

## THIRD WORLD FASCISM

## Sri Lanka, Eelam Tamils and the Ethical Crime

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Sound, it can be said, is relative to the silence that precedes it. Deeper the silence, louder the noise. There was indeed relative silence in the world on the Sri Lankan war and the Eelam Tamils' struggle, a silence that benefited a fascist state the most. The 'Killing Fields' video of Channel 4 came with a devastating bang and exposed to the world the horror that was Sri Lanka's 'war on terror'. While the news was already old for Tamil activists, something that many have been writing about for long, the powerful visuals of the 48 minute documentary created shock, especially among the ruling elites of Sri Lanka.

The Lankan government went on a hyperbole in its attempts to dismiss the video as false. The army spokesperson rubbished the video as 'propaganda'. Der Fuhrer Rajapaksa, in an interview to his Indian Goebbels, an Indian journalist who was awarded the Sri Lanka Ratna and has remained loyal to the country that gave him that honour, remarked that the video was just a "film". His brother Gothabaya, the defence secretary, was even more forthcoming - in his characteristic chivalrous manner that the Tamils are so familiar with, he wanted to know why one of interviewed war victims was not raped by the army men even when she was "a person so attractive". Others in the Lankan defence were also more or less gender sensitive while commenting upon allegations of rape by the Lankan forces that the video has proved.

There were some comic gestures on the part of other Sinhala politicians as well. Chandrika Kumaratunga, for one, said that after watching the video one would be ashamed to call oneself Sinhalese. When the Lankan Army overran Jaffna in 1995 under her rule, all the atrocities that Lankan Tamils accuse them of today were committed then, maybe on a slightly lesser intensity. If the naked story of Vanni massacre is embodied in the face of Isaipriya today, the face of brutalities under Chandrika's regime were depicted in the stories of Koneswary and Krishanty yesterday. Rajapaksa did not jump from the skies to commit these crimes. The wheels of genocide were set against the Tamils much farther back and Chandrika was as much a spoke in it as Rajapaksa. One thing is clear after the Channel 4 video now. No one can claim innocence over what happened in 2009. It is all a matter of taking sides.

But where is the Sinhala 'civilian' in this debate on genocide? The following is an excerpt from a conversation this writer had with a Jaffna Tamil friend who was personally affected by the war about the supposed progress of 'reconciliation' between the communities of Sri Lanka that Rajapaksa and his PR men were boasting about.

"What do you see when you look at a Sinhala army man?" I asked her.

"A murderer and a rapist," she said.

"Ok. What do you see when you look at a Sinhala civilian?"

"The employer of murderers and rapists."

Further enquiries on 'reconciliation' were unnecessary. There are those who are largely ill-informed of the Sri Lankan situation who would lay the blame of the war on the Lankan leaders alone owing to their being "mere instruments of class rule and national oppression" and/or because they are "puppets of imperialism." Such an argument only partially exposes Sinhala racism for it ignores the essence of fascism in Sri Lanka.

The tragedy in Mullivaikal in 2009, the largest massacre in the history of the Tamils, was celebrated by huge numbers of Sinhala 'civilians' across the island country. Over 100000 Tamils were butchered in the last stages of the war and while people mourn it, remembering their loved ones, the Sinhalese participate in government celebrations. The condition in Sri Lanka bears likeness to that state of a society that Hannah Arendt so famously described as 'the banality of evil.' The genocide of the Tamils in their homelands was not executed by a ruling class and its military alone, it had the wilful consent of the taxpayers-citizens who stood by the state in all its violent measures. Sartre was more explicit in condemning the inactivity of the passive citizen in such societies, if one did not protest when the government that one voted for commits genocide, then one was "undoubtedly a torturer". What else explains the absolute absence of any major anti-war demonstrations from the Sinhalese side while there have been massive outpourings of support for the jingoistic rallies celebrating victory over the Tamils? How does one account for the anti-war Socialist ideologue Siritunga Jayasooriya receiving less than 0.36% of the total votes in the Presidential elections after the war while Rajapaksa, with his fascist diatribes, emerged with a thumping majority as a national hero?

Fascism has its roots deep in Sinhala society and the ruling class alone cannot be blamed for it. The Sinhala today is in a unique position in history like never before. He is much like the German 'civilian' on the dawn of Nazism, and he will be remembered by the Tamils in the future the same way a Jew today would think of the German in 1938. If the regime he voted for is drunk with power, he is inebriated with a sense of permanence. He denies that anything is wrong with the regime he supports. Even if the truth, as naked as the executed Tamil civilians shown in the C4 video, is thrown in his face, he will still stare with adoration at his national emblem and rally behind calls for unity. He is the ethical criminal who gives the power to the war criminals in the state. Then, the fascist at the top is not an aberration, he is the rule, while the likes of Viraj Mendis and Jude Fernando who live in exile for supporting the Tamils are oddities—much like what Oskar Schindler was in Nazi Germany. 'The Sinhala civilian is an employer of murderers and rapists'.

There is another layer that seems supposedly 'in between' in the whole conflict. The liberal multiculturalist, the likes of those who run 'groundviews' and other such outfits that use sophisticated jargon like 'post-conflict reconciliation', 'coexistence', and 'citizen's alternatives' to cover what they really are - apologists of state oppression. They are indeed a spectacle - they endorse all identities provided it does not hurt the general identity of 'Sri Lankan', which for the Eelam Tamils means occupier of their lands. And like all multiculturalist hypocrites, their organizations and positions resolutely deny the existence of the unique Eelam Tamil identity, the identity of an oppressed people asserting which they sacrificed over 200000 lives, serving the purpose of no one but the oppressors and their ideology.

Collaborating with them are a group of Tamil intellectuals, an elite, steeped in liberalism and groomed in NGO politics. There are those who deny that there was a genuine liberation struggle led by the Tigers. There are those who say that the war on the LTTE was justified, but the government needs to give the 'right reasons' - as if any such reasoning would assuage the wounded sentiments of those who asserted their rights to their homeland and were thus hunted. And of course, there are those who say that let bygones be bygones. Against this academic onslaught, where does the politics of the Tamil patriots stand?

The 'groundviews' from Vavuniya, Kilinochi and Jaffna, the views of the Tamil natives, are this—the average Sinhala colonizer views the Tamil as a defeated person, to be pitied or to be held in contempt, if not to be trampled upon. The average Tamil views the Sinhala as a sadist who turned the other way while his army committed genocide in his name, a torturer, if not a killer. If the Sinhala colonizer's gaze makes of the Tamil an object, it is because it is backed by an occupying army. If the Tamil's gaze shows despair, a precursor to rage, it is because the most committed defenders of her interests, the LTTE, have only recently been militarily defeated, a defeat that the occupier flaunts in her face as the end of her genuine political aspirations. The raw material required for explosion, resentment and shared memories of persecution and injustice is prevalent throughout the territory of Eelam. And this is the truth in united Sri Lanka, no matter what its apologists like Sarva-nanthan and Ahilan Kadirgamar might like to portray.

Here is a parallel. In colonial Algeria, there were compradors who betrayed their fellow nationals, collaborating with the occupiers, for privileged positions in the bureaucracy. Among Algerians, there were men who fattened themselves with the crumbs that colonialism threw, with the blood money of their countrymen, and could even buy luxurious villas in the occupying power's metropolis. And there were Algerian intellectuals who sought to be more French than the French themselves, who would justify a peaceful coexistence between oppressor and oppressed, violator and violated, with colourful jargons and sophisticated prose. Did the FLN wage the Algerian independence struggle for such men? Or did they wage it for those countless men and women who saw the brutal face of French occupation and chose to assert their rights and their identity, for the martyrs of Setif and Phillippeville?

Eelam struggle was, is, and will be waged for those Tamils who assert their legitimate right to their homeland, to be different and to secede, at the risk of sounding sentimental, for the thousands of young Tamil men and women who chose to fight and die even when they had a choice to collaborate and live, and at the risk of sounding metaphysical, for the vindication of their faith that one day there will be a land called Tamil Eelam that they can call home. So, the Tamil liberal who infests the elite circles of Colombo 7, who speaks of 'post-war reconciliation' or 'citizen activism' without addressing the fundamental political demands of the Eelam Tamils is as guilty of ethical dishonesty as his intellectual bedfellow, the Sinhala liberal who, like all liberals of oppressor nations, primarily serves his nation's interests only. The Eelam Nation is still facing war - as even a cursory glance of Gothabaya's recent statements would indicate. The reality of war, as Sartre observed, is always Manichean and all discourses of 'plural identities' and 'multiculturalism' is nothing short of a farce. And the intellectuals who take refuge in such arguments are as guilty of crimes as the rapists and murderers and their employers. □□□

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