

## Can Prabhakaran do a Yasser Arafat? (1993, November 21). *The Sunday observer.*

*"Much of the suffering endured by humanity during successive epochs of history has been the result not of evil or wickedness but of bigotry. The world has never been lacking in persons who were unshakably convinced not only that they were right, but that no point of view opposed to their own was worth a moment's consideration."*

— Prof. G. L. Peiris.

# Can Prabhakaran do a Yasser Arafat?

By H. L. D. Mahindapala

When the PLO leader Yasser Arafat stretched his hand out at the south lawn of the White House to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the world heaved a sigh of relief hoping realistically not for the end of violence overnight but for the dawning of peace by ending bigotry that has torn apart two tribes born from the same father, Abraham. What happened on the south lawn was only a beginning, an expression of a willingness to abandon the bigotry that bred the gun culture and seek alternative methods of accommodating each other, even though what was given by the Israelis was far less than what was demanded in "the armed struggle for the liberation of Palestine." There was courage in Yasser Arafat's decision to swallow his pride and shake hands with the Jews whom he had sworn to eliminate from the map of the Middle East.

There was greater courage in the pioneering move of President Sadat who paid with his life for daring to shake hands with the Jews.

Reynolds. Political observers expect that their summit meeting, scheduled to be held in December, will evolve a formula for peace, even if it means leaving the IRA out of the peace package.

### Arabs and Jews

Well, if the Arabs and Jews can do it, if the blacks and whites in South Africa can do it, and, hopefully, if Catholics and Protestants can do it, will it be impossible for the Sinhalese and the Tamils to do it? No. None at all. What is needed is a major shift from the entrenched positions, beginning particularly from the dark phase of 1983. On the side of the Tamils, there is a growing feeling that the violence which was endorsed and manipulated since the Vadukoddai Resolution of 1976 and used craftily to forge a new identity, has now outlived its usefulness. Initially, it was seen as a unifying force. Now it has become a divisive force, driving the Tamils not only out of Jaffna but away from each

other. It has become the war of the weak which is increasingly dependent on the politics of killing for the sake of a ruling Mafia in Jaffna without the original justification for it as a war of liberation for the Tamils, or the Tamil-speaking people.

Even militarily, it has lost the initial momentum. The disillusioned youth are looking for escape routes from Jaffna rather than rushing into the dwindling ranks of the LTTE. To the horror of Tamil parents, the Tigers are now recruiting, according to some reports forcibly, teenagers between 12 and 16 years. The Tigers, no doubt, still retain the capacity to strike selected targets as, and when they please. That, of course, is the advantage of any terrorist movement. But that does not give them the military muscle to carve out a "homeland". In fact, it is their chauvinistic militarism that has undermined their moral and political bases. The Eelamist concept of the "homeland" included the north and east as one Tamil-speaking unit. Much against the popular will of the Muslims in the East the

romantic view of Stalin's Soviet Union, hoping that the future would transform it into a socialist paradise, whilst in reality opting to live in America, if they were asked to make a clear choice.

The political dilemma of Tamils has driven them into a moral vacuum. Except for repeating the mantrams of the past, there is no one to guide them into attainable goals. Why are they drifting in no-man's land? Isn't it because the paradise has turned into a nightmare? Isn't it because the Jaffnaite, who was always

on the promise of delivering them from the oppression of the "Sinhala state". But what has replaced the "Sinhala state" is a political monstrosity which is repulsive to the traditional Tamil psyche. Besides, it has not given the security to the Tamils as promised in their propaganda. But the Tamils today behave very much like the socialists during the Stalinist era. They preferred to adopt a

check the terrors unleashed in his name in the North? Isn't it because he is weary of war? Most of all, the pragmatic Tamil man knows that he has lost the support of the international community. No movement which shot so speedily into the highest spots in the international agenda dropped so dramatically to sub-zero level. It is basically because they relied too much on the Vadukoddai Resolution which endorsed violence, or "extra-parliamentary" action. The Jaffna elite relied too much on the "boys"

and it could change further for the better in the south if the Tamils adopt a more realistic attitude towards the new political scene. But there is no leadership to take up the new challenge: They are all looking over the shoulder to see from what direction the next Tamil bullet would hit them. Besides, their minds are fixed irretrievably in the post-1983 phase. They are paranoid about moving away from 1983

the people in line to serve interests of expedient politics. Ostensibly, old bigotry in Jaffna is served as another form of "liberation theology" to people who had suffered but in reality it serves political agents to maintain a tight grip on the minds of the people. Old bigotry also appeals to emotion and not to morality. So having lost the moral base — and also the political base for merging with the Tamil-speaking people of the East — what future is there for the Tamils in the politics of violence?

Isn't the most viable option for all communities in building a multi-ethnic democracy? But the Tamil politicians, who redefined their political parameters in the post-1983 phase to suit their sectarian interests only, are refusing stubbornly to accept the needs of the other communities in reformulating a new peace package acceptable to all communities. Their insistence on merging the North and the East much against the wishes of the Muslims and the Sinhalese of the area, their refusal to compromise on the Srin-

There are nuances and gradations which can be chosen to suit the requirements of a particular situation. Australian federalism is very different in content and degree from Canadian federalism; the federal characteristics of the constitutional structure of India differ fundamentally from German or Swiss federalism, or from the federalism that used to exist in Yugoslavia. American federalism constitutes yet another significant variant on the model.

"Demonstrably, then, there exist a series of choices. Nevertheless, federalism itself is not the only answer to the problem. There are other modalities or structures of devolution which may appropriately be looked at, as viable alternatives. Whatever model is chosen, the irreducible condition is this: that the minority communities must find it possible to retain their self-esteem and dignity and not have cogent reason to believe that they are denied due process or equality of opportunity in matters which are of importance to them."

Homeland



"The Jaffna elite relied too much on the boys to ride into power. Eventually, the leaders who moved and passed the Vadukoddai Resolution had to pay a heavy price. They were dislodged from their traditional political base. They were driven away from their serene way of life ensconced behind the cadjan curtain. And eventually some had to pay the ultimate price with their lives. In Jaffna, the children of the Vaddukoddai Revolution swallowed their fathers"

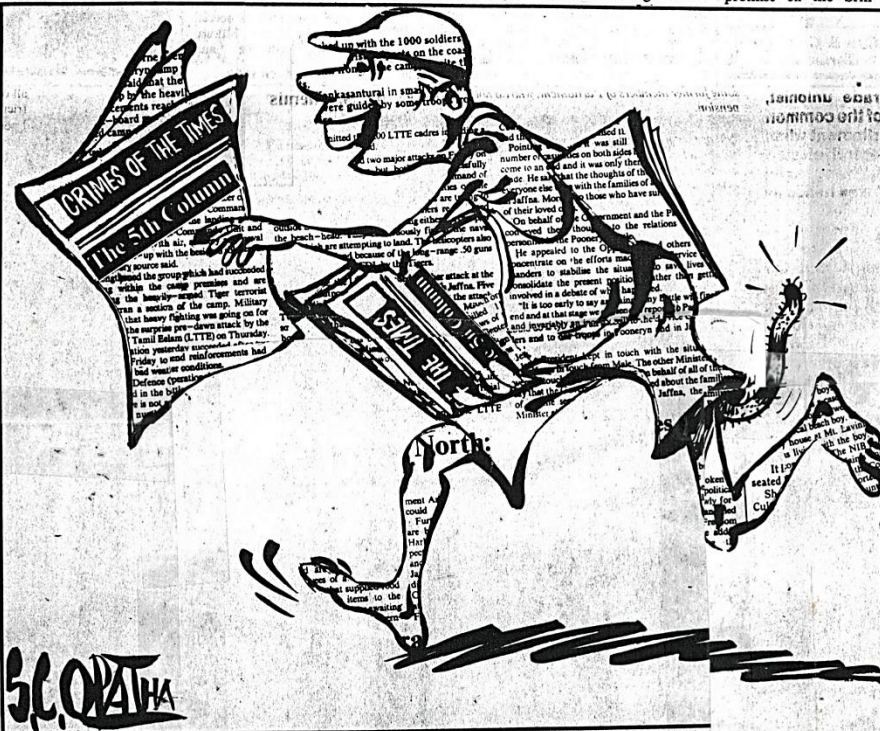
There is also a glimmer of hope emerging in Ireland. The bigotry of Catholics and Protestants crucifying each other seems to take them nowhere. What has emerged from centuries of Christianity is a Mafia-type killing machines on both sides. For instance, the notorious Protestant bigot, nicknamed "Mad Dog" by the Police for killing 12 Catholics, arrogantly twists the Christian commandment "Thou Shalt Not Kill" to "Thou shalt not be caught killing!" This doctrine has given power to the killers without promising any salvation to the divided Irish communities. Disenchanted with violence the war-weary public is, ironically, consoling each other at cemeteries, abandoning their old bigotry reinforced by mutual violence. There is a new mood, arising mainly from the latest escalation of indiscriminate killings of both sides. It has given some credibility to the peace moves led by the British Prime Minister, John Major and the Irish Prime Minister, Alfred

other. The concept of Tamil Eelam lost its original meaning in the intercaste warfare where Tamils killed Tamils first and later when Tamils killed Tamil-speaking Muslims. The concept of Eelam soon became an abominable justification for the liquidation of anybody who was presumed to be a threat to the ruling military clique in Jaffna.

It was different in July 1983. The Tamils locally and internationally held the high moral ground. Then they were seen as the victims of violence. The Tamil propagandist lobby proclaimed at various fora that they had never killed innocent civilians. They rationalised the emerging terrorism of "the boys" as justifiable retaliation against the violence of the "Sinhala state". However, when the relatives and friends of this Tamil lobby became victims of their "boys" they had to climb down from their high horse and withdraw into a moral dilemma which they have never quite resolved yet. The tragedy is that the Tamils have lost their moral base and are left with only a bewildering ambivalent attitude towards both the "Sinhala state" and their so-called liberators in the North.

**Capacity**

Of the two, it is apparent that they certainly prefer the "Sinhala state" to the fake Eelam that holds them captive as prisoners in Jaffna. Rangini (*Broken Palmyrah*) Thirangama and Rajan Hoole, who carries on her work courageously, have documented the horrors of Tamil Eelam. Apart from the theoretical expositions, the living proof of this is the exodus from the North, which is rapidly and also irreversibly depopulating the "homeland" of the Tamils. Tamil families are fleeing not so much the terrors of the war as the terrors that haunt their promised land. Like most terrorist movements, Tiger terrorism has now



Eelaamists went out to define these inhabitants of the East as "Islamic Tamils", implying that they were not descendants of Muslim Arabs but as Tamil Muslims of South India. It is an old debate going back to the turn of the 20th century. But the overbearing chauvinism of the Tamils emphasised, mainly to boost their claim to the East by including Tamil-speaking Muslims, affinities with the language ignoring the ethnicity. When the Muslims rejected this arrogance of the Tamil leaders, Tiger militarism decided to do a bit of "ethnic cleansing" in the East, massacring on one occasion nearly 130 Muslims who were at prayer in a mosque. Tamil liberation became a nightmarish oppression for the Muslims.

**Stalinism**

Like the Muslims, the brutalised and traumatised Tamils of the north are looking for an end to their political dilemma. The myth of Tamil Eelam was based

very conscious of building a neat and safe niche for himself, knows very well that the future is blighted in Tigerland? And because he knows that what is happening in his name goes against his moral grain? Also because he feels guilty that too many innocent lives - some of them precious Tamil lives - have been ruined, or liquidated in his name? And unhappy because his friends, relatives and neighbours have migrated elsewhere leaving him alone to face the music at home? Isn't it because he knows that he is trapped and is never likely to lead a normal life like his friends, relatives and neighbours living elsewhere? Isn't it because he prefers the democratic processes (however defective it may be) to the "warlordism" of the north but he has no freedom to choose? Doesn't his despair stem from the fact that there will be no end to the sacrifices he will be asked to make for the elusive Eelam? Isn't it because some smug expatriate Tamils pay cash

to ride into power. Eventually, the leaders who moved and passed the Vadukoddai Resolution had to pay a heavy price. They were dislodged from their traditional political base. They were driven away from their serene way of life ensconced behind the cadjan curtain. And eventually some had to pay the ultimate price with their lives. In Jaffna, the children of the Vaddukoddai Revolution swallowed their fathers.

**Chelva**

Prof. A. J. Wilson, one of the theoreticians behind the Vaddukoddai Resolution, claimed that his father-in-law, S. J. V. Chelvanayakam's, biggest contribution was to play the role of the father to the people of Jaffna. But there are no father figures in Jaffna today. The Jaffnaite is drifting in a vacuum today clearly because there is absolutely no credible and courageous leadership to guide him. He knows that circumstances have changed in the North and the South

theses from July 1983 which they fail to realise is counterproductive in the search for a solution acceptable to all communities. Furthermore, 1983 presents a sectarian cause of the Tamils only. This has changed in 1993 which is a totally new phase in search of a solution for all communities. The real impediment to a solution is not the unwillingness of the South to accept the new face of 1993 but the intransigence of the Tamils to budge one inch from the phase beginning from July 1983 to accommodate other communities.

**Ideology**

So the Tamil propagandists are bent on keeping memories of a bitter past alive which is another way of preventing the liberation of minds to grasp the new realities. The old bigotry safely enslaves the mind to a limited or fixed point; but breaking away from it to think afresh is dangerous to established ideology. Old bigotry helps to imprison minds and keep

ivasan proposal, their blunt rejection of the Parliamentary Select Committee recommendations adds up to nothing more than extracting their pound of flesh at any cost.

In fairness to the much-maligned southern parties, it must be noted that they had come a long way in meeting "the aspirations of the Tamils". They had even gone to the extent of accepting a form of devolution for power-sharing without calling it federalism. The controversial issues of language, lands, education, jobs, constitutional guarantees, have been worked out and if further refinements are necessary they too can - and should - be developed. But, as Prof. Peiris outlined in his lecture on GANDHIAN IDEALS AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY, there are several forms of federalism. He said: "Moreover, it has been forgotten that federalism is not a split but a spectrum. There is no single, immutable model of federalism.

But both sides can work out such modalities only in a political atmosphere free from violence; but the pressures of violent politics deny the options available in the art of the possible. Violence demands the impossible. It claims that the Tigers are the sole representative of the Tamils. Other Tamils say that's not possible. It claims that there should be a new "homeland" exclusively for the Tamils which the other communities say is not possible. It says that two-thirds of the coastline should be given to 12 per cent of the population. Possible? No, says the rest. So, is there a way out? In Palestine and in S. Africa both sides went out of their way to grab what is available at hand. Both have had arrived at points of accommodation only through compromise. Those who stick to the gun will be forced to look for holes in their heads. But if implacable enemies like the Jews and the Palestinians can shake hands, is it possible for Mr. Prabhakaran to do an Arafat? Pessimists would say never. Optimists say, never say never.