. Its notorious genocide resolution a month after regime change in Colombo last year, apparently passed to mobilise international actors, in effect polarised the country and undermined the new political space for reconciliation. The sad reality is that the NPC has lost its credibility with the local population.

The defeat of the Rajapaksa regime opened the space for public discussion and even widespread protests in the militarised North, but

democratisation with progressive social engagement and meaningful political representation are not in sight. Even as polarising Tamil nationalist mobilisations dominate regional politics, the economic travails of the dispossessed people continue.

In Colombo, the TNA voted with the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government on the 2016 Budget. However, very little has been delivered to the war-torn regions, other than the meagre allocation of Rs 14 billion to the Resettlement Ministry, a mere 0.5 per cent of total budget expenditure. A donor conference to be held in Tokyo in June 2016 for reconstruction of the North and East was quietly cancelled without comment.

A Cabinet decision a year ago to build 65,000 houses in the North and East was manoeuvred by the government to purchase prefabricated steel houses worth \$1 billion from ArcelorMittal, a multinational company. The project is on hold following concerns about the motives of the decision-makers when locally preferred brick and cement houses would have cost half as much while boosting northern industries and local labour.

The North presents a veneer of development, with shiny-black roads, supermarkets and financial institutions stacked in every town. But the reality is that if one travels a few hundred metres into the by-lanes, deprivation and poverty are all too visible. There are increasing reports of suicide linked to heavy indebtedness, and of women caught in a web of exploitative microfinance schemes.

These desperate conditions are linked to falling incomes and crippling livelihoods, particularly in the predominantly agriculture and fisheries sectors. In the war-torn regions, household incomes are by far the lowest in the country. In Mullaitivu district, which was razed to the ground in the last phase of the war, median per capita income is SLR4,683 (Rs.2,157) per month with half the district's population living on less than \$1 per day, according to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey

2012/2013. District-level data indicate 15 percent unemployment in Jaffna, with close to 90 percent of it comprising youth between age of 16 and 36.

### **The political and societal malaise**

The economic crisis in the North is linked to the political malaise in the country; the political vision for substantive reconstruction is missing. Extreme Tamil nationalism and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism have the common goal of rejecting a political solution; one for its separatist goal and the other for its majoritarian agenda. After decades of engaging a polarised polity, neither Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party nor the faction of President Maithripala Sirisena's Sri Lanka Freedom Party seem to have the courage and imagination to provide the direction to substantively address the national question.

The politics of the Federal Party led by R Sampanthan and, for that matter, the more extremist Tamil nationalism promoted recently by Chief Minister Wigneswaran, along with his coterie of losers from the last parliamentary elections, are unable to address the fascist legacy of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Lack of critical reflection about the armed struggle and the LTTE's suicidal politics is perhaps the single biggest impediment to rejuvenating Tamil politics. Indeed, rebuilding relations with the Muslim minority would require addressing the brutal attacks against them and their eviction from the North by the LTTE in the 1990s. TNA parliamentarian MA Sumanthiran has been a notable exception in critiquing the LTTE and recognising Muslims' grievances, only to be unfairly attacked by the Tamil media and nationalist diaspora groups.

Contributing to the malaise is the taboo of discussing caste relations that are reconsolidating in the North after the war. In Jaffna district, for example, about 10 per cent of households do not even own the small plots of land necessary to qualify for post-war housing grants, and the bulk of them belong to oppressed caste communities.

The government-initiated Public Representations Committee on Constitutional Reform created a glimmer of hope with submissions from broad sections of society. However, its report in May 2016 seems to be all but forgotten with the ongoing constitution-making process limited to a few parliamentarians and “experts” in Colombo. It has also become an exercise in political management in response to the Rajapaksa camp’s chauvinist majoritarian push.

A constitution drafted under such a shroud of fear is bound to fail as it does not challenge the very forces that have resulted in the need for a new constitution. And the liberals in Colombo are twisting their tongues to justify a unitary structure of the state, which inevitably centralises power in Colombo to the detriment of meaningful devolution of power.

Given the devastation and a generation lost to the war, another insurrection in the north is highly improbable. However, the failure to address local grievances coupled with the manipulation of centralised state structures, may lead to violence and riots in pockets, and aggravate the continuing ethnic polarisation.

Almost two years after the inspiring democratic change of regime, Sri Lanka has descended to politics as usual. The need of the hour is a movement for social justice combining calls to address the grievances of minorities with demands for decent economic life for the citizenry at large. It is such inter-ethnic movements that can also address the social and economic travails of the war-torn people.

*[Ahilan Kadirgamar is a political economist based in Jaffna and a member of the Collective for Economic Democratisation.]*

\*\*\*\*\*

# Climate Change: What is installed for our future?

*Asvaththaamaa*

## **Introduction**

Across the world there is a rise in the frequency of climatic anomalies with potentially disastrous consequences. Besides direct ecological impact of climate change there are political and social consequences of equal impact. Scientific evidence asserts that the earth is warming at an unprecedented rate largely owing to human activity. Long-term changes in climate that have already set in — such as the rise in sea level, droughts of growing intensity and longer duration, increasingly intense tropical storms, frequent heat waves and heavy precipitation — are projected to continue. The likely consequences of these changes and of the environmental degradation associated with them are grave. These in turn may increase a range of risks to human security, including the risk of deadly conflict.

Globally, there is a rise in the number of “environmental refugees”, namely those who, as a result of soil erosion, desertification, water shortages or rise in sea level, face such desperate living conditions cannot continue to live in their homes. Also, many flee, at least temporarily, from weather-related catastrophes such as droughts, floods and devastating storms. Given the anticipated population growth of the developing world from the current 6 billion to pass 9 billion by 2050, the number of environmental refugees, currently estimated at 25 million per year, will probably continue to rise (Pittock 2009). Refugees will seek other places to live such as the emerging mega-cities of developing countries or the overpopulated but still fertile regions of their own or neighbouring

countries. Alternatively, they will try to reach the rich industrialised countries. This situation has serious potential for conflict. Christian Aid (2007) claims that an estimated one billion people will be forced to leave their homes between now and 2050, destabilising whole regions with increasingly desperate populations competing for dwindling supplies of food and water (Hansen et al. 2010). Along the same lines, Homer-Dixon (2007), a reputed scholar in environmental conflict, argues that 'climate change will help produce...insurgencies, genocide, guerrilla attacks, gang warfare, and global terrorism.'

The relationship between climate change and conflict, however, is complex and insufficiently understood. This is in part because climate projections are somewhat limited in geographic and temporal specificity, and the ability of societies to adapt to climate changes and related effects varies with society because the process that leads to violent conflict in any given situation is generally complicated. Although environmental change most probably was never, and is highly unlikely to be, the sole or proximate cause of deadly conflict, it can contribute to conditions that decide its severity.

The research of Binningsbø et al. (2007) who examined environmental pressure in 150 countries from 1961 to 1999 shows minimal connection between climate change and conflict. Using an internationally recognized technique to measure the environmental sustainability of a country — the Ecological Footprint — they compared these numbers with statistics on armed conflict during the same period. Their conclusion are seemingly paradoxical: lands where resources were heavily exploited show a strong correlation to a lack of armed conflict. This could be because the rate of exploitation of natural resources in nations troubled by war was low during the period of study. Such conclusions provide ammunition to those seeking to de-link environmental scarcity and violent conflict.

However, the issue of correlation between climate change and armed conflict is characterized by two aspects that have been largely ignored in the debate on the subject. Firstly, many activities contributing to global warming, were publicly acknowledged only in the past fifteen years, with a remarkable decline in the frequency and severity of armed conflict.

While oversimplified comparisons will not provide the basis to decide on the possibility of current and future links, opposing trends nonetheless deserve note. Secondly, the empirical foundation for a general relationship between resource scarcity and armed conflict is at best indicative, and many questions on the proposed causal association remain unanswered. While several single-case analyses have suggested that resource scarcity contributes to the outbreak of organized violence, there has also been interaction with exogenous conflict-promoting factors. Statistical literature appears to have failed to converge on any significant and robust association between resource scarcity and civil war.

A question worth exploring concerns the main causes for climate anomalies? Marxist understanding of the subject is worth exploring as it draws attention to how the emergence of capitalism and the combination of global capitalism and free markets have accelerated environmental degradation. Foster (1999), among and others, has argued that the pace of commodification and extraction of raw materials under conditions of capitalist expansion and the great distances over which raw materials, food resources and waste are transported in the ever-expanding circuits of capitalist economic organization, human interchange with the natural environment under capitalism results in serious disruption of natural ecosystems systems and bio-geochemical cycles.

Foster (2016) points out that capitalism to survive as a system must expand continually, in its ceaseless search for new natural sources, cheaper labour and, above all, new markets. He argues that the system, by its very nature, must grow and expand until it eventually confronts the reality of the finite nature of natural resources so that the expansionist strategy results in inevitable winners and losers, with strong implications for global social and environmental justice. It is in view of such prospect that it is necessary to take a broader view of climate change.

## **Background**

The most commonly discussed scenarios are that resource scarcity due to climate change prompting violent conflict, and migration induced by resource scarcity leading to conflict in target region. Several scholars



(Nordas and Gleditsch 2007; Barnett and Adger 2007; Raleigh and Urdal 2007) link these discussions to existing research on the causes of conflict, particularly the “greed or grievance” debate. They argue that if conflict is primarily motivated by resource-abundance (or greed) as opposed to scarcity, then water or arable land shortages prompted by climate change are of minimal concern to conflict prevention analysts. Despite critique of the “greed or grievance” debate in recent studies, environmental conflict research does not give it prominence.

Since the end of the Cold War, armed conflicts have steadily fallen in number and so has the accompanying causality rate. Nevertheless, war and armed conflict remain the most serious challenges for development policy as armed confrontation impedes development. The risk of armed conflict in poor countries is twice as high as elsewhere. Promoting development in countries affected by internal armed conflict is among the hardest development policy tasks, so that conflict has direct bearing on development. Many analysts argue that encouraging development will reduce armed conflicts. But, as argued by many, if climate change plays a role in creating and aggravating conflict, then development will, at least indirectly, be affected by climate change which poses a serious challenge to social and economic development. Developing countries are most vulnerable as their economies generally depend strongly on climate-sensitive natural resources while they are less able to cope with the impact of climate change. The path of development thus has implications for climate change and its impact on the vulnerability of societies.

Bridging the gap between climate change and development is not easy. Scant attention has been paid to ways of making development more resilient to the impact of climate change. In a narrow engineering sense, this would involve taking climate change into account in the siting and design of structures and infrastructure. At policy level, it would involve addressing implications of climate change for development activities including poverty reduction, sectoral development, and natural resource management.

Climate is closely intertwined with development. For climate is a resource in itself and affects the productivity of critical resources, such as

crops and livestock, forests, fisheries and water. Natural climate fluctuations such as the El Niño phenomenon cause severe disruption of harnessing of resources and social survival. But, most importantly, human development choices as a whole have had a demonstrable impact on local and global climate patterns. Over-construction has led to the formation of urban “heat islands”; deforestation and changes in land use affect regional temperature and rainfall patterns; and increases in atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations caused by industrial activity has been a key contributor to global climate change.

Besides natural climate variability, long- and short-term trends in climate change have already had a discernible impact on development. A prime example comprises the link between rising temperatures in the Himalayas leading to glacier retreat and the accompanying risk of catastrophic glacial lake outburst flooding. Many development activities, from setting up of hydropower to rural development and settlement, will need to adapt to such impact. Even where there is no immediate impact, possible scenarios of future impact will urge ensuring that adaptation responses are built into planning, one reason being that it is cost-effective to implement adaptation measures early, particularly for long-life infrastructure. Another is that current development activities may irreversibly affect future adaptation to the impact of climate change. Examples include destruction of coastal mangroves and the building of human settlements in areas that are particularly vulnerable to climate change. In such instances, near-term policies will need to consider long-term implications of climate change.

The general dialogue on adapting to a world affected by climate change by definition excludes the world’s poorest people and most of them belong to developing countries. And yet it is the world’s poorest who are often put forward as the ones who are most likely to suffer the impact of climate change and least likely to be able to deal with them. Thus climate change and its effects become more important to developing countries than to developed countries. Nearly 40% of the world’s population or just under 3 billion — survive on less than \$2 a day. None of them is likely to exchange an automobile for a far more expensive

greener model or to install photovoltaic solar panels atop their roof, for such exercises are neither affordable nor priority.

Comparing the average annual per capita carbon footprints of rich and poor countries is revealing: The average American's annual carbon footprint — 20.4 tons — is around 2,000 times that of someone living in land-locked Chad in Central Africa. And the average daily carbon dioxide emission of Britain is as much as the annual per capita average for Kenya (De Soysa 2002a). Overall, the UN estimates that the carbon footprint of the world's poorest one billion (those living on less than \$1 a day) represents just 3% of the global total. Between 1990 and 1998, more than 94% of the world's biggest natural disasters (and there were 568 of them) occurred in the developing world, according to Oxfam. One reason is that 75% of the world's poor live in rural areas, relying on the land to make a living (Pittock 2009).

One way to link climate and conflict is to extrapolate existing temporal trends. The earth is already warmer, even as patterns of conflict have changed considerably. Yet, the linkage between climate and conflict is neither linear nor isolated. The very "zones of peace" that distinguish the developed world are also "zones of pollution". Industrialization — the consensus culprit in global warming — is arguably the major determinant of democratization and economic development, which in turn have close links to inter-state peace. Democracies seldom fight each other, and the democratic community has been credited with making the world less warlike. Developed states cluster together peacefully, while at the same time projecting force to distant places. Since indirect effects of global warming on conflict are more substantial than the direct effects, the overall impact of climate change would be to reduce the incidents of interstate conflict.

More now refer to this phenomenon as "environmental injustice," and it has rankled those who see climate change as a "rich nations' problem." Several recent studies suggest that the impact of rising temperatures on agriculture will be far worse for developing countries, which are mostly located closer to the equator, than for high-income countries located in temperate regions.

Climate change once had relatively low priority in the policy agendas of most developing countries, partly because of the priority for economic development and poverty reduction. Although the views of developing countries on climate change have changed, they are divergent. Low-lying, small island developing states (SIDS) or countries with vast floodplains (like Bangladesh) view their situation from the perspective of a potential victim of rising sea level. Developing countries with large populations are subject to external pressure to curb their total Green House Gas (GHG) emissions which, despite relatively low per capita emission, comprise a significant component of global emissions.

The diversity in the way countries see global warming and climate change is more than matched by that among different interest groups in each country, ranging from unawareness or scepticism to serious concern and voluntary action. Interest groups frame their views of climate change based on their own perceived costs and benefits of action or inaction. Research is needed in the region to make reluctant groups conscious of the real costs and benefits, particularly where actions are guided by wrong assumptions, and to identify effective policy interventions that will alter their assessment of costs and benefits.

Given the differences in the understanding of and response to climate change among individuals, groups and governments of developing countries, let us examine what kind of policy analysis might lead to a better understanding of the way decision makers are responding and prevailing upon them to respond more proactively in the near future. A helpful approach to understanding what underlie the climate change debate and policy responses will be to study how various interest groups interact in their respective political settings (Koubi 2005). Evidence of environmental policy decisions in several developed countries suggests that an amalgam of group interests and general social welfare maximisation will decide the outcome.

## **Arguments**

Climate change manifests itself as temperature increases, changes in precipitation, rise in sea level, and more intense natural hazards such as

storms, floods, droughts, and landslides (IPCC 2007). A major implication of global warming is greater scarcity and variability of renewable resources in many parts of the world (IPCC 2001, 2007). With concern rising about such effects of climate change, some scholars, commonly referred to as neo-Malthusians, posit that climate change is a security threat. For instance, Homer-Dixon (1999) suggested that environmental scarcity is at least in part responsible for some recent conflicts.

Arguments of the above kind imply that impaired access to renewable resources increases frustration among affected individuals and social groups. Such frustration, in turn, creates grievances against the state, to weaken the state and civil society, and increase opportunity to instigate insurrection. Building on this hypothesis, neo-Malthusian arguments focus on two interrelated processes that could exacerbate resource scarcity and competition for means for livelihood. Firstly, rise in temperature, precipitation anomalies and extreme weather aggravate processes of resource degradation that are already under way (Homer-Dixon 1999; Kahl 2006). Secondly, climate change implications, such as extreme weather conditions and rising sea levels, force people to migrate. Such migration, in turn, can lead to greater pressure on resources in destination areas and to increased resource competition there (Barnett 2003; Homer-Dixon 1999; Reuveny 2007).

Scholars referred to as cornucopian or resource optimists dismiss this pessimistic view. While acknowledging the likely negative impact of environmental degradation on human wellbeing, they argue that humans can adapt to resource scarcity through market mechanisms pricing mainly, technological innovation, and other means (Lomborg 2001; Simon 1998). Simon notes that, while population growth can lead to shortages or increased economic burdens in the short run, the ability of society to respond to such circumstances by advances in technology and efficiency usually outstrips the constraints imposed by an increasing population.

The neo-Malthusian argument has also been criticized for being overly deterministic, and ignoring important economic and socio-political factors (Buhaug et al. 2008; Barnett and Adger 2007; De Soysa 2002b; Gleditsch 1998; Salehyan 2008). Critics have argued that scarcity of

renewable resources is just one factor in the overall relationship between climate change and conflict. Buhaug et al. argue that “climate change may increase the risk of armed conflict only under specific conditions and in interaction with several socio-political factors, and reject the theory that climate change has a direct effect on the prospect of conflict. They point to several causal pathways by which economic and political instability, social fragmentation, and migration could strengthen the prospect of climate change leading to armed conflict.

Zhang et al. (2007) hypothesize that climate change influences conflict by its impact on agricultural productivity and conclude that changes in average temperature strongly correlate with changes in agricultural production and the frequency of wars. Several studies have sought to explain conflict using environmental degradation— water scarcity, soil erosion, land degradation and such factors that are likely to hurt human activity, economic development and the political system in particular. There are other studies that suggest that poor economic conditions could increase the chances of intra- and inter-state conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2003, Collier and Hoeffler 2002, 2004), and that such conflict may in turn increase the probability of recessions and affect economic growth (Schaffer 2007; Blomberg et al. 2006; Koubi 2005). This two-directional effect could create a poverty-conflict trap. Miguel et al. (2004), for example, in a study of 41 African countries in 1981–1999, offers evidence that negative deviations in annual precipitation (an instrumental variable for economic growth) substantially reduces national economic growth and thereby indirectly increases the probability of intra-state conflict. Hence it will be important to not merely identify theoretically the exact pathway by which climate change would influence civil conflict but also to align the empirical analysis closely to the theoretical arguments.

There is a much literature on security and climate change, particularly by authors who take a broad view of ‘human security’ including sustainable livelihood, food security etc. There is a general consensus that climate change poses a serious threat to human security. This literature is relevant only if it specifically links increased human insecurity to increase in outbreaks of violent conflict. Some of the popular literature on climate

change emphasises the threat to international security. The suggested scenario is that increased global competition for resources will lead to more international tension, which could spark violent, inter-state conflict. At the time of this query, no academic research was found that supported this view. The popular literature frequently refers to an important link between climate change and violent conflict. But when it comes to academic articles or reports, or even web pages, climate change and conflict are seldom mentioned in the same sentence. Moreover, the link is rarely substantiated by convincing evidence (Nordas and Gleditsch 2007). Thus there is a case for caution in seeking links between climate change and conflict. Much of the literature on environmentally driven conflicts is more theoretical than empirical, and motivated by Northern political and strategic interests rather than by research informed by solid empirical data. This in part explains the long-standing problem in finding meaningful evidence of the determinants of violent conflict and war at international and sub-national levels (Barnett 2003).

## **Marxist Perspective on Climate Change**

On a planet that is being slowly poisoned by the economic system under which it is run, transforming energy sources is the single biggest item that demands change, which needs to be put in place rapidly. Most scientists agree that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions need to be reduced by up to 80 or 90% globally by 2050 to avoid serious irreversible climate change. The fact that the entire economy runs on essentially three fuel substances — oil, coal and natural gas — which are most responsible for global warming poses capitalism with an effectively insurmountable problem.

Karl Marx, introduced the notion of ‘social metabolism’ (or socio-ecological metabolism), defining the labour process as the metabolic relation between humans and nature, thus providing an ecological perspective that underpinned his entire critique of political economy. A similar concept of metabolic relations underlies the concept of ecosystem as developed by early twentieth-century system ecologists. Given this historical background, it should not be surprising that Marx’s approach to social metabolism and his concept of metabolic rift (or ecological crisis)

are becoming increasingly central to the political-economic critique of the alienation of nature under capitalism, constituting the single most important legacy of social science in this realm.

Frederick Engels, in his 'The part played by labour in the transition from ape to man' declares "Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first."

Capitalism in its highest form is creating havoc. One outcome of the present phase of globalization of capital and the spectre of global food shortages is the ongoing massive land grab. Private capital and government sovereign wealth funds (state-managed investment funds, often under the control of a central bank) are striving to gain control of vast areas of fertile land across the world to produce food and biofuel feedstock crops for their home markets. It is estimated that some 30 million hectares of land (approximately two-thirds of the arable land in Europe), much of it in Africa, has been recently acquired or is in the process of acquisition by foreign countries and international corporations. This global land seizure (even by "legal" means) comprises part of the larger history of imperialism.

Another outcome is that, multinational corporations scour the world for resources and opportunities wherever they find them, to exploit cheap labour, lax environmental regulations and tax benefits offered by poor countries desperate for foreign investment. All of them reinforce, rather than reduce, divisions between the wealthy countries and poor countries. The result is a more rapacious global exploitation of nature and increased differentials of wealth and power. Such global corporations know no loyalty to anything but raising their profit levels. Despite rapid income growth in some countries, primarily in Asia, inequality between the poorest and richest countries of the world persists and has deepened for much of the world.



It is noteworthy to look at Marx's arguments for metabolic rift. The concept of metabolic rift is rooted in Marx's theory of alienation: the estrangement of human beings from themselves as producers, from their production process and products, from fellow human beings and from their being as human species. This metabolic rift is a concrete expression of human estrangement from the material conditions of life and from nature. Marxian dialectics provided the only scientific approach that would recognize the ecological problem as simultaneously economic and ecological, and rooted in the capitalist mode of production. No other approach has had the capacity to integrate a natural-scientific and social-scientific critique that can inform our practice in the Anthropocene.

Marx maintained that capitalism generated an unhealthy circulation of matter from urban industry and industrial agriculture, which damaged the reproductive capabilities of both human labour power and the land (Foster and Burkett 2016). Whereas Marx saw that humans' pre-industrial interaction with nature enabled harmonious and sustainable production, capitalism failed to sustain the social relations or the conditions for the recycling of nutrients back to the soil. Thus was born the metabolic rift. Today, the rift has grown both in scale and complexity, to the point where economic activities of the human society cause unprecedented environmental change. Thus Marx's theory on metabolic rift helps us to scientifically understand the notion of climate change.

## **The Case of Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka has entered a new phase following the end of the thirty years long civil war. Post-war Sri Lanka has several new dimensions to it. The new setting poses enormous challenges. The destruction caused by the civil war in the economic, social and cultural spheres have torn Sri Lankan society into pieces. Sri Lanka in the past decade has felt the impacts of climate change.

Being a small island nation, Sri Lanka falls into the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and IPCC's category of 'vulnerable' small island nations under serious threat from various climate change impacts, such as sea level rise and severe floods

and droughts. Sea level rise and related scenarios will have major impacts on the coastal zone of the country. Around 40% of the country's population lives in coastal areas. However, Sri Lanka's anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are negligible compared to those of other developed or larger developing countries. This means that its potential for contributing to the mitigation of global GHG emission is minimal. Analysis has shown that the maximum and minimum temperatures in all metrological stations in Sri Lanka have clearly been increasing, with the highest increase of minimum temperature being about 2.0°C at Nuwara Eliya. Rainfall data reveals that the variability has been increasing in the past in most parts of the island resulting in water scarcities in the dry zone of Sri Lanka. All above have the potential to create conflicts in future in Sri Lanka.

Post-war Sri Lanka now engaged in full scale development. Climate change poses a serious challenge to social and economic development. Developing countries are particularly vulnerable because their economies generally depend more on climate-sensitive natural resources, and because they are less able to cope with the impacts of climate change. How development occurs has implications, in turn, for climate change and for the vulnerability of societies to its impact. Bridging the gap between climate change and development is not easy. Very little attention has been paid to making development more resilient to the impact of climate change (Gartzke and Rohner 2009). In a narrow engineering sense, this would involve taking climate changes into account in the siting and design of roads, bridges, buildings and other infrastructure. At policy level, it would involve considering the implications of climate change for various development activities including poverty reduction, sector wise development, and natural resource management. Climate is closely intertwined with development since climate is a resource in itself and affects the productivity of other critical resources, such as crops and livestock, forests, fisheries and water resources. Natural fluctuations in climate such the El Niño phenomenon cause widespread disruption in society's ability to harness resources and even to survive (Raleigh and Udal 2007). But human development choices also have a demonstrable

impact on local and global climate patterns. Over-construction contributes to the formation of urban “heat islands”; deforestation and changes in land use can influence regional temperature and rainfall patterns; and increases in greenhouse gas concentrations as a result of industrial activity are responsible for global climate change.

Very little research has been done on climate anomalies affecting Sri Lanka. Notable studies include Yamane (2004), Munasinghe (2008), and Eriyagama and Smakhtin (2007). But all of them have looked at specific aspects of climate change such as agriculture, irrigation and water resources. But very little research has been done on the climate change — development — conflict nexus.

## **Conclusion**

All the factors discussed above bring into question whether climate change marks the onset of armed conflict. Scholars have argued for and against the prospect. Much of the debate has been, in a way, between statically proven data and politico, socio and economic analysis. To put it simply, it has been a battle between quantitative and qualitative data. Is there a middle ground in this whole gamut of research done on the field of inter linkages between climate change and conflict? Understanding the connection between the two in order to rethink the conflict–development nexus from the perspective of climate change is key. There is no clear link between climate change and conflict, although there is clear link between conflict and development. Then the question of the link between climate change and development remains alongside the question of the impact of development on climate change and conflict. Underlying the studies of all of them has been a liberal reading of development.

Capitalism with the help of neoliberal policies and globalization is plundering the earth and its resources, but the liberal thinking which dominates academic discourse works on the assumption that capitalism is capable of resolving the problem of climate change. The truth is that capitalism has no solution to the environmental problems facing humanity and the planet. International treaties to arrest deterioration of global climate within the confines of capitalism are doomed to fail, as

evident from the fruitless outcomes of the series of UN sponsored climate change conferences, the reason being that capitalism, besides its inability to solve the problem, lies at the root and heart of the problem.

## **Bibliography**

- Barnett, J. 2003. *Security and climate change- new Dimensions*. Norwich: Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research.
- Barnett, J. and W.N. Adger. 2007 "Climate change, human security and violent conflict" *Polit. Geogr.* 26: 639-655.
- Binningsbø, H.M., I. de Soysa and N.P. Gleditsch. 2007. "Green giant or straw man? Environmental pressure and civil conflict 1961-1999" *Popul. Environ.* 28: 337-353.
- Blomberg, B., G.D. Hess and S. Thacker. 2006. "On the conflict- poverty nexus" *Econ. Polit.* 18(3): 237-267.
- Buhaug, H., N.P. Gleditsch and O.M. Theisen. 2008. "Implications of climate change for armed conflict" paper presented at the World Bank Workshop on *Social Dimensions of Climate Change*.
- Collier, P. and A. Hoeffler. 2002. "On the incidence of civil war in Africa" *J. Conflict Resolut.* 46(1): 13-28.
- Collier, P. and A. Hoeffler. 2004. "Greed and grievance in civil war," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56(4): 563-595.
- De Soysa, I. 2002a. "Ecoviolence: Shrinking pie, or honey pot?" *Global Environ. Polit.* 2(4): 1-34.
- De Soysa, I. 2002b. "Paradise is a bazaar? Greed, greed, and governance in civil war, 1989-99" *J. Peace Res.* 39(4): 395-416.
- Eriyagama, N. and V. Smakhtin. 2007. *How prepared are the water and agrarian sectors in Sri Lanka for climate Change? A review*. Colombo: Int. Water Management Institute
- Fearon, J.D. and D.D. Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War" *American Polit. Sci. Rev.* 97(1): 75-90.
- Foster, John Bellamy. 1999. Marx's theory of metabolic rift: Classical foundation for environmental sociology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105: 366-405.
- Foster, John Bellamy and Paul Burkett. 2016. *Marx and the earth: an anti-critique*. Leiden: Brill.
- Gartzke, Erik and Dominic Rohner. 2009. *To Conquer or Compel: Economic Development and Interstate Conflict*. San Diego: University of California.
- Gleditsch, N.P. 1998. "Armed conflict and the environment: A critique of the literature" *J. Peace Res.* 35(3): 363-380.

- Hansen, J., R. Ruedy, M. Sato and K. Lo. 2010. "Global Surface Temperature Change" *Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* 107: 17828-17899.
- Homer-Dixon, T.F., 2007. 'Terror in the Weather Forecast.' *New York Times* 24<sup>th</sup> April.
- Homer-Dixon, T.F. 1999. *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- IPCC Fourth Assessment Report (AR4). 2007. *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report*.
- IPCC Third Assessment Report (AR3). 2001. *Climate Change 2001: Synthesis Report*.
- Kahl, C.H. 2006. *States, Scarcity, Civil Strife in the Developing world*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Koubi, V. 2005. "War and economic performance" *J. Peace Res.* 42 (1): 67-82.
- Lomborg, B. 2001. *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Miguel, Edward, Shanker Satyanath and Ernest Sergenti. 2004. "Economic shocks and civil conflict: An instrumental variables approach" *J. Polit. Econ.* 112(4): 725-753.
- Munasinghe, M. 2008. "Rising Temperatures, Rising Risks" *Financ. Dev.* 45(1).
- Nordas, R. and N.P. Gleditsch. 2007. "Climate change and conflict" *Polit. Geogr.* 26: 627-638.
- Pittock, B. 2009. *Climate Change: the Science, Impacts and Solutions*. London: Earthscan.
- Raleigh, C. and H. Urdal. 2007. "Climate change, environmental degradation and armed conflict" *Polit. Geogr.* 26(6): 674-694.
- Reuveny, R. 2007. "Climate Change-induced Migration and Violent Conflict" *Polit. Geogr.* 26(6): 656-673.
- Salehyan, I. 2008. "From climate change to conflict? No consensus yet," *J. Peace Res.* 45(3): 315-326.
- Schaffer, L-M. 2007. *Economic growth and civil war: A one-way street?* Zurich: CIS- ETH.
- Simon, J.L. 1998 "Lebensraum: paradoxically, population growth may eventually end wars" *J. Conflict Resolut.* 33(1): 164-180.
- Yamane, A. 2004. "Rethinking Vulnerability to Climate Change in Sri Lanka" Paper presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> Int. Conf. Sri Lanka Stud., Matara, Sri Lanka.
- Zhang, D.D., P. Brecke, H.F. Lee, Y-Q. He and J. Zhang. 2007. "Global Climate Change, War, and Population Decline in Recent Human History" *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 104(49): 19214-19219.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Indian Dalit Politics: a Left Turn?**

### **The Background**

Indian identity politics, much in practice in the name of Dalitism, has, especially in Tamilnadu, carefully avoided reference to certain issues. Class and class struggle, imperialism and national question received minimal attention or been totally ignored. For over two decades such Dalitist approaches had serious influence in the political affairs of the State of Tamilnadu as well as of the entire country. But the net outcome was disappointing.

The main weakness of Dalitism was not just its inability to unite a large mass of people marginalized by Indian *Varna* system but also its inability to align the Dalits with communities whose socio-economic conditions were as bad as those of Dalits or at times even worse to launch united struggles against social oppression.

Although Dalitist leaders initially dwelt much on matters of social injustice and denial of rights including caste-based discrimination, partiality and violence, soon their attention turned to power and position in Parliament, State Assemblies and local government. The way politics of Dalit unity was conducted in each state of India, was much like the way minority nationalists of Sri Lanka used ethnic unity, for one or another form of bargaining, which had little to do with the issues at stake. Proliferation of political parties representing different caste-based groups hurt the vote banks of Indian national parties, the Congress in particular. In the Uttar Pradesh (UP) with the highest Dalit percentage population, caste-based electoral alliances enabled the leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) Mayawathi to become chief minister. While it was a

remarkable achievement for her to become chief minister, compromises made in the process with 'Other Backward Caste' parties and later even the Brahmin elite eventually sapped the BSP of its Dalitist essence and, more importantly, weakened the struggle of the Dalits for social justice. The BSP, had no serious impact in Haryana with a 20% Dalit population, and had limited success in Madhya Pradesh with 7 out of 230 seats in 2008 dwindling to 4 seats in 2013. The point is that the hopes and aspirations stirred by the success of the BSP in UP soon evaporated as the interests of the Dalitist leaders were not at one with those of the Dalit population; and the performance of Dalit parliamentary politicians was, overall, less impressive than that of their predecessors with other party affiliations and much less mass support. What parliamentary Dalitism lacked most was the ability to arrive at ways that would lead to the expected social emancipation of those oppressed by caste.

### **The Crisis of Dalitist Politics**

In place of political consensus among members of all castes subject to caste-based oppression to overcome such oppression, Dalit parliamentary politics lost direction to make unholy alliances with strong parliamentary parties in order to strengthen the hold of the elite of certain caste groups on power. A most despicable example of this was the Dalitist BSP seeking the support of Hindu fundamentalist BJP with a strong Brahminist undercurrent to become the ruling party in the State Assembly of Uttar Pradesh in 1995, only for the latter to withdraw support and topple the regime months later. The BSP also wooed the Brahmins in UP since 2007 to secure power in the UP. The poverty of Dalitism of the time was even more evident in Dalitis and urban Tribal populations joining hands with the BJP in the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in 2002.

Especially in Tamilnadu, Dalitism has degenerated to the level where each depressed caste has a party for itself; the Paattaali Makkal Katchi (Toiling People's Party, PMK) which started as Vanniyar Sangam (Association of the Vanniya caste) representing an 'Other Backward Castes' group formed an opportunistic electoral alliance with the Vituthalaich Chiruththaikal (Liberation Leopards, a Dalit Party) to

contest State Assembly elections. That alliance barely survived an Assembly election. Today PMK is back to square one as a party of the middle-level Vanniyar caste which indulges in anti-Dalit violence.

## **Brahminism as Dominant Ideology**

Whatever is the origin of caste in India, the Brahmin system of Varna had a major role in casteism to its present status and making untouchability an integral part of the Hindu religions. But it may be said that the caste system as we see today took shape after British colonial penetration of India and amid compromises between the colonial rulers and Indian feudalism. Although Brahminism still plays a strong role in matters of religion and ritual, it has lost its instrumental role which it played once, even a century ago, in the practice of caste oppression, despite being the source of religious justification for the Varna system with which the caste system, and untouchability in particular, had close links. Caste groups that rose to positions of social power and influence during the past century or two have since adopted and sustained the practice of caste oppression, especially in rural India, where resentment is strong among these groups against any sign of individual or collective upward social mobility of local depressed caste groups.

Thus we should be mindful of the reality that Brahminism, which constitutes a key component of the dominant ideology of various Indian societies, can survive without a role for the Brahmin. It is also necessary to overcome the tendency to equate anti-Brahminism to merely resisting parasitic Brahmin interests, especially those of the Brahmin elite and middle class groups.

## **Left Responses**

There is now need to review positions adopted by the Left and other progressive forces towards Brahminism and Varnasrma in the context of social changes in the past century, when social movements led by BR Ambedkar and EV Ramasamy (Periyar) had great impact on awareness of caste oppression as well as resistance to it. Readings of Ambedkar and Periyar also deserve a balanced review free of sentimentalism. There is a



tendency among sections of the Left to over-correct earlier critical stands on both Ambedkar and Periyar, for their distancing themselves from the left movement and to some extent left ideology. Opportunistic pandering to the idol worship of Ambedkar and Periyar will not help and will in fact hurt the genuine Left ideologically and politically. What is really needed is due recognition of the positive roles of not just Ambedkar and Periyar but also other Dalit leaders, especially those with a broader social outlook.

The heydays of Dalit parliamentary politics were over by the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as revealed by the results of the parliamentary elections of 2014. The Dalit vote bank will, however, remain strong in states like UP so that the Dalitist BSP will hold sway for some time since rival political parties have yet to offer a credible alternative for the Dalits. Nevertheless, the failure of Dalit political opportunism has during the past decade paved the way for alternative thinking among younger urban Dalit activists.

Interaction between Left and Dalit activists has been growing among the educated youth, outside the domain of parliamentary politics, especially in universities. The militant left in India, notably Marxist Leninists, have recognized the need to address caste oppression as an important aspect of their struggle against the capitalist state and its imperialist allies.

While the Parliamentary Left, in response to the rise of Dalit politics, softened its stand on Periyar and Ambedkar in late last century, the Marxist Leninist Left held to its position supportive of Dalits on matters affecting their rights and wellbeing and of the oppressed nationalities and the tribal people in struggles against state oppression.

A succession of events during the past five years or so has been particularly encouraging from the point of view of a Left-Dalit dialogue. An important turning point was the election of the BJP to power with a steam roller majority in 2014, soon followed by high handed action by the BJP and its Hindutva affiliate organizations in a series of attacks against

religious minorities, especially the Muslims, and Dalits. This was time for the Left to stand up and be counted, which it did.

## **Recent Developments**

An important instance was the stand of the Left as a whole, and Marxist Leninist parties in particular, on the banning of the Ambedkar-Periyar Study Circle (APSC), a predominantly Dalit student association of IIT Madras, by the administration in late May 2015, following an anonymous complaint from pro-BJP quarters that it was instigating protests against the policies of the Centre and creating “hatred” against Prime Minister Modi and the Hindus. Mounting public protest forced the administration to retreat a month later.

Things came to a head when Rohith Vemula, a PhD student at the University of Hyderabad committed suicide on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2016 following harassment by the university administration based on his role in the activities of the Ambedkar Students Association (ASA) earlier in August 2015. Protests by the ASA were themselves about politically motivated persecution of Muslims like the death penalty for Yakub Memon, wrongly convicted in the 1993 Bombay bombings and the attack by the pro-BJP student body, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) on the screening of the documentary “Muzaffarnagar Baaqi Hai” in Delhi University.

Vemula’s suicide note was a strong political statement against the caste-based persecution which led him to take his life. Vemula’s suicide rapidly grew into an all India issue with protests by university students in many parts of India. The University responded with attempts to discredit Vemula by questioning the legitimacy of his claim to be a member of a “Scheduled Caste”. The response of left wing student organizations in universities was vigorous and as strong as it was on other burning issues such as state brutality in Kashmir and the selective targeting of Muslims.

Shortly after, on 9th February 2016, members of the Democratic Students Union (DSU) of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) held a

protest meeting on the campus against the hanging of Afzal Guru in 2013, wrongfully convicted for the armed attack on Parliament in 2001, and the unlawful execution of Kashmiri separatist Maqbool Bhat in 1984, defying withdrawal of permission for the meeting by the university authorities. The arrest of JNU Students' Union President Kanhaiya Kumar by the Delhi Police and charging him of sedition led to a wave of protest and the first public show of solidarity between Left and Dalit student bodies. Convergence of solidarity with the oppressed Muslim community and Kashmir nationalists was a new political experience for both. Although attempts by the BJP regime and the Hindu Nationalist student body ABVP to intimidate the Left and Dalit students failed, harassment of students and academics supportive of democratic rights persists in university campuses.

There are vested interests with an anti-Left agenda seeking to drive a wedge between progressive Dalit youth and the Left. Dalit reservations about the Left cannot, nevertheless, be readily dismissed. Trust between the Left as a whole and the Dalit community needs to be built and cannot arrive overnight. Differences take time to clear. Meanwhile, contesting student union elections in ways similar to parliamentary elections will hurt the prospects for an anti-fascist alliance in a grave situation where the far right is working aggressively to undermine opposition to the BJP regime within universities.

Among Dalitists who nurtured deep suspicion of the left and even argued that taking a working class stand could harm Dalit interests are enemies of the left whose loyalties are to the capitalist classes. But there are also others whose fears and suspicions although not well founded have genuine concerns which need to be addressed. Ways need to be found to win over every section of society oppressed by caste, religion, nationality, gender or any form of identity to the cause of social justice for all. This is an issue which only the genuine left can address credibly and provide sustained leadership.

A healthy trend has gathered strength in the wake of the crises at the University of Hyderabad and the JNU, and should be developed upon. The willingness of various Dalit groups to speak aloud about issues faced

by other oppressed sections of society is a good thing and should be cultivated. Militant solidarity between Dalit and Left activists should be built to transcend rivalry for parliamentary posts and other positions of power and influence in a bourgeois democratic setup.

There is a long way to go for the genuine left. Ritualistic praise of Ambedkar and Periyar will do no good. The Left should seriously study their respective roles as individuals and as leaders and spokespersons of popular organizations. Their positive contributions and errors should be critically studied in context. What should be most appreciated is the service that such leaders rendered to the oppressed people— subject to limitations imposed by their circumstances on their thoughts and deeds. Dalit and Left activists need to be particularly cautious of those who seek to present Ambedkar and Periyar as infallible cult figures and thereby cultivate forms of idol worship, which neither leader would have ever endorsed. Intellectually dishonest persons promoting the worship of Ambedkar and Periyar have their self-interest at heart and will overtly and covertly resist the unity of progressive forces in the struggle against class, caste, gender and national oppression.

The genuine left of India needs to adopt a more holistic approach to identity-based issues. In the neo-colonial era, reaction has hijacked issues of racial, gender, national and caste oppression. The dogmatic Left has at times isolated itself from oppressed identity groups by taking an inflexible stand on identity-based issues. The opportunist Left, on the other hand, has resorted to stands bordering on populism to attract the vote of oppressed minorities. Neither approach helped the socialist project. Admittedly, the genuine left has some way to go in winning over the marginalized identity groups to its anti-imperialist cause. But there is no easy way. There can never be a substitute for a principled position that takes into account the objective reality and adopts a flexible approach in identity-based issues.

It will thus be futile for the genuine Left to heap ritualistic praise on Ambedkar or Periyar. What is needed is an honest and critical analysis of their respective social roles in historical context and of the contextual limitations in their world outlook — which was not proletarian — and

giving them their fair due for their mainly positive and commendable roles. While their errors should not be swept under the carpet, there is need to assess them in specific contexts alongside a self-critical view of the roles played by all sections of the left at the time.

## **Lessons from Sri Lanka**

The experience of the genuine left in the struggle against caste oppression in Sri Lanka is much relevant to the Indian context. Persistent struggle against caste oppression took off with the political awakening of the North of Sri Lanka in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It won small but significant victories, including the passage of the Prevention of Social Disabilities Act of 1957, prohibiting caste-based discrimination against anyone. But that piece of legislation was inadequate to overcome the continuing practice of untouchability, which denied members of the depressed castes of northern Sri Lanka entry to temples and other public places including eateries, besides discrimination in education, employment and access to social services.

Protests and peaceful campaigns for social rights for the depressed castes therefore continued but faced difficulty under the right-wing UNP-led coalition government of 1965-70, which included the two main Tamil parties. When matters came to a head under the right wing regime, the Marxist Leninist faction of the Communist Party (then referred to as the Peking Wing Communist Party by the media) decided to launch a mass struggle against untouchability and caste-based discrimination. A struggle known as the Mass Movement to Eliminate Untouchability was launched in October 1966.

The campaign itself was not anybody's brainchild, nor was it the result of any particular event. It was the culmination of a long process of struggle which synthesised the class outlook of Marxism Leninism, the idea of a broad-based united front which was highly effective in the anti-fascist struggle in Europe, and the Mass Line as evolved by Mao Zedong.

Marxist Leninist leadership ensured that the struggle upheld a class-based outlook and put in proper perspective the relationship between

caste and class in the matter of caste oppression. It identified the dividing line between the feudal-capitalist oppressive class which upheld the caste system and the mainly worker-peasant class that opposed the oppressive system, supported by enlightened sections of the middle classes. The united front strategy enabled unity of all forces that could be united against the injustice. The mass line combined with the recognition of the need to bear arms against the oppressor made the campaign the only successful post-independence militant campaign in Sri Lanka.

Nobody claims that the 1966 October campaign which lasted until 1972 has eliminated the caste system. But it can be said with confidence that it succeeded in delivering a death blow to the socio-economic base of the system, making it irredeemable. It also gave courage the oppressed to dare to expose discrimination and injustice, making it hard for oppressors to act brazenly in the way they did even as late as in the 1950's. Thus the remaining struggle is at the social level, against feudal remnants of the dominant ideology.

It seems that the Indian Left has not learned much from the lessons of Sri Lanka: on fighting Trotskyism and revisionism; on the dangers of opportunist electoral alliances and cohabitation with capitalist parties; on addressing the caste issue, which certainly is quite complex in India but just as severe as in the North of Sri Lanka at one time.

The Dalit movement has to learn about the benefits of broad based alliances, the need to avoid sectarianism, and the pitfalls of parliamentary politics.

We recommend therefore that the Marxist Leninists of Sri Lanka who recently celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the mass movement of October 1966 should expand on the political lessons of the struggle for the benefit of the South Asian Left and the oppressed by caste.

\*\*\*\*\*

# **Jaffna Conference held to Explore and Redress Caste Oppression**

**Thulasi Muttulingam**

Caste oppression has a long and convoluted history in Jaffna. There is also, nearly a century's worth of recorded history of progressive elements within the community agitating against the caste system. Serious ground was beginning to be gained by the anti-caste movement in the 60's and 70's before ethnic conflict and consequent militancy drove the movement underground for nearly three decades. Now, post 2009, issues of caste oppression have risen again like a spectre (the LTTE had banned most of its outward manifestations) — and so too has the pushback against it.

October 2016 marks the 50th anniversary of a historic march from Chunnakam to Jaffna by thousands of men and women protesting caste oppression. "The marchers came from all walks of life," said SK Senthivel, one of the stalwarts of the anti-caste movement in Jaffna. "We were youths at the time following leaders like N Sanmugathan, KA Subramaniam and VA Kandasamy. Our march was joined by nearly all castes of the Tamil community as there were progressive members among the oppressive castes too. Even Muslims who did not face caste oppression themselves joined us on that historic march, to lend us solidarity." The historic march which took place on 21 October 1966 was overtaken by police brutality. Many of the leaders were beaten up and jailed. Nevertheless, a consciousness had arisen — both in the minds of the anti-casteists as well as the casteists whom they were addressing — that caste oppression would no longer be accepted or unchallenged.

Fifty years later, on 15 October 2016, a conference was convened in Jaffna by a coalition of left groups calling themselves the Mass Movement

for Social Justice, to review the past as well as to strategize the way forward.

Panels comprising activists, researchers and academics were hosted to review the history and possible future, of the anti-caste movement in Jaffna. Among other things they explored the ways literature and arts helped combat caste oppression as well as documented its social realities; the current context in terms of land oppression and the economy; education and culture, and so on.

SK Senthivel was the guest speaker who explained the history of the anti-caste struggle in Jaffna from the 1920's onwards. According to him the Jaffna Youth Congress and other left oriented organisations had begun the struggle in 1924, mostly through peaceful demonstrations. At the time, overt forms of oppression included not allowing the oppressed castes into Hindu temples and serving them tea in broken bottles or rusty tumblers— unlike the polished vessels used for the oppressing castes.

The series of peaceful demonstrations had an effect so that by 1958, three of the major temples of Jaffna — Nallur Murugan, Vannaarpanani Sivan and Yaal Perumal temples — threw their doors open to the oppressed castes. This was a major feat to have achieved without violence — the upper caste management of these temples were progressive for their time — but various other temples had to have their doors forcibly opened over the next decade, for temple entry to take place.

Similarly, certain tea stalls in Jaffna agreed to serve all castes in similar vessels. In the meantime, the VSSK Cafe became the first restaurant to open its doors wide to everyone as well. All this took place in the late 1950s. Over the next decade, a mostly nonviolent movement which has put up with violence from the dominant castes for decades finally decided to retaliate with the slogan, 'We will no longer turn our other cheek. If you slap our cheek, we'll slap yours back'. They took to arms and forced their way into resisting temples and eateries until nearly all these establishments opened their doors.

Apart from this historic achievement of opening up temples and tea stalls however, progress in negating other areas of caste oppression



continued to be slow; hence the protest march of 1966. In 2016 however, SK Senthivel was not entirely certain whether much tangible progress had been achieved apart from the opening of tea shops and temples.

He also noted that Uduvil Girls School in Jaffna, currently under media speculation for controversy of another kind (regarding the retirement of its principal) was the first school to voluntarily offer equal seating in common congregations when serving meals at functions. Earlier, the oppressed castes whether students or parents, had to sit out of the way, separately. Thereafter, the government made it a mandatory regulation to serve everyone equally, and took action against principals who flouted the regulation.

The theme of the conference was to rise as humans to live in equality in Jaffna. Senthivel concluded his speech by asking the audience, “We keep hearing rousing rhetoric around here that we’ll rise as Tamils. My question to our community though is, are we ready to rise as humans instead?”

## **Land Oppression and the Current Context**

Ahilan Kadirgamar, a political economist who does research work in Jaffna, presented a paper on “Land Rights and Economy within Contemporary Caste Society”. He noted that every time caste oppression is sought to be addressed in Jaffna, many in the mainstream reject the need to do so with the superfluous response “Oh but caste oppression is no longer present in Jaffna; we only observe caste when arranging marriages”. Ahilan noted, however, that even though overt forms of tangible oppression had gone underground, oppressive practices were still pervasive — and this could be seen especially when it came to ownership of land, as well as economic structures.

The oppressed castes traditionally did not own land. To this day, when educated, socially mobile members of their community attempt to buy land, they are thwarted in multiple, insidious ways; should they succeed even then in buying lands, especially in dominant caste bastions,

the community around them tended to harass and marginalise them in various ways.

Post-war, when grants were given to rebuild houses to war-affected peoples, the poorest 10% of the war affected in Jaffna lost out on the grant— because a stipulation of the grant is that they should own at least two perches of land to build those houses on. Needless to say it was mostly the oppressed castes who lost out due to this, for no fault of theirs.

Akalya Francisglain, a sociology graduate and researcher, presented a paper on education and culture in contemporary caste society. She noted that previous speakers had talked about the value of literature and arts in capturing and documenting the culture and lived realities of the oppressed castes. She however observed that the culture of the Vilella (the most oppressive caste in Jaffna) being that of the majority and the dominant one, much of literature and the arts tended to pass off Vilella culture as synonymous with Tamil Jaffna culture. Thus, while some of the other castes did have distinctly different cultures, they were made to feel different or ashamed, with many of the oppressed castes aping Vilella culture to achieve social mobility in their lives. She said this was a prevalent yet unfortunate phenomenon that had taken place over time, obliterating non-dominant caste cultures along the way, which as a phenomenon were not sufficiently studied or documented.

On that note, the academics of Jaffna (a few of whom attended the conference) came in for severe criticism from both speakers and the audience, for not researching or critically analysing caste oppressions enough. So also were criticised the local media, who were perceived as not covering the matter in depth.

Ajith Balasooriya, a visiting academic from Colombo University, brought up a caste-related phenomenon he had observed in Jaffna that neither the local media nor the Jaffna academics appeared to be covering; the oppression of the palmyra industry. While outside the peninsula, Jaffna's cultural identity is deeply entwined with the palmyra industry — within the peninsula, the industry either doesn't receive much support or is covertly oppressed — because it is handled by an oppressed caste.

“At supermarkets and handicraft shops in Colombo, entire aisles are dedicated to palmyra products but the shelves are often empty. The sales staff tell us that there is not enough supply to match the demand. Yet over here in Jaffna, I am told that of the four million palmyra trees standing in the North, only about four percent is being utilised. The rest are going to waste. Mostly because only a certain caste engages in the industry, and even they have been made to feel so ashamed of it that many of them do not practice it if they can avoid it,” said Ajith.

## **Education and Schools**

Regarding education, Akalya noted that to date, discriminatory practices continued in the enrolment of students at schools. “I saw on a school admission form that parents had to fill to enrol their child in Grade 1— details had been asked about the parents’ income, educational levels attained, and even whether they owned land. What has the parents’ income or education (which would knock out many of the oppressed castes’ parents), and especially their ownership of land, got to do with their child’s education?”

Udayani Navaratnam, Women’s Development Officer in Jaffna, endorsed Akalya’s statement with an anecdote of her own: “We know of a certain school that knocks out applicants based on their addresses — They use the addresses to perceive if a child comes from a dominant caste or not. So oppressed caste parents who want to enrol their children in that school have now learned to give fake addresses — thereby ensuring that their children are given a seat which would otherwise be denied them.”

Many more aspects of historical and contemporary caste structures as well as the way forward to address them were explored at the conference by other speakers and during lively participant interaction. These will be explored in a follow-up article.

*Saturday, 22 October 2016*

*[Courtesy: <http://www.ft.lk/article/575291/Jaffna-Conference-held-to-explore-and-redress-caste-oppression>]*

## **Iron Cages for War Victims**

### **Press Release**

*20<sup>th</sup> December 2016*

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement denouncing Cabinet approval to impose prefabricated steel houses for those rendered homeless by the war.

The Ministry of Resettlement is now planning to impose on the people of the Districts of Kilinochchi and Mullaitheevu, a part of the earlier scheme to provide 65,000 houses prefabricated steel houses, which was already rejected by the people of the District of Jaffna. The Cabinet has authorized the construction of 10,000 prefabricated steel houses in the above districts by the multinational company ArcelorMittal. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly condemns the stubbornness of the Ministry of Resettlement to provide the homeless with prefabricated steel houses which are totally unsuited for the lifestyle and long term habitation of the people and will in effect be iron cages. The Party urges that a scheme to provide these people with brick houses should instead be implemented.

Initially ArcelorMittal, the iron and steel multinational, proposed to build these houses at a cost of 2.1 million rupees each. But it was opposed by the public, mass organizations, parliamentarians and Provincial Council members. The proposal seemed to have been abandoned as a result was. But the Ministry in its arrogance to impose the scheme on the people has obtained cabinet approval for it.

The cost per house has now been revised to 1.6 million rupees. Still a far better brick house can be built for much less with local labour and materials; and many of the homeless have already benefitted from schemes to build brick houses. Under the circumstances, what is the

justification to impose on the people steel cages in the name of prefabricated housing built by a foreign company using unsalable steel? The obstinacy of the Ministry and approval by the 'Good Governance' regime raise questions about ulterior motives. It is highly questionable why a government which waxes eloquent about development has opted to make way for a foreign company rather than choose a local housing scheme.

Hence the Party calls upon the government to take into account the opposition of the people in need of houses and others concerned and abandon the proposed steel prefabricated houses in favour of a scheme for brick housing. That will be true assistance free of ulterior motives that the government could deliver to a desolate people who have lost family, property and housing because of the war.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary, NDMLP

## **An Anti-People Budget**

### **Press Release**

*16<sup>th</sup> November 2016*

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party the following statement on the Budget for 2017.

The Budget for the Year 2017 put forward by the present government led by Maithripala Sirisena and Ranil Wickremesinghe referred to as the "Good Governance" regime exposes its true essence and the wrong direction in which it is heading. The Budget contains proposals for further expansion of the foreign import-based economy at the expense of an economy based on agriculture, small industry, fishery and local production. The Budget, thus, paves the way to closely bind the whole country and its economy with neo-colonial, neoliberal globalization.

The Budget has been drafted with liberalized trade, privatization, and welcoming of finance capital as the basic economic policy. As a result, the toiling masses including workers and peasants and the lower middle

classes face economic suffocation and starvation. Meanwhile, the Budget offers tax concessions and benefits to the upper crust of society comprising ten percent of the population and the comprador capitalists, foreign investors and big businesses associated with them, and to political forces of the ruling classes that safeguard their interests. Thus there is no doubt that the budget that is being currently debated in parliament is an anti-people budget, and the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly opposes it.

The Budget has been designed to conform to conditions laid down by the IMF as a requirement to provide a loan of 1.5 billion US Dollars as well as to attract foreign investors and finance capital. Indirect taxes that are to be levied, especially the 15% VAT, to reduce budget deficit will subject the entire toiling masses to severe difficulty in their day to day life.

While minimal financial allocations have been made towards agriculture, small industry and fishery, allocation has been curtailed for the educational and health sectors, whose privatization has been given inducements.

The Finance Minister has proposed drastic increases in taxes for mobile telephones, tariff for water supply and penalties for traffic offences among others. Thus this budget can be viewed as one which will directly and indirectly ruin the toiling masses and the lower middle classes. Thus the Budget demonstrates that this government does not constitute a regime of good governance but is an anti-people government, and the Party appeals to the people of the country to strongly oppose it.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary, NDMLP

## **A Fair Demand**

### **Press Release**

*14<sup>th</sup> November 2016*

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party issued the following statement on behalf of the

Party Politburo on the demand of the Public Health Workers of the Jaffna Municipal Council.

127 cleaning services workers in the Public Health Services Section and 197 workers in the Works Department and other sections of the Jaffna Municipal Council, who have served on a casual/temporary basis over the past six to seven years, have been demanding that they should be made permanent employees. But the Municipal Council administration has kept rejecting the request. Under these conditions, public health and other workers have been on strike since 7.11.2016 to press their demands. Permanency of appointment is fundamental to the sustenance and livelihood of the workers, and their demand is fully justified.

The Party strongly condemns the arrogant dismissive attitude of the Jaffna Municipal Council administration and the top rung of the Northern Provincial Council administration towards the demands of the workers, and urges that the demands are fulfilled immediately.

The reason why workers demand permanency is not to lead a life of luxury but to be able to survive and secure their livelihood as well as to secure their lawful entitlements such as pension. It is in no way just to dodge the issue of permanency of the deprived workers in a way that will threaten their employment and livelihood. It is also unjust to threaten to dismiss the workers who are on strike and to intimidate them with proposals to seek alternative ways to get the work done. It is uncivilized for the administrators of the Jaffna Municipal Council and some ministers of the Northern Provincial Council to take a hierarchical attitude and treat the workers as dregs of society.

In the 1970's, with Mayors Alfred Duraiappa and A Visvanathan and Special Commissioner CVK Sivagnanam at the helm of the Jaffna Municipal Council, the workers launched struggles based on various demands and on several occasions succeeded in securing rights that were denied to them. Thus the Party urges that they should persevere in struggle to win their demand, and expresses support.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary, NDMLP

## Message to Sri Lanka Ambassador for Cuba in Sri Lanka

### Revolutionary Salutations to Comrade Fidel Castro Ruz

Dear Ambassador for Cuba

We note with great pain the departure on 25th November 2016 of Comrade Fidel Castro Ruz, Commander in Chief of the Cuban Revolution.

Kindly convey our message of deep appreciation of the services rendered by Comrade Castro to the oppressed people of the World.

His leading role in the liberation and the revolutionary transformation of Cuba has been an inspiration to the entire oppressed people and nations of the world for nearly 58 years and will remain so for a long time to come. His sustained brave defence of the Cuban revolution and socialism as well as his support for several other countries, especially in Latin America and Africa, in facing the most vicious imperialist conspiracy and aggression has been exemplary, especially during the most difficult years for Cuba as well as socialism, with his firmness in principle all along was a pillar of strength to people struggling for social justice.

The example set by Cuba in serving the people — especially in addressing essential social needs — under his guidance, which continued even after his formal stepping down as leader but without abandoning active interest deserves emulation by all nations.

No number of words will suffice to express our appreciation of Comrade Castro.

We conclude with our Fraternal Salutations to a Great Revolutionary and Leader of Humanity whose loss is enormous not only to Cuba but to the entire humanity.

Fraternally Yours

SK Senthivel

General Secretary

New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party of Sri Lanka



## Revolutionary Tributes to Comrade Castro

Meetings were held on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016 at five venues across the country by the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party and the Mass Movement for Social Justice to pay revolutionary tribute to the great revolutionary leader Comrade Fidel Castro Ruz who passed away on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

**Jaffna:** Comrade S Thevarajah chaired the meeting organized by the Jaffna Regional Branch of the Party and Comrades SK Senthivel, K Thanikasalam, T. Sri Prakash and S Thanujan addressed the meeting.

**Vavuniya:** Comrade N Pradeepan chaired the meeting organized by the Vavuniya Regional Branch. The meeting was addressed by Comrades V Mahendran, Chandrapadman, Mahendran, KK Arunthavaraja, N Praveena and R Rajesvaran.

**Matale:** Comrade David Suren chaired the meeting organized by the Matale Regional Branch. Comrades S Mohanraj, Jazeema Ismail and Manivel Rudra also addressed the meeting.

**Ragala:** Comrade P Mariyathas chaired the meeting organized by the Ragala Regional Branch of the Party, and Comrades S Mohanarajan, Ragala Panneer and Semmalar Mohan.

**Colombo:** The meeting organized by the Mass Movement for Social Justice was chaired by Dr S Sivasegaram, and the main address was by TG-Z MeeNilankco. The talk was followed by discussion and films on the life and politics of Comrade Castro.

## International Day of Struggle to Save the Natural Environment

A meeting was organized by the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party on 12 November 2016 under the banner of the International Coordination of Revolutionary Parties and Organizations (ICOR) in Jaffna to mark the International Day of Struggle to Save the Natural Environment.

The speakers were Comrades SK Senthivel, K Thanikasalam, S Sivasegaram and S Thanujan. The talks emphasized the dangers posed by the growing environmental crisis, the dominant role of capitalism in creating and aggravating the crisis and the significance of the anti-imperialist struggle to the struggle to protect the environment.

## **Political Public Seminar**

The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, Matale Region conducted a public seminar titled “Will the Governance Regime Relieve the Toiling Masses of their Sorrows?” in Matale on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2016. The well attended meeting was chaired by Comrade David Suren, Matale Regional Secretary of the Party. Comrade V Mahendran, National Organizer addressed the Meeting in Sinhala and Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the Party, delivered the main address in Tamil. The discussion that followed was in both languages.

## **Signature Campaign**

The Hill Country Mass Organization for Social Justice organized signature campaigns in the Ragala–NuwaraEliya region and in Matale protesting against the Collective Agreement between the Employers Federation and leading Trade Unions in view of the deceptive nature of the agreements thus far and the contemptuous way in which the renegotiation of the agreement due in 2015 has been handled. There was strong favourable response from plantation workers and the public.

\*\*\*\*\*

# I am an Unconquered Lamb

## *Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd*

I am born as a lamb  
In the meadows of caste  
All around me were wolves  
Educated abroad to be nationalists  
My competition on the grass land  
Was seen as anti-national.  
My knowledge of the land, water, forests  
Was seen as meritless madness.  
My awareness of myself  
Was seen as Un-Indian absurdity.

They wanted to swallow me  
Yet I survived as I am not EKALAVYA  
I advanced as I am not BALIRAJA  
I declared, I am Not a Hindu, as I am not KABIR  
I know the language that they never knew  
I rejected the authority of all wolves  
I operated outside their ideology  
I am Ilaiah Shepherd  
Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd

*[Released on the occasion of 64th Birthday of Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, reputed scholar and Dalit activist. Source:*

<http://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/NewsDetail/index/9/8871/I-Am-An-Unconquered-Lamb>]

**O BHARATIYA BRAHMINS**

*O Brahmins of Bharath and the World*

*You want to crucify me*

*Knowing that I can't resurrect,*

*As I am not Jesus Christ.*

*But, I will follow that Star,*

*As I am an Indian shepherd.*

*I will not destroy your temples*

*But, I will destroy all our shackles,*

*As I follow only the God of Equality.*

*Good, you tell all lies about me*

*You abuse me as Iligadu*

*I do not abuse the abuser,*

*But, lay down my life for the abused.*

*I turn my inside out*

*I am now Ilaiah Shepherd*

*Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd.*

Published by V Mahendran of 15/4 Mahindarama Road, Mt Lavinia  
Phone, Fax: 011 2473757; E-mail: [newdemocraticmlparty@gmail.com](mailto:newdemocraticmlparty@gmail.com)  
Website: <http://www.ndmlp.org/>

Printed at Comprint System, HL 1/2 Dias Place Colombo 12  
Phone: 011 7201738