

Rising from the Ashes

Tragic Episode of the Jaffna Library
(A Reference Guide for Researchers)

N. Selvarajah



Thesam Publications

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2021

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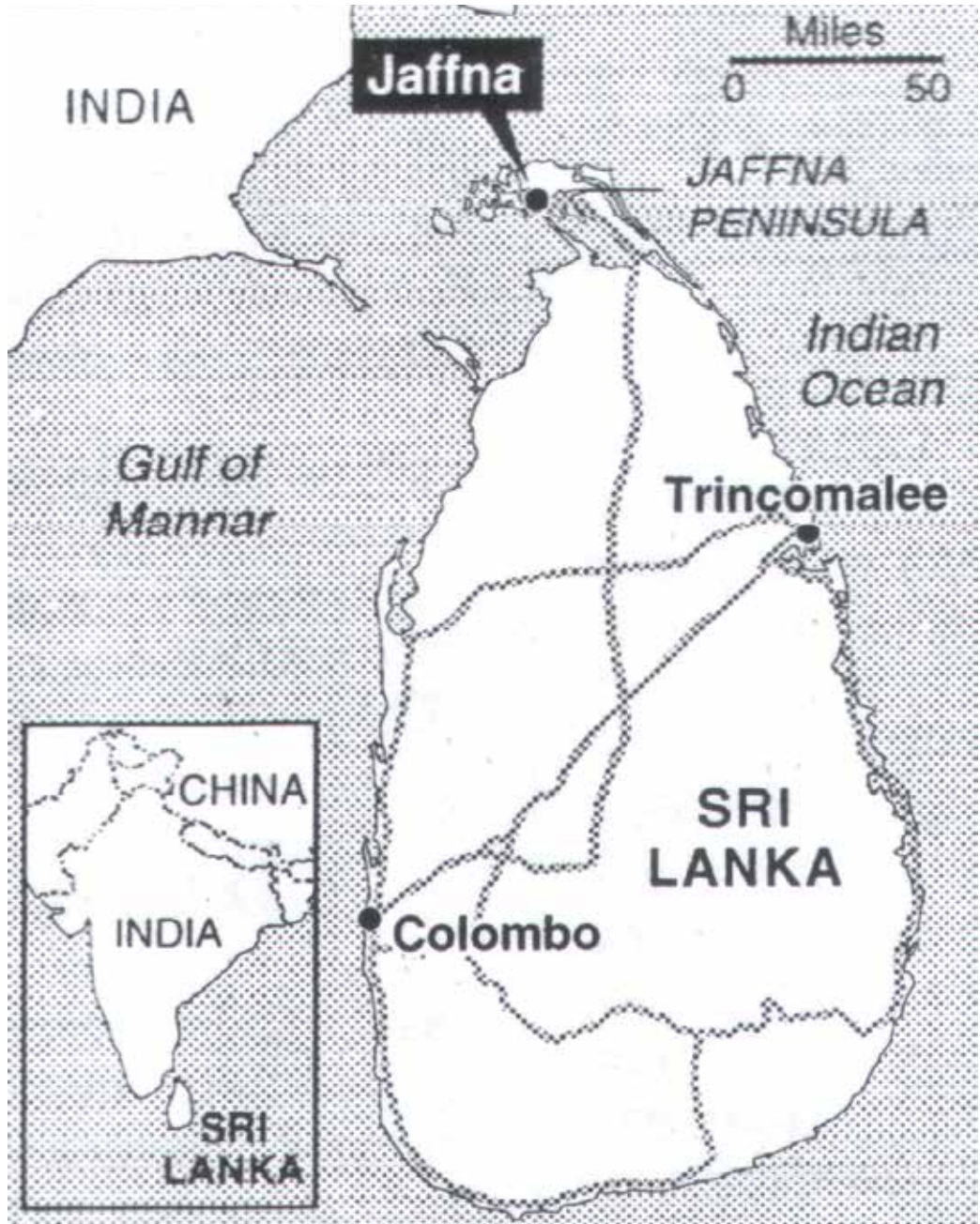
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Introduction

The Jaffna Public Library was burnt down in 1981 by the Sri Lankan Police and mobs on the eve of the District Development Council elections. The fortieth remembrance anniversary falls on 1st June 2021. This publication was originally printed in 2003 and this revised edition was created to mark the fortieth year.

The library, considered as one of the finest in South Asia containing a cultural heritage that comprised around 97000 priceless books and about 150 years old irreplaceable Tamil manuscripts, lost its entire collection when the original two storeyed building was destroyed.

The destruction of the library had a particular resonance. Many Tamils came from the arid North, where they are in the majority, and had risen to national prominence in the professions and the civil service through a devotion to education. The attack on the library was seen as an assault on their aspirations.

Professor K.Sivathamby has pointed out that, in the Tamil psyche the burning of the Jaffna public library in 1981 constituted a major symbol of what was aimed at them- a total annihilation of all their intellectual resources. If one makes a careful study of the Sri Lankan Tamil literature during this period of resistance, one would find 1981 as a major dividing line. The burning of the library mobilized the entire population against the oppressive actions of the State.

A similar compilation was made in the year 2001, in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Burning of the Jaffna Library. It was a bi-lingual publication mostly aimed at the Tamil reading public. It has been urged that a similar compilation must be made in order to bring home the historical facts of the Library to the international community.

Until 1981, it was a Municipal Library, serving a geographically defined public. After its rebuilding in 1984, the scope of the servicing area expanded to the whole Jaffna District. Now the library has been politically rather than academically exposed much wider than ever thought.

At this point, the main aim of this compilation is to find means of helping the Jaffna Municipal Council in planning and developing the Library so as to serve the Tamil Society at home and abroad. It should be noted that the Jaffna Public Library will never be the same as during the pre 1981 era, when it was serving as a "public" library to a limited membership. It will never be erased from our

minds. It should be an archive of our society's intellectual wealth and a centre for our historical records without any bias.

During the District Development Council Election period between end of May and early June 1981 there was mass unrest and tension in the North. An unofficial curfew was in place and violence erupted. As a result to this day, there is still confusion over the exact date of when the Jaffna Public Library was burnt down.

Various opinions are present between the Sinhala community and within the Tamil community, as to the original cause of the fire, the political reasons and influences and the exact date of the event.

This publication comprises of articles from both communities showing their opinions. In order to keep true to the writers' article no words or dates of the documentations have been altered. As such, it is hoped that the reader will be able to understand the true situation at the time of the historical event.

This publication has been compiled with selected articles published in the various media. I wish to thank to all those writers who have recorded their messages of facts and views on the Jaffna Public Library, through various newspapers, journals and websites. The focal point of their thought is our priceless library, its history, development, destruction and redevelopment.

I wish to thank all those publishers whose newspapers, journals and websites helped to carry these articles. Their references appear along with the articles reproduced in this work.

This publication gives broad information on the library, its' development, destruction, renovation and various personal thoughts and views pertaining to the library. This is not a complete compilation. There are several publications which I could not retrieve. I hope that they would be included in future editions. The aim of this publication is solely for research and documentation purposes.

N.Selvarajah

(Bibliographer- Noolthettam)

3rd January 2021

History Can't be Wiped Out by Fire

N.Selvarajah

For a very long time authorities have been following the practice of destroying opponent's ideas and views by burning publications, libraries and also by eliminating those whose ideas they do not approve.

The authorities subjected the Alexandria library to arson. Manuscripts written on papyrus, palm leaf and slate were destroyed because those publications conveyed opinions and views contrary to those held by the opponents. This practice continues even in this age of the printing press.

In 213 BC emperor, Shih Huang-ti made himself the head of an establishment consisting of distinguished scholars. In fact, it was he who was mainly responsible for the building of the Great Wall of China. It was during his reign that he decided to commission the publication of the Great Chinese history. At the same time he instructed the destruction of all works that opposed astrology except works on Agriculture, and Science He ordered such works to be burnt.

It is believed that the magic circle surrounding him influenced him in this decision to destroy the literary works. He also proclaimed that any discussions pertaining to the contents of the proscribed books were subjected to capital punishment. Unfortunately he did not have the opportunity to rule for a long time. The Great Chinese history that he commissioned did not materialise. Works on psychology won worldwide acclaim. In 206BC, those who succeeded him allowed ancient Chinese literature to flourish. Archives were created. Ancient history was carefully nurtured.

The Alexandria Library established 283 BC in Greece had thousands of archives. In Athens, hundreds of copies of drama were there. The great collection of Aristotle were there too, Greek literature, and new scientific thoughts were flourishing. Even though all these works were destroyed, Aristotle's thoughts began to spread and did not disappear,

In Tamil Nadu, during the rule of the Cholas there are references to 'Saraswathi mendicants' there is references to libraries that had the charter from the Kings They were called Saraswathi Palaces. All these were destroyed during the wars and yet, Tamil literature and Hindu Vedas have since survived.

In Hitler's Germany in May 1933, we are reminded of similar atrocities meted out by the Emperor Shih Huang-ti, Nazis confiscated books, and put them in big piles and burnt them. Joseph Goebbels, Germany's minister of information during that time said that history was being re-written and that during the next 1000 years Germany will give birth to a new era. But what actually happened was, the burnt ashes finally covered the faces of those officials with black soot!

If we look at the contemporary times, those who decided to wipe out Tamil history burnt the Jaffna library. They also burnt the building of a newspaper. Finally, what did they realise? After nearly 21 years, a new library building is now taking shape. The burning of the library, indeed, was a catalyst to inform the whole world the problems faced by the Tamil nation. The struggle for independence by the Tamil people thus has been well publicised. This was the result of the arson committed by the government Caretakers with a matchstick!

In Bosnia, the library built in 1990 with 155,00 rare books and the University library with over one and a half million books were burnt down by the Serbs in August 1992. The fire raged for over 3 days. What was the result? It is now history; various organisations worldwide have been collecting books to replace the ones that were burnt. Like in Sri Lanka, this incident helped to present the Bosnian problem to the whole world.

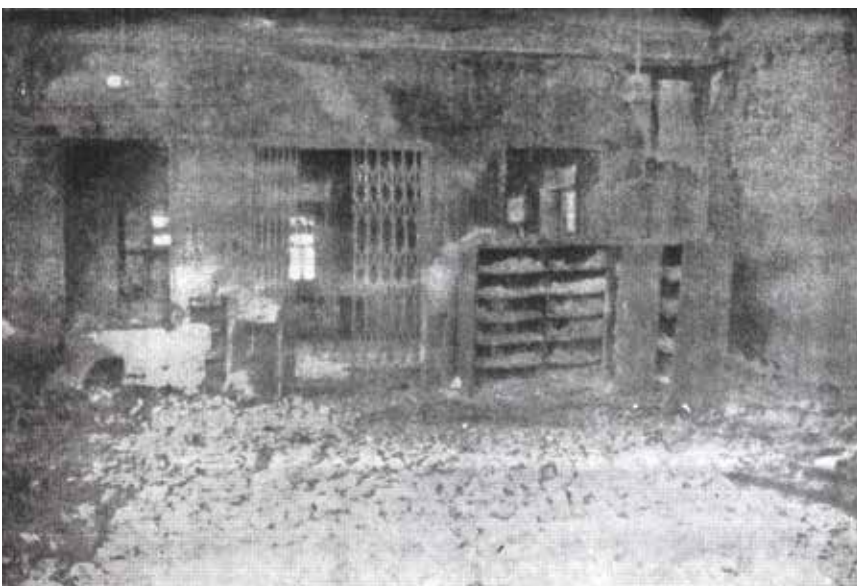
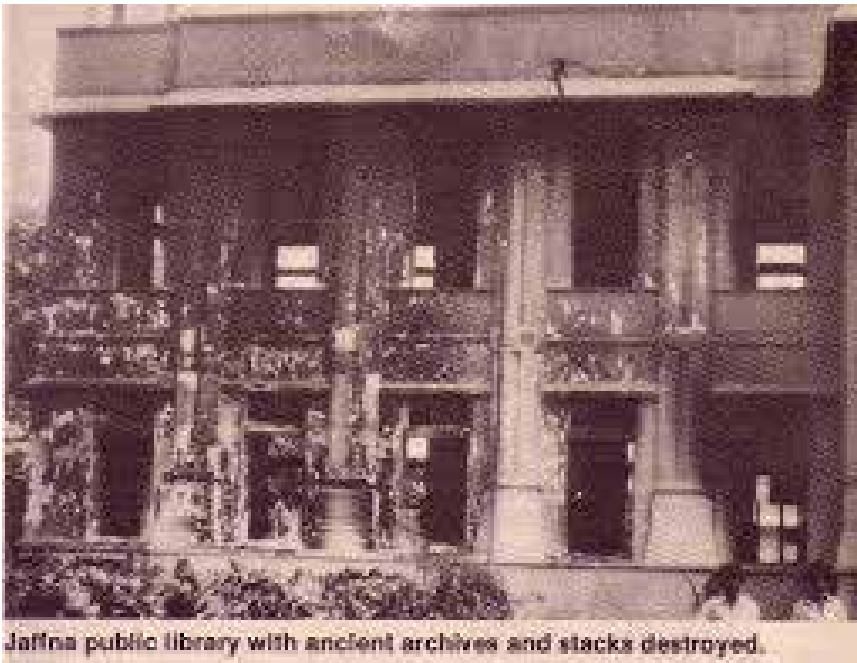
In March 2000, the friends of Cuban libraries alleged that books donated by Spain to the Cuban University libraries, were either burnt, buried or hidden and never reached the recipients. It should be noted that most of the works related to human rights and others were mainly children's books.

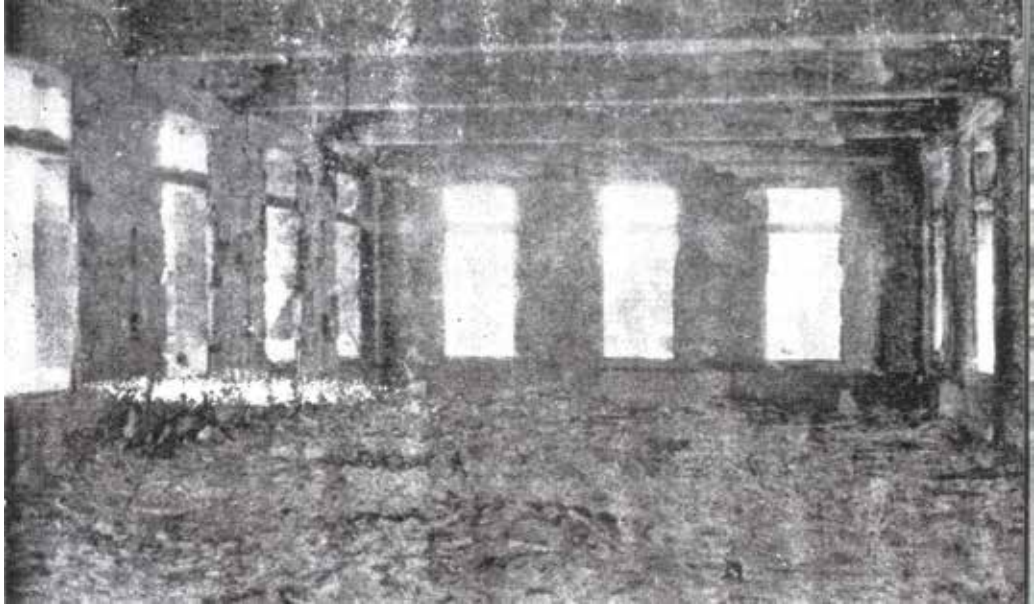
There is the Fatwa proclaimed by the Ayatollah on Salman Rushdie for the publication of his book, 'Satanic Verses'. This was not a well read or known publication. This act of fatwa gave lot of publicity thus contributing to the eventual increase in sales of this publication.

There is also the J K Rowling's, Harry Potter - 'The sorcerer's Stone' that was made into a film. A group of Christians led by a priest Jack D Brock met with the congregation in USA. The book was burnt as it was supposed to highlight magical virtues, which were in antithesis to Christian teaching. What really happened finally was this incident gave publicity to the poor author who subsequently became a millionairess.

One can destroy literary works, only temporarily. How long are the authorities going to continue to follow this practice of arson? To remove pages from books that are contrary to their views can only be suppressed for a very short time. These are the very pages that would form the backbone for further publications and the spread of much wanted knowledge; can't the authorities learn from these lessons?

(Thesam-London, July-September 2003, Issue 9)





Jaffna Library

A general meeting of the Jaffna Library took place on the evening of the 5th inst. at 7pm. Mr. W.C.Twynam, C.M.C. the patron of the institution was the Chairman, and the following members were present, Dr.Grenier, Rev.Mr.LeBracy, Messrs,F.Bowes, T.Changarapillai, S.T.Arnold, B.Santiagopulli, S.Olegasagaram, Alex Toussaint, S.P.Lawton, A.Kanagasabai, Chas. Strantenbergh and W. Woodhouse.

The secretary having read the report, which was satisfactory, the following resolutions were moved and seconded viz: 1st moved by Mr. Alex Toussaint and seconded by Mr. Lawton, that the report now read by the Secretary by adopted. 2nd moved ny Dr. Grenier seconded by Rev. Mr. Labrooy, that a vote of thanks be accorded to the retiring office bearers and committee members for their valuable services rendered to this institution. C.Stratenberg, Secretary and Treasurer, Messrs Alex Toussaint, S.A.Allagakoen, S.Nagalingam, A.Kanagasabai, T.Changrapulli be elected the Secretary and Mr. Lawton the Treasurer, and that the following gentlemen be elected to a Committee for this year, and till the next annual general meeting of the subscribers, viz. Messrs,Bowes, Alex Toussaint, C.Strantenbergh, S.Olegasagaram, B.Santiagopulle, S.A.Allagakoen, S.Nagalingam, Kanagasabai, and Arnold.

Moved by A.Kanagasabai and seconded by C.Stratenberg, that a vote of Thanks be accorded to W.C.Twynam, Esq.CMC the Patron and Chairman for his kindness in presiding at this meeting.Proposed by Mr. Woodhouse that the subscription be raised to Rs.1.50 per month seconded by Mr. Strantenbergh. Amendment proposed by Mr. Kanagasabai that there be two classes of Subscribers, one of Rs. 1.50 and the other Rs.One, that those paying 1.50 may have the privilege of having the papers and periodicals sent home, seconded by Mr. Bowes.Amendment carried nemcon.

Mr. Alex Toussaint proposed and Mr. Santiagopulle seconded that the Committee should take steps to obtain an increase of grant from Government by Rs.50. Mr. Bowe proposed that the Committee take steps to see if the Inspector of School's building can be obtained for the Library. Seconded by Dr. Grenier. Carried. Proposed by Mr. Woodhouse and seconded by Dr. Grenier "That the Committee be instructed to write to Messrs Mudie & Bros with a view of obtaining books from them, carried.The president thanked the meeting for the welcome and the vote of thanks. Suggested by the president that all members who shall be over 3 months in arrears by 30th June 1894, shall cease to be members, Carried.

(The Overland Ceylon Observer, 10.04.1894.
Reprinted in Sunday Observer 10.04.1994).

Library's Baptism by Fire

K.Nesiah

The last recorded destruction of a library in the sub-continent was towards the end of the 12th century when a Central Asian horde under Khilji annihilated Nalanda University, the famous Buddhist seat of learning in North India, with a three-block library, one nine storeys high.

It was then nearly 800 years after that, on the inglorious first of June 1981, the priceless collection of nearly 100,000 books in the Jaffna Public Library was consigned to the flames and a building which was the architectural pride of the North severely damaged.

It was in the early 40's that District Court Secretary Chellappah pioneered the movement which resulted over the decades in one of the finest libraries in the land. It is a heart-rending spectacle to those associated with the movement from the beginning.

The grimmer is the tragedy because the perpetrators of this dark deed were no other than those who were expected to be custodians of law and order and the moment chosen for their misguided action was the eve of the election of what was believed to be the conciliatory gesture of the District Development Council.

Would that we realised that the loss is not just to the North and to learning among the Tamils? It is a deep dent in the country's intellectual system and loss, too, to the International community of learning. So don't send to find for whom the bell tolls!

But, did not A.N.Whitehead say that at the terminal period of the Greek and Roman contribution to European civilisation, the fate of that civilisation was saved by the fortunate eruptions of barbarians and the rise of two new religions, Christianity and Islam?

Learning did not cease in India with the dismantling of Asia's then best collection of manuscripts at Nalanda and the disbandment of the then world's finest assemblage of scholars.

Was it not in subsequent centuries that Indian scholars, writers and scientists make their great contributions in other Indian languages besides Sanskrit, Pali and Tamil, and in languages like English.

Or, to take an example from another field, was it not following the Great Fire of 1666, London emerged as a great city of brick, stone and concrete And in some ways the world's capital city, built on ashes of an erstwhile timber built town? It has often times happened that such deep tragic experiences in the history of a people have proved a turning point in their life where their turned a disaster into a triumph.

It is heartening therefore to note that, on the advise of the Library Committee the city fathers have decided to immediately reopen in an improvised place, the children's section and the periodical and newspapers rooms. It is fulfilling an obligation cast by the Human Rights Declaration in Article 26 and 19. In due course, even before the library is re-built, let us hope that the Library will resume its role as an agent of continuing education. And in the long term it could become the centre or a system of libraries in the region and partake, too, of some of the characteristic, of a national library for the Tamil people of Sri Lanka.

Towards re-designing and rebuilding the Library in due time, the tax-payer apart, men of means and men with the architect's genius have an obligation. Towards



re-stocking the library, there is an obligation on the part of those who have books or could get at books, regardless of geographical frontiers. But the immediate obligation is to citizens of the city.

Will every family contribute one book each and those who can, books by the tens and by the hundreds?

The purpose of a general public library is somewhat the same as that of education as conceived today. If education seeks to implant a sense of heritage and impart a vision of the future in the minds of the young and continue through life to stress that sense of heritage and enlarge that vision of things to be, so does a modern public library.

The library then is much more than a classified stock of books and audio-visual aids. It has to be in its building design and mode of functioning an educational institution within its walls and without. Well may we say that a city's public library is the eye of the city by which the citizens are able to behold the greatness of their heritage and behold the still greater greatness of their future.

**(Morning Star –Jaffna, June 1981; Saturday Review – Jaffna.,
Vol. 3, No. 15, 26.5.1984)**

“ What sort of Animals are these?” (President Speaks...)

“What sort of animals are these?” cried Sri Lanka President Mr. J.R.Jayawardene referring to the widespread violence to which the Tamils of Sri Lanka were subjected to during July-August.

Speaking at the All Ceylon Executive Committee of the United National Party meeting held on September 4, the President said:

“ I speak more in sorrow than in anger. Recent events throughout the Island North, Centre and South show that the religions we profess do not seem to influence for the good some of our people. I regret that some members of my party have spoken in Parliament and outside words that encourage violence and the murders, rapes and arson that have been committed.

“How many of our party leaders throughout the country have spoken against the recent acts of violence? What is the example we as leaders of the governing party are setting to our followers and to the rest of our countrymen? I must have reasons to be proud of the party of which I am leader.

“If I cannot, it is better for me to retire from the leadership of this party and let those who believe that the harming of innocent people and property that has happened recently is the way to solve the problems that face this multi-racial multi-religious and multi-caste society,take over the leadership of the party.”

(Tamil Times - London, October 1981. Vol.1, No.1, pp.4)

Statement- Citizens Committee for National Harmony (Extract)

“The burning of the Jaffna Public Library on the night of 1st June 1981 resulting in the destruction of every book including several rare historical collections is a great loss not only to the people of Jaffna but also to the entire nation. The sense of outrage which all humane persons feel at the destruction of this repository of knowledge, culture and historical records would, we feel, make them want to express their concern over this national calamity and demonstrate their solidarity with the people of Jaffna, and build up goodwill and desire to undo as far as possible the damage that has been done.”

Extracts from a statement issued by the Citizens Committee for National Harmony.

High ranking members of the Buddhist and Christian clergy have joined other well-known Sri Lankans from all walks of life to support the appeal for funds to rebuild the Jaffna Library. Among these are:



Ven. Andrurupotha Gunaratne mahanayake Thero, Ven Pandit W.Seelaratane mahanayake Thero, Ven Pandit Moratuwe Sranaratune Anunayake Thero, Ven Madihe Pannaseeha Nayake Thero, Pandit Akuretiya Amarawansa Nayake Thero (Principal Vidyalankara Pirivena), Ven. Buddiyagama Chandraratne thero, Ven Baddegama Samitha Thero, Archnishop Nicholas Marcus Fernando, Bishop Leo Nanayakkara OSB, Bishop B.Deogupillai, Bishop Marcus Fernando, Bishop Lakshman Wickremasinghe, Dr. P.R. Anthonis, Dr. James T.Rutnam, LTP manjusri, H.W.Jayawardene, QC, Iranganie Serasinghe, Harry Pieris, Henry Jayasena, Fr. Joe de Mel OMI.

(Tamil Times - London, October 1981. Vol.1, No.1, pp.3)

Appeal- Citizens Committee for National Harmony

The Citizens Committee for National Harmony has launched an appeal to “persons of all walks of life to contribute towards a fund for the rebuilding of the Jaffna Public Library... We think that the nation as a whole should expiate this crime by our forces of law and order”. The signatories are: Mr. Godfrey Goonetilleke, Tissa Balasuriya, O.M.I., Prof.E.R.Sarathchandra, Bp. Leo Nanayakkara, O.S.B., Dr. Gunadasa Amarasekera, Dr. Carlo Fonseka, Mr. Norbert Mawalage, Mr.G. Kurukulasuriya, Ms.Kusala Abhayawardhana, Mr. Victor Gunawardena, Rev. Celestine Fernando, Sr. Helene Marguerite H.F., Mr. S.Nadesan, Q.C., Mr. A.Samarajeeva, Mr. H.A. Ian Goonetilleke, Mr. M.M.Mohideen, Ms.Bernadeen Silva, Rev. Yohan Devananda, Mr. Hector Abhayawardhana, Mr.K.Kandasamy, Sr. Rose Fernando, P.H., Dr. B.Kaneshalingam, Mr. Rex Wanigaratne, Mr. Donovan Moldrich, Mr. Richard Dias, Ms. Manel Fonseka and Al-Haj S.M.A.Raschid.

A statement by the Committee also notes: “We are distressed that persons, so far undetected, have had recourse to the killing of some political leaders and police officers - 19 of them since 1977”.

“It is even more sad and condemnable that the forces of law and order have also been the agents of killing and mass destruction particularly in this present instance.

“ The Government itself must take its due share of the responsibility for this brutal assault by the agents of the State, even if “the police force in that area was on the verge of a virtual mutiny” as reported to Parliament by a Minister. No government may renounce responsibility for the actions of its agents. The country would appreciate a more responsible and sympathetic attitude from the members of the government than has been hitherto forthcoming.

“We urge the Government-to extend the terms of reference of the Commission of Inquiry that it intends to appoint to include the period up to the end of the recent Emergency and the acts of murder and destruction caused by all parties.

“ We further recommend that the Commission to be appointed consist of at least three members who are judges of the Supreme Court or of the Court of Appeal or retired Judges of the Supreme Court.

(Lanka Guardian, 1st July 1981)

Tamil Times (London) October 1981, Vol.1 No.1

AID POURS IN

The Mayor of Jaffna and the Organising Committee in charge of the restoration work of the Jaffna Public Library have been inundated with aid and promises of aid from several sources.

In response to a call made by the Bishop of Colombo the Rt.Rev. Swithin Fernando, the 100 Anglican congregations within the Colombo Diocese contributed the special Sunday Collection at the Church Service on 5.7.81 for the restoration of the Jaffna Public Library which the Bishop said, though an institution in the North was “a national wealth”.

The Library was re-opened for use on 2.7.1981 in the Jaffna Town Hall.

Part of the Jaffna Public Library which was burnt down will not be rebuild, the Mayor said, but stand as a monument in remembrance of the incidents that took place in Jaffna between May31, and June 8 this year.

Tamil Times (London) October 1981, Vol.1 No.1

DONATION- THE COLOMBO MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

The Colombo Municipal Council at its meeting on Monday 27.7.81 has decided that members should volunteer contributions from their allowances to re-build the Jaffna Public Library. The motion was moved by Mr. D.W.Abeyakoon, an SLFP member of the Colombo Municipal Council.

Tamil Times (London) October 1981, Vol.1 No.1

DONATION FROM MALAYSIAN MP

A Generous Gift of Rs. 50,000 has been made by Mr. Ponniah, the Malaysian M.P., to the Mayor of Jaffna towards re-equipping the Jaffna Public Library.

Cultural Incineration

Text of a letter written by Mr. H.A.I.Goonetilleke, the eminent Sri Lankan Librarian and Bibliographer to Fr. Paul Caspersz, the President of the Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equality

17, Wijerama Lane,
Nawinna,
Maharagama.
4th July 1981

Fr. Paul Caspersz
President, Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality,(MIRJE)
6 Aloe Avenue,
Colombo 3.

Dear Paul,

Knowing you as I do, I can well imagine how totally grieved and depressed you must be over the loathsome tragedy of a month ago, and I can see, from your reports of May and June 1981, the concerned and resolute determination with which you have pursued your unhappy investigations, and written of them with a clinical and cleansing passion and perception.

In the entire catalogue of carnage, arson, pillage and murder which you have so courageously documented, the complete destruction by an act of calculated and cold-blooded incendiarism of the splendid Jaffna Public Library is the most wounding to the sensibility of our brethren. In the North, and must outrage the humane feelings of every person in the land, whatever his political, racial or religious persuasion.

Containing over 90,000 volumes, this notable library was the second largest public library in the island, and possessed a rich and diverse collection of valuable literary material, some of them irreplaceable. It was a distinct cultural landmark in the Peninsula, and served the purposes of an intellectual resource centre.

The wanton and senseless despoliation of a major repository of knowledge and learning is a national calamity and, perhaps, the most dastardly episode of vandalism in the modern history of Sri Lanka.



The gutted building is a grim testimonial to savage and bestial tendencies of communal hate, and even more saddening and shocking is the knowledge that the blindly chauvinist exponents of this cultural incineration were apparently operating under the sinister patronage of public sector terrorism. No level of official explanation(and, curiously enough, none has been forthcoming so far), or far-fetched apologies conjured up to suit each face-saving speculation can excuse this irrational atrocity.

State-sponsored fanaticism was let loose in the city of Jaffna between May 31st and June 4th 1981, and Mayhem and terror stalked the streets, but with an implacable resolution and unmatched courage the Jaffna voter, brushing the ashes off his stricken face,administered a fitting coup-de-grace to his faceless enemy. In the indomitable spirit of this unquenched ardour, the library will surely rise again to light the way and shine like a brighter beacon. May the restitution of this gap in the national heritage become a symbolic cornerstone of amity, concord and unity between the people of the South and the North.

MIRGE has a vital and valuable role to play as a catalyst and healing agent in the long- drawn-out process of recovery of faith, hope and trust, remembering all the while that the most significant ingredient in any prescription for communal harmony is understanding, enlivened by love and steeled by fortitude in the face of continuing adversity.

Yours sincerely,

H.A.I.Goonetilleke

(Tamil Times - London, Vol.1, No.1, October 1981;
Saturday Review – Jaffna,
Vol.3, No.16, 02.06.1984)

Indictment Against Sri Lanka Destruction Of Jaffna Public Library, May/June 1981

"Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advance and its benefits."

Article 27.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Virginia Leary: Ethnic Conflict and Violence in Sri Lanka - Report of a Mission to Sri Lanka on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists, July/August 1981

"...a large group of police (estimated variously from 100-200) went on rampage on the nights of May 31-June 1 (1981) and June 1-2 burning the market area of Jaffna, the office of the Tamil Newspaper, the home of the member of Parliament for Jaffna and the Jaffna Public Library... The widespread damage in Jaffna as a result of the actions of the police were evident during the visit of the ICJ observer in Jaffna in August...

The destruction of the Jaffna Public Library was the incident which appeared to cause the most distress to the people of Jaffna. The ICJ observer heard many comments from both Sinhalese and Tamils concerning the senseless destruction by arson of this most important cultural centre in the Tamil area.

The Movement for Inter-racial Justice and Equality sent a delegation to Jaffna to investigate the June occurrences. The delegation's report, in referring to the arson of the Public Library, stated, 'If the Delegation were asked which act of destruction had the greatest impact on the people of Jaffna, the answer would be the savage attack on this monument to the learning and culture and the desire for learning and culture of the people of Jaffna... There is no doubt that the destruction of the Library will leave bitter memories behind for many years'...

The 95,000 volumes of the Public Library destroyed by the fire included numerous culturally important and irreplaceable manuscripts... The government should lead a major national and international effort to rebuild and develop the Jaffna Public Library destroyed by arson by police in June 1981. Such an effort

would evidence the respect the government for the cultural rights of the Tamils, help to remedy a serious injustice done to the Tamil community and contribute to restoring Tamil confidence in the government...

A primary concern of the government should be the physical security of the minority Tamil population and the avoidance of future communal violence so frequently directed against Tamils in the past... In this regard the government should pursue a vigorous policy of investigation and prosecution of police officers responsible for the burning of many areas in Jaffna in May/June 1981".

Nancy Murray, the State against the Tamils in Sri Lanka - Racism and the Authoritarian State - Race & Class , Summer 1984

"With several high ranking Sinhalese security officers and two cabinet ministers, Cyril Mathew and Gamini Dissanayake (both self confessed Sinhala supremacists), present in the town (Jaffna), uniformed security men and plainclothes thugs carried out some well organised acts of destruction.

They burned to the ground certain chosen targets - including the Jaffna Public Library, with its 95,000 volumes and priceless manuscripts, a Hindu temple, the office and machinery of the independent Tamil daily newspaper Eelanadu.. Four people were killed outright. No mention of this appeared in the national newspapers, not even the burning of the Library, the symbol of the Tamils' cultural identity. The government delayed bringing in emergency rule until 2 June, by which time key targets had been destroyed."

Statement of Sri Lanka Opposition Parties,in June 1981 quoted in Satchi Ponnambalam,Sri Lanka, the National Question and the Tamil Liberation Struggle, Zed, 1983

"More than 100 shops have been broken, burnt, looted; market squares in Jaffna and Chunnakam look as if they have been bombed in wartime; several houses have been looted and badly damaged; the house of the MP for Jaffna has been reduced to ruins; several deaths have occurred at the hands of the state armed personnel; the headquarters of the Tamil United Liberation Front in the heart of Jaffna has been destroyed; the public library in Jaffna - the second largest library in the island with over 90,000 volumes - has been reduced to ashes.

Even more reprehensible are the facts that these outrages should have taken place when cabinet ministers and several leaders of the security services were personally present in Jaffna directing affairs, and that a section of the security services, which had been sent there to maintain law and order, had been directly involved."

Francis Whelen, New Statesman and Nation, 17 July 1981, visiting Jaffna soon after the destruction of the Library

"Today its rooms are thickly carpeted with half burnt pages, fluttering in the breeze which comes through broken windows. Inspecting the charred remains, I met a heart broken lecturer from the local teacher training college. 'The Sinhalese were jealous of the library, he said. 'I used to come here every day to prepare lectures and tutorials. Now I shall have to go to Colombo and some of these books aren't available even there'."

Orville H.Schell, Chairman of the Americas Watch Committee, and Head of the Amnesty International 1982 fact finding mission to Sri Lanka

"It is regrettable that the government did not institute an independent investigation to establish responsibility for these killings (in May/June 1981) and take measures against those responsible. Instead, one police officer involved was promoted and emergency legislation was introduced facilitating further killings."

- Sri Lanka President Premadasa speaking at a Muslim College in Puttalam in October 1991 in the aftermath of the impeachment resolution against him sponsored by UNP dissidents led by Mr.Lalith Athulathamudalai and Mr. Gamini Dissanayake.

"During the District Development Council elections in 1981, some of our party members took many people from other parts of the country to the North, created havoc and disrupted the conduct of elections in the North. It is this same group of people who are causing trouble now also. If you wish to find out who burnt the priceless collection of books at the Jaffna Library, you have only to look at the faces of those opposing us."

The Parliamentary Debate

"The TULF MPs took their battle into parliament. They moved a vote of no confidence in the government, on the grounds that the May-June 1981 violence in Jaffna had been state sponsored and carried out by Sinhalese Ministers and high ranking government officials present on the spot.

The government responded by going on the offensive. What followed was the most racially poisonous verbal vendetta in Sri Lanka's parliamentary history. In the debate that followed one Sinhalese MP called for the return of the traditional death penalty which 'tears the offender's body limb by limb'.

They sought to remove the (Tamil) Leader of the Opposition. To general amazement they brought in a motion of no confidence in him on the grounds that he did not 'enjoy the confidence of the Government'!. The Speaker overruled a point of order that the motion was not within the powers of the House." - **Satchi Ponnambalam, Sri Lanka: The National Question and the Tamil Liberation Struggle, Zed 1983**

"If there is discrimination in this land which is not their (Tamil) homeland, then why try to stay here. Why not go back home (India) where there would be no discrimination. There are your kovils and Gods. There you have your culture, education, universities etc. There you are masters of your own fate....

If the sleeping Sinhalese wake up to see the Tamils trying to establish a Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, then things may not be quite calm. It would be advisable for the Tamils not to disturb the sleeping Sinhala brother. Everybody knows that lions when disturbed are not peaceful." - **Mr.W.J.M. Lokubandara, M.P. in Sri Lanka's Parliament, July 1981.**

"If we are governing, we must govern. If we are ruling, we must rule. Do not give into the minorities. We are born as Sinhalese and as Buddhists in this country. Though we are in a majority, we have been surrendering to the minority community for four years. Let us rule as a majority community". - **Mrs. Wimala Kannangara M.P., Minister for Rural Development, in Sri Lanka's Parliament, July 1981**

"Now, Sir... what should we do to this so called leader of the Tamils? If I were given the power, I would tie him to the nearest concrete post in this building and horsewhip him till I raise him to his wits. Thereafter let anybody do anything he likes - throw him into the Beire (lake) or into the sea, because he will be so mutilated that I do not think there will be life in him. That is war." - **Mr.D.M. Chandrapala, Sinhala M.P. for Kundasale in Sri Lanka's Parliament, July 1981.**

"Since yesterday morning, we have heard in this honourable House about the various types of punishment that should be meted out to them (Tamil Parliamentary leaders).

The MP for Panadura (Dr Neville Fernando) said there was a punishment during the time of the Sinhalese kings, namely, two arecanut posts are erected, the two posts are then drawn toward each other with a rope, then tie each of the feet of the offender to each post and then cut the rope which result in the tearing apart the body. These people also should be punished in the same way..

...some members suggested that they should be put to death on the stake; some other members said that their passports should be confiscated; still other members said that they should be stood at the Galle Face Green and shot. The people of this country want and the government is prepared to inflict these punishments on these people." - **Mr. G.V.Punchinilame, Sinhala M.P. for Ratnapura in Sri Lanka's Parliament, July 1981.**

(Tamil Nation, <http://www.tamilnation.org>)

Jaffna Public Library Restoration Project

(Published by Jaffna Municipal Council, in 1981 as a bi-lingual (Tamil & English) pamphlet in 15 pages. This publication contains the following Introduction followed by an Appeal by the Jaffna Mayor Mr. Rajah Visuvanathan. This pamphlet also contains detailed drawings of the proposed library building and some black and white photographs of the burnt down library building.)

GENERAL APPEAL BY THE JAFFNA MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

IT was the first of June, 1981, and the hours of the night, when the priceless collection of 97000 books and some rare manuscripts in the Jaffna Public Library were turned to ashes and a building which was the architectural pride of the North burnt and severely damaged. Seven times since the fateful year of the Island's Independence (1948) have the Tamils of Ceylon suffered the humiliation of assault and arson, killing and loot, and the rape of their women, but the attempt to burn the repositories of their ancient culture hurts beyond measure. It hurts the more since the perpetrators of this dark deed were no other than the custodians of law and order maintained by the taxes of citizens, and the moment chosen for their misguided action the eve of the election of what was believed to be the conciliatory gesture of the District Development Council.

THE movement for a free public library in the City came in the wake of Universal Franchise (1931) and the man behind was K.M. Chellappah. The year after Independence, Jaffna got municipal status and its first Mayor Sam A. Sabapathy secured the approval of the Municipal Council to construct a specially designed Library Building. The noted Indian Architect Narasimha Rao drew the plans for a building in Dravidian style, in consultation with Library Expert S.R. Ranganathan, and the first stage of the new building was completed and occupied in 1959. A grateful people remember Father T.M.F. Long, The Asia Foundation and the Indian High Commission as among those who helped to make their dream a reality. During these two decades and more the Library has developed rapidly, its book stock including such collections as the Ananda K. Coomaraswamy Collection and the Isaac Thambiah Library collection. Many seminars and exhibitions have been held.

WOULD that be realized that the loss is not just to the North and to learning among the Tamils? Is it not a deep dent in the country's intellectual system and a loss too to the international community of learning? So don't send to find for whom the bell tolls.

BUT, it has often times happened that such deep tragic experiences in the history of a people have proved a turning point, where they turned disaster into a triumph. For example, was it not following the Great Fire of 1666 that London was rebuilt, worthy to be something like the World's Capital City, thanks to the genius of Sir Christopher Wren?

IT is heartening therefore to note that on the advice of the Library Committee, the City Fathers have commissioned the well-known Architect V.S.Thuraiajah to plan for an enlarged and somewhat redesigned building to serve the functions of a Public Library in the context of today. The new edifice, normally the second stage of Narasimha Rao's original plan and still faithful to its architectural style, will be a three- storeyed block, with its entrance facing the West. The symbol of the harp, recalling Swami Vipulananda's epic writing on this theme, will adorn the central high tower over the new main entrance. Be it noted, the Architect's services are a labour of love.

WHEN completed, the new Public Library should provide ample room for all the services of a modern Library conceived as an Educational Centre-Lending Library, Children's Library, Newspapers and Periodical Room, Reference Library, Conference Room, Exhibition area and Mobile Library Room, Special Collection Room, Audio Visual Library, Study Rooms, Auditorium, not least, provision of a specially designed access to the disabled in their wheeled chairs. It is hoped to have a system of Branch Libraries, with some of these facilities, in different parts of the City. And, in the long term, it could become the centre for a system of Libraries in the District and partake too of some of the characteristics of a National Library for the Tamil people of Ceylon.

IT is for this noble cause that the Mayor of Jaffna, Raja Visuvanathan, has made his appeal to institutions and individuals in every continent to help rebuild the Library and expand its services.

THE JAFFNA MAYOR'S PUBLIC LIBRARY APPEAL

The wanton destruction of the Jaffna Public Library - a magnificent building that contained a collection of 97 000 books and rare manuscripts is perhaps the most shamefully tragic event in the island's history. It is the more tragic in that it was

deliberately done by the custodians of law and order who plunged the city in arson and assault during the first week of June.

Jaffna it is well known enjoys the reputation of being the intellectual and spiritual centre for the Tamils of Ceylon, thanks to an illustrious line of savants, statesmen and godmen. The names of Srila Sri Arumuga Navalar, Ananda K.Coomaraswamy, Fr. Gnanapragasar, Sir Ponnambalam Brothers, Leaders of Tamil Nationalism, G.G.Ponnambalam and Thanthai S.J.V.Chelvanayagam, and last but not least Ven'ble Siva Yoga Swamigal stand out among a huge host of immortals.

The Jaffna Public Library on its 50 years of existence attained a stature worthy of this tradition. It is with reverence and gratitude that people remember stalwarts like K.M.Chellappa who mooted the idea effectively, the first Mayor of Jaffna Sam A.Sabapathy who ventured on the building project with the Council's approval. Fr. T.M.F. Long who sailed the high seas to collect funds, and institutions like the Asia Foundation and the Indian High Commission which contributed substantially to fulfil the project.

While we deplore with the civilised world this barbarous act of cultural assassination we feel, we should not lose time in restoring this symbol of our peerless heritage. We are therefore launching an appeal for funds from friends and well-wishers, and we are confident you are in sympathy with our efforts.

“Adversity sees miracles” in the words of Shakespeare; and we are emboldened to reconstruct modern library, with better amenities and more spacious accommodation while conforming to the original plan in its essentials.

We expect that you will want to contribute the maximum you could spare for a worthy cause like this that is estimated to cost approximately Fifteen Million Rupees.

The Jaffna Public Library Trust Fund Account No. 2893 has been opened in Bank of Ceylon, Jaffna and we shall be grateful if you can send your contribution direct to the Bank, with advise to us.

Thank you,
Yours sincerely,
R.Visuvanathan
Mayor, Jaffna

**THE JAFFNA MAYOR THANKS
ALL THOSE WHO HAVE RESPONDED
TO HIS PUBLIC LIBRARY APPEAL**

It was the 1st of June, 1981 and during the curfew hours of the night of the then prevalent emergency when the priceless collection of 97,000 books and some rare manuscripts in the Jaffna Public Library which was one of the largest in South East Asia were turned to ashes and a Dravidian style architectural building- the pride of the North- was burnt and severely damaged.

The civilised world has condemned it as a cultural genocide and a crime against humanity. But the attempt to burn the repositories of their ancient culture hurts the Tamils beyond measure since the perpetrators of this dark deed were no other than the custodians of law and order maintained by the tax-payers.

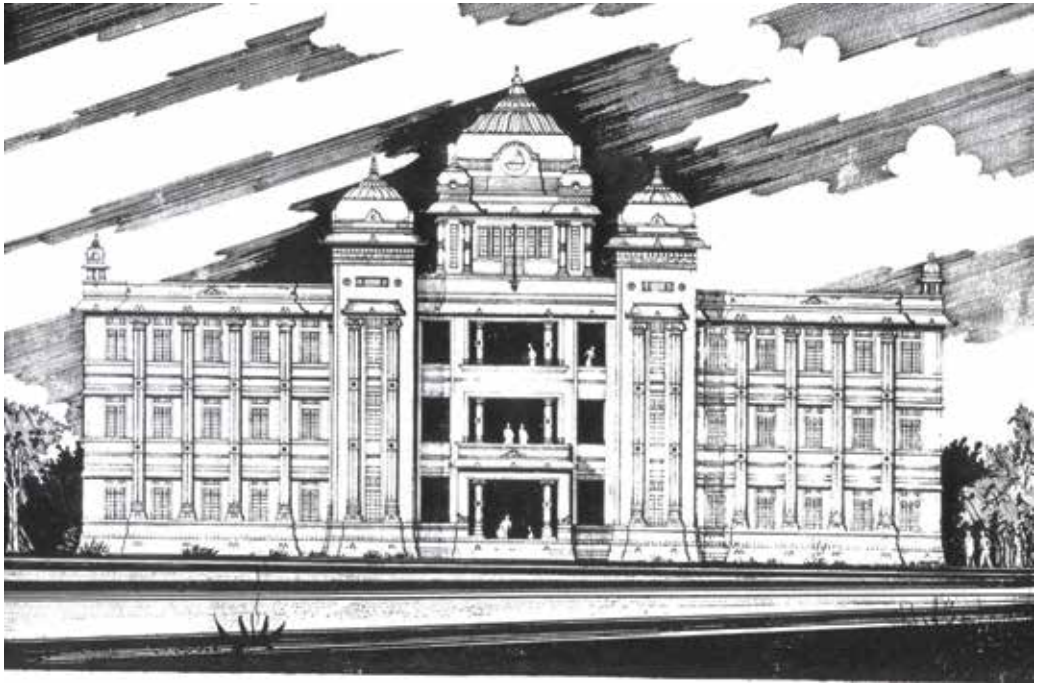
On the advice of the Library Committee, the City Fathers have commissioned the well known Architect Mr. V.S.Thuraiajah to plan for an enlarged and somewhat redesigned building to serve the functions of a Public Library in the context of today.

When completed, the newly restored Public Library shall provide ample room for all the services of a modern Library conceived as an educational centre- Lending Library, Children's Library, newspapers and periodicals section, Reference Library, Conference room, Exhibition area and a Mobile Library room, Special collections room, Audio Visual Library, Study room, an Auditorium etc. not least with the provision of a specially designed access to the disabled in their wheel chairs.

The new edifice, nominally the 3rd Stage of Mr. Narasiman's original plan and still faithful to the Dravidian Architectural style will be a two-storeyed block with its entrance facing the west. The symbol of the harp recalling Swami Vipulananda's epic writing on this theme will adorn the central high tower over the new main entrance.

Hence, the restoration and reconstitution of the Jaffna Public Library is being taken up in two parts. The 3rd stage of the original plan will appear as an extension to the existing building at an estimated cost of Rs. 30,17,632 for which the work has already commenced and is in progress.

Whereas the restoration and reconstitution of the Northern Wing of the existing building has been completed at an estimated cost of Rs. 2,93,296. We are glad to inform you that we have resumed the basic services of the Jaffna Public Library in a nuclear format as from the last Human Rights Day (i.e. on 10th December, 1982) and with the books donated by supporters and well-wishers the Reference Library has already started functioning there. The newspapers and periodicals sections



that were earlier housed for want of space in a portion of the Jaffna Town Hall too has now been shifted there. We are hoping to open the Children's Section and the Lending Library by the end of April, 1983.

The sum so far collected as at April 14th 1983 towards the restoration and reconstitution of the Jaffna Public Library is Rs. 44,54,907.72

Recently the American Embassy has donated books on two different occasions to the tune of about 4 lakhs and has promised further assistance in the future as well.

The World Council of Churches which has already donated in cash a sum of Rupees One and a half Lakhs to the Jaffna Public Library Trust Fund through the Jaffna Christian Union, has again donated a further sum of Rupees One Million to the same Organisation for the purchase of books to be donated to the Library in its name.

We have already received a consignment of forty four tea chests full of books from London from the Standing Committee on Tamils' affairs there and another consignment of eleven tea chests full of books from Melbourne Eelam Tamil Association. Although we would very much like to do so, in order to make this report brief, we beg to be excused for not mentioning all the individual contributions in detail.

While expressing my sincere thanks and appreciation to all those Institutions and individuals in every Continent for the help and assistance they have rendered to rebuild the Library and expand its services. I take this opportunity on the eve of

relinquishing my post as Mayor of Jaffna, to request every one of you to remember to observe the forth-coming 2nd anniversary of the wanton destruction caused to the Jaffna Public Library in a fitting manner this year and continue to do so thereafter on the 1st of June every year.

Kindly circular this letter of mine so as to convey my thanks and gratitude to every single individual who has contributed for this noble cause.

R. Visuvanathan

Mayor of Jaffna

Town Hall

Jaffna

18.04.1983

(Reprinted from an eight page bi-lingual pamphlet titled “The Jaffna Mayor expresses his gratitude” published by the Jaffna Municipal Council and printed by St. Joseph’s Catholic Press, Jaffna on 18.04.1983)

Tamil Times (London) February 1982, Vol.1 No.5
Foundation Laid For Library

The foundation stone for the new building to house the Jaffna Public Library was laid on February 7, 1982 by Mr.R.Visuvanathan, Mayor of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

To be built at a cost of Rupees Fifteen Million the new edifice, nominally the second stage of the noted Indian Architect Narasimha Rao's original plan and still faithful to its architectural style, will be a three-storied block with its entrance facing the west. Architect V.S.Thurairajah who was commissioned to carry out the project has volunteered to do it as a labour of love.

The Jaffna Mayor has made a public appeal for funds. The Jaffna Public Library Trust Fund Account No. 2893 has been opened in the Bank of Ceylon, Jaffna. Contributions could be sent direct to the bank with advice to the Mayor.

Saturday Review (Jaffna) 26.05.1984
Public Library Rises Out of the Ashes

The third stage in the reconstruction of the Jaffna Public Library which was destroyed by khaki-clad Gundas from the South on 1st June 1981, will be inaugurated on 4th June.

At noon on that day, A.Amirthalingam, the Secretary-General of the Tamil United Liberation Front will ceremonially open a wing constructed at a cost nearly Rs. 3 million. In the first stage of reconstruction, the northern wing, the lobby and ground and first floors were repaired. The second stage centred on the restoration of the children's section. This work cost nearly Rs. 240,000.

On the recommendation of the Lionel Fernando Committee, Rs.2 million was granted to the Library as compensation from the President's Fund. Another Rs. 3.2 million was raised through public donations.

So far, about 45,000 books have been received by the Library as gifts from various individuals and organisations, both in Sri Lanka and abroad. About 35,000 of the books have now been catalogued.

At the time of the destruction, the Library housed nearly 100,000 books, some of which were not available elsewhere.

At the function on 4th June, a donation of books from South Indian Universities is expected to be handed over to the Library by Mr.S.J.S.Chatwal, High Commissioner for India.

Arrangements for the function are in the hands of the Library committee headed by Mr. S.Sivagnanam, Municipal Commissioner.

Saturday Review (Jaffna) 02.06.1984: Vol.3, No.16

DOUBTS ABOUT LIBRARY FUNDS (Letter)

The Editor,
Saturday Review.

With reference to your lead news in the last issue, about the Jaffna Public Library, there is a certain amount of doubt on the funds received.

We all know that there is a President's Fund, out of which monies are voted for charitable causes as well. If I remember right, Rs. One million was transferred from the President's Fund to what is called the Jaffna Public Library Trust(or Reconstruction) Fund.

From this, Rs.9 Lakhs were given as relief to the Jaffna Public Library. A balance of Rs. One Lakh was left in the President's Library Trust or Reconstruction Fund. Even members of the public were requested to contribute to this fund..

According to you, Rs. two million was donated from the President's Fund. If that be so, was it from the President's Jaffna Public Library Trust (Reconstruction)Fund or the President's Fund? If it is the former, then it should have been contributions made by the public, because the public contributed to this fund.

The Lionel Fernando Committee appointed by the Government recommended Rs. 10.2 Million as compensation to the Jaffna Public Library. What has happened to this recommendation? Has it been shelved?

Will any of your readers or the authorities please clarify these doubts?

T.Arumugam
Puloly East.

Saturday Review (Jaffna) 08.09.1984: Vol.3, No.30

Another Library up in Flame

Will the Government render any assistance in restoring and reconstructing the century -old Wesleyan Hartley College Library at Point Pedro destroyed by arson by the Sri Lankan Security Force on 2nd September?

This is the obvious question agitating the minds of educationists and the student population of Jaffna.

They know too well that although the Lionel Fernando Commission recommended the payment of Rs. 1 million as compensation for the destruction caused to the Jaffna Public Library in June 1981 the money was not paid.

Burning of libraries anywhere are acts of cultural genocide amounting to the crime against humanity. But when the acts are performed by the very forces maintained at the expense of the citizen to preserve law and order it is shocking.

The people of the North are watching for the response of the Government.

Acknowledgements

C.V.K. Sivagnanam
Municipal Commissioner, Jaffna

Very many persons and Institutions were involved either directly or indirectly in the rehabilitation and re-construction of the Jaffna Public Library. Without in any way under-rating the services and contributions made by others, special mention has to be made of the following as an expression of gratitude for record purposes:-

1. His Excellency J.R.Jayewardene President of the Republic of Sri Lanka for releasing Rs. 2 million out of the President's Fund and for future contributions to be made.
2. The Jaffna Municipal Council in Office up to 31st May, 1983 headed by Mr. Rajah Visuvanathan, Mayor, for the initiative and involvement in the project.
3. Mr. A.Amirthalingam, former M.P. for Kankesanthurai and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament for securing contributions, especially for having been responsible for obtaining compensation from the Government.
4. Mr. M.Sivasithambaram, former M.P.for Nallur, Mr. V.Yogeswaran, former M.P. for Jaffna and Mr. A.M.Alalasantharam former M.P.for Kopay for their assistance in securing contribution.
5. Mr. V.S.Thuraiajah, Architect, his Associates and staff for the architectural drawings and plans of the buildings and for making themselves available at all required times.
6. Rev. Fr. G.A.Francis Joseph, Rector, St. Patrick's College, Jaffna for having organised the Flag Day collections in the various schools which brought in more than Rs. 2 lakhs. Reference must be made to the Principals of Schools also for their co-operation along with the Director of Education for giving the required approval.
7. The Student's Council of the University of Jaffna for having collected contributions and donated books to the value of about Rs.2 lakhs.
8. The Jaffna Public Library Restoration Project Colombo Committee consisting of Messrs V.S.Thuraiajah (Architect), V.R.Vadivet karasan, K.Kandasamy (Attorney - at - Law), S.Thiruchelvam, I.T.Sambanthan, E.Shanmugam and

S.P.Samy for organising the Library Week in Colombo and assisting in the collections. Mr. Vadivetkarasan deserves special mention for having organised the Dance recital of Tamil Nadu State Dancer Miss Swarnamuke in aid of the Fund. We are very thankful to Miss Swarnamuke also.

9. Mr. R.Paskaralingam, Secretary, Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Construction for granting the necessary authority for the expenditures, engagement of staff and for the rendition of services by the Officers of the Building Department especially Dr. (Miss) P.Sivapragasapillai, Chief Structural Engineer and Mr. P.Naganathar, Senior Structural Engineer.
10. Dr. (Miss) P.Sivapragasapillai for having guided us in regard to the revised structural designs of the buildings.
11. Mr. P.Naganathar, Senior Structural Engineer of the Department of Buildings for providing continuous advice on the spot and for making available his services at all required times during the progress of the constructions.
12. The world Council of Churches for the generous contribution of Rs. 1.5 lakhs in cash the donation of books and 100 book-shelves through the Jaffna Christian Union.
13. The Lions Club and Redd Barna for contributions towards the rehabilitation of the Children's Section and NORAD for their generous contribution of Rs. 322,580.00
14. Members of the Library Committee - Mr. K.Nesiah, Rev.Fr. J.A.Francis Joseph, Messrs. E.Sabalingam, H.M.Shahul Hameed, S.Thiyaga rajah, N.Mylvaganam, K.Murugaratnam, S.Muru gavel, S.Ambikaipahan, Mrs. R. Ratna Nava ratnam and Mr. N.Sabarathnam for their involvement in the project.
15. The Librarian and the Staff for the classification, cataloguing and arrangement of books, and making them available to the public.
16. The Officers and Employees of the Jaffna Municipal Council for their effective involvement and contributions towards the project.
17. Mr. V.Satchithanathan, former Works Engineer for the initial involvement in the drawings, plans and specifications etc, Mr. E. Vaithialingam sometime Consulting Engineer and Mr. N.Nadesan for serving as Resident Engineer of the project with keen interest from October, 1983.
18. Mr. A. Jayarajah, Contractor, for having taken pains during the period of construction and for having completed the work with dedication and interest. His personnel too deserve special reference for the interest with which they worked on the project.

19. All those living beyond the shores of this country who had made contributions towards the project, Reference should be made to the Tamil Association of Alberta, Canada, Mauritius Tamil Temple Federation of Rose Hill, Mauritius, Tamil Association of Australia, Tamil Organisations of U.K. like Standing Committee of the Tamil Speaking Peoples, London, Thiruvalluvar Tamil School etc., France Tamils Organisation, Norway Tamil Association, and Tamils living in Germany, Zambia, Nigeria, Nairobi, Brunei, Norway, Botswana, U.S.A., Malaysia, Tamil Nadu and other countries who had made contributions.
20. The Tamil Nadu Government headed by Chief Minister, Hon. M.G. Ramachandran, Finance Minister Hon. V.R. Nedunchelian, Minister of Education Hon. V. Aranganayagam, The Director of Public Libraries, Tamil Nadu for donating books to the value of Indian Rs. 5 lakhs.
21. The Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka for taking up the responsibility for transporting the books from Madras to Jaffna.
22. The Canadian and British High Commissioners and the American Ambassador and the British Council for donating books.
23. All those who had made contributions in cash and donated books who may not have been specifically mentioned here or elsewhere.

C.V.K.Sivagnanan

Municipal Commissioner, Jaffna

21.05.84

(Extracted from the “Commemorative Souvenir: Opening of the Rehabilitated Building of the Jaffna Public Library” 04-06-1984)

Saturday Review (Jaffna) 06.07.1985: Vol.4, No.16

The Library is for Burning

We reproduce the report of S.Parthasarathy, which appearing in a recent edition of The Hindu:

The “Security forces” have to their credit hatrick performance. First it was the Jaffna Public Library destroyed in 1981. Then came the burning of Hartley College library earlier this year followed by the burning of the collection of 500 odd books belonging to one Nagamani Vijayaratnam in Point Pedro.

He (Principal of Hartley College) wondered whether the Government would with a sense of remorse arrange for assistant to restore and reconstitute the hundred year old library burnt down by security forces on September 1.

This raise the question of what compensation the Government paid for the wanton destruction, again by security forces, of the Jaffna Public Library in 1981 on the eve of the election to the DDC.

The information showed that it had not heeded the recommendation of Lionel Fernando Committee that Rs. 10 million be paid by the State for rebuilding the library and the President instead had just allotted just Rs. 1 million from his relief fund for the purpose.

On the Jaffna Library Arson: 1981

Prof. Kopan Mahadeva

A twin poem in translation from the original யாழ் நூலக எரிப்பு by Poet S.Karunanandarajah (Yuhasarathy)

Why did they plot this despicable act? The schemers, did they prefer to sever
Their noses and appear before us as ill omen to dampen our path to progress?
Why did the dastards commit this cowardly crime? What profits have the fools
Reaped, and what gain has anyone made by burning this, our ancestral wealth?

What ills did all those ancient books in English, some in certain Aryan tongues,
Most in our own sweet Tamil, and some even in Sinhalese, with their age-old,
Accumulated wisdom, which were of practical use in noble and friendly ways,
What harm did these works do to them to be set on fire and burnt all together?

Did they think they were setting a trap to slow the flow of the learning streams
In the domains of Goddess Tamil? Didn't they pound just empty mortars of wood?
Why did these mean folks attempt to beat the bright sun with part-burnt firewood?
Did they try to demolish our culture and us, by damaging this, our nation's gem?

Why did these halfwits empty their trash-bins of hate into the pure, refined pool
Of wisdom, to block the flood and flow of enlightening knowledge and truth?
Having failed to coax out dust, which shut their sights, with gentle wash-and-wipe,
These dolts decided to pierce their eyes with pins, thus forever becoming blind.

History is laughing at these misguided miscreants who, with their very hands
Have filled their eyes with grimy sand. Humanism is frowning at and lamenting
The survival yet, in its midst, of these ill-bred specimens who mar its grandeur.
Good Earth stares helpless at these twits who've smudged her face with excrement.

The whole world is laughing in derision at these laze-driven louts who have
 Their lowliness of passion broadcast with tom-toms, pretty well by their own acts.
 The entire world is sobbing with shyness at the foolishness of these fanatics
 Who had really cut off their noses to treat themselves against common cold.

What use laughing at them now? What use crying day-and-night at our plight,
 Now that our Goddesses of Learning and Wealth are all but dead? How many
 Senses do these two-legged fire ants that ate our much-prized books possess?
 Who, did these dog-brained persons think, will gain from their damaging act?

Why did these mean men strive so hard to maim for good this world's wisdom?
 Like spitting in the huge wide sea to make it mean, like trying to mask the sweet
 Fragrances of the Arabian Jasmine by throwing at it smelly sediments from drains,
 Like trying to block out the moon with their bare hands, did these evil men try

To disgrace golden Mother Tamil, world's ancient and elegant lamp of learning?
 Who has really lost by their sub-human action of garlanding the most holy statue
 Of our temple with prickly thorns? Is it only ancestral Tamil Eelam where we're
 Rooted deep, that lost? Is it just the Tamil language that has lost? No, not so!

But the world itself has lost by the arson committed on our Jaffna's Library.
 All those learned, in the world, have lost thereby, That's why the whole world
 Is thinking, with fingers on noses, how this slinging of mud could occur,
 How such base-passions sprout, how such enmities are born between men!

Who are these offenders? Which dense jungles' hyenas and jackals are they?
 Why did they think of such despicable acts? Never in the history of this world
 Had anyone performed such a horrible crime; never before have human beings
 Suffered such losses to their glorious civilizations. Nowhere in world's annals!

Even Hitler who authored atrocities, being soaked up in his fascist doctrines,
 Never gave any such orders to his henchmen or troops. Even while allowing
 The bombing of London in WW-2, he instructed them to spare the Museums.
 Why? Because he knew that therein lay the seed of knowledge and wisdom.

Are these men mere fools? Or, are they rice-guzzling hollow balloon-bags,
 To destroy our precious Library, popular as the best in all of South Asia then,
 Without the brains to discern Lord Siva's Lingam stone from simple gneiss,
 And to have lifted one leg and urinated without finding out on what or where?

Even when we choose to forget all these, our minds are not fully cooperating!
 We find it hard to decide on the most fitting words from world's dictionaries
 To describe their shameful and cowardly act, in having sacrificed our abode
 Of learning to some devil they worship. Even long after we are dead and burnt,

The souls of Tamils who love their language and heritage will sob loud and curse
 Those culprits. Having done what they did, those hypocrites soaked in falsehood,
 Having wounded the heart of our Goddess of Learning seated on her white lotus
 With tears of fire triggered by their act, they are applying puny drops of perfume

To her bleeding heart. Those who unhesitatingly destroyed our Tamil treasure
 Are now pretending to form a movement to rebuild this monument. Will they
 Do anything concrete? That mean clan which showed no regard for our centre
 Of learning is pretending to collect bricks and books for building it back for us.

They are lifting their garments to their faces to shield their shame, and the world
 Is laughing at their Folly. Even if we use our skills-with-words and vilify them
 As we now do, even if we become storm and defeat these ignoramuses in warfare,
 Still we should not forget that donkeys never learn of the fragrance of perfumes.

They do not respect education. Books are just paper for donkeys to bite and eat,
 And they regurgitate knowledge only as eaten paper, and then they loudly bray.
 Therefore, dear kinsmen, let us remove the pain inflicted by those whose nature
 Is to do evil, and throw that pain far away. As an antidote for their poisoned act,

Let us dedicate ourselves to diligent learning and research, and rebuild our nation.
 Let us collect rare and useful books from everywhere, in thousands, in each home
 And keep them for our country being freed. Let us take cunning cues from trees
 And blooms like bamboo, lilies and lotus, which start re-sprouting, and flowering
 As soon as water returns, even after months, in dried and cracked up clayed soils.
We will rise again very soon from our ashes, like the phoenix. Of that we're sure!

Institutional Services of The Jaffna Public Library

Mrs. R.Nadarajah, Librarian

Phoenix-like the Jaffna Public Library has risen from its own ashes of the burnt library as a symbol of immortality, the Jaffna man's cultural heritage. It is now a standing monument of the indestructibility of the vision that inspired our forbears.

Temples of knowledge and men of profound scholarship never perish. They pass on to the future generation all that is estimable and the library is one of those gifts. Our Jaffna Public Library is an excellent example of this fact, it has emerged with a new life and a new glory. The library with its original 13,000 Sq.ft. has spread itself all over the Public Library Square and now covers almost twice its former area. This expansion has facilitated the assembling of the undermentioned sections of an institution under a single roof.

CLOAK ROOM

Bags, parcels, books files etc brought by readers are expected to be handed over here and a token obtained, and returned before collection of articles. This will not apply to readers proceeding upstairs to the study.

SECURITY DESK

Every borrower removing books from the library should produce them at the exit security desk for checking.

EXHIBITION AREA

The lobby will form a permanent exhibition area with the display of oil paintings of revered leaders, photocopies of ancient books, manuscripts, works of arts, handicrafts, etc., of indigenous items. Also an illuminated glass almirah will display latest additions of books in the library. Picture postcards of the Jaffna scenery will also be available for sale.

LENDING SECTION

At present the lending section covering an area of 2,100 Sq.ft. is housed in the right wing of the ground floor. This section after the June, 1981 fire mishap was opened to the public on 14th of July, 1983. For lack of space, the children's section which is now housed in this area will, with the opening ceremony be shifted to the renovated building of the former children library that was burnt.

As the space allocated to the lending section has become inadequate, it is proposed to convert the entire ground floor into the lending section making a square area of twice 2,100Sq.ft . With over four hundred readers a day, and the additions of several thousands of books, this expansion has become imperative.

Lending section is open to all members of the Jaffna Public over 14 years of age with special conditions to residents outside Jaffna Municipal limits. It is open to members from 08.00 to 19.30 on all days excepting Mondays and Public Holidays.

The lending section is wellstocked with books in English and Tamil to suit the tastes of the most a stute and discerning readers. Books in various subjects from up-to-the minute fiction to old historical novels, biographies, travel, literature, art, religion, science, economics, etc. are available.

The book shelves have been arranged in accordance with the standard library practice to enable readers to have access to books without any delay. The entire section is well ventilated with natural light pouring in.

CHILDREN'S SECTION

This section is housed in the connecting link between the main and new building covering an area of 1,600 Sq.ft. Special thanks are due to Lion's "International District 306B" and Reddbarna of Norway who provided funds for the complete renovation, re-decoration, furniture, fittings and toilet facilities of this section.

It is open on all days excepting Mondays and Public Holidays. On week days (excluding Mondays) it is open from 11.30 to 18.00 and during week-ends and school vacations, it is open from 08.30 to 18.00. Books in all three languages, English, Tamil and Sinhala are well stocked in shelves easily accessible to children. Also, furniture is especially designed and executed in various colours to suit children from 07 to 14 years. Regular children's programmes such as handicraft hours, drawing hours, story telling hours. musical programmes are conducted. The story hours, singing, speech making, intelligent quiz etc. will be conducted in the miniature park just adjoining this section.

NEWSPAPER AND PERIODICAL SECTION

Soon after the burning of the library on First of June 1981, this section and the children's section were the first to be re-opened to the public. Temporarily they were housed in the Town Hall building. After the renovation the former was shifted to the ground floor lobby. As this is the most widely patronised area of the library, it will be shifted again to a more spacious area of the new wing covering an extent of 2,100 Sq. ft. This section is open from 08.00 to 20.00 to all members of the Public on all days of the year.

Special features of this section is the lending of general periodicals to card holding members. A wide range of popular periodicals for recreational reading and current information in local and foreign affairs is available.

English and Tamil news-papers, both local and foreign are available; and some Sinhala dailies are also available to cater to Sinhala reading public. There are also Government Publications.

AUDITORIUM

This section is to be housed in the right wing of the ground floor of the new building covering an area of 2,100 Sq.ft. Auditorium walls will be specially constructed with wooden panels and floor tiered with special seats to accommodate 200 patrons. This section will be used for seminars, lectures, conferences, exhibition, film shows, etc.

FOR THE HANDICAPPED

The needs of the disabled and the handicapped are receiving our attention. Mention must be made of the fact that in the new wing steps are taken to construct a Ramp to enable disabled person to enter the library in their own wheel chairs. Also devices are being planned to provide easy access to such persons in to the Newspapers and Periodicals Section, Children's Section, Lending library and to the Auditorium.

To those deprived of their eyesight the name of Helen Keller is an eternal inspiration. It's therefore, our desire and prime duty to go all out to offer even in a small way a "Braille" section to develop the potential of this category of the handicapped.

THE STACK AREA

This is housed in the mezzanine floor of the inter-connecting link covering an area of 1,600 Sq.ft. Bound volumes of Government Publications, back numbers of

special and general periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, and less used books are stored here.

REFERENCE SECTION

At present this section is housed in the right wing of the main building covering an area of 2,100 Sq.ft. This section is open to all members of Jaffna Public. Books in every field of learning mostly in English received as donation from various sources are well stocked in open shelves according to Dewey Decimal Classification and are readily available with a knowledgeable librarian in charge.

Collections of ready reference books such as Dictionaries, Encyclopaedias, Year Books, Bibliographies, Hand Books, Atlases are shelved separately, learning in educational, historical, scientific and cultural areas.

Majority of books received as donations are mainly in English and very few in Tamil and Sinhala. The public need for Tamil reference books has not been fulfilled even to a small extent and the call for same is increasing daily. Therefore, it will be a great boom if this dearth is fulfilled by way of complimentary copies, from those who can kindly place them with the library. As many of these books are out of print and are not procurable this short-coming can only be met by the rare breed of avid collectors of such volumes who should willingly respond to this appeal. Invaluable Ola and Hand-written manuscripts and rare special collections which are now on the ash heap can perhaps never be replaced, but we still hope that there are families and individuals who own such rarities. We also appeal to them to donate such collections to this library. Our special thanks are due to Embassies The Asia Foundation, The British Council, American Center, The Canadian Organisation for Development Through Education, The Central British Fund for Tamil Refugees Rehabilitation, The Jaffna Christian Union, The Citizen Committee of Sri Lanka and National Library Services Board of Sri Lanka. The Jaffna University Students Council which has donated several latest editions of books of educational and cultural value deserves special mention. Also our thanks are due to Leo Club of St. John's College, Jaffna Central College, Jaffna and several individuals too numerous to thank individually who has unstintingly brought their entire collection to our very door.

Other than educational books, Government publications, Newspaper clippings, Pamphlets, TOEFL Cassettes are also available.

SPECIAL COLLECTION ROOM

This section will be situated opposite the reference section. Books pertaining to Sri Lanka, Jaffna District will be kept here. Jaffna collection will consist of both books on Jaffna from ancients to the present day and books written by Sri Lankan Tamil Authors. Books and other materials will be stored in glass cupboards for this purpose. Ten glass cupboards have been bought and the collection work has started. Research books, rare books, books on Sri Lanka and Books written by foreign authors on Sri Lanka also will be collected.

A photocopying service will be made available facilitate taking photo copies of relevant documents needed by students and researchers.

A Micro-Form Reader Unit has been donated by a well -wisher and it will be accommodated in this section. Micro photocopying services will commence soon after the completion of the building.

AUDIO-VISUAL SECTION

This will house a Video-viewing equipment with cassettes of topical interest such as science, space travel, animal life and other allied subjects of an educational nature. Facilities for listening to cassettes and records also will be provided.

STUDY ROOM

This section is to be situated with individual seating accommodation for a Hundred in the left wing upper floor of the new building to enable students to use it for study with books and notes of their own or those borrowed from the Library.

ADMINISTRATION SECTION

This section will be situated in the lobby of the upper floor of the main building covering an area of 900 Sq. ft. Donations are received and old editions, out dated, multiple copies etc are disposed of at this point. Processes of work such as accessioning, classifying, cataloguing, binding are done here.

This section will be shifted to the right wing upper floor of the new building. In due course the Librarian's Office and the Office of the staff will also be shifted to this area.

ART GALLERY

This section is situated on the second floor of the main building right under the dome. This dome has been specially designed with glazed windows for sufficient lighting. Also niches are provided to enable portraits and paintings to be hung conveniently. On both left and right of this gallery, the flat roof gives panoramic view of the entire Jaffna Town making it possible to view a few square miles of our scenic beauties.



SPECIAL APPEAL

This resume of an invaluable social amenity would be incomplete if the readers—the co-partners in this enterprise were not taken into confidence, the Jaffna Public Library resurrected so marvellously and within a comparatively short time is the nerve-centre of Jaffna's intellectual system. The story of its rebirth is the story of the splendid response to our call for help. It is therefore, up to the users of this facility to make themselves worthy of it, by using the books and periodicals with care letting no room for vandalism of any sort, not even disfiguring or much less mutilating articles in their care. It has become necessary to make a special appeal. In the new set up the need for a new outlook on the part of us is particularly great and we are confident they will co-operate.

(This article is reprinted from the Commemorative Souvenir published by the Jaffna Municipal Council on 04-06-1984 Opening of the Rehabilitated building of the Jaffna Public Library. Mrs. Rupawathy Nadarajah was the Chief Librarian of the Public Library during the period of Destruction in 1981 and its restoration in 1984.)

Saturday Review (Jaffna) 06.07.1985: Vol.4, No.16

From India -With Love

Over 7,800 books on subjects ranging from Tamil classics, modern literature, culture, Indian Philosophy and music to economic history, social and physical sciences, management, agriculture and industry in Tamil and English languages were presented by the High Commissioner of India, Mr. J.N.Dixit to the Municipal Commissioner of Jaffna, Mr. C.V.K. Sivagnanam on 25th June at the Indian High Commission in Colombo. These books worth nearly Rs. 3 lakhs, have been gifted by the Tamil Nadu Government through the Government of India for the Jaffna Public Library, which was partially destroyed by fire in June 1981 and has not been renovated.

The books which were received in 1983, could not be presented earlier due to disturbed conditions in the area.

This collection of books is the first instalment for the Jaffna Public library out of the Rs. 1,125 million worth of books earmarked by the Tamil Nadu Government.

At the presentation ceremony, the High Commissioner identified the background against which the presentation of books to the Jaffna Public Library had been possible at this juncture. He said that the presentation symbolised the “new beginning”



that had been made in the quest for peace in Sri Lanka as also return to normalcy which was the aim of the process.

He hoped that the process would continue and be successful. There was a cessation of hostile acts or cease- fire - whatever name be given to it - and the fact remained that there has been a defusion of violence. The restoration and renovation of the Jaffna Public Library and the installation of those books there would, he hoped, enable young people whether Tamil, Sinhala, Muslim or Christian to read, think and act with understanding, good-will and harmony.

Mr. Sivagnanam in his reply expressed his deep gratitude on behalf of the Municipal Council and people of Jaffna, who, he said, was deeply indebted and thankful to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the Government of India, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Mr. M.G.Rama chandran, and the Government of Tamil Nadu, as well as the Late Srimathi Indira Gandhi for the gifts of these books, which, he said, would assist in the restoration of normalcy which was underway in Jaffna.—

Burning of the Jaffna Library - A Konstradt for Thousands of Tamils May 1992 - Eleventh Anniversary

Nadesan Satyendra

It was Louis Fischer who in the 1940s wrote about Konstradt. The draconian Soviet suppression of the sailor's revolt on the island of Konstradt near Petrograd during the revolution in 1917, served to turn many socialist sympathisers away from the Soviet Union. Louis Fischer commented:

“What counts decisively is the ‘Konstradt’. Until its advent, one may waver emotionally or doubt intellectually or even reject the cause altogether in one's mind and yet refuse to attack it. I had no ‘Konstradt’ for many years.”

The burning of the Jaffna Public Library by the Sinhala police on the night of the 1st of June 1981 served as a Konstradt for many thousands of Tamils who until then had wishfully thought that they would be able to live with dignity and self respect with the Sinhala people and that despite everything, answers to problems of discrimination would be found through the Parliamentary process.

It was not simply that these Tamils were unable to dismiss the attack on the library as the action of looters and arsonists who had gone out of control. It was not simply that they knew that looters and arsonists do not usually attack libraries. It was also that these Tamils knew that the attack was launched by large numbers of Sinhala policemen whilst senior Government Ministers were in Jaffna, on a special visit, together with a contingent of high ranking Sinhala security personnel.

Again, though on the previous night i.e. the 31st of May, the policemen had attacked the Jaffna Market buildings and the house of the Jaffna Member of Parliament, emergency was not declared. Curfew was not imposed. Strange actions indeed, if, as the Sinhala Ministers sought to make out later, the Sinhala police had ‘mutinied’ and were ‘out of control.’ Emergency was not declared till after the Library was burnt on the following night. Furthermore, despite the protestations of the Sinhala Ministers that the police had gone on a frolic of their own, no inquiry was ever held into the events of the 31st May and the 1st of June. No effort was made to bring the guilty to justice.



And when the Tamil leader of the opposition sought to bring a motion of no confidence against the Sinhala Ministers who had been present in Jaffna on those fateful days, the ruling Sinhala political party pre-empted the move by bringing a motion of no confidence on the Leader of the Opposition! It was reportedly the first and only time that a motion of no confidence had been moved by a ruling party, on the leader of the opposition in any parliament, anywhere in the world. A point of order raised against the no confidence motion was overruled by the Speaker.

And, the debate on the motion was used to launch a well-orchestrated campaign of vitriolic abuse and threats, intended to insult and intimidate the Tamil people, and

subdue their reaction to the events of the nights of the 31st May and 1st June. If the burning of the Jaffna library was the pre-meditated injury that was inflicted on the Tamil people on the 1st of June, eleven years ago, then the parliamentary debate on the no confidence motion was the calculated insult that was added to the injury.

But that was not all. As Nancy Murray writes in 'The State against the Tamils in Sri Lanka - Racism and the Authoritarian State':

'While Sinhalese MPs discussed in parliament how to best kill (the Tamil parliamentary leaders), Tamil peasants were actually being murdered by organised gangs in the border areas of Batticaloa and Amparai. During July and August (1981), Tamils in the East and South, including the hill country plantation workers, were terrorised and made homeless. Women were raped and at least twenty five people perished. The attacks, many by well-organised goon squads, were widely believed to be directed by members of the ruling UNP, among them close friends of the President.'

Thousands of Tamils, both young and old, had their 'Konstradt' in the burning of the Jaffna Public Library. They were compelled to face up to the political reality that the Sinhala government was bent on subjugating the Tamil people and bending them to its will. They were compelled to recognise that the Sri Lanka Parliament was no place for a Tamil with self-respect.

Murder

M.A.Nuhman In Tamil, Translated into English by S.Pathmanathan

Last night
I dreamt
Buddha was shot dead
by the police,guardians of the law.
His body drenched in blood
On the steps
Of the Jaffna Library.

Under cover of darkness
Came the ministers,
“His name is not on our list,
why did you kill him?”
they ask angrily.

“No sirs, no
there was no mistake.
without killing him
It was impossible
to harm a fly-
Therefore...” they stammered.

“Alright, then
hide the horpse.”
The ministers return.

The men in civvies
dragged the corpse
into the library.

They heaped the books
ninety thousand in all,
and lit the pyre
with the Cikalokavadda Sutta.

Thus the remains
of the Compassionate One
were burned to ashes
along with the Dhammapada.

(Himal Southasian Volume 26, No 1 P.188)

The Jaffna Central Library

In the late forties leading educationists felt that Jaffna needed a Library of significance.

A library association was inaugurated and the Municipal Council was advised to administer the Trust Fund. A new building was to be built for the Jaffna Central Library and to equip it in such a manner so as to make it become a cultural centre in the truest and fullest sense.

The Library was meant to reflect Tamil culture within and Dravidian architecture without. The chief architect of Madras Mr. V.M.Narasimhan drew up plans for the building.

After discussions with heads of local bodies, educational institutions, teachers, school inspectors, doctors, lawyers and governmental officials, Dr. S.R.Ranganathan, Professor of Librarianship at the University of Delhi came to the conclusion, that the Central Library should be sited in Jaffna Town. The second step was to establish branch libraries in each of the wards in the Jaffna Municipal area. The third stage was to expand the scheme by establishing similar branch libraries in each of the adjoining local body's areas until the entire Jaffna district was embraced by this scheme. The next step was to affiliate and manage the libraries of the various schools and colleges in the Jaffna district as branch libraries and the final step was to provide a mobile service.

This library was to be a model for East Asia in the matter of library facilities.

The Central Government and the various local bodies and educational institutions were to contribute money to finance this scheme. The public were also asked to donate generously and to create endowments for the benefit of the movement. For the Central Library alone half a million rupees were needed.

Rev. father T.M.F.Long who was one of the prime movers of this library scheme travelled to America and was able to get a very generous response for this appeal. With help from various quarters and several individuals the library was begun and completed within the set period.

This excellent building housed some of the most treasured and priceless volumes of Tamil language, literature, culture, religion, history and tradition. By 1981 this library housed several thousands of ancient rare publications and "Olai" - leaf scroll manuscripts.



But the Sinhala chauvinist government, could not bear to see this treasure trove in Jaffna and in 1981, the Armed forces burnt it down completely in two attempts. This act of arson was committed ironically when a Minister of state was in Jaffna.

What a wanton destruction. What an irreparable loss.

(Extracted from: Puthumai Penn: Souvenir of the Photographic Exhibition, 1992 -organised by International Federation of Tamils, London)

Help rebuild the Jaffna Library

Candappa

It is reported that the Government is taking active steps to reconstruct the Jaffna Public Library, destroyed in 1982 by deliberate conspiracy hatched by powerful men from the South in authority then and carried out physically by bus-loads of armed men transported from Colombo to the horror of the people of Jaffna.

The fact that these thugs were enthusiastically helped by some misguided men of the forces then stationed in Jaffna was also an indication that the rapidly thinning link uniting the Tamil and the Sinhalese in one motherland is being rudely snapped. One, therefore, sees the proposed action now is in many ways an act of collective atonement aimed at healing the deep wounds inflicted on the Tamil psyche by the pre-planned destruction of Tamil culture-a sanctified place of learning. This bestial act of coercion and armed thuggery on the unarmed people of Jaffna became, quite rightly, an object of international condemnation and marred the fair name of the majority community in this country-most of whom not merely were innocent of this dispicable crime but even today condemn it in the most unequivocal terms. The price the country has paid since then when Northern youth, not merely refused to yield to this intimidation; but also decided on armed resistance as the final recourse through extra-parliamentary means to assert what they considered as their legitimate and inalienable rights.

It is reported that the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs under the Chairmanship of an influential Cabinet Minister will head this Committee, that will be formed of distinguished citizens in the country drawn from the major communities. The Government's action is to be applauded, because what was destroyed was not merely a structure and some books but the sentiments and susceptibilities of an ancient and cultured people. The act was aimed at bringing to its knees a proud people with a very strong cultural ethos to maintain which they will be prepared, as we can see now, to go to great lengths. The process of restoration and the restoration itself should not merely attempt to capture repairing the structure alone. The Committee should show the country and the world that what was destroyed belonged to ALL SRI LANKANS. And, the restoration is in fact the restoration of one of Sri Lanka's

greatest and proudest cultural heritages and as many Sri Lankans as possible from all communities-in whatever humble sum, must be asked to contribute to this important effort at national integration. No doubt many a friendly country will come forward to re-do the damage done and this indeed must be welcome, because it is a tribute to the esteem with which this much-maligned land is held by the world community. However, nothing will match the spontaneous gesture of our people- helping in cash and kind- to re-do a national outrage so that we can all come out of this collective shame.

I am reminded of the restoration of the Coventry Cathedral in England after the 2nd World War, brought down by the firepower of the German Luftwaffe. When plans for restoration were known many German Pilots, who took part in the air raids came along from Germany, some of them carrying symbolic bricks and other material and helped re-build the Cathedral. The Architects of the Cathedral cordoned off and have marked for preservation the destroyed part of the Cathedral so that posterity will know that at some point of man's irrational anger and behaviour he acted no different to a beast. The very same men who were part of the process of destruction of the Coventry Cathedral, in this act of atonement when tempers calmed – helped rebuild what they destroyed. Today, carcasses of the destroyed Cathedral and the serene and beautiful new Coventry Cathedral are there for everyone to see. This is indeed one of the finest examples of the humaneness of man that came out of the debris of the Second World War. I hope our own team that goes to restore the Library also will set aside a part of the destroyed building to show generations to come the good and the bad this country went through in her recent bloody history so that this shall never, ever be repeated.

The time to forgive and forget in Sri Lanka has come. If we drool on the wounds of the past we will lose both the present and the future. The people of this generation have suffered enough. We have a duty to provide a safe, secure and harmonious land to our children, as did our fathers to us and their fathers to them. The government's effort to re-build the Jaffna Public Library to its past glory and the nation's effort at trying to unite in a spirit of fraternity and peace must be fully supported by each and everyone in this land.

(Letters to the Editor. The Sunday Times – Colombo, 10.11.1996)

Tamil Net 14.01.1998 (<http://www.tamilnet.com/reports/>)

Temporary Jaffna library opened

The temporary Jaffna Public Library was opened this noon by Sri Lanka's media minister Mr. Mangala Samaraweera under very heavy multi-layered security. Persons invited for the function were checked at several points.

PLOTE's Mayoral candidate for the Jaffna Municipality Manikkam Daasan, who is also the group's military wing leader, who was one of the people officially invited by the army for the function turned back at the entrance in protest over the checking procedure.

He objected to being searched at the second check point at the entrance of the venue and turned back.

Sources said that army check points were set up at every 25 yards on the way to the venue of the Library opening.

Minister for Education and Higher education Richard Pathirana and deputy minister for social services B.Premalal Dissanayaka appointed the Media minister to Jaffna today.

The education minister took part in a function to distribute free school books to children in the town.

The original Jaffna library was torched by Sri Lankan police in 1981. At the time it held the best collection of Tamil literature in Asia, including many irreplaceable manuscripts.

Widely regarded by the Tamil community as an act of cultural vandalism, the destruction of the library by the predominantly Sinhalese police has long been a point of resentment.

The PA government is attempting to win Jaffna residents' hearts and minds by rebuilding the library. However, it is the loss of the literature within the building that is felt most here.

Tamil Net 01.06.1998 (<http://www.tamilnet.com/reports/>)

Burning of Jaffna Library Remembered

People in Jaffna will wear black ribbon today to mark the burning of the Jaffna Public Library 17 years ago, said PLOTE and EPRLF sources in Jaffna. The library, burnt to the ground on the 1st of June 1981 by Sri Lankan Police, contained the

largest collection of Tamil Literature in Asia, a collection that included many irreplaceable manuscripts.

Widely regarded by the Tamil community as an act of cultural vandalism, the destruction of the library by the predominantly Sinhalese police has long been a point of resentment.

Tamil Net 13.01.1998 (<http://www.tamilnet.com/reports/>)

Reluctant officials threatened by SLA

A top local government administrator of the Jaffna Municipal Council was threatened with arrest yesterday for refusing to cooperate with the Sri Lankan Army in connection with a major state function to be held tomorrow in the Jaffna town, said sources in the peninsula.

SLA soldiers in uniform visited this officer, who did not wish to be named, about 6.00 p.m. last evening and told him that he would be arrested as a member of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for not extending his support to the military and the Sri Lanka Government.

This Tamil official told the military authorities that the Jaffna Library, scheduled to be opened tomorrow morning by Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera, a close confidant of the Sri Lankan President would give the wrong signals in an atmosphere charged with political rivalry as parties campaign for the forthcoming local government elections in Jaffna.

The flag hoisting ceremony by the minister at the official opening of the Jaffna is scheduled for 9.00a.m. tomorrow.

The Peoples' Alliance (PA) Government is using the reconstruction of the Jaffna Library as a symbol of the restoration of peace to the war torn north and a gesture to win the hearts and minds of the Jaffna people.

However critics say that at a time when large parts of the Peninsula lie devastated, symbolic acts such as this are meaningless.

Mangala Samaraweera, has been associated with the library rebuilding project through the Sudu Nelum movement (White Lotus), The Sudu Nelum movement is a propaganda arm of the SLFP, A handful of members of the Sudu Nelum Movement in the peninsula are contesting the local polls under the banner of the Eelam Peoples' Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) for the Jaffna Municipal Council.

Meanwhile free text books were distributed to school children at Vembadi Girls School in Jaffna town by media Minister Mangala Samaraweera this morning, said sources in Jaffna.

With him were Sri Lanka Army's Jaffna Town commander Susantha Mendis and Director of Education, Jaffna District, R.Ratnarajah.

This gesture by the Sri Lanka Government on the eve of the municipal council elections is seen as a move must support for the Sudu Nelum activists who are contesting the Jaffna municipal elections. (TN/98011307)

New Jaffna Library

Double Size of Old Complex

E. Weerapperuma

The new Jaffna Public Library will be more than double its original size but the new building complex will retain the same classical architectural style, the Sunday Observer learns.

The National Integration Ministry in collaboration with the “SUDU NELUM” Movement is overseeing the estimated Rs. 300 million to build the new Library. The Jaffna Public Library was burnt down by rampaging gangs in 1981, and has remained in ruins to date.

The Urban Development Authority has estimated that the reconstruction work on the existing building alone would cost about Rs. 90 million. There will be two new blocks added at a cost of Rs. 195 million while the estimated cost of furniture and fittings is around Rs. 20 million.

The Government has appointed a Committee of experts to advise on the reconstruction to suit the needs and aspirations of the people, Committee sources said.

The Committee considering the fact that Jaffna being the main city in the North and one of the major urban centres in the country has suggested that the new library should be comprehensively equipped with reference section, special collection section, children’s section, research room, study room, lending section, newspaper, periodical and audio visual sections and facilities for handicapped (disabled) readers. There will be a computer system.

Apart from the principal committee, five sub committees have been appointed to look into various aspects of the reconstruction of the Library. The destroyed library building consisted of a land area of 27,880 square feet. The proposed new complex will cover a land area of 93144.50 square feet according to the plans drawn up.

Two reports on the Library have been handed over to the Library Committee for their perusal by former Assistant Director of the National Library Service and presently the Librarian at the Islamic Centre, S.M.Kamaldeen and former Librarian at the Peradeniya University H.A.I.Gunatileke.

The Committee is very optimistic that they will have a large number of book donations coming into the library. According to Committee sources a number of libraries in the world possess important material relevant to Tamil Culture and Civilisation and the committee hopes to canvass their support to have these records as microfilm copies to the Jaffna Public Library.

(The Sunday Observer – Colombo, 22 .12. 1996)

Note on History of Jaffna Public Library

From a letter from V.S.Thuriarajah, architect, to the Sri Lanka Government controlled Ceylon Daily News, 17 July 1996

It was on the night of June 1, 1981 that the Jaffna Public Library with its priceless collection of books and some rare manuscripts was turned to ashes. Half a century of toil and dedication by several individuals and institutions that built up the reservoir of knowledge, was to be the target of some vandals. Would it be realised that the loss is not just to the North of Sri Lanka, but to the whole of Sri Lanka and the international community of learning?.....

....At this time, it is relevant to study the history of this world renowned library. In 1933, a well-wisher named K. M. Chellappah, out of his desire to share knowledge with others was conducting a free library in his house. Appreciating the idea of Mr. Chellappah, some lovers of learning got together and formed a committee and met on June 9, 1934 to establish a Library. Issac Thambiah, who was the High Court judge of Jaffna at that time, was elected chairman and K. M. Chellappah was elected secretary.

Due to the effort of this committee, on August 1, 1934, a library was opened in a small rented room on Hospital Road, Jaffna, in front of the electrical station. At inception, this library had only 844 books and about 30 newspapers and magazines, yet it was patronised by all citizens, young and old, with yearning for knowledge.

The library grew a large number of books and more space was needed. In January 1935, it was shifted to a rented building on Main Street, Jaffna. In 1936, the present municipal building and Town Hall was built (it was razed to the ground). This library was shifted to a building near the Town Hall.

At that time the membership fee was only Rs. 3/-. With this subscription, lending of books started. The popularity of the library was such that there was a demand for a permanent building with all modern facilities.

A conference was held under the chairmanship of the first Mayor of Jaffna Sam Sabapathy, to find ways and means of collecting funds to build a new library. It was decided to conduct a carnival, music and dance recitals by Indian artistes, sale of lottery tickets etc., Large sums beyond the expectation of the organisers,

was collected. A library committee was formed in 1953, Rev. Fr. Long, who was the rector of St. Patrick's College at that time, was also a member in this committee (it should be noted here that Fr. Long died of a heart attack when he heard of the burning of the library).

The contribution made by Fr. Long was so great that his statue was erected in front of the library by the public. The library committee invited a leading specialist in library science, Prof. S. R. Ranganathan from Delhi, to advise on the formation of the library to international standard. It also invited K. S. Narasimman, who was at that time the architect to the Madras government, an authority in Dravidian architecture.

A master plan was drawn and the front wing was to be built as stage one and the rear wing to be built later as stage two. The foundation was laid for stage on March 29 1953, in the presence of several educationists and well-wishers, not only from Jaffna, but from all over the island and from India.

The first stage of the building was completed and on October 11, 1959, the building was ceremonially opened by the then Mayor of Jaffna, Alfred Duraiappah. A children's section was opened on November 03, 1967. Asia Foundation donated books worth Rs. 9,500/-. At that time this amount was a large sum.

An auditorium was opened in the first floor in 1971 for the purpose of holding lectures, seminars, literary and cultural performances. Valuable books and centuries-old manuscripts were collected from the time of Mr. Chellappah in 1933.

There were about 97,000 valuable books, old newspapers and magazines up to the torching of the library on June 01, 1981. Alas! all these rare collections were set on fire by some insane human beings. The burnt building remained without repair as a monument to the vandalism of man.

In 1981, the Municipality of Jaffna, under the leadership of the then Mayor, Rasa Viswanathan, obtained the advice of engineers to ascertain whether the building was structurally sound to renovate it. The engineers advised against the renovation as they were doubtful about the strength of the building. Then the Municipality decided to build stage two of the master plan. The same year, I was appointed architect to design stage two of the building.

It was decided to keep the same details of Dravidian architecture found in stage one. The estimated cost of the building at that time was about 11 million rupees. The Jaffna Municipal Council decided to start a fund-raising and book collection campaign in Colombo. The Mayor appointed a committee with myself as its chairman.



The Colombo committee decided to organise a "Jaffna Public Library Week" from May 15 - 21, 1982 and a flag day on May 21, 1982. The press in Sri Lanka gave tremendous publicity to these events. On the first day, within an hour, a sum of Rs. 90,000/- was collected. Several businessmen, social service organisations, religious organisations and members of the public came in the hundreds and donated cash and books.

It was like a week of solemn devotion and dedication that people of all walks of life disregarding differences of caste, creed, community or religion converged on Saraswathy Hall, as in a pilgrimage to hand over their gifts for the restoration of the house of knowledge. Thousands of books were collected and sent to Jaffna.

With the funds collected the construction work on stage two commenced in June 1982. The building was nearing completion by June 1983, when the second calamity took place. The war broke out and this building received a severe beating by bullets, shells and bombs. What remains today is a structure with shell and bullet holes and blackened walls with the smoke of burnt books. can anyone bring back the valuable ola manuscripts and books which have turned into ashes?

(<http://www.tamilnation.org>)

Who will donate the valuable ola leaves burnt to ashes?

N.Parameswaran

Library Assistant, Public Library Jaffna

While Sri Lanka is celebrating its 50th Golden year of “Independence”, the Jaffna Municipal Public Library celebrates its 150th year of origin without any pomp and pleasure, very silently.

The Jaffna Public Library was originated 100 years ahead of the Independence of Sri Lanka. This Public Library was originated in 1848 by the Assistant Government Agent, Sir William Twynam.

The reading Room, which was started by the Secretary of the Courts, Jaffna Mr.F.C. Grainier in 1842, was later developed as Public Library by Sir Twynam in 1848. When Sir Twynam took up his duties as Government Agent, Jaffna, on 3.6.1894, he convened a meeting for the development of Jaffna Public Library.

In this meeting, it was decided to get Rs.50 only as donation from the Government to purchase books from Muddi and Brothers. Mr.Chellappah of Atchuveli, printed hand bills about the development of Jaffna Public Library, on 11.12.1933 and also advertised about this Public Library in newspapers and collected funds for this Library.

A decision was taken on 9.6.1936 in a meeting held at Jaffna Central College, that Ola Leaves to be bought and preserved.

This Jaffna Public Library started functioning in a shop at Hospital Road, Jaffna, from 1.8.1934. The Jaffna Town development Board had taken charge of this Library from 1.1.1935.

The Jaffna Public Library started functioning in a house by the side of the Jaffna Rest House, no sooner the Jaffna Town Development Board, had taken charge the Library. With the idea of developing the service of this Library further, Mr. Sam A.Sabapathy and father Long had a meeting on June 6, 1952. It was decided at this meeting, to hold a carnival and sell raffle tickets. In order to materialise this decision, Father Long went to England and had meetings with the Library Experts to put up the best Library in South East Asia.

On the advices of these Experts, Father Long came down to Tanjavur and met Mr. S.R.Ranganathan who was considered as the Father of Librarianship.

On the request made by Father Long, Architect Expert Mr. Narasimman, made a visit to Jaffna North. Mr. S.R.Ranganathan selected a suitable place, close to the Jaffna Muniyappar Temple, to build the Public Library. They also prepared the Plan of the Public Library on 16.10.1953.

On 29.3.1954, a foundation stone was laid, according to Hindu rites. At this laying of the Foundation stone, the British High Commissioner Sir Cyril Ice, American High Commissioner Mr. Philip Grove and the First Secretary of the Indian High Commission were presented.

There were four carnivals held in 1952, 1954, 1959 and in 1963. Funds, more than expected were collected, by selling raffle tickets and flags. The first phase of this building was declared opened on 11.10.1959. On 3.11.67 the children's Section and in 1971 an Auditorium, was also opened and the second phase was also completed.

The Jaffna Public Library which was built by Mr. Twynam and Dr. S.R.Ranganathan has a good historical background to his credit, and such a famous Jaffna Public Library was set ablaze allegedly by some thugs in uniform. The Jaffna Public Library was not famous for its building or for the number of books, it had within it. It was famous for its collection.

When this library was set on fire, it had 97000 books, 10000 Manuscripts in its possession. Apart from this, in the section where Ola Leaves and Ola books had been kept, there were valuable Ola leaves. Out of these old valuable Books, Catholic religious books (including some Spanish Books) that were released in 1586. The History book written by Robert Knox in 1660 when he was in Kandy Prison. History Book written by Phillips Baldias about the Ceylon History, during Dutch period were some remarkable and noteworthy books.

Apart from this, so many Ola Leaves in Sanskrit about Religion and Ayurvedic Medicine, too were burnt to ashes.

The present Government of Mrs Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaranatunga, has said that, the burnt Jaffna Public Library would be renovated, and donation were received from many foreign countries.

She can if necessary provide a Library with computer facilities, but she cannot provide, the valuable Books and Ola Leaves that had been burnt to ashes.

(Weekend Express - Colombo, 13.6.1998 Express Miscellany)

An Open Letter to The American Ambassador in Sri Lanka

S. Sivanayagam

(Former Editor Saturday Review, Tamil Nation and Hot Spring)

Dear Ambassador Ashley Wills,

I have a copy of the official text in English of a speech you have reportedly made at the Jaffna Public Library on Wednesday, 7th March. I do not know from which “Jaffna Public Library” you made your address, but as far as the Tamil people are concerned THEIR Jaffna Public Library, consisting of ninety odd thousand volumes was burned down nearly twenty years ago, on the night of 1st June 1981. Since in your speech you speak of terrorism and violence, let us start talking of burning of libraries. You will concede Sir that nowhere else in this “globalising world” that you are referring to, are libraries put to the fire. I presume you are sufficiently informed as to who did the burning? Would you consider that as an act of violence? If terrorism is too strong a word for it? Or would you wave it aside as a simple non-violent act of incendiarism because the criminals who perpetrated that act were Sinhalese goons, inspired by the presence in Jaffna of two Sinhalese cabinet ministers of the Sri Lanka government? Surely you can't?

Mr. Ambassador, you say you have lived in Sri Lanka for six months. I have lived in that country for 53 years, born and bred there along with my Tamil forefathers for several centuries; long before America was discovered. So I should know that country better. Today, I am 70 years old, having spent 17 years in the evening of my life searching for some country in “this globalizing world” to take me in. You say you have lived in Romania, South Africa, the West Indies, Yugoslavia, Belgium, India; in good comfort I believe. I have been to as many countries as you have – even more – but as a refugee, a wanderer, cut off from my family, looking for safety. That was because that country which in my naivety I thought was my own made me a “wanted man”. Not because I was a terrorist Sir, not even by the American yardstick. All I did was to edit a badly printed weekly paper from Jaffna – the SATURDAY REVIEW. In your own country you are familiar with the power of the Press, where

newspapermen could even bring down Presidents like that unlamented Richard Nixon. What happened to those newspapermen? Nothing. They only write books about their achievement. They make money. They prosper and flourish, thanks to what they did.

In my case I did not attempt to unmake Presidents. I wrote condemning, yes, condemning the anti-democratic, anti-Tamil military actions of President Junius Richard Jayawardene, who you might have heard of, was a great friend of your country and was nicknamed “Yankee Dick” by his own Sinhalese people. The price I paid for that was – the paper was banned, the editorial office was sealed, and the police began hunting for me. I had to flee to India by a midnight country boat to save my life. Thank God for small mercies they did not burn down the office as they did to the Tamil newspaper – the EELANADU in Jaffna in 1981; yes, by the same arsonists who burned down the Jaffna Library. Burning of libraries and newspaper offices and bookshops belonging to Tamils (not to mention burning of Tamil humans in the Sinhala riots of 1958) has been an interesting pastime in that country Sir, where fortunately you have lived only for six months. (Incidentally, I have some news for you. One of your predecessors in Colombo, Ambassador John Reed did extend the great courtesy of calling on us at the SATURDAY REVIEW office on a weekend visit to Jaffna in 1982. That I think was a small American tribute to what was after all an anti-Establishment paper)

History Sir is a great teacher. One cannot judge the present with any sense of fairness unless one gets to know the past. Let me take you back to an experience that happened to me 45 years ago ! Whatever happened to me has been happening to thousands of my fellow Tamils over the years. So let me only offer my own experience as a sample. On the morning of June 6, 1956, I was nearly pushed out of a moving train near Colombo by a gang of thugs. But for some hand of Providence that saved me, I should not be living today to write to you this. I would have been another nameless statistic among other nameless Tamils manhandled, robbed, humiliated and killed by marauding mobs over the years. Why did they want to kill me? Simple. Because they saw in me a Tamil.

Today, in the year of the Lord 2001 you make a nice, erudite speech, and of all places in government-ravaged Jaffna, and believe me Sir, I get a funny feeling in my solar plexus reading your good advice. You are after all addressing the Tamil people in Jaffna, (although there is one Sinhalese soldier there today to every ten Tamil, man, woman and child), a Tamil people who have gone through violence from mobs and terrorism from the State for 45 years now. Can you see that? You are of course asking these wretched Tigers to give up terrorism and violence. What you are asking Sir is not exactly that. No Sir. What you are really asking them is to

stop overrunning Sri Lankan army camps! Let us be honest about it. This talk of terrorism is only a neat cover to hide the endless failures on the war front.

The Tigers are not born-violent, born killers from Mars or some outer space. Believe it or not Sir, they are also Tamils, a new generation of Tamils who are sensitised to the endless sufferings of their people, and who are ready to give up their lives so that succeeding generations of Tamils could live in peace in what was once their homeland. They have watched their past leaders making brave speeches in parliament, seen them crying hoarse about the Tamil plight from public platforms, they have even seen their democratically elected leaders led by that gentle Christian Chelvanayakam sitting in silent Gandhian protest against the Sinhala Only Bill at Galle Face Green on June 5 1956, only to be mauled by a violent mob in the presence of the country's guardians of the law, the policemen. They have heard of their kith and kin slaughtered by the hundreds in the anti-Tamil riots of 1958, even poured petrol on their persons and burned alive! Would you be interested to know that the Tiger leader Prabhakaran was a 3-year old child when all that happened.

One cannot start reading history from a halfway point. If one wants to read American history, or what little of it is there, one has to begin with George Washington and Thomas Jefferson and come down the line. One does not start the story by talking of the American chemical assault on the Vietnamese people. Nor does one start writing American history with that best known act of international terrorism – the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima which killed well over one hundred thousand human beings. The armed struggle of the Tamil Tigers Sir is a late arrival in Sri Lankan history, a logical consequence of a quarter century of Sinhala violence and the sorry failure of peaceful non-violent Tamil protest over the same period. It was one of your Presidents, the late assassinated John F. Kennedy who said: “Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable”. That Sir is where our Sinhalese brothers who have been ruling the country for 53 years made their mistake.

Mr. Ambassador, do I detect the tone of a world policeman when you say: “...we reject the idea of an independent Tamil state carved out of Sri Lankan territory; we regard the LTTE as a terrorist organization and do not believe it is the sole representative of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka.... With all respect to you Sir, your syllogism is flawed. While your government is certainly entitled to whatever views you hold about the LTTE, the question of REJECTING or accepting the idea of an independent Tamil state is surely a matter between the Sinhalese and the Tamil peoples. Suppose at some point of time in history the Sinhalese people come round to accepting the idea of an independent Tamil state, would your government still reject it?

You refer to the fact how some people fit facts to the theory as in the story of the Procrustean bed. In quoting Salman Rushdie where you say: "...cultures collide constantly in the modern world, crisscrossing at high velocity; one moment we are in a village with a charming sense of remoteness; in the next, we turn on TV and are connected instantly to a global village..." you are merely stating the theory. May I tell you why the facts do not fit the theory when it comes to the Tamil people? Have you ever seen on the American TV, the CNN, the war that the Sri Lankan government has been waging in the northeast of the island? CNN has shown the bombing of the Central Bank in Colombo, yes, but have you seen on your TV the bombing of the Naval Church in Jaffna? Or the bombing of the Nagerkoil School in Jaffna? Are you saying, by fitting facts to your theory that Jaffna is OUTSIDE that global village of yours?

One of the unfortunate facts in life Sir, is that peacemakers generally give good advice to the victims, not to the villains. It was a well-thought out speech that you made in Jaffna, as speeches go, but how one wishes you would also make similar addresses in Colombo – at the Bandaranaike Memorial Centre for example.

S.Sivanayagam, Paris, France

11 March 2001

The Vine: Northampton Diocesan News April 2002 No.148 p.2**Library books for Sri Lanka**

Now back home in Aylesbury, but with his heart still firmly focused on Sri Lanka, is St. Joseph's parishioner Joe Pilendiram.

In August 2000 The Vine reported Joe's return to his native land and his horror at the ravages caused by the 18 year old ongoing civil war between Government forces and the Tamil Tigers. "Innocent parties like the Church and ordinary civilians are the victims," Joe told The Vine.

While in Sri Lanka Joe was working for Bishop Thomas Savundaranayagam of Jaffna and through The Vine Joe appealed to the people of Northampton Diocese for help for the large number of war orphans being cared for by the Church.

"There was a very generous response from many people in the Diocese," said Joe. "Bishop Thomas said he will cherish the memories of all those benefactors and I myself will treasure the support of the people of Northampton."

During Joe's time in Sri Lanka the Jaffna Seminary was moved to a new site in a refugee camp, safe from the fighting and bombing. And work began to rebuild and replenish the library, bombed time and time again by the opposing forces.

Since leaving Jaffna Joe has spent his time begging for books for the library on behalf of Bishop savundaranayagam. He has travelled to the USA and Australia and is now continuing his appeal in England.

"I am directing most of my efforts to collecting books suitable for the final five years of study for the priesthood," he said. "So far the response from bishops, priests and lay people has been overwhelming."

Two decades after the burning down of the Jaffna library in Sri Lanka

Vilani Peris

When the Taliban regime in Afghanistan announced and then carried out the destruction of the massive stone Buddha statues at Bamiyan, the action justifiably provoked outrage around the world. In Sri Lanka, however, the reaction in ruling circles and among the Buddhist hierarchy was mixed with a good deal of rank hypocrisy.

For decades the political establishment in Colombo has promoted the chauvinist view that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist and Sinhalese country in which Tamils and other minorities must take second place. The deliberate stirring up of communal sentiment by successive governments led to the imposition of discriminatory measures against Tamils, anti-Tamil pogroms and in 1983 to the ongoing war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

When the Taliban destroyed the Bamiyan statues, political figures competed with each other to express their disgust at what was taking place. The Buddhist clergy took to the streets in protest and promised to build replicas in Sri Lanka. Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, known for his Sinhala chauvinist views and links to the clergy, rapidly headed for Pakistan to see what could be done to save the statues.

There was a complete silence in the Colombo media, however, over the parallels in Sri Lanka to the Taliban's cultural vandalism—notably to the destruction of the Jaffna Library in 1981. It is only now, two decades after the library was burnt to the ground, that a replacement building is finally being built in the centre of Jaffna town, 400km north of Colombo. Construction has begun and, according to the engineers in charge, the building should be completed by December.

Nothing, however, can be done about the thousands of priceless Tamil books, manuscripts and ola [dried palm] leaf documents that went up in flames in 1981. Jaffna has been an important Tamil cultural centre for centuries. Some books such as *Yalpanam Vaipavama*—a history of Jaffna—were literally irreplaceable, as the library contained the only existing copy.

The library, which was inaugurated in 1841 and then moved to a more majestic building in 1950, had one of the finest collections in South Asia and was known throughout the world. It was popular among intellectuals, teachers and students—both Sinhalese and Tamil—and was used extensively by ordinary working people. Its destruction, two years before the outbreak of the country's civil war, was an outrage aimed against the cultural heritage of the country's Tamil minority and deliberately calculated to inflame communal sentiment.

A group of racist thugs, instigated by the United National Party (UNP) government, carried out the arson. Eyewitnesses at the time reported that uniformed police accompanied by the gang, brought from the south of the island. They arrived by truck in the dead of the night of May 31, 1981 and set fire to the library buildings.

The fire provoked widespread anger in Jaffna setting off three days of mayhem. Four Tamils were taken from their homes by police and killed. Sinhalese thugs also set fire to the head office of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in Jaffna and then looted about 100 Tamil-owned houses and shops before setting them ablaze as well.

The house belonging to TULF parliamentarian, V. Yogeswaran was destroyed. The offices and press of the Tamil language newspaper, Ealanadu, were burnt to the ground. Thugs also defaced or demolished a number of statues of Tamil cultural and religious figures erected at road junctions in the town. The rampage only came to a halt after elections for the District Development Council (DDC) was completed on June 4.

The immediate pretext for the destruction of the library was the killing of two police constables at a TULF election meeting in Jaffna on May 31. No one ever claimed responsibility for the deaths, which took place in a climate of provocation and intimidation whipped up by pro-UNP gangs sent to Jaffna for the election. Police and thugs attacked TULF supporters at the meeting and later that night burnt the library.

A campaign of thuggery

The campaign of harassment and thuggery that followed was aimed at intimidating voters and providing a cover for the systematic stuffing of the ballot box to ensure the election of at least some UNP candidates. The UNP established the system of District Development Councils in 1980 in an attempt to placate the demands of Tamils for democratic rights. While the TULF leaders supported the DDC, younger Tamils opposed the charade. As hostility began to grow, the UNP government resorted to more ruthless methods to ensure the outcome of the vote.

Throughout the leadup to the election, the government maintained a media blackout on the crimes being perpetrated in Jaffna by its thugs. On June 3, the presidential office issued a statement insisting that even though Jaffna was under emergency rule, the election would go ahead. In an effort to make the Tamil minority the scapegoat for its own thuggery, prime minister R. Premadasa announced in parliament that a commission would be appointed to probe the deaths of the policemen and a UNP candidate. No official inquiry was held into the destruction of the library.

On the same day, two senior UNP ministers—Gamini Dissanayaka, a close political associate of President J.R. Jayawardena, and Cyril Mathew—arrived in Jaffna with more thugs to direct operations. They were widely accused of ballot rigging to such an extent that in some areas there were more ballots than voters. Their arrival coincided with the arrest of TULF leader A. Amirthalingam. On election day police detained three more leaders—Navaratnam, Dharmaratnam and Sivasithambaram. Despite these actions the UNP could muster only 23,302 votes while the TULF received 263,269 votes winning all DDC seats.

The UNP government, like the previous Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)-led coalition, relied on stirring up Sinhala chauvinism to shore up its own base amid growing discontent caused by a deteriorating economy and its own turn to open market reforms. Its ability to do so depended above all on the betrayal of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, which in 1964 had abandoned the perspective of socialist internationalism and joined the SLFP government of Sirimo Bandaranaike. In 1972, as part of the SLFP coalition, LSSP minister Colvin R. de Silva was responsible for entrenching Buddhism as the state religion and a Sinhala-only language policy in the constitution. When the UNP won office in a landslide in 1977 as a result of widespread opposition to the coalition's policies, it further inflamed communal sentiment.

Cyril Mathew, one of the two ministers dispatched to Jaffna immediately after the burning of the library, was notorious for his anti-Tamil racism. He was the author of a book entitled *Sinhalese! Rise to Protect Buddhism* and a series of his inflammatory speeches made in 1979 were collected together in a pamphlet *Who is the Tiger*, which was passed from hand to hand.

Other writings indicate the character of the political climate being created by Colombo politicians and the media. A vicious pamphlet entitled *The Diabolical Conspiracy* published in 1980 accused Tamil teachers of giving high marks to Tamil students thus allowing them to enter university in preference to Sinhalese students. This is “a burning question... exploding within the hearts of Sinhala students, parents

and teachers,” it stated. Another document denounced Tamil plantation workers warning “we see that Sinhala culture, Buddhism and the up-country villagers will all vanish.” It went on to attack Tamil traders, declaring that “the wholesale and retail trade... is now completely in the hands of Indian nationals.”

It was in this atmosphere that the UNP, with the backing of sections of the Buddhist clergy, unleashed groups of Sinhala thugs to physically attack Tamils, their homes and shops not only in the north and east of the island but also in the plantation districts in the central hills. The burning of the Jaffna Library marked a turning point in the process that led to the eruption of war.

The present Peoples Alliance government belatedly announced the decision to rebuild the library in 1998 amid growing demands from the major powers and sections of big business in Sri Lanka for a negotiated end to the war. At a meeting held to establish a temporary library, then PA Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera said: “The present government considers the destruction of the former library by forces of chauvinism and misguided politics as an evil act.”

Neither then nor now, however, did the PA government seek to identify either the “forces of chauvinism” or the character of their “misguided politics”. To do so would raise too many questions about the role of the SLFP and its other allies in the Peoples Alliance in promoting the chauvinist politics that lay behind the burning of the Jaffna library and other outrages against the Tamil minority that led to the outbreak of war.

(World Socialist Web Site 30 May 2001)

Culture in Ashes: The Path to Civil War

Effort to Rebuild Tamil Library Becomes a Symbol of
Sri Lanka's Struggle

Celia W. Dugger
(New York Times Service)

Jaffna, Sri Lanka- On a fateful night 20 years ago, Sinhalese police officers rampaged through this town's public library, one of the great repositories of the Tamil people's history and culture, and committed an act of ethnic vandalism that helped set this country on a path to civil war.

They stormed into the grand public rooms of one of South Asia's finest libraries and set 97,000 volumes ablaze.

Rare old manuscripts written on palm leaves and stored in fragrant sandalwood boxes, miniature editions of the Ramayana epic from the children's section, yellowing collections of extinct Tamil Language Newspapers – all were consumed in a blaze that convinced many Tamils that the Sinhalese were out to annihilate their very identity.

“Still I feel like crying after 20 years,” said Nadarajah Raviraj, now the Mayor of Jaffna, who recalled staring into the flames as a college student. “It is in my memory.”

Until recently, the library stood as a gutted monument to the wrongs done to the Tamils, who are mostly Hindu, by the Sinhalese, who are mainly Buddhist and make up three-quarters of the population in this island nation.

Now the library is being rebuilt here in the Tamils' cultural capital. It is a hive of activity, with workers laying bricks and plastering over the bullet holes. But it has not become the symbol of national reconciliation that President Chandrika Kumaratunga had hoped to create, at least not yet.

In 1996, she appointed a commission to restore the building. But the renovation has taken years to get under way. Government officials say the killing of two mayors of Jaffna by Tamil rebels in 1998, as well as severe war-related disruptions of travel and shipping, has caused the delays.

But many Tamils say these are excuses. Whatever the reasons, the trust the president had hoped to build among Tamils for the Sinhalese dominated central government has curdled. In that, the tardy library project is a metaphor for the government's peace initiatives.

Everything has taken too long. The constitution that she said would give Tamils greater autonomy to rule themselves in the north and east is unrealised. Peace talks with the Tamil rebels have yet to begin. And some Tamil leaders who were with her at first have drifted away.

"All these Sinhalese majority governments have showed step motherly treatment of Tamils," said the mayor, Mr. Raviraj, who belongs to a Tamil political party that had helped the president draft s constitution. "The Tamils are not treated equally and that is why the ethnic war is still going on."

The burning of the library on June 1, 1981, and deadly anti-Tamil riots two years later were the pivots that radicalized young people and turned a largely peaceful movement for Tamil rights into a civil war waged by separatist rebels, students of the conflict say. The war has claimed more than 62,000 lives in a nation of 19 million people.

The destruction of the library had a particular resonance. Many Tamils come from the arid north, where they are in the majority and had risen to prominence in the professions and the civil service through a devotion to education. The attack on the library was seen as an assault on their aspirations.

"The terms on which the Sinhalese and Tamils accepted each other, the value system that kept us together as a country and a civilisation, were broken by these two events," said Radhika Coomaraswamy, director of the International Center for Ethnic Studies in Colombo, who is herself from a family of Jaffna Tamils.

The initial destruction of the library was already part of a cycle of vengeance. The police are believed to have burned it- with the tacit acceptance or outright connivance of cabinet ministers in Jaffna that night-to retaliate for the killing of two police officers.

But in the year since, the library has become caught in the crossfire of the war. It was restored in part and reopened in 1984.

Sunlight again streamed into its towering windows by day, while lamps inside cast a glow on the town at night. The periodical room echoed with the crackling sound of newspaper pages being turned.

But in spring of 1985, Tamil Tiger rebels attacked the police station near the library. The army was stationed nearby, in the Jaffna Fort.

One afternoon, said Sulochana Ragunathan, a librarian, she heard militants from one of the many separatist groups-not Tigers, she thinks- firing from near the library toward the fort.

Ms. Ragunathan said she phoned the army to ask for safe passage out for the people in the library. In the conversation she found herself denying that the militants had been allowed to wage their fight from inside the library itself.

As the staff and students in the library filed out later that day, Ms. Ragunathan said, she glanced back and saw soldiers swiftly going in.

That night, hours after curfew had emptied the green, she heard the blasts of bombs she assumes were planted by the army in the lending room. Tens of thousands of books on the newly stocked shelves were shredded, she said.

She said she believes the army did the deed, but the militants must share the blame.

“They didn’t care about human life or consequences,” she said. “They only thought about what they wanted. They shouldn’t have used the library for their fight. Who are the losers? We the public.”

The library has been empty of books and readers ever since. In the late 1980’s, the stately green, with its dignified public buildings, turned into a battlefield and the libraries empty shell grew ever more pocked and scarred.

In 1990, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam took control of the town. Five years later, the government took it back. But the Tigers still desperately want to reclaim it.

In 1998, in quick succession, they killed two mayors of Jaffna, both from a Tamil party that favors a peaceful settlement. For the following three years, Jaffna was without a mayor.

Mr. Raviraj, who was deputy mayor in 1998, did not become mayor until this January, when he finally dropped the word “acting” from his title. His law practice is in Colombo, the capital, but he comes to Jaffna every month. When people in the town thought a contractor picked by the central government was doing a bad job on the library renovation, Mr. Raviraj yelled about it at public meetings. The contract was terminated. Now the town itself and local Tamil workers are doing the work.

Mr. Raviraj regularly stops by to check in. One recent morning, as he conferred with building supervisors on the roof, sweaty Tamil labourers-many of whose homes were destroyed in the fighting-planed the wood and heaved the cement to raise this library from the ashes for the second, though perhaps not the last time.

(International Herald Tribune, Monday, August 20, 2001)

Library reconstruction to hide Cultural Genocide?

S. Somitharan

A controversy has erupted between Jaffna Mayor Sellan Kanthayan and certain civil society organisations over reopening of the Jaffna library scheduled for today. Informed sources told the Northeastern Herald it is allegedly due to differences on whether the building's reconstruction by the government is a subtle way of erasing an act of cultural genocide perpetrated over two decades ago when Sinhala thugs burnt the edifice down. However, those opposed to the reopening charged that they were only against the event because of the physical defects in the building. They said those defects had been glossed over by the mayor in his haste to get on with the reopening.

Civil society organisations, including student bodies have protested that since the building had shortcomings arising from faulty engineering it should not be reopened till the building is made totally safe for users. Sources said there were plans to hold a black flag protest in the event the mayor tried to open the building against the wishes of the students and other members of civil society.

The mayor speaking to the Northeastern Herald said that it was pointless keeping the building closed if it could be used. "Whatever that was to be completed with the monies already allocated has been done. Additions will be done from funding from the Ministry of Rehabilitation," he said. Sources said that interested political parties were trying their best to manipulate matters so that they could win kudos for the reconstruction. The reconstruction was originally undertaken by a private party, which was eventually taken over by the Urban Development Authority (UDA) and thereby came under the government.

"The PA was very keen on rebuilding the library so that it could score one over the UNP that was responsible for the building's destruction in 1981. Now the UNF is trying one better and saying it will be able to rebuild the edifice. Its all political posturing," said sources unwilling to be identified.

They said when the UNF had come to power in 2001, Minister Jayalath Jayewardene had spearheaded the move to expedite its reopening. He had promised it would be done before Thai Pongal and would be reopened by Prime Minister

Ranil Wickremesinghe. That however had not materialised and now the Jaffna Municipal Council has taken over playing the lead role.

Jaffna library is a municipal library: hence the importance the Municipal Council is attaching to the reopening. Further, furniture and fittings too have been turned out in the municipal workshop. Civil society bodies and students however claim that over and above the tussle to claim credit for the reopening of the building, southern governments were keen on wiping out an act of cultural genocide by appearing to make restitution. “Once a new building is put up the evidence of the barbarity of what took place will be forgotten,” said students.



They said that in other countries when an act of disgrace like the burning of a library was perpetrated memorials were erected to remain as symbols of the past, whereas here a subtle and concerted effort was being made to deny proof of the incident.

Sources pointed to the Holocaust Museum and other institutions that kept alive memories of the past despite the shame they caused individuals and communities. Hooligans with close ties with the UNP of that time, who were in Jaffna for the District Development Council elections in 1981, allegedly burnt the Jaffna library. Controversial Industries Minister Cyril Mathew and Lands and Mahaweli Minister Gamini Dissanayake, are widely blamed for not preventing the burning of the library when it was in their power to do so.

Meanwhile, sources claimed the library is a public good that was rehabilitated to be of benefit to the Jaffna public. They said the public supported the reopening and it was only a politically-motivated minority who were against.

“Nobody will protest unless there is backing for it from outside,” the sources said. They did not elaborate on who the ‘outsiders’ were.

(Northeastern Herald, Colombo, February 14-20, 2003)

Tamil Net February 13, 2003

Opening of the Jaffna Public Library

All twenty one members of the Jaffna Municipal Council led by Mayor Mr. Sellan Kandian Thursday tendered their resignation in protest to the pressure exerted on them by some organisations to put off the opening of the renovated Jaffna public library scheduled to be held on February 14, Friday, sources said.

Tension mounted in the Jaffna town as the Mayor Mr. Sellan Kandian who vowed to go ahead with the scheduled opening of the renovated Jaffna public library on Friday was diffused with the resignation of all municipal councillors including the Mayor. MC sources said the opening of the Jaffna Public Library would not be held on Friday as announced by the Mayor.

Mayor Mr. Sellan Kandian was insisting that the library should be opened before the municipal council completes its tenure of office on February 17, sources said.

International Tamil Students Union and the Consortium of Public Organisations requested the Mayor to put off the opening of the public library for a latter date as the construction work was yet to be completed.

The organisation estimated that only 25% of the construction work has been completed. But according to the Mayor, 99 percent of the reconstruction of the Jaffna public library had been completed and the Jaffna MC too had unanimously decided to open the library on Friday 14.

In 1999, Rs. 120 million was allocated for the reconstruction of the Library by the government. The work of reconstruction was first given to an Indian firm. But, due to some malpractices, the work was later handed over to the government buildings department.

The Jaffna public Library was burnt down in 1981 by the Sri Lankan Police and Sinhala thugs on the eve of the district development council elections. The library, considered as one of the finest in South Asia containing a cultural heritage that comprised around 97000 priceless books and about 150 centuries' old irreplaceable Tamil manuscripts, lost its entire collection when the original two storied building was destroyed.

Widely regarded by the Tamil community as an act of cultural vandalism, the destruction of Jaffna Library by the predominantly Sinhalese police has long been a point of resentment.

Do we begin the *Esela Perahera* with the *Randoli*?

Opening of the Jaffna Public Library

Professor Karthigesu Sivathamby

Post-Ceasefire Agreement politics in Sri Lanka brings up charges and counter-charges blaming one party to the agreement or the other. These litanies vary with the language used by the press. The latest has been on the failure of the Jaffna Public Library to be reopened last Friday. From Her Excellency the President to His Worship the Mayor of Jaffna, every one has had their say. The voices of the students of the Jaffna University, those of the NGOs concerned, as well as the general public that are always suspected of repeating their Master's voice – the LTTE's – have made their contribution. The Demala Santhanaya about which the Sinhala press created a mystique, is virtually ripped open with the TULF having to face much of the criticism, and also the praise of some though from very unlikely sources.

The problem is the reopening of the public library of Jaffna is a matter of grave concern. As one interested in the study of Sri Lankan Tamil society and who has had the pleasure or pain of going through a quarter century of war between the security forces and the Tamils (not the militants alone), it is my duty to share with my non-Tamil friends the importance of the Jaffna Public Library and its history.

In the Tamil psyche the burning of the Jaffna public library in 1981 constitutes a major symbol of what was aimed at them – a total annihilation of all their intellectual resources. If one makes a careful study of the Sri Lankan Tamil literature during this period of resistance, one would find 1981 as a major dividing line. The burning of the library mobilizes the entire population against the oppressive actions of the State. A poet described it as “Fire on the clouds” and one of major South Indian painter Veerasanthanam has depicted this on canvas.

It is also one of the early incidents of vandalism that shocked many Sinhalese. They just could not condone this act by the security forces. Many of those who believed in the oneness of the country offered their personal libraries for redeveloping the burnt institution. In his last will, Peiter Keuneman mentioned donating his books to the Jaffna public library.

This was also an incident that shocked the conscience of the world. No civilized society would take the burning of a library as an inevitable part of military war or strategy.

In fact, it is the burning of the library that really looms largest in the minds of discerning Sinhalese about the horrors of the ethnic war. This incident gnaws at the roots of their being and disturbs them tremendously. The earlier we do something to erase that bitter memory, the better it will be.

I am in total agreement that the new phoenix that has arisen from the ashes should sing not of the bloody past but of the charming future for an equal, just and united Sri Lanka. But this has to be done properly. This should not be hurried. We should not try to whitewash nor should we sweep the past under the carpet.

Before I go into the arithmetic of this problem, I wish to emphasize another aspect of the of the library's destruction. The night it was burnt was also election night – elections to the District Development Council, Jaffna. Those who were charged with the burning of the library were the additional 'resources' that were brought to Jaffna and temporarily stationed at Duraiappah Stadium that lies to the northeast of the Library.

It was also the night when efforts were made to stifle a free and fair election. Government Agent Jaffna, Yogendra Duraiswamy, was searching for six lost ballot boxes in all the likely places they could have been hidden, including where those who had come to 'work' for the elections were lodged. The six ballot boxes were never recovered. To me, this unsung incident is of equal importance as the burning of the intellectual materials in the library. For democracy proper to come back to Jaffna, there should be no such threats hereafter.

To come back to the library, one should not take it as any municipal library. Those who know its history and the calibre of the people involved in its planning will realize that it was to be an intellectual core housing all the possible data relating to Knowledge.

As one who used it, I know how meticulously it was planned and how effectively it worked. I remember the steel cupboards containing donations from various learned men of Jaffna. I cannot to this day forget the collection of Cumaraswamy, the renowned father of the late TULF Leader C. Vanniasingam. Two other cupboards contained all the known literary source materials of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. That loss can never be replaced. There were also cupboards with books gifted by Christian priests. (If I remember right, there was also some material on which Rev. Fr. Gnanapragasar worked). Rev. Fr. H.S. David, the lean slightly built man with sparkling eyes, was usually seen brooding carefully over those volumes.

No wonder the destruction of the Jaffna Public Library looms so large. But we got to come out of this, come out of this in such a manner that will assure us of a greater unity and the need to be fearless about any further incidents of this type occurring, not only in Jaffna but also in any other part of our country. Such a task must be undertaken with foresight and a sense of thoroughness leaving nothing to chance.

The truth is the building was not complete. Sunday Veerakesari of 16 February has published a report stating that Rs.23 million was needed to complete the renovation and that on the day of the reopening, the building did not have fire extinguishers, air-conditioning and the lift has not been installed, the roof and the cafeteria were not completed and the purchase of generators had not been done. They had only furnished 80 % of the building. Telephones had not been fixed nor could there be any use of the Internet. To add to these, there is a major cry against the inadequate stock of books. My student told me impishly that one section of a rack was full of social studies readers published by the NIE (these are the books about which the Ceylon Tamil Teachers Union protested for giving a distorted version of the history of Tamils in Sri Lanka).

Jokes apart, any decent reopening should have publicised the names of the donors and institutions that had helped the library with books. I think we owe it to those people – Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and even foreigners. There has been accusation that the municipal council took the books from two branch libraries and brought them here. What happens to users in those branches?

There are graver problems if one knows the geography of where the Jaffna Public Library is situated. The environs of the library that lie on the east, southeast and south are in ruins. The once busy Main Street is an area with broken walls and overgrown shrubs. It is a picture of desolation. The Rest House is not there, the former Town Hall, an example of exquisite Victorian architecture, is rubble. On the northern side however, Veerasingham Hall has been renovated and the Jaffna Central College lying almost opposite the library is also functioning. It was not many days ago that Minister T. Maheswaran openly indicted the government for not yet voting a single cent for the rehabilitation of Jaffna. I do not for a moment doubt the sincerity of the government to rebuild Jaffna. But the question is: what are the priorities. Refugees are getting back voluntarily, renovating their houses, re-demarcating their properties and trying to start a new life. In a situation like this, we should start by restoring basic needs first and work gradually toward retrieving the lost grandeur of Jaffna. There is no point in producing more heat than light.

It is true (I hope) that peace has finally arrived. If so, let us proceed from the first to the last and not last to first. Any Buddhist knows that the Randoli Perahera, the

pageant that demonstrates the grandeur of the Kandyan culture comes at the end, or as the grand finale to the Eseala Perahera that begins with the more basic rituals and ceremonies. Similarly, in Hindu temples the therr (chariot) and theerththam festivals do not come at the beginning of the season.

The reopening of the Jaffna Public Library with its facilities to cater to the information and knowledge society of the 21st Century should come as the grand finale. Given the present environs of the library, no one is going to make use of this in the manner it is intended. This does not mean however that the work on the library should be delayed. It is not that the Jaffna library is not functioning now. Thanks to the efforts of the former Municipal Commissioner D. Balasingam there are branches of the library distributed in the various parts of the town. The one at Navalar Memorial Hall has a wonderful collection on the fine arts. So it is not the case of denying the facilities to people, it is a case of honoring a symbol.

I believe on the day it is earmarked to be reopened in full pomp and pageantry, we should not fail to invite the vice chancellors from all the universities in Sri Lanka, the great Buddhist scholar monks and all those who have been involved in librarianship from Ian Goonatilleke to Eashwary Corea and to Kamaldeen.

In the meanwhile, let us not start the Esala Perahera season with the Randoli. It is wise to begin at the beginning.

(Northeastern Herald, Colombo, February 21-27, 2003)

www.museum-security.org: February 14, 2003

Famed Jaffna Library not Reopening, Soldiers Guard Complex

JAFFNA, Sri Lanka - The Sri Lankan government postponed the reopening of the library in the northern city of Jaffna on Friday and posted armed troops to guard it after a controversy erupted between local councilors and Tamil rebels. All 23 members of the town council in Tamil-dominated city resigned Thursday, alleging they had been threatened by rebel supporters who sought the postponement.

The rebel supporters argue that reopening the library, whose cherished Tamil texts were destroyed in an arson attack 22 years ago by an anti-Tamil mob, should wait until more books are collected and until after an additional wing is built with material explaining the building's history and the effects of its destruction. The arson in 1981 disillusioned many young Tamils, prompting them to join militants fighting against the Sinhalese-dominated government. Council members, who are mostly moderate Tamils, alleged that supporters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamileelam had pressured them to block the opening due Friday, but did not elaborate on the threats. On Friday, nearly 40 Sri Lankan soldiers and policemen guarded the library.

The library was renovated at a cost of 120 million rupees (US\$1.26 million). It lost its entire collection of 97,000 books and about 150 centuries-old Tamil scripts on herbal medicine when the original two-story building was destroyed in the 1981 attack. The rebels started their insurgency in 1983 to create a separate state for the minority Tamils. They say Tamils are discriminated against by the Sinhalese in education and jobs. Jaffna, which is 300 kilometers (185 miles) north of the capital, Colombo, was the scene of some of the heaviest fighting in a war that killed more than 65,000 people and displaced 1.6 million.

A Norway-brokered cease-fire signed last February halted the conflict, and the rebels have agreed for regional autonomy instead of total independence.

www.museum-security.org: February 11, 2003

France Donates 800 Books to Famed Jaffna Library

JAFFNA, Sri Lanka - The French government on Tuesday donated 800 books to the reconstructed Jaffna Library, which was destroyed during an anti-Tamil arson attack 22 years ago.

French Junior Foreign Minister Renaud Muselier made the donation during a visit to Jaffna, an ethnic Tamil majority city in northern Sri Lanka.

The government has renovated the public library — which officially reopens Friday — in a bid to win back the confidence of Tamils, who comprise a minority in most of the country. The library lost its entire collection of 97,000 books and about 150 centuries-old Tamil scripts on herbal medicine when the original two-story building was destroyed in June 1981. The destruction disillusioned many young Tamils, who later joined militant groups to fight a civil war against the government, dominated by the country's Sinhalese majority. The Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tiger rebels signed a cease-fire last February and are holding peace talks to end the 19-year war

Daily News Saturday 15.2.2003

President urges re-opening of Jaffna Library

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga yesterday called for the re-opening of the Jaffna Public Library, saying it would be an "important step in bringing reconciliation and healing in our land".

In a news release issued yesterday, President Kumaratunga regretted the cancellation of the reopening of the Jaffna Public Library.

"It is regrettable that at time when the Government and the LTTE are engaged in talks aimed at resolving the ethnic conflict and bringing healing and reconciliation amongst our peoples, that the reopening of the Library which would be an important milestone in rehabilitation and reconstruction is being obstructed by the LTTE. This demonstrates the fallacy of the notion that rehabilitation and reconstruction should receive priority," the President added.

She said: "The burning of the Jaffna Public Library in 1981 was a watershed event which contributed significantly to deep divisions in our country. The reconstruction of the same, commenced after the writ of government was reestablished in Jaffna in 1995, was with the intent, to right the wrongs committed in the past, an act of wanton destruction for which the then government was clearly complicit.

"The current peace process is deficient in its lack of safeguards for democratic rights and freedoms. This totalitarian act is sadly symbolic of the current trends in the North and East to curtail independent thinking, dialogue and critical analysis. The Jaffna Public Library has long been a symbol of learning and liberation for the people of the North. The wanton destruction of which was symptomatic of a totalitarian state two decades ago and the prevention of its reopening is a totalitarianism of another kind."

The People's Alliance said yesterday that the government had bowed to the threats of the LTTE betraying democracy.

"We want to emphasise that the cancellation of the re-opening was done at the instance of the Government. The Government has advised the TULF and its Leader Ananda Sangaree to bow down to the LTTE and cancel the meeting," PA media spokesman Sarath Amunugama said at a news briefing.

Dr. Amunugama said: "When we must strengthen the political establishment of people who are freely and democratically elected in the Jaffna peninsula, the Government is encouraging violence and stopping public events which had been decided upon by the elected representatives in Jaffna."

He recalled that the PA initiated the book and brick donation programme to restore the Jaffna Library.

Jaffna Public Library

A Historical View

S.Thanabalasingam

(Librarian, Jaffna Public Library, 1990-2011)

The Library Service in Jaffna has a long history which began in 1848 with the start of the Jaffna Public Library by Sir William Tynum the Government Agent of British Ceylon. Also there was a Law Library in Jaffna which served for Lawyers. But the Present Jaffna Public Library history starts with the establishment of a Jaffna Central Free Tamil Library on 01.08.1934. The key person to establish the library was former court secretary late Mr. K.M. Chellappa who summoned a meeting at Jaffna Central College on 09.06.1934 and established this institution. The committee of the Jaffna Central Free Library movement decided to hand-over the Library to the Urban District Council to run as a free Public Library. The Chairman of the Urban District Council Mr. R.R. Nallaiah accepted the decision and took over the Library on 01.01.1935. Mr. C.S. Rajaratnam was appointed as first Librarian of this Library.

This library was established in private building at Hospital Road, but U.D.C transfer this Library Aboobuker Building at Main Street due to inadequate space. The increase of volume of books and the patroners was forced to transfer the Library to a big Building. It was transferred to Malavarayar building in front of the U.D.C building in 1936.

The change of the building helped to divide the Library as Book Section, Periodical section and newspaper section. The readers of the library also increased. Mr. K. Nagaratnam became the Librarian after the retirement of Mr. Rajaratnam, Mr. K. Nagaratnam was the Key man to get the collection of Books of Rev. Dr. Isac Thambiah.

The Library Service was became a essential service to the citizens of the Jaffna and patronising the library increased. At this stage the U.D.C planned to build a big library to cater all Kinds of Readers. The U.D.C was upgraded as Municipal Council on 01.01.1949 Mr. A. Sam Sabapathy became as first Mayor of Jaffna. Hon. Mayor wished to build a well organised Public Library and he summoned a Public

meeting on 16.06.1952 and formed “Jaffna Central Library Board”. Mr. A. Sam Sabapathy elected president and St. Patrics College Rector Rev. Fr. Long was elected as Vice president Rev. Fr. Long toured all over the world and encouraged to build up a New Library. Rev. Fr. Brought the Chief Librarian of Delhi University Dr. S. R. Ranganathan and Architect Narisiman to plan the Library. Dr. S.S.Ranganathan selected the location drafted the Library plan and Archt. Narisiman Drawn Library Plan. The M.C. conducted carnival and library week to raise funds. The foundation stones were laid by Sam. A. Sabapathy Mayor of Jaffna, Rev. Fr. Long, H.E. Cecil Sayer; British High Commissioner, H.E. Philip Crove, Ambassador for U.S and Mr. Siddharchary, first Secretary of Indian High Commission donated Rs. 10,000/= at this function.

The increase of Readers was forced to open the new library before the completion of the construction work. Then Mayor of Jaffna Mr. A.T. Duaryappa was declared open the Ground Floor of the library on 11.10.1959. The Library building was completed and the services extended to all kind of readers. Many private Collections were received as donation particularly Kopay Vaniasingam’s Collection, Vabuniya pandithar Rasainar’s Collection, Kulasabanathan’s Collections were enriched the Library Book Collection. After the retirement of Mr. Nagaratnam, Mr. V.E. Packianathan who told M.Sc. in Lib. Science became Librarian. He organised the Library according to the Library System, such as classifying books, Cataloguing books. He had very interest develop the library and he worked hard to start the Children’s Library and collected rare Collections such as Palm leaves manuscripts. He was the key person to amalgamate the U.S Information Library which was closed in Jaffna.

This Library’s floor area was 1591 sqr.ft and consisted of Reference Library, Lending Library, Children Library, Periodical Section and an auditorium. This Library contained 97,000 volumes of Books, Pamphlets, Rare Collections and palm leave manuscripts.

This Library was set on fire on 31st May 1981 midnight by anti Social elements. The valuable collection of books, furniture and others completely became ashes. Rev. Fr. David who had seen fire and smoke from the balcony of St. Patrics College collapsed and was dead. The destruction of this library created a big problem for the Govt. of Sri Lanka.

Jaffna citizens and Municipal council wanted to rebuild the Library, as service of the Library is very essential to the Jaffna people’s education. All kinds of the society came forward to aid for rebuild the Library. School Students and Teachers, University Students, Religious organisations and other social organisations contributed to this

reconstruction. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Mr. M.G Ramachandiran sent books worth of Rs. Five million, which enriched the constructed Library.

The Govt. appointed Mr. Lionel Fernando as Commissioner to investigate the anarchy and he recommended Rs. 10.2 million as compensation but President J.R. Jeyawardne granted only Rs. 2,000,000/-.

The M.C reopened the Periodical Section at Town Hall on 03.07.1981 and started to repair the dilapidated Library Building. The North wing was repaired and Reading Room Reference and Children Library were opened in this wing on 10.12.1982.

In the meantime a third wing of the Library was planned and H.W. Mayor of Jaffna Mr. Rajah Visuvanathan laid the foundation stone on 07.02.1982. This Building was constructed and the Ground Floor was completed when it was ceremonially opened on 04.06.1984 by EX. M.P and opposition leader Mr. A. Amirthalingam. According to this plan the building will consist of a section for disabled persons. The construction and development works were continued but the war which disturbed the progress of the work. The Fort Area was the main battle field and the Library was abandoned in 1985.

The Municipal Council and the Library Committee were decided to start Branch libraries to continue the Library services and secure the books. H.W. Mayor Viswanathan and the Municipal Commissioner Mr. C.V.K. Sivagnanam had taken actions to restore the library services. A portion of books and furniture were recovered from the main Library and moved to Nullur Cultural Hall. The Chief Librarian Mrs. R. Nadarajah was acted fast to reopen the library. First Branch Library was established in Chundikuly at Racca Road Community Centre and it was shifted to YMCA Building with effect of 23.03.1986. The Branch Libraries were opened at Nallur, Vannarponnai, Gurunagar and Muslim Area. Also a Hindu, Tamil Cultural Library was opened at Navalur Hindu Cultural Hall. The Jaffna Library service continued through these Libraries to promote the citizen's Educational and Cultural activities. These branch Libraries were specialised in various subjects. The Municipal Council was planned to build permanent buildings to branch libraries. Four buildings at Nallur, Vannarponnai, Gurunagar and Muslim Area were constructed.

The wars started in 1987 and 1990 were heavily destroyed the branch libraries. In 1990 the Municipal Council at Nallur also had aerial attack. The revenues of the Municipal Council decreased to zero and the grants to the M.C were restricted. The library service stood still without any development due to lack of funds. Mr. V.P. Balasingam the Municipal Commissioner thought to develop the library service

to promote the education activities of the books and other assistances. Also he made arrangements to purchase books in Columbo and transport them by sea as required books had not been available in Jaffna. All branch libraries were developed step by step and the students and other scholars of the entire peninsula received a good library service during the war period. But again the branch libraries were abandoned due to mass exodus occurred in 1995. Some libraries were completely destroyed when people returned to Jaffna. The Municipal Commissioner Mr. V.P. Balasingam had taken actions to repair the buildings and reorganise the library services. A preliminary report said that 29000 volumes of books were lost during the mass exodus.

The destruction of the Jaffna library got onto the National Politics and every Government talked regarding the rebuilding of the library. H.E. Mrs Chandrika Kumaranathunka had taken steps to restore this library. A presidential Committee was established for reconstruction works. The Books and Bricks programme was taken to raise funds through "White Lotus Movement." Donations were received through out the world for this programme. H.E. President decided to open a Interim library till the original Library was reconstructed. On 14.01.1998 Thaipongol Day the Interim Library was declared open at Kandy Road in National Housing Authority's Building by Hon. Minister Mangala Samaraweera and Richard Pathirana at the presence of British High Commissioner and British Council Director. Rs. 3 million was released from Presidential Funds to establish this Library. Gift of Books from India-Central and Tamil Nadhu Govt, British-Book, Aid International Asia Foundation and Local Well-wishers including security forces. British Council also donated 02 Computers to modernise the Library Services.

The actions for reconstruction of the Library were continued. A two stage plan was drawn to reconstruct this Library at the cost of Rs. 72 billion. First repair the existing building and in the second stage 02 three storied buildings will be erected by both sides of the Building. The well known Architect M/S. Thurairajah Associates prepared the Plan and they were appointed as consultants with their consultation the Buildings Department reconstruct the Building. The following sections will consist in this Library:

Ground Floor - Periodical section, Lending section, Children section, Acquisition Department and Disabled section.

First Floor - Reference Section, Archive Section, Computer Section and Auditorium.

Top Floor - Art Gallery.

There is an opinion among the scholars who visited this library that the reconstruction of the whole building made to forget the historical destruction and there are no evidences for the future generations' research.



The reconstruction works are nearly completed. The UNESCO with collaboration Ford Foundation had taken a project at the cost of US\$ 2000 to computerize the library and other Technical Assistants with a Mobile Library. Mr. Kurumbasiddy Kanagaratnam wished to give his historical collections on Micro Films. Well-wishers all over the world prepared to assist in the Development programme. Mr. N. Selvarajah from London made arrangements to develop the Book Collection in Library Science and Sri Lanka Collection Chennai Roja Muthaiah Research Library had donated 2000 volumes of rare Collection on Tamil Studies.

The reopening of the reconstructed library is going to be a landmark in the Sri Lankan politics and history of Sri Lankan Tamils. The first stage of the reconstruction is to be completed but the second stage must be commenced very early as this library is going to be developed as one of the modernised model libraries in South East Asia.

Remembering a Cultural Rape

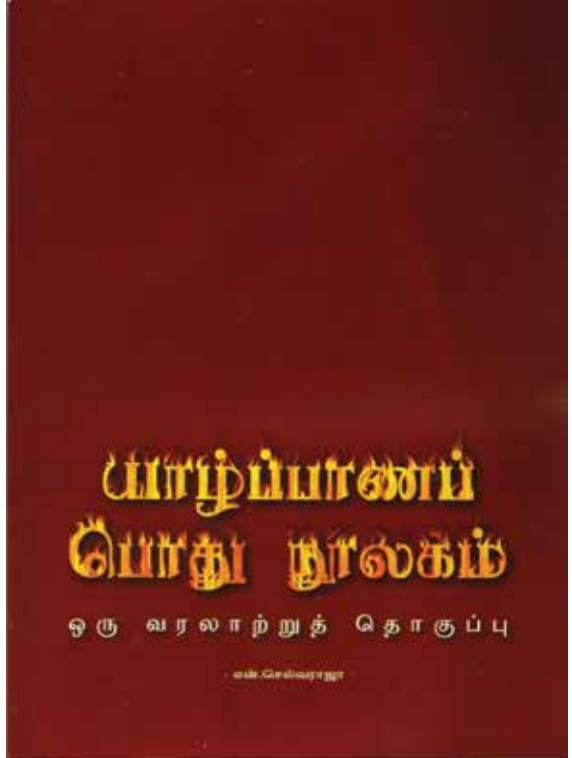
Dr. Siva Thiagarajah

Mr. N.Selvarajah's bilingual (English and Tamil) book JAFFNA PUBLIC LIBRARY: A HISTORICAL COMPILATION published in the United Kingdom on 1 June 2001 marks the twentieth anniversary of the burning of Jaffna Public Library in Sri Lanka.

THE ACT

It was on the night of 1 June 1981 the Jaffna Public Library – one of the most acclaimed libraries in South East Asia – with its invaluable collection of books and rare manuscripts was set on fire.

The library had a priceless collection of 97,000 books and 10,000 manuscripts. The manuscripts included many Ola leaf books. There were Catholic religious books written since 1856 in Spanish and Dutch, and the hand-written manuscript of Robert Knox's History of Ceylon, written in 1660 while he was imprisoned in Kandy. There was "Ceylon Under Hollanders" - the manuscript by Philips Baldius written in 1672. Other works included: The Sanskrit works of Kalidasa in Ola leaf books; the Ola leaf text of 'YalpaNa Vaipava Malai' by Mylvagana Pulavar of Mathagal; some sections of the 'Rasa Murai' – the Ola leaf manuscript detailing the lineage of the Ancient Kings of Jaffna; and the Jaffna(Ola leaf) version of 'Tholkappiyam' used by Ganesha Iyer in the 1930's to write his famous commentary on the Ancient Tamil Grammar. All these were consigned to the flames!



THE REASON FOR THE ARSON

The Act of arson against the Jaffna Public Library was another instance of state-sponsored fanaticism which was let loose in the city of Jaffna between 31 May and 2 June 1981, causing mayhem, carnage and terror.

“With several high ranking Sinhalese security officers and two cabinet ministers Cyril Matthew and Gamini Dissanayaka present in the town (Jaffna), uniformed security men and plain clothed thugs carried out some well organised acts of destruction”. (Nancy Murray: *The State against the Tamils of Sri Lanka: RACISM AND THE AUTHORITAN STATE*: London, 1984.)

“A large group of policemen (estimated variously between 100-200) went on a rampage on the night of May 31- June 1 and June 1-2, burning the market areas of Jaffna town, the office of a Tamil newspaper, the home of the member of Parliament for Jaffna and the Jaffna Public Library.” (Virginia Leary: *Ethnic conflict and Violence in Sri Lanka: Report of a Mission to Sri Lanka on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists*; July-August, 1981.)

“Thousands of Tamils, both young and old had their ‘Konstradt’ in the burning of the Jaffna Public Library. They were compelled to face up to the political reality that the Sinhala government was bent on subjugating the Tamil people and bending them to its will. They were compelled to recognise that the Sri Lankan Parliament was no place for a Tamil with self respect.” (NADESAN SATYENDRA: *Burning of the Jaffna Library: A konstradt for the Tamils: TAMILNATION*, May 1992.)

The destruction of the Jaffna Public Library is an example of a calculated and cold blooded cultural rape among a catalogue of carnage, arson, pillage and murder. The irony is that the perpetrators of these barbaric acts call themselves ‘intellects’ of another race!

THE BOOK

Mr. Selvarajah the author of this book, a consultant to the Jaffna Public Library since 1991 has painstakingly collected materials – press cuttings, editorials, articles, communiqués, leaflets, letters etc. to present this excellent tribute- a catalogue of destruction, devastation, tragedy, anger, rage, hope and faith.

The material presented spans over twenty years from 1991 to 2001, contributed by people from all walks of life. It is interesting to note that the concept of building a library in Jaffna took place more than 150 years ago. In October 1842, Mr. L.C. Grenier, Secretary to the Jaffna Magistrates Courts began collecting books for a library. In 1848 when Sir William Twinham became the Assistant Government

Agent for Jaffna, he acquired Mr. Grenier's Library. On 3 June 1894 he declared this as a Public Library.

There is no information as to the intervening years. In the 1930's this library came under the management of Mr. Isaac Thambiah, the High Court judge of Jaffna. In 1933 K.M. Chellappah, a public figure of his day was conducting a free library at his home, sharing his books with others. Mr. Isaac Thambiah and Mr. Chellappah decided to pool their books and resources together. On 1 August 1934, the Jaffna Public Library was opened at Hospital Road. In January 1935, this was moved to a site at Main Street.

In 1953 Mr. Sam Sabapathy, the Mayor of Jaffna, with the corroboration of academics like Rev. Fr. Long, rector of St. Patrick's college, laid the foundations for the modern Jaffna Public Library. The first stage of this monument was completed in October 1959.

When rebuilding of the damaged library building commenced a year after its destruction, many voiced concern about the wisdom of building the library in its original site in a remote place, removed from the population. Several others raised concern about building a library near Jaffna Fort, which always housed the Army and other service personnel. These 'critics' were proven right when war broke out soon after its reconstruction. The restored building took a stern beating with shells, bombs and bullets.

A more recent idea that has been put forward is to spread out the library as small units to different parts of the peninsula, so that any future destruction would not be as calamitous as before. In many countries valuable manuscripts and rare books are preserved in microfilms and are stored in the vaults of the library. Such advanced storage facilities must be employed to preserve our rare books for future generations.

This book provides room for ideas from all sides, providing a balanced view to the administrators of this library to formulate an appropriate provision in future. Several photographs, line drawings, and maps that accompany the text enhance the quality of the book. Furthermore all 128 pages of double crown size are printed on high quality glossy paper.

Overall this is an excellent book that must be possessed by every Sri Lankan Tamil who values their cultural heritage.

THE AUTHOR

Mr. Selvarajah, the compiler of this work is a well known librarian from Sri Lanka. He began his career in 1976 as a librarian at Ramanathan College, Chunnakam and later became the chief librarian at the Jaffna District Library of the Sarvodaya Movement. During 1981-82 he served an year in Indonesia under United Nations Development Programme as a UN Volunteer, to organise a Rural Community Library System.

In 1983 he became the chief librarian at the Evelyn Rutnam Institute for Inter-cultural Studies, affiliated to the Jaffna College. In 1990 he became an adviser to the department of Hindu Culture, under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of Sri Lanka. Since 1991 Mr. Selvarajah is a consultant to the Jaffna Public Library. He founded the Ayothy Library Services in 1985, which has published this invaluable book.

Govt.-LTTE Tussle Over Reopening of Jaffna library

Kesara Abeywardena

A tussle between the government and the LTTE is taking place on the reopening of the Jaffna Public Library which is scheduled for Friday.

Jaffna sources said that the LTTE had strongly objected to the reopening ceremony on Friday to be attended by several government ministers and had instructed the Municipal Commissioner of the Jaffna Municipal Council not to have the opening ceremony. The public library comes under the Jaffna Municipal Council which is controlled by the TULF.

However the government and the Jaffna Municipal Council are expected to go ahead with the opening of the Jaffna Public Library on Friday despite severe objections from the LTTE. Several front organisations of the LTTE had also openly objected to the reopening ceremony saying that the reconstruction work of the library building was not yet fully completed.

Jaffna Mayor S. Kandiah told "The Island" yesterday that the reconstructed Jaffna Library would be opened by TULF stalwart and Jaffna district MP V. Anandasangari on Friday as scheduled. He ruled out any objections to the opening ceremony and said that the reconstruction work of the building was almost finished.

Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Refugees Minister Jayalath Jayawardena who was in Jaffna yesterday said there was no problem regarding the reopening of the library and it would take place as scheduled. He said that Power and Energy Minister and deputy leader of the UNP Karu Jayasuriya was also expected to attend the ceremony.

Jaffna Mayor S. Kandiah had already sent invitations to government ministers and other dignitaries for the ceremony. Jaffna sources said that the LTTE was not in favour of government ministers and other democratically elected representatives of the Tamils in Jaffna being in the limelight in the area.

Meanwhile Rehabilitation Ministry sources said that a meeting is expected to be held today in this regard to take a final decision on the issue. Earlier it was reported

that the LTTE had objected to a move by the government to bring school children from the North to Colombo to participate in the Independence Day celebrations.

The Jaffna Public Library which was a central symbol of the North-East conflict was burned during the District Development Council elections in 1981. With the recapturing of Jaffna by the government troops the reconstruction of the library building also began. Over Rs.120 million had been allocated to the reconstruction of the massive building. The work so far had cost Rs. 98 million, reconstruction ministry sources said.

(The Island, 11.2.2003)

Destroying a Symbol: Checkered History of Sri Lanka's Jaffna Public Library

Rebecca Knuth

(University of Hawaii USA)

**(Abstract of a paper presented at WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION
CONGRESS: 72ND IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL
20-24 August 2006, Seoul, Korea)**

Despite (or, in some cases, because of) modern revulsion for book burning, the destruction of libraries in the last century has continued unabated. My new book, **Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction** (Praeger, 2006) probes the dynamics of library destruction and devotes significant attention to the disturbing phenomenon of ethnic biblioclasm. As occurring in postcolonial countries, library destruction has tended to be the violent product of social flashpoint as well as political calculation. Thrown off balance by rapid secularization and urbanization, poverty, a lack of economic and social safety nets, and polarization along ethnic and religious lines, perpetrators have been schooled to believe that their group's physical and cultural survival is under threat. Seeing themselves as defenders of a beleaguered people, extremist groups (such as religious nationalists), execute book and library destruction as a high-stake, high-affect tactic in battles over clashing belief systems. With their own community sanctioning their actions, perpetrators operate with relative impunity. Extremism, however, breeds extremism. In Sri Lanka, the destruction (by the Sinhalese) of the Jaffna Public Library, the Tamil minority's primary cultural institution, led to full-scale civil war. The shattered library served and still serves as a symbol of violation and ethnic violence.

Tamil and Sinhalese conflicts emerged after decolonization. When the British took over control of the region they called Ceylon in 1796, they administered the Tamil areas as a separate entity. But by 1815 they had conquered the whole island and set up a centralized government in Colombo. The British enforced supremacy for the English language and Christianity. In the late nineteenth century, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism was revived in the south, and in the north the Tamils maintained

group consciousness by retaining their own language, culture, territory, and Hindu faith (Wilson 2000, 1).

The Jaffna Public Library began as the private collection of the scholar K.M.Chellapha, who began lending books from his home in 1933. In 1934, a committee set up a formal library, with Chellapha as secretary. Initially, 1000 books, newspapers, and journals were kept in a single room, but soon the collection was shifted into a building on Jaffna's main street and was opened to subscribers. The library was so popular that a cross-section of prominent members of the community began raising funds to build a permanent, modern building. A noted architect designed the new building, and prominent Indian librarian S.R. Ranganathan served as an advisor to ensure that the library was held to international standards. Educated members of the community donated books. The main building opened in 1959. The children's section and an auditorium were added later.

The collection became well known internationally and was popular with Sinhalese and Tamil intellectuals, as well as the general public. It became the major repository for all known literary source materials of the Tamil people (Sivathamby 2004). By 1981, it had almost 100,000 Tamil books and rare, old manuscripts and documents, some written on dried palm leaves and stored in fragrant sandalwood boxes. Some books were literally irreplaceable: the *Yalpanam Vaipavama*, a history of Jaffna, was the only existing copy (Peris 2001). The library held miniature editions of the Ramayana epic, yellowing collections of extinct Tamil-language newspapers (Dugger 2001), and microfilms of important documents and records of the *Morning Star*, a journal published by missionaries in the early twentieth century ("Civilization and Culture..." 2003). It held historical scrolls, works on herbal medicine, and the manuscripts of prominent intellectuals, writers, and dramatists. Indeed, one could think of the Jaffna Library as a national library even though a Tamil nation had not yet come into being.

With privileged-minority status assured by the British, the Tamils, although only one-fifth of the population, were well represented in the government until independence in 1948. Before leaving Ceylon, the British established both Sinhalese and Tamil as national languages. But the postcolonial government was increasingly dominated by Sinhalese Buddhists who operated on the "fact" that Sri Lanka was "inherently and rightfully" a purely Buddhist and Sinhalese state (Nissan 1984, 176). In the face of intense competition over economic opportunities, education, and political power and representation, Sinhalese officials saw their role as rectifying perceived inequities by directing resources away from the Tamils and towards their own ethnic group (Senaratne 1997, 21). In their eyes, decreasing Tamil influence was a necessary part of fostering Buddhist cultural renaissance (De Silva 1986, 178). Language policy became a vehicle for cementing preeminence as Sinhalese-

only policies undermined the Tamils' ability to secure and retain government and professional positions. Politicians diverged from this path at their peril: In the late 1950s the Buddhist prime minister declared Sinhalese to be the only official language; upon vacillating in the face of Hindu protests, he was assassinated by a Buddhist monk who considered him to be a traitor to the faith (Haught 1995, 108). Buddhism became the state religion.

The Sinhalese claimed power in Sri Lanka on both demographic and ideological grounds. Their destiny as an ethnic group was inseparable from their religious beliefs (Obeyesekere 1984, 155). Though Buddhists are generally perceived as pacifists, the Sinhalese believed that their charge of preserving the "true" Theravada Buddhism justified violent measures (Fox 2002, 78). Post colonial anti-Western sentiments fueled Buddhist nationalist claims that the Sinhalese *jatiya* (race or nation) had been weakened by the influence of Christianity, modern lifestyles, and foreign commerce (Roberts 1994, 191). Throughout the 1970s, ethnic conflict was aggravated by the breakdown of traditional norms and the population's frustration with inflation and economic problems. Authoritarian measures used to maintain control pitted the government not only against the Tamils but also against civil society, liberalism, and moderation in general. United National Party (UNP) politicians and merchants hired gangs of "thugs" (a term that was common parlance in Sri Lanka) and used state-owned buses to transport them to sites where they broke up political meetings and protests and harassed opposition parties, trade unions, workers, and public employees. The thugs threatened judges, artists, and writers. They beat up Sri Lanka's best known dramatist Ediriweera Sarachchandra, who had satirized the decay of cultural values brought on by the government's policies (Obeyesekere 1984, 163). No one was ever prosecuted or arrested for these attacks. Rather, paramilitaries and the police were empowered by legislation that outlawed "terrorism," which was the word used to describe dissent in any form (Obeyesekere 1984, 174).

A renewed sense of national pride grew alongside of an opposition to pluralism (Roberts 1989, 70). Buddhist nationalism was constructed in direct opposition to the Tamils who were viewed as as "parayo"--foreign inferiors who had to be controlled or cast out if catastrophic disorder was to be avoided (Roberts 1989, 70). Buddhist extremists promoted the notion that Buddhism was under attack by the Hindu Tamils, who dominated the northern part of the country and the city of Jaffna (Peris 2001). "Threat" was magnified by the existence of millions of Tamils in nearby India. The Sinhalese propaganda recast the Sri Lankan Tamils as longstanding enemies and the Sinhalese as chronically having had to fend off Tamil invasions (Obeyesekere 1984, 155). The violence that erupted was cyclical: when the Tamils balked at Sinhalese-only and other discriminatory policies, whether through peaceful protests or isolated terrorism, the Sinhalese government and

people responded in a “mood of savage paranoia” (Spencer 1984, 193). The Sinhalese targeted the Tamils in violent riots in 1956, 1958, and 1977 ((Das 1990, 6). These riots were similar to pogroms in that they were semi-organized and instigated as a frenzied response to atrocity stories and rumors that spread quickly and elicited first horror and then retribution (Roberts 1994, 323).

Systematic discrimination plus mob violence in turn radicalized many Tamils (Wilson 2000, 5). During the 1970s, a budding culture of resistance, expressed first through literature, became increasingly politicized. In 1973, at its 12th Convention, the major Tamil political party, the Federal Party, invoked the recognized principle of the right to self-determination and resolved that the Tamils were fully qualified to be regarded as a separate Nation by virtue of their language, culture, history, and territory (Wilson 2000, 105). In the second half of the 1970s, civil disobedience by Tamils increased. Youth groups embraced terrorism as a method of self-defense and viewed themselves as engaging in a holy war against the Sinhalese state (Wilson 2000, 125). They confronted the government with guerilla tactics and through murder and robbery. They were not well organized, but the desire for a separate state had moved from the “lunatic fringes” into the center of Tamil political calculations and events were building to a showdown (Arasaratnam 1979, 516).

Flashpoint arrived in Jaffna in 1981 during long-awaited elections in which Tamils hoped to redress a lack of political representation. The Sinhalese UNP party, however, was determined to control the results and sent a contingent of police, paramilitaries, and thugs to intimidate Tamil voters. On Sunday, May 31, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) held a rally at which three Sinhalese policeman were shot, two fatally. That night the Sinhalese police and paramilitaries began a pogrom that lasted three days. The TULF headquarters was burned, as were the offices and press of the Tamil language newspaper. Statues of Tamil cultural and religious figures were defaced and demolished (Peris 2001). A Hindu temple and over one hundred Tamil-owned shops and homes were looted and torched. Four Tamils were taken from their homes and killed. Late on the first night, eyewitnesses saw uniformed police and Sinhalese gang members set fire to the Jaffna Public Library (Peris 2001). Two Sinhalese Cabinet members who watched it burn from the verandah of the nearby Jaffna Rest House claimed that it was “an ‘unfortunate incident,’ where a ‘few’ policeman ‘got drunk’ and went on a ‘looting spree,’ all on their own” (“Remembering the Jaffna ...” 2001). National newspapers did not cover the event or the pogrom that accompanied it. Sinhalese politicians expressed no regrets and used subsequent parliamentary discussion to drive home the message sent by the library’s destruction: if the Tamils were unhappy, they should leave Sri Lanka and return to their homeland, India (Destruction of Jaffna... 2004).

The Tamils reacted to the loss of the building and collection with intense grief. Immediately afterwards, a journalist found a “heartbroken” local lecturer wandering through rooms thickly carpeted with half-burnt pages: He quoted him as saying “The Sinhalese were jealous of the library” (Wheen 1981, 13). Twenty years later, the mayor of Jaffna, Nadarajah Raviraj, still grieved at the recollection of the flames he saw as a college student (Dugger 2001). For the Tamils, the devastated library became an icon of the “physical and imaginative violence” of Sinhalese extremists (Nesiah 2003). For Tamils who had come from the “arid, hardscrabble north” and risen to prominence in the professions and civil service through a devotion to education, the attack was an assault on their aspirations (Dugger 2001), value for learning, and traditions of academic achievement (Nesiah 2003). The attack convinced many that the Sinhalese intended to extinguish Tamil culture and race in Sri Lanka (Dugger 2001). Group loyalty solidified, and the secessionist militancy of Tamil radicals was affirmed (Wilson 2000).

After the attack on the Jaffna library, the Sinhalese government accelerated its long-standing pattern of muzzling those who favored compromise. For moderates within both groups, the burning of the library brought home the horrors of ethnic conflict, with its renunciation of liberal traditions in the face of concerted efforts to maintain violent emotional reactivity (Nesiah 2003, Sivathamby 2004). The attack on the library ultimately benefited all those, Tamil and Sinhalese alike, who wished to foreclose a robust civil society and arrest public debate (Nesiah 2003). The demise of the Jaffna Library facilitated a power shift among the Tamils. Radicals gained power and attacked not only the Sinhalese majority but also Tamil liberals, who until that point had maintained at least some influence. In an increasingly polarized atmosphere, both Sinhalese and Tamil extremists seemed bent on negating any definition of Tamil identity that centered on a pluralistic culture of learning. Moderate Tamil liberals, as a result, were forced into exile. Some of those who remained and witnessed the ensuing civil war would become profoundly despairing. In 1990, a Jaffna poet, Sivaramani (2001), made a bonfire of her poetry and then committed suicide. Her poem, “A War-Torn Night,” mourns the brutalization of Tamil culture and renunciation of critical thinking.

The pogrom of 1981 was followed by violent outbreaks in 1983. Hindu guerillas ambushed an army patrol and triggered another anti-Tamil riot in which Buddhists massacred hundreds of Hindus. Then, in turn, the fanatical Tamil Liberation Tigers launched terror campaigns with bombings and executions. Armed Hindu groups attacked Buddhist holy sites and shot Buddhist monks in line-ups. In one incident, 173 people were killed (Haught 1995). Counterexecutions and retaliatory cycles of violence led to full-scale civil war in which an estimated 65,000 people died

and 1.6 million were displaced (Aryaratnam 2003). Jaffna was controlled by the Tamil Tigers from 1990-95. It was captured by the Sinhalese government in 1996, whereupon Norway brokered an uneasy cease fire.

In May, 1982, a year after the library's initial destruction, the community had sponsored Jaffna Public Library Week and worked together to collect thousands of books. Repairs on parts of the building were near completion when war broke out in June, 1983, and the library building was damaged by bullets, shells, and bombs (Thuriarajah 1996). Partially restored rooms were reopened in 1984 only to be caught in the crossfire yet again in 1985. When Tamil rebels attacked a police station near the library, a librarian was able to negotiate safe passage for the staff and students. But that night Sinhalese soldiers entered the lending room and set off bombs that shredded thousands of books. The library was finally abandoned and its shell- and bulletpocked walls, blackened with the smoke of burnt books, haunted the city. In 1998, the government began renovating the library in response to international demands for a negotiated end to the war. It was an effort to win back the confidence of the Tamil people (Francis 2003). The media minister publicly lamented the destruction of the library as an "evil act," the product of hatred and misguided politics on the part of the previous government (Peris 2001). One million dollars was spent and 25,000 books in the Tamil and English languages were collected. By 2001 a replacement building was finally built. The opening was to serve as a step for healing the wounds of two decades of warfare, but political conflict over its opening highlighted the mistrust that lingered (Beck 2003). The opening ceremony in 2003 was postponed after twentythree members of Jaffna's town council resigned in the face of threats by Tamil Tiger insurgents (Aryaratnam 2003). The immediate fate of the library, of course, depends on the longevity of the tenuous brokered peace. Its long-term survival is linked to whether the government can manage tolerance and intellectual freedom and whether the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples can learn to live together in peace.

Destroying a library is a satisfactory way to lash out at a despised group and express contempt for its purpose and goals. The violence contributes to a repressive environment in which the perpetrator's exclusivist goals can be profitably pursued. A government does not have to be directly involved in the destruction of culture to be complicit: politicians merely have to stand by and let it go unpunished. If the government and central belief system accommodates pluralism, then books and libraries are fairly secure. If, however, the state is captured by an exclusionist group, then books and libraries enter the danger zone. Inflamed by ideology and possessing far too much power, an extreme regime may conclude that ethnic cleansing is justifiable. A case can be made that ethnic cleansing, including the

destruction of libraries, is the logical end of ethnic conflicts that have been intensified exponentially by grievance, greed, and power. When rivalry fuels hatred and clashes over beliefs spawn extremism, violence visited upon the bodies of the enemy is also visited on their texts.

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Who burnt the Jaffna Library? Edward Gunawardena

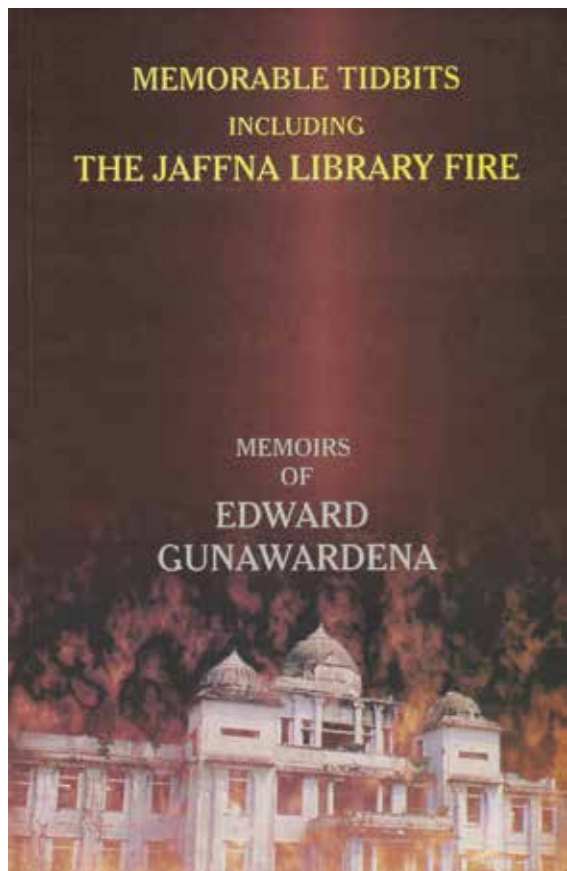
(Extracted from the Chapter XI of the Book 'Memorable Tidbits including The Jaffna Library Fire' Memoirs of Edward Gunawardena, Battaramulla, 2013)

The burning of the Jaffna Public Library in 1981 is not only a controversial subject, it is a sensitive one. Much has been written on the subject mainly for propaganda purposes and for political advantage. It is significant that no person who was a witness to the incident or even present in Jaffna at the time of the incident has written anything on the subject.

Having kept mum on the subject for three decades except once in 2006 when I was compelled to come out with the truth when an admirer of Anton Balasingham writing to a Sri Lankan Newspaper alleged that I was

responsible for the burning of the library (when I conclude this chapter I hope to elaborate on this), I decided that I should write particularly to dispel the untruths clouding this event; of what I witnessed, what I came to know and the deductions and conclusions I arrived at particularly with my training and experience as an intelligence officer.

I thought the best way to make a start to this all important chapter is to present the reader with a reminder of the common perceptions regarding the burning of the library that existed in the eighties and even prevails to the present day. An



article on the subject that appeared in a Sri Lankan newspaper in 2008 projecting the common perceptions in a nutshell provided me with a suitable platform to commence this effort.

Burning Memories

A Journalist by the name of Aboorvan Prabanjana writing on ‘Tamil Matters’ in the Sunday Lakkima of 16th October, 2008 has opened his article entitled, ‘Burning Memories’, thus: “The burning of the Jaffna library in 1981 is an event that has left indelible imprints in the minds of Sri Lankan Tamils. It marked the destruction of the intellectual heritage preserved down the ages by the Jaffna community. It is now an open secret that the crime was plotted and perpetrated by the politicians of the then ruling party”.

This article of Prabanjana written twenty seven years after the event has been meant primarily to draw attention to a documentary film entitled ‘Burning Memories’ directed by one S. Someetharan. Inter alia this article also alleges:

- a) “Mobs brought to Jaffna from the southern part of the country allegedly led by a prominent politician of the then ruling party who was active during the campaign for the District Development Council elections of 1981, created a frenetic situation in Jaffna. The mobs were reportedly aided by the police. They set fire to several important buildings in the Jaffna town including the public library”.
- b) “President Ranasinghe Premadasa who in a public speech hinted about the culprits responsible for the wanton act, speaking at a Muslim College in Puttalam in October 1991, in the aftermath of the impeachment against him sponsored by the UNP dissidents Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake President Premadasa reportedly said, During the District Development Council elections in 1981, some of our party members took people from other parts to the North, created havoc and disrupted the elections in the north. If you wish to find out who burnt the priceless collection of books in the Jaffna library you have only to look at the faces of those opposing us”.

The above assertions of Prabanjana, to me who was an eye witness to the happenings in Jaffna including the library going up in flames are baseless and unsubstantiated. The present generation has been fed on writings of this nature and made to believe that mobs, politicians and police officers were culprits. All these assertions have to be critically looked at without bias to arrive at any reasonable conclusions as to, “Who burnt the Jaffna library”.

In the penultimate paragraph of Prabanjana’s article he has made an observation on the formal opening of the renovated library, an observation that will become

increasingly significant as we go along. The narrator of Someetharan's documentary has stated that the renovated library began to function without any formal opening as, "opposition grew to the government's and municipal Council's willingness to declare open the library".

But Prabanjana wittingly or unwittingly adds, "There is however another version of this story relating to the cancelled opening ceremony which the documentary fails to mention. Many a 'Dalit' activist has pointed out that the move to declare open the library faced strong opposition because the event was to be headed by the then Jaffna Mayor Sellan Kanthaiyah who was from an oppressed caste. It is said that those who belonged to the dominant caste in Jaffna could not tolerate the public library being declared open under the chairmanship of a 'low caste' man",

The question that comes to my mind and should to any prudent person is if the dominant caste in Jaffna (The Vellala caste) could not tolerate a 'low caste' man opening the renovated library, with what restraint the 'low caste' non vellala community would have for decades tolerated the existence of the library which was symbolic of the intellectual and social superiority of the vellalas? Did they bide their time and wait for an opportune moment to destroy this symbolic edifice of the Hindu aristocracy? It was the oppressed non vellala castes that comprised the bulk of the Prabahakaran led LTTE.

To this LTTE with its unquestionable caste foundation "the destruction of the intellectual heritage preserved down the ages", was of little or no consequence. In fact it was not too long ago that the library was the exclusive preserve of the Vellalas. There is no reason to believe that Prabahakaran and his young followers imbued with Marxist thinking would have viewed the public library symbolic of the establishment- the intellectually and socially superior elite Hindu Vellala aristocracy. This was indeed a major stumbling block to the forward march of the 'the Boys'. They certainly could not have entertained any qualms even in destroying this symbol if it were to give a turbo-boost to their ambitions.

The Beginnings of LTTE Terrorism

The lies and dubious assertions all of which can be countered by facts repeated over and over again even in our not so prestigious parliament, by individuals who pose as intellectuals interested in the so called ethnic question and by mercenary NGO's have come to be believed without question. The propagandists of the LTTE undoubtedly got maximum mileage out of the burning of the library as people in Sri Lanka and abroad had been made to believe that it was the work of Sinhalese politicians, police officers and goons.

More importantly, the present generation believes or has been made to believe that the LTTE's quest for a separate state of Eelam through a war characterized by terrorism was motivated solely by acts such as the burning the library and the anti-Tamil riots of 1983.

If I were to recount briefly from memory, sporadic acts of terrorism began to emerge particularly with the promulgation of the Republican Constitution of 1972. As far back as May 1972 attempts were made by militant youths to topple a key high-tension electricity tower and also kidnap the children of a Tamil Cabinet minister Chelliah Kumarasuriyar.

Organized Terrorism

Organized Terrorism began to emerge by the mid-seventies. Alfred Duraiappah was personally assassinated by Prabahakaran. Police officers including retired officers and police informants began to be brutally killed. Robberies of banks, co-operatives, petrol filling stations and even passenger bus collections had become the order of the day.

Before the end of the seventies the LTTE had advanced so much as a well-knit terrorist outfit that it was seeking world attention. The meticulous planning that went into the explosion of the Air Ceylon Avro aircraft on the 7th Sept. 1978 showed that the 'Boys' had come of age. Fortunately the plan misfired. The explosion that was planned to take place over the Galle Face Green when the ceremonies connected with the promulgation of the new constitution were taking place in fact occurred before the Avro took off from Ratmalana. Had it exploded as planned it would certainly have hit the world headlines like The Lockerbie crash.

Another sensational act of terrorism in the same year, in April if I remember right was the brutal killing after much torture of IP Bastiampillai, SI Perampalam, PS Balasingham and PCD Siriwardena at Murunkan. The first information received was of the four decomposing bodies by the Intelligence Services Division (ISD) of the Police of which I was the Director at the time.

It was about this time, 1979 to be more precise when I was the Director of Intelligence that I accompanied Brigadier 'Bull' Weeratunga to Jaffna. The latter's mandate from President Jayawardena was 'to eliminate terrorism from the peninsula'. But the militant youths who began to be hunted down fled to India where they continued their training under Indian and the PLO experts on Terrorism. However, by 1981 most of the trained youths had returned to commit murders and robberies with impunity. Their ranks were also beginning to swell enamored by their adventurous nature of the movement.

It was in this prevailing atmosphere that the government decided to hold the District Development Council (DDC) elections. The Jayawardena government believed that the strengthening of the state's hold over the peninsula by holding elections and having a democratic peripheral administration would help to break the backbone of the Tigers. To the latter who by now not only had the backing of India but who had announced to the world of their existence as a formidable group of 'freedom fighters' it provided a challenge of a different nature. Anton Balasingham who by now was firmly in the saddle as the mentor of Prabahakaran was to tell the 'Boys' that under no circumstances should the government of J.R. Jayawardena be allowed to take political control of Jaffna.

The Indira Gandhi government that had strained relations with J.R's rule was also interested to see that the central government did not have control over Jaffna. India wished for a maneuverable power set-up in the North of Sri Lanka. Indian intelligence, (RAW) had been given the task of disrupting the DDC elections. I shall later recall an incident where I had an encounter with a RAW agent during the elections in Jaffna.

Reaching maturity

It is indeed significant that when the eighties commenced the separatist movement of the Tigers had reached a high degree of maturity. Splinter groups had been eliminated and Prabahakaran who had built up an image as a strong and dynamic leader had become the supreme commander. Uma Maheswaran who believed that a separate state could be achieved by resorting to urban guerilla tactics had lost his appeal.

Prabahakaran firmly believed that a well planned multipronged approach was required. He had realized the need for a sound theoretical base that would appeal to the youth, the importance of the collection of funds, getting the support of the western world where there were Tamils in influential positions in many cities and above all he was determined to make the world know that the LTTE had launched a liberation struggle for the oppressed Tamil people.

The shrewd Prabahakaran also realized that to win the sympathy of the West he had to demonstrate an affinity to the catholic faith. By indirectly portraying the Vellalas as the protectors of the Hindu tradition he had successfully won over the Catholic bishops to his cause. Dr. Anthonypillai Stanislaus Balasingham a Catholic Marxist theoretician married to an Australian radical had become Prabahakaran's main propaganda organizer. Pamphlets craftily authored by Balasingham even with a map demarcating the boundaries of the proposed Eelaam were being circulated

in all western capitals. These were freely available even in Pettah, Wellawatta and Wattala.

Balasingham who authored a book entitled, “Towards a Socialist Eelaam”, was also a member of the Communist Party of Britain. A keen student of world terrorist movements he had hardened himself as a brutal strategist not opposed to the killing of non-Christians for the furtherance of the movement he represented. Had he not died before the war ended in 2009, perhaps he would have successfully used his clout with powerful elements in Europe, America and Canada or even Australia to provide safe passage out of the country for Prabahakaran, Nadesan and others.

LTTE Terrorism immediately prior to 1981

Reference has already been made to the return of trained cadres who had fled to India in 1979. With their return after intensive training in Indian jungle camps under PLO experts, arms and explosives also had been smuggled into the country and stored in safe-houses. The Jaffna District Intelligence Bureau reported to the Intelligence Services Division that police patrols were under threat of attack by pistol gangs and that more and more youths were joining the rebels.

The Superintendent of Police Jaffna had reported to the DIG of the Northern Range that the Government agent Yogendra Doraisamy had received anonymous telephone calls ordering him under threat of death not to a) Carry out instructions of government when making appointments government departments without a letter from one ‘Kanthan’ alias ‘Harry’ b) not to carry out requests of TULF leaders and c) not to issue liquor licenses unless recommended by ‘Kanthan’.

I met Yogendra Doraisamy for the first time in 1979. He was at the airport to receive Brig. Weeratunga and myself when we went for the Emergency operation. Yogendra Doraisamy was a gentleman of the highest integrity. Hailing from a distinguished Hindu family of the Jaffna aristocracy he was a highly cultured, erudite and able administrator who had been nurtured in an atmosphere of high democratic and moral values. Such threats coming from people of his ancestral Jaffna would have been truly heartbreaking.

The treatment that this much respected gentleman had to endure demonstrated in no certain terms the dramatic change that was taking place in the peninsula. Clearly it was a manifestation of the rejection of the hitherto respected values and the gross disregard for the lawfully established instruments of administration by the ‘Boys’ hell-bent on destroying the establishment.

It is not clear whether the DIG Northern range ‘Brute’ Mahendran reported this dangerous development to the President or the Defence Ministry. Mahendran

himself a Tamil with relatives and interests in Jaffna naturally would have been apprehensive of repercussions. The tigers had proved that they had no mercy for ‘Tamil traitors’.

The Escalation of Violence and Political Intrigue

From the time the Jayawardena government decided to hand over the administration of Jaffna to the people of Jaffna violence had begun to escalate. Policemen serving as well as retired were the targets. When the People’s Bank cash was robbed at the Neervely junction in March 1981 constables Muthu Banda and Ariyaratna were shot dead with a sub-machine gun.

Apart from the violence angle, the political intrigue that developed and the socio-political environment of the time in Jaffna also need to be looked at to properly understand the circumstances that prevailed in Jaffna during the DDC elections when there were several cases of arson including the burning of the library.

Intelligence reports suggested that if a District Council was formed with elected representatives the problem of the people could effectively be addressed and the influence of the militant youths would wane. President Jayawardena also believed that by the vigorous development of industries and fisheries more employment could be provided. He was also keen to develop the schools and promote sports.

The Tamil political parties naturally came to the conclusion that if the UNP or any other national political party won it would be their death knell. The TULF and the Tamil Congress decided to enter the fray using their maximum resources. These parties expected the support of the militants. But the latter through overtly with them entertained fears that a political victory for the TULF would lead to their downfall. They also told the TULF in no uncertain terms that they could form a district administration with the militants for which a committee was to be formed under the chairmanship of a confidant of Prabahakaran.

I as the Director of Intelligence at the time kept the President and the Ministry of Defence informed of the above developments but the TULF was not in a position to offer any assistance or co-operate with the President. The TULF in fact refrained from accepting any office or responsibility for the administration of the District resulting in a UNPer becoming the District Minister.

The Role of Indian Intelligence

By the end of the seventies the relations between India and Sri Lanka were far from cordial. JR had even most undiplomatically made an insulting reference to the Congress Party symbol. As mentioned earlier the RAW (Research and Analysis

Wing) had been given a distinct task- the disruption of the election.

A highly disturbing prospect for RAW was the emergence of a democratic Eelaam with elected rulers. RAW was of the view that such a development would not only lead to dangerous separatist repercussions in Tamil Nadu but also provide a bulwark to India's avowed ambition to be the sole and undisputed power in the Indian Ocean.

India was becoming more and more convinced that a state of Eelaam would be a threat to the defence and stability of India. Even in the seventies Indian defence analysts like K. Subramaniam the Director of the Institute of Defence and strategic studies had expressed fears that an Eelaam would not be strong enough to resist superpower influence and it would also link up with the massive Tamil community of South India which could present India with a problem more serious than the Kashmir- Jammu problem, The Assam problem or the Naxalites.

It goes without saying that the LTTE that by this time held the UNP and the Tamil Political parties in distrust, determined to disrupt the DDC elections to prevent the emergence of a democratic set-up would have been pleasantly encouraged by the imbroglio that India was in. RAW would certainly have briefed the 'Boys' on what India desired.

At this point I cannot help but recall an incident that occurred on the day following the burning of the library. In the late seventies as Sri Lanka's Director of Intelligence I had been able to make direct contact with RAW. On my visit to Delhi with President Jayawardena in 1979 I was taken by Mr. Gonzales the acting Indian Foreign Secretary to the South Block and introduced to Norshi Suntook, Director of RAW. Thereafter I was able to make a few good RAW contacts.

On the 2nd of June 1981, the day following the acts of arson in Jaffna when I was resting in the afternoon in the Residency and Army officer woke me and told me on Shan had come to see me. He was dressed in Verti like any other Jaffna gentlemen. For a moment I could not recognize him. I had met him last at a Madras hotel where I shared a beer with him. I had come to know him when the Indian Prime Minister Moraji Desai came to Sri Lanka and I was his Security Co-ordinator. Shan came in Moraji Desai's advance security contingent; and I remember taking him and another office Medhekar, who later became the IGP of Mumbai, to my brother's residence in Kandy for lunch one day.

Shan had a brief chat with me. He told me that he was in a hurry as he had to see the Indian High Commissioner in the evening. When I asked him what brought him to Jaffna his reply was, "our mission is to see that the government does not

win the election”. Without my soliciting an opinion he also add, “The (meaning the burning of the library) will make Sri Lanka international pariahs”. Apparently RAW was aware of the advice received by the LTTE and what the latter was planning to do. My suspicions were confirmed. It became clear to me that there was a nexus between the disruption of the elections and the burning of the library.

Balasinghams active in Madras

Although it was too late for analysis and any meaningful conclusion, for nearly a week prior to the 1st of June 1981 information regarding the activities of Anton Balasingham and his wife Adele from informants who had actually attended the lectures of the Balasinghams.

Although the Balasinghams were usually resident at 54, Kelvendon House, Guildford Road, London SW8, they had taken up residence at a state guest house in Madras with the help of a Tamil Nadu politician a friend of Prabahakaran. Obviously Prabahakaran had wanted to have Balasingham close at hand for urgent advice. Apparently things had begun to move fast.

The main thrust of Balasinghams lectures to the ‘Boys’ in Madras had been:

- a) The time was appropriate for as many Tamils as possible to seek asylum in the capitals of Europe, America, Canada and Australia. This should be to convince the foreign sympathizers that the Tamils are an oppressed race, they are being harassed by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces and the Police and the government of Sri Lanka is violating Human Rights.
- b) The need for some sensational act to attract the attention of the world to the cause of the Tamils and also provide grist to the mills of the world media.
- c) The need for a steady flow of funds if the movement is to be sustained particularly if an armed struggle had to be launched. Balasingham had stressed that an armed struggle was inevitable.
- d) Adele Balasingham had specifically mentioned that she was in touch with the Australian immigration authorities and the latter welcomed asylum seekers from oppressed communities.

Balasingham had emphasized that something to galvanize world media attention had to be accomplished early. This only the Balasinghams, the LTTE high command and a selected section of the media apparently knew ‘something’.

How I happened to be in Jaffna at this crucial time

On 24th May 1981 Dr. Thiyagarajah the Chief UNP candidate for the DDC elections was shot at Moolai in the Chankani police area after an election meeting of the UNP. He was rushed to the Jaffna General Hospital and died on the following day.

With his assassination the intensity of the police patrolling was increased. The Army and Navy were also called in to assist the police. All police officers were to be armed, inspectors and Sub-inspectors with revolvers and Sergeants and Constables with repeater shot guns. There were no assault rifles issued to the police at the time. Large numbers of police from different parts of the country were ordered to be sent to Jaffna.

At this time I was the Deputy Inspector General of Police in charge of the Colombo Metropolitan Range. This range covered the Police Divisions of Colombo, Peliyagoda, Negombo, Nugegoda and Mt. Lavinia. The superintendents in charge Douglas Ranmuthugala, Henry Silva, A.C.A. Gaffoor, Amarakoon, Serpanchy and M.D.A. Rajapakse were all excellent officers whose competence, initiative and integrity could be trusted.

On the 30th of May I was summoned to Ward Place by the President at about 6 p.m. When I went to 'Braemar' the Prime Minister and the IGP were also there. I was ordered to proceed to Jaffna, but I was not assigned any specific duties. P. Mahendran was the DIG of the Northern Range, but I was senior to him. When I asked the IGP what the role in Jaffna was going to be, he merely said, "you just be there". As for the Metropolitan Range the IGP undertook to overlook the work of the Superintendents.

The President and Prime Minister were pleased that I had readily agreed to go Jaffna at such short notice. They felt that my presence in Jaffna would be morale booster for the rank and file whose 'chips were down'.

I reached Jaffna by helicopter at about 4p.m. on 31st May. My car with Inspector Sathiyana and driven by PCD Anthony had arrived from Colombo by then. I tried to contact 'Brute' Mahendran the DIG but failed. At the Jaffna Headquarters station I met the S.P. Jaffna Tony Mahat several other officers who had come on 'Special duty'. I remember meeting SP Dennis Peter and ASPs D. Weerakoon, M.D. Perera, Edmund Karunanayake and Jinasena. HQI Jaffna Lalith Gunasekera, in about 15-20 minutes gave me a complete run down of all that had happened in Jaffna from the time the elections were announced. Lalith Gunasekera of whom I had only heard earlier- captured by JVP insurgents when he was a young SI in charge of the Rambukkana Police Station was a courageous officer who had escaped from JVP custody. He certainly had a total grasp of the situation in Jaffna. His main worry

was that the government was panicking and the LTTE could take advantage of the confusion to advance their cause.

Having had a discussion with all the senior officers present, dressed in mufti I left in my car driven by PCD Anthony and accompanied by Inspector Sathiyar on a recce of the Jaffna town. At about 10 p.m. I overheard on Police radio that police on duty at the Nachiamman Kovil meeting had been shot and the injured officers taken to the Jaffna General Hospital.

I decided to go to the hospital. Although I was in civvies I was armed with a Webley 9mm pistol. Inspector Sathiyar who was also in civvies had an Uzi Uzi automatic. As we walked in there were several police officers in uniform and many civilians. I raised my voice and ordered the police to clear the ward of all unwanted persons. I even spoke in the little Tamil I knew to disperse the crowd. It was only then that the police at the hospital realized that I was the DIG Metropolitan who had been specifically assigned to Jaffna.

That was the manner in which I announced to the rank and file of the Jaffna police of my arrival as the specially sent DIG. Listening to the gossip that went through the police airwaves gave me the impression that they welcomed my presence in Jaffna. However, it was noticeably clear that the police were gripped by a sense of fear and insecurity particularly after the Nachiamman Kovil shooting resulting in the death of Sergeant Punchi Banda. This gruesome murder coming on top of a series of killings of police officers certainly had a chilling effect.

Influx of Special-duty police

By this time about four hundred policemen from different police divisions had arrived in Jaffna. Surprisingly the number of senior officers was quite disproportionate to the number of Sergeants and Constables. It had fallen upon the shoulders of the HQI Lalith Gunasekera to arrange for their billeting and food. The situation had been so bad that the HQI had at one point pleaded with Col. Hamilton Wanasinghe and Major Denzil Kobbekaduwa for food for these large numbers of policemen. He had even spent his own money to purchase some dry fish and rice to be given to the Mess for cooking!

The complete lack of co-ordination between the DIG and the Northern Range and Police Headquarters had resulted in a chaotic situation which had to be tactfully sorted out by HQI Gunasekera and myself.

If I was to deviate from the sequence of the narrative, from the point of view of food for the hungry policemen and also many other officials who had come to Jaffna on duty the arrival of Mr. Gamini Dissanayake on the 3rd of June was indeed

a blessing. As soon as I heard of his arrival I called on him at Kings House. When I went there he was having a chat with Mr. T.B. Werapitiya who was the Deputy Minister of Defence. The latter was in fact briefing him on what had happened in Jaffna on the 31st May and 1st June. I too joined in the conversation and was able to convince both of them that the acts of arson especially the burning of the library could not have been committed by the police, the armed services or any unruly mob. They were certainly apprehensive of the possible consequences.

Mr. Gamini Dissanayake specifically asked me whether the police have had adequate food. Apparently he had heard of difficulties the police were facing. When I told him that even I had not eaten anything other than a boiled potato with salt and pepper he laughed. Having thought for a while he got a telephone call to Navaloka Mudalali who undertook to send 1000 packets of bread, seeni sambol and hard boiled egg. Mr. Dissanayake made arrangements for these to be airlifted. This exercise was repeated on the following day too.

The Night of 31st May in Jaffna

This was a night of arson in Jaffna. HQI Jaffna Lalith Gunasekera had suggested to me that it would be advisable to keep all policemen in the barracks including the men who were billeted in the Duraiappah Stadium. The HQI felt that policemen could cause problems in the few eating houses that were functioning as food was a scarcity in the town. I made an order accordingly. HQI Gunasekera and I visited the barracks and the Duraiappah Stadium and spoke to the men. I explained to them that there was unfortunately a breakdown of welfare facilities and requested them to bear with it. By their reaction I realized that they had come to know that even the senior officers were working only with an occasional cup of tea. On the way back to the station I remember remarking to the HQI that a few soothing words could even make people forget their hunger! Minutes after returning to the Station G.V.P. Samarasinghe the Cabinet Secretary who was at Kings House telephoned to remind me to exercise the maximum supervision over the men. When I briefed him of the action taken already he was pleased.

At about 10 p.m. Inspector Sathiyana and I drove to the town. A small boutique had one shutter open and we were able to buy a few biscuits and about a pound of dates. Police radio clatter indicated that everything was quiet in the town. Brigadier Weeratunga was in the streets with a few armed men. HQI Gunasekera was also on a patrol with 2 sergeants and 2 constables armed with 303 rifles.

At about 11 p.m. all of a sudden fires started erupting here and there. Mischief makers were setting fire to roadside Palmyra fences. HQI reported to me on radio that he was busy making fire gaps in fences close to the Nachiamman kovil. He

had not been able to locate anybody suspicious. To persons familiar with the roads taking cover was easy. I still remember HQI calling me on radio and saying “Sir, it looks as if some fellows are trying to be funny. To shoot at sight is the answer.” “Go ahead we can answer any question”, was my response. I always believed that any act committed within the law and in good faith could be justified.

Just then a major fire erupted opposite the main bus terminal. HQI Gunasekera was there in no time. He could do nothing more than make fire gaps with the 4 men that he had. Soon I realized that this could be a planned move to implicate the police and bring discredit to the police and the armed services.

Statement of HQI Gunasekera to Investigators.

Whilst writing this chapter, I am happy that I was able to lay my hands on a statement made by HQI Lalith Gunasekera to ASP Canagaratnam on 14th June 81. This statement describes briefly what happened in Jaffna town on the night of 31st May and 1st June 1981. More importantly it helped me to bring to my memory what I too did on those two crucial nights.

The statement made to investigator Canagaratnam is as follows: “Whilst we (HQI and party) were fighting the fire (fire near bus terminal) I received a message from the Control that DIG Elections Mr. Edward Gunawardena wanted to see me at the station. This was at about 12 M.N. I came back to the station with my party. I was asked to summon all men to the conference hall which is on the 2nd floor of the station. I went to the barracks in the Fort and ordered all the men to attend an instruction class at the police station.

About 00.30 Hrs. on 01/06/81 all the men assembled at the station and DIG Mr. Gunawardena addressed them and requested them to be calm. They were told to refrain from visiting the town unless specifically ordered.”

“The next morning (01/06/81) I remained at station. No complaints were received from any member of the public regarding looting or arson in Jaffna town or Nachiamman Kovil area. ...the body of the late PS Punchi Banda was brought to the station at about 15.00 Hrs. At about 18.30 Hrs. Mr. G.V.P. Samrsinghe, Col. Dharmapala, Mr. T.B. Werapitiya, Brig. Weeratunga and the IGP visited the station. I assembled over 100 policemen for the Deputy Minister, IGP and others to address. They were all apologetic about the welfare measures and were thankful to the men for acting in a disciplined manner.... On information given by DIG NR (Northern Range) I got into a jeep and rushed to the town. Opposite the hospital I saw army personnel extinguishing a fire in a shop. I did not see any police officers in mufti or in uniform....

On seeing me Brig. Weeratunga got into my jeep and we drove towards the New Market. The shops along the KKS road were in flames. The Brigadier drove with me to the Communications Centre and requested the Navy to send their water browser... .

G (Mr. Gunawardena) summoned me to the station and I was asked to make a head-count of all police officers. This was to ensure that no officers had strayed out of line. The time was about 22.00 Hrs. When the roll-call was being taken Col. Dharmapala, Mr. G.V.P. Samrsinghe and the IGP came to the police station. Just then the G.A. Jaffna drove in and stated that the library was on fire.

The Brigadier immediately rushed to the scene with about 30 police officers and a few army men.”

At this time, having left the police station I was at the King’s House having a discussion with Ministers Hurulle, Festus Perera and Gamini Jayawickrema Perera. As soon as I got the message on my walkie-talkie I rushed to the police station and then to the scene. With me were IP Sathiyana and SP Dennis Peter who was also at Kings House with Mr. Festus Perera. From a distance we saw the flames licking one side of the building from the ground level upwards. The frontage of this imposing building was well lit. Brigadier Weeratunga and the men who accompanied him were all gazing at the building helpless. Weeratunga told me that the Navy was finding it difficult to send even one water bowser. HQI was also helpless without fire engines or water.

I ordered PCD Anthony to drive on all the roads in the vicinity of the burning library. We observed several youths taking cover. They were all dressed in dark clothing. At least foreigners, one a woman were seen turning towards a roadside residence. Two of them were carrying video cameras. I immediately radioed the police station. But they could not respond fast enough to make any arrests. The manner in which they disappeared behind palmyrah screens indicated that they were being put up in some houses.

The statement of HQI Lalith Gunasekera made to ASP Canagaratnam goes to show: a) How mischievous arsonists were operating on the 31st of May and 1st of June. b) How the police could in no way have been involved in these acts of arson c) How the police with limited resources had made every effort to maintain law and order during this crucial time particularly to put out the fires, and d) That there were no unruly mobs to be seen anywhere in Jaffna town.

The importance of what I was able to observe

What I saw when I followed Brig. Weeratunga and party to the scene of the burning library is indeed of immense significance.

Early in the morning of 2nd June, when I mentioned this to the Cabinet Secretary G.V.P. Samarasinghe over coffee he at once realized the significance of the presence especially of photo journalists just at the time of the fire. GVP's belief was that they would have had prior information of the burning of the library.

Most people particularly those who have made and who continue to make irresponsible statements accusing the police even when specific references to me and politicians who were not even present in Jaffna at the time the library was on fire, do not appear to know that more than one team of investigators led by the best known investigators of the time Tyrell Goonetilleke and R. Sundaralingam investigated this case of arson. Tyrell Goonetilleke's CID team was in fact reporting direct to the President himself. As a result the other investigation teams were of no consequence.

I remained in Jaffna until the 9th of June spending my time more in the Mannar and Mullaitivu police area whilst these investigators were looking for clues. Surprisingly none of the investigators knowing very well that I could have helped in the investigation, got in touch with me. Even after I got back to Colombo and resumed duties as the DIG Colombo Metropolitan Range I was not contacted even to clarify any matters that obviously were within my knowledge.

It became clear to me that Amirthalingam made a statement in Parliament alleging that it was Mr. Gamini Dissanayake who burnt the library with the goons he had brought from Kandy and Kurunegala the investigators had been told to fabricate evidence against me so that I could be the scapegoat to save the reputation of Gamini Dissanayake. I can boldly say that I got this information from none other than Mr. R. Sundaralingam himself one of the most honorable officers who ever served in the Sri Lanka Police. He had bluntly told his supervisor who had made this vicious suggestion that he (Sundaralingam) would never falsely implicate a colleague of his.

It is relevant to recall here that although I was not questioned by an investigator I was summoned by the Sharvananda C.J. Truth Commission that was appointed by President Kumaranatunga. I was asked only one question, "was Mr. Gamini Dissanayake in Jaffna at the time the library was burning?" My reply was a firm "No". As stated earlier Mr. Dissanayake came to Jaffna only on the morning of 3rd June. Amirthalingam's accusation was a calculated canard to put the entire blame on the government. Indeed it was one of the most vicious lies ever to be uttered in

Parliament by a responsible member. Let alone Gamini Dissanayake, Amirthalingam himself was not in Jaffna at the time the library was on fire. He was in Trincomalee!

Apart from this question the Truth Commission refrained from asking any other question from me. Apparently the Commission did not want my exposing any startling facts about the burning of the library which the country was not aware of then, or the farcical investigation carried out particularly by 'the most ruthless investigator' who at a later time obeying the dictates of his master converted that most respected gentleman politician Vijaya Kumaratunga to a 'Naxalite'!

It did not take much time for it to become obvious to me that the so called 'reputed' CID did not have the courage to record my statement. Had my statement been recorded the CID's assignment to find a scapegoat would have been completely stifled. The investigators were so much focused on one track they even rejected vital pieces of information received by them.

When a petrol shed owner of Jaffna town informed me that on the night of 1st June three youths dressed in jeans and come on bicycles and forcibly taken away three cans of petrol, I told him to inform the CID and gave him the CID telephone number. An officer had listened to him, but had not summoned him or contacted him for further questioning. I learnt that the petrol shed owner had been subsequently killed by the LTTE.

The investigation into this case of arson which was to have a damning impact on the country was a complete farce. By trying to 'fix' a scapegoat the investigators failed to get to the truth. Or was it that for some reason they were wary of getting to the bottom of the case. Undoubtedly the CID's lack of understanding of the sociological background to this crime also contributed to their failure to make any meaningful progress.

Conclusions

As stated earlier, by the commencement of the eighties the LTTE had increasingly begun to distrust the Hindu Vellala aristocracy and they had come under the influence of the Catholic Bishops of Jaffna and Mannar. Balasingham had also begun to cast a spell over the leadership of the LTTE. This mastermind of terrorist strategy had often stressed the importance of a sensational event for the internationalization of the LTTE cause. Although the Avro explosion of 1978 did not materialize as planned it certainly had a significant impact.

The tactics the LTTE adopted to confuse the police reached a crescendo on the night of the 1st June. The target for the LTTE to destroy to give them maximum

propaganda stood out like a sore thumb. There was nothing else for the LTTE to destroy in Jaffna than the Jaffna public library.

To the world the Jaffna library was symbolic of the Tamil Hindu Culture. It was the repository of classical Hindu treatises and the pedigree of the Hindu Vellala Aristocracy. But the world knew little of nothing about the rigid caste structure that dominated the social fabric of Jaffna.

It was certainly not an institution to be admired and venerated by the non-vellala Tamils. What better target for destruction? From the point of view of desired results it certainly was more significant than the Lockerbie disaster. To the mind of the terrorist the burning of the Jaffna library was the easiest means of inviting the attention of the world's sympathy to the Tamils and their struggle for Eelaam. Most significantly to Prabahakaran, Balasingham, the Catholic Bishops and the 'Boys' this was a double triumph. Whilst gaining world attention to their cause they succeeded in destroying Jaffna's symbol of vellala dominance. What better evidence of this than Prabanjana's article, "Burning Memories".

The propaganda boost that the LTTE received from the burning of the Jaffna library was much more than they ever imagined. Its repercussions reverberate even today.

It is significant that the LTTE leadership did not make any utterances condemning the act. The crusade was taken up by the Tamils in general and other interested parties as it was presented by the medias as, "the destruction of the intellectual heritage down the ages of the Tamil community". The politicization of the event with the opposition capitalizing on it to discredit the UNP government added further impetus.

In fact it could be said that the burning of the library gave the LTTE all that it wanted. The world began to believe that the Tamils of Sri Lanka were an oppressed community and the Sri Lankans were a barbaric brutal race. Seeking refugee status and the collection of funds certainly became easier.

The blatant lies that began to take center stage: a) that Edward Gunawardena and the police did it b) That Gamini Dissanayake did it and c) that goons from the South did it began to gather momentum for political expediency. Being one of the key witnesses to the events, even after I had told the Truth Commission that Gamini Dissanayake was not in Jaffna when the library was burnt which statement was not contested, the canard could not be completely erased. The tragedy is that puerile politicians, crooked NGO's and some journalists thrived on 'beggars wounds'.

It is indeed noteworthy that no Tamil politician made any compliant either in Parliament or outside that the police burnt or had a hand in the burning of the

library. The only complaint of note was the blatant lie uttered by Amirthalingam in Parliament alleging that Gamini Dissanayake was responsible. It was this lie that President Premadasa is alleged to have made use of to discredit Gamini Dissanayake once he fell out with the latter after the impeachment motion.

In fact many Tamil politicians led by Sivasittamparam accompanied by the Bishop of Jaffna called on me in the morning of 2nd June at the Residency. They came in a delegation not to make any complaints but to express complete confidence in me to ensure the prevention of escalation of violence. They did not broach the subject of the burning of the library. By their demeanor I got the impression that they knew who the culprits were.

I really do not know whether the Government Analyst visited the scene during the course of the investigations. The manner in which the flames rose from the ground level lighting up the architecturally imposing edifice is also significant. Apparently some material like waste gunny sacks soaked in petrol stacked by a wall would have been set on fire. The well-lit façade of the building engulfed by flames would have pleased any photographer.

Interesting reports reaching from UK stated that a certain TV channel had shown video images of the library burning just two days after it happened! It is perhaps footage from these original videos that Someetharan has used in his documentary “Burning Memories”.

What I wrote in 2006 when the LTTE and the Eelaam Lobby were strong and active

Before I conclude this all important chapter of my memoirs I would like to refer to some open correspondence on the subject I had with one T. Balachandran of Wattala presumably an admirer of the LTTE and Anton Balsingham. This was in March 2006, over five years ago. The views expressed by me then are almost identical with my views expressed earlier in this chapter, but for a few insignificant discrepancies in the details.

Although five years have lapsed neither Mr. T. Balachandran who provoked me to reply nor any other person, research body, NGO or even the CID has to-date made an effort to counter my conclusion that it was the LTTE that burnt the Jaffna Library; that it was the LTTE and LTTE alone that had good reason to destroy the library.

To recount briefly, in March 2006 I wrote an article on the hypocrisy of Anton Balsingham at the Geneva peace talks. This article appeared in The Island of 10th March 2006 under the heading ‘The mind of Balsingham’. This same article

appeared in the Daily Mirror of 13th March 2006 under the title ‘True Nature of the LTTE Exposed’.

In response to this article one T. Balachandran of Wattala had written a letter to the Daily Mirror of 21st March 2006 taking me and also the IGP of the time Chandra Fernando to task. Balachandran’s letter was under the heading ‘Parrot Cries are but for Parrots’. Referring to me directly and unambiguously Balachandran in his letter to the Daily Mirror of 21st March 2006 has stated: “The retired DIG is none other than one Edward Gunawardena whose responsibility for the most diabolical act of cultural terrorism perpetrated in this country in the burning of the Jaffna library is an open secret. In fact this act has been seen as an act of cultural genocide and universally condemned”.

The writer Balachandran by the contents of the article, his language and style certainly appears to be an erudite person who had a great admiration for Anton Balsingham and the LTTE. I even wondered whether it was Dr. Anton Balsingham the one time British Council employee who wrote this himself under a pseudonym.

Balachandran’s declamation was a crude and direct accusation as if he had seen me setting fire to the library! Reluctantly though, even at grave risk of harm to myself or my family as the LTTE was then an active, dangerous terrorist power to reckon with I decide that I should reply. My somewhat lengthy rely of nearly 4 columns of the Daily Mirror entitled ‘A Miserable Defence of Balsingham’ appeared on the 4th April 2006.

Quoted below are relevant extracts from my article in the Daily Mirror of 4th April 2006:

- 1) “It is indeed regrettable, to buttress his feeble defence of Balsingham and the LTTE he (Balachandran) has chosen to descend to the lowest depths of defamation and slander. For whatever it is worth he has blotched his contribution. To be vituperative, crude and even personal particularly in open discussions of public interest via the media is not a trait in my nature. I am proud of this and will not relent even under abrasive provocative abuse or intimidation”.
- 2) “Regarding the unfortunate Jaffna Library episode of twenty five years ago, I am magnanimous enough to believe that Mr. Balachandran is grossly misinformed and has become a victim of his muddled mind”.
- 3) “For the information of Mr. Balachandran, the DIG in Charge of Jaffna at the time of the DC elections in 1981 was that amiable sportsman and gentleman Mr. P (Brute) Mahendran. My substantive posting was DIG Colombo Metropolitan Range”.

- 4) "I was ordered and sent to Jaffna by helicopter with hardly a few hours notice, to assist my colleague Mahendran. This was in the aftermath of the assassination of a prominent UNP candidate. My arrival in Jaffna was signaled by the shooting down of two policemen on duty by pistol wielding youths'.
- 5) "When the first flames were noticed from the direction of the library I was at King's House. The defense Secretary Cabinet Secretary and Army Commander were also there. The IGP and DIG Northern Range were out in the field. The lights in the town were out and the streets were deserted with an unofficial curfew on. I rushed to the Headquarters Police Station. SP Tony Mahat was there with SP Dennis Peter and ASP M.D. Perera. The energetic HGI Lalith Gunasekera appeared to be in total control... But neither water nor fire engines were available to fight the fire (the burning library)".
- 6) "Almost the entire high command of the TULF led by Mr. Sivasittamparam met me at the Residency where I was staying, the following morning. They had no remorse against the Police. They pleaded with me to take total control to prevent further trouble. I had to politely explain to them that the IGP and even officers senior to the IGP were present in Jaffna and a DIG was not of much consequence".
- 7) "It did not take long for the government to realize that the backlash of this, arson or not, was going to be disastrous. The hunt for a scapegoat began. The top officials were either political appointees or kinsmen of the President. DIG Jaffna was a Tamil. Edward Gunawardena had to be first in line. Backed by unseen officials hands the rumor mill began to work and the parrots that Mr. Balachandran talks of were in business. But I must say to credit of all Tamil politicians of the time Tamil policemen and all others affected no accusation was made against me. A worried President let loose all the investigative agencies of the State to 'fix somebody'. But even the head of the CID who had fixed Mukthars and Thahas and even transformed a much loved actor to a Naxalite could not make up his mind to question me or record my statement. I even appeared before the Truth Commission headed by former C.J. Sharvananda. The only question that was asked was whether the late Mr. Gamini Dissanayake was in Jaffna on the night that the Library was burnt. My answer was an emphatic 'No'. It is relevant to recall that this entire matter was discussed fully in Parliament. Mr. Amirthalingam spoke at length. Not one did he or any other MP mention my name. All Amirthalingam's gun were turned on Gamini Dissanayake (See Hansard)".
- 8) "But it is ironical indeed that both Amirthalingam and Dissanayake were not in Jaffna in the date and time of the event. Both were good men, outstanding gentlemen. Both were respected leaders who had done much for the country;

and from whom much more could be expected. But they were both assassinated by the LTTE!”

- 9) “The labored attempts through wild accusations at public for a and well orchestrated rumors failed to even lead to a reasonable inference that Sinhala politicians or some Sinhala fanatics were responsible for this act. The destruction of places of cultural and religious significance has historically been alien to the Sinhala-Buddhist ethos. It is also appropriate to emphasize that in their blind and desperate search for a scapegoat as an urgent damage control measure, the governments investigators either deliberately or more through lack of knowledge failed to explore many more avenues that could have provided useful clues. Understandably, they were oblivious to the characteristic historical trait of revolutionaries’ fanatics and fundamentalists targeting symbols of culture and religion which they consider as obstacles in their path.

The Jaffna library was the repository of rare treatises strengthening the foundations of the great ancient Hindu culture. It was a modern edifice symbolic of traditional Hindu learning and social values”.

- 10) So are the great temples and temple festivals of the Tamils. Arundathie Rajasingham writing in the Island of 15th February 2006 has said, “the LTTE appears to have undermined Tamil Society, its religious traditions, its demography, its education and its livelihood. The diehard secularism of the LTTE has undermined Hinduism, a religion that inspired Tamil traditions and culture down the centuries. The LTTEs hard line stand on the ethnic issue has served to undermine Hinduism. If one were to look at the government held territory in the North one notices that Hindu temples flourish. Many Temples have been reconstructed. Temple festivals are celebrated with gusto. The reverse is the case in LTTE controlled areas.

One wonders whether Tamil nationalism as enunciated by the LTTE is intended to sideline the Hindu religion and to make it irrelevant in the public space”.

Arundathie Rajasinghams omission to specifically attribute the destruction of the Jaffna library, Jaffna’s symbol of Hindu culture and traditions to the LTTE is understandable.

Who Burnt The Jaffna Library?

Prof. Carlo Fonseka

(Extracts from the Text of Carlo Fonseka's prepared speech delivered at the Mahaweli Centre on 19 January 2013, launching the MEMOIRS OF EDWARD GUNAWARDENA. Published by the Author. Battaramulla. 2013. 390 pages with photographs and appendices)

Preliminaries

The striking front cover of the Memoirs of Edward Gunawardena proclaims that among the “tidbits” of his memorable, eventful life of some 78 years, is the story of the Jaffna Library Fire. To call the story of the Jaffna Library Fire a “tidbit” is a bit like calling Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II “Liz”, but let that go. The Jaffna Library Fire is surely the major public event documented in this book. EG was our man on the spot and he was an eye-witness to the event. Chapter XI titled: Who burnt the Jaffna library? gives a clear, authoritative and comprehensive account of the Jaffna Library Fire. It riveted my attention. It disabused my mind of an illusion, or rather I should say, a delusion. In psychiatry, a delusion is defined as a false belief persisted in despite evidence to the contrary. I now think that the period in question was one in which “the time was out of joint” in our country and EG was born to set the historical record right. Owing to my delusion that it was Minister Gamini Dissanayake who burnt the Jaffna Library, I became guilty of an act which will remain a permanent source of regret in my life. Allow me to use the privilege of appearing on this platform to try and make amends for the injustice I inflicted on Minister Gamini Dissanayake. But before doing so, let me say a few words about other matters in the Memoirs of EG.

Biography

The facts of the life and work of my distinguished, scholarly, policeman friend are engagingly narrated as part of the social history of our country in his extremely readable Memoirs. Edward is, I should say, an out and out Josephian, having entered the “baby class” of St. Joseph's College in January 1939 and left it in December 1952 to enter the Arts Faculty of the University of Ceylon Peradeniya during the period when Sir Ivor Jennings was its Vice Chancellor. I joined St. Joseph's College

in 1947 and got to know Edward in secondary school. At University Edward read Geography and excelled in it and graduated with honors in 1957. After a brilliant interview which he recounts modestly, he was chosen to the Police Department and he entered the Police Training School in 1958. After a very fruitful, eventful, and distinguished career he took early retirement from the Police as Senior DIG in 1987. Along the way he went on a Fulbright Scholarship to Michigan State University and earned a Master of Science Degree in Criminal Justice. As most of us here know, Edward is a very literate man with a straightforward, graphic English style. In 2001 he published a sprawling novel called “Blood & Cyanide” on the theme of life and love and strife in our upper-class, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural society. The novel deserves to be much better known than it is. In my judgment EG is the most literate IGP Sri Lanka never had!

Changing World

EG’s Memoirs give a liberal, educated, cosmopolitan man’s insight into the “interesting times” we lived through in the 20th century. By now things have changed drastically from the time most of us here in this audience were born in the 1930s. Attitudes have changed; so have the landscape and the environment and even the weather! But the cobbler must stick to his last. So as a retired medic and the current Chairman of the National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol, allow me to abuse the privilege of this platform to remind you that the majority of us here will die, as we all must one day, of one of the four major Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs). These are cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer and chronic lung diseases. There are four major causative factors of these NCDs- unhealthy diet, lack of physical exercise, tobacco use and alcohol abuse. I noted from pages 271 and 274 of Edward’s Memoirs that as a young man he was in the habit of drinking a little wine and beer. That was and is not illegal, and as we can all see from his robust appearance, Edward has manifestly not abused alcohol. At page 283 he tells us that he lit a cigarette in his office. Today smoking is widely recognized as the most preventable cause of disease and death and smoking in a government office in Sri Lanka is illegal. This law is generally observed. So there are definite improvements in our country. It has not gone wholly to the dogs as some grumpy political animals are heard to cry.

Arson

Finally let me come to the burning question in this book: Who burnt the Jaffna Library? EG a Master of Science in Criminal Justice has marshaled the evidence to demonstrate beyond any manner of doubt that it was the LTTE that master-minded this crime against civilization. Why did the LTTE do it? Evidently to prove to the

world that Sinhalese Buddhists are barbarians. By and large the world believed the LTTE propaganda. Because at that time I was anti-government and because I felt that the UNP – government in power was anti-Tamil (it had unleashed violence on them in 1977 and 79 and 81) I readily believed that Mr.Gamini Dissanayake was the villain who had got the Jaffna library burnt. So during the 1994 presidential election campaign I verbally crucified Mr.Gamini Dissanayake for the crime which I believed he committed. Now after reading Edward’s account I have realized that I committed that atrocity because I believed the absurdity that Gamini Dissanayake burnt the Jaffna Library. Let me spell out the way in which I came to excoriate Mr. Dissanayake.

“Murder”

In 1993 I read a poem titled “Murder” on the burning of the Jaffna Library. It was published in the Ceylon Medical Journal as a filler. I gathered that it was an English translation of a poem written by M.A. Nuhman, who was at that time a Senior Lecturer in Tamil in the University of Peradeniya. I was greatly moved and touched by the poem. It goes like this:

Last night/ I had a dream/ Lord Buddha was shot dead/ by the police/ guardians of the law/ His body lay drenched in blood/ on the step/ of the Jaffna Library/ Under cover of darkness/ came the ministers/ “His name-not in our lists/ Why did you him?”/ they ask in anger./ “No, sirs, no/ There was no mistake./ Without bumping him off/ it was impossible/ to harm even a fly./ Therefore...,” they stammered./ “Okay, okay,/ Hide the corpse.”/ The ministers vanish./ The men in civvies/ dragged the corpse/ into the library./They heaped the books,/rare and valuable,/ninety thousand in all./ They lit the pyre/ with the Cikalokavada Sutta./ Thus the remains/ Of the Compassionate One/ were burned to ashes/ along with the Dhammapada.

I don’t know why but I felt an impulse to translate this poem into my mother tongue and I did so. The translation was lying somewhere in a file. In the run-up to the presidential election between Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and Mr. Gamini Dissanayake I campaigned vigorously for CBK. I concluded my speech which was repeated at least 30 times in different places, by rendering my translation of the poem in dramatic style.

The poem invariably evoked rapt attention and something like awe. The listeners were primed to receive the message I wished to deliver. With my hands raised above my head in worship I ended my speech in favor of CBK with the incantation (Transliterated): “May maha Ghathanayata sammaadama wu Gamini Dissanayaka Mahatha may rate Janadhipati Noweva”

At the height campaign in many places at least a few in the audience responded by saying Saadu!! Saadu!!

Conclusion

I do not believe for a moment that this “curse” I uttered against Mr. Gamini Dissanayake about 30 times in different places in the country had anything to do with his tragic end. But as I remember well, on the 23rd of October 1994, we started the campaign at Beruwala at about 2.00 p.m. and then I repeated the same speech at several places including Payagala, Wadduwa, Panadura, Moratuwa and Kirulapone. I went to bed tired and exhausted and I was aroused from my sleep in the early hours of the 24th of October to be told that Mr. Gamini Dissanayake had been killed in a bomb blast at Peliyagoda. Ever since that time I have felt a deep sense of remorse because I knew Mr. Gamini Dissanayake well. He was a perfect gentleman. He had never wronged me by word or deed. He was always very courteous to me although we differed politically. Having read Edward Gunawardena’s Memoirs I realize what a crime I had perpetrated against Mr. GD. All I can now do to make amends for the gross injustice I inflicted upon him is to ask Mrs. Srimala Dissanayake, Mr. Navin Dissanayake and Dr. Lanka Dissanayake to forgive me because I did not know what I was doing. Indeed, in regard to me, Mr. Navin Dissanayake can act in the compassionate way that Jesus Christ reacted to those who crucified him: “Father, forgive him for he did not know what he was doing”. Let me conclude by thanking my friend Edward Gunawardena for providing me with this opportunity for apologizing abjectly and unconditionally to the Dissanayake family.

(Colombo Telegraph, February 2, 2013)

Ex-DIG Edward Gunawardena Challenged and questioned Over his “Version” of the Jaffna Library Burning by a former Police officer

Mr.Krishnadasan

(Following is the text of an open letter sent by *former Sri Lankan Police officer K.Krishnadasan* to *senior DIG of Police Edward Gunawardena* about assertions made by the *retired DIG* about the burning of the *Jaffna public library* in a book written by him. Mr.Krishnadasan who claims to be an *eyewitness* to the burning questions Ex-DIG Gunawardena about references in his book that the library was burnt down by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) organization. Mr.Krishnadasan also poses some *challenging questions* to Mr.Gunawardena about the retired DIG's *role and conduct* in Jaffna at the time of the Jaffna library incident)

Herewith forwarding the reply I sent to Rtd S/DIG Mr Edward Gunawardena in response to the Book he launched in 2013. The book titled 'Memorable Tidbits Including The Jaffna Library Fire' in which he explains as to who was responsible for

burning the Jaffna Public Library in 1981. This is a long awaited reply which I have with-held, and I have explained the reasons for the delay in my reply to Mr Edward Gunawardena. Rtd SSP Mr Tassie Seneviratne's article to the news-paper appears below for your reference.

Rtd S/DIG Mr Edward Gunawardena

Subject: FW: Re. Burning of Jaffna Public Library

Hi Sir

My name is K. Krishnadasan. I served in the Sri Lanka Police Service from June 1967 until December 1986, and I migrated to Australia and have happily settled down with my family in Sydney. I did not have an opportunity to work under you during my career in the Police. You functioned as our ADT at the Echelon Square Police Training School In June 1967 until I passed out in December 1967 and was posted to Matara as my first station. My last major posting was HQI Batticaloa, from October 1983 to March 1986. Thereafter I served a few months at Police HQ

when you were S/DIG Administration, before migrating to Australia. By the way Sir, I am also an old Josephian like you.

I am writing this in response to Rtd SSP Mr Tassie Seneviratne's article which appeared in the Sri Lankan news-papers recently. Mr Tassie Seneviratne is a good friend of mine and he is currently holidaying in Sydney. Since I was an eye witness to the burning of the Jaffna Public Library, he requested me to write to you giving details of my version of the event. I wish to relate to you the circumstances under which I was an eye witness to the burning of the library.

From January 1980 to December 1982, I functioned as the Officer in Charge of the Divisional Crimes Detective Bureau (DCDB), directly under the supervision of SP Jaffna Division and ASP Crimes Jaffna. I was the second most senior Inspector next to the HQI at the Jaffna Police Station. The HQI was Mr Lalith Gunasekera, at that time.

Eye Witness – Burning of the Jaffna Public Library

On the 31st of May 1981, at about 7.00 – 7.30 p.m. I was at the front compound of the Jaffna Police Station, in the company of DIG/NR Mr P Mahendran. From the station premises we noticed heavy smoke emerging from the Jaffna Public Library building, and we knew that the library building as been set on fire. At that moment DIG instructed me to take a Police party and rush to the library building immediately.

I then promptly rushed with a police party comprising of 2 Sub Inspectors and about 10 Constables on foot as the library building is only about 250 yards from the Police Station. As we approached within a few yards from the library building, I notice about 20 Army personnel in uniform inside the building. They were adding fuel to the fire by pulling down the books from the shelves and throwing them into the fire.

On seeing the police party one officer came out followed by a few other army personnel pointing their AK47 rifles towards us and shouted in a rough tone in Sinhala and ordered us to get back to the Police Station. I then immediately contacted the DIG and apprised him of the situation. DIG was constrained to advise us to get back to the Police Station. Sometime after we came back to the Police Station, we noticed the whole building going up in flames.

DIG tried his best to contact the Army top brass who were in Jaffna, to inform of the situation, but to no avail. Under the circumstances it was not at all prudent for the police party to take any action against the army personnel. It was a tragic scene I had to witness haplessly. The sight which I witnessed on that day cannot

be easily forgotten, and it will linger in my memory as long as I am alive. After my return to the Police Station, I made an entry in the RIB re what I had seen. DIG/NR too made his OVB entries to the effect.

Unfortunately Mr Mahendran is not among the living today, otherwise he too would have supported my statement. But, Mrs Mahendran is still alive and domiciled in Sydney, Australia. You may contact her to find out what Mr Mahendran has told her when he returned to his DIG's quarters in Jaffna, after the fateful event.

Please read Mr Tassie Seneviratne's article to the news-paper that a Police Sergeant attached to the Jaffna Police had initially set fire to the library building, and that he has confessed to him and also to Rtd DIG Mr C L Ratnayake (batch mate of mine).

Whoever initiated the fire, what I have reported is what I saw. I only visited the scene after the fire has started to engulf the building.

Recently I had the opportunity to read your book 'Memorable Tidbits including the Jaffna Library fire'. You have attributed the blame for burning the Jaffna Public Library to the LTTE, due to the caste conflict prevailing among the Tamils.

It is highly unlikely that LTTE would have set fire to the library building to implicate the Forces and the Government. The precious Jaffna Library belongs not only to the Tamils, but also to the whole country. Burning of Jaffna Public Library is now history, and most sensible thinking people knows as who had done it.

It's high time the Government appoint a commission to go into the truth about burning of the Jaffna Public Library, by appointing a high level judicial panel even at this late stage.

The truth will never be discovered unless the various stories are independently examined. It is not too late to revisit the scene independently and objectively, and establish the facts, taking into account the version of all concerned.

As you have gone public with your views on this episode, may I humbly seek from you the following information that will help to put the matter to rest:-

- (1) Was the special assignment on which you were sent by President Jayewardene, to do with Police duties or with the Government's election campaign?
- (2) If it was in connection with police duties, how is it that you did not come to the Police premises to meet DIG/NR and the Jaffna Police and hold briefing / debriefing class as usually done in such important police assignments? Or, were your duties 'under-cover'? Even so, how is it that you did not want to see or hear what everyone else knew? I wish to state that I never saw you at the Jaffna police premises on the day in question.

- (3) Were any other police officers associated with you in your assignment other than IP Sathiyar? If so who were they?
- (4) What made you to avoid CID officers who had come to Jaffna to make enquiries about the burning of the Jaffna Library, and reveal to them whatever you knew, because the CID too was sent on HE the President's orders?
- (5) Was a report submitted by you to IGP / HE the President re matters pertaining to your special assignment in Jaffna?

At this point I need to explain why I waited so long to come out publicly with what I saw and reported to DIG/NR immediately:

The atrocities being committed by the military that dominated the country were such that it would have been suicidal to implicate the army. Although I migrated to Australia I used to visit Sri Lanka frequently, my last visit being in June 2014 to attend our Police 67 batch get-together.

I however have disclosed privately what I saw to whoever wanted to know it.

The situation has now changed since the last Presidential election, and I am writing to you now because, now I can go public in this issue.

I shall be very grateful to you Sir if you could help to clarify the information that I am seeking with great respect.

Yours Sincerely
Kris Krishnadasan

(DBSJeyaraj.com 23.02.2015)

The Jaffna Public Library

Rajan Philips

(Extracts from: 'MR Finishing JR's Relay, Bodu Bala Sena At Temple Trees, And Fire-Walking Over The Jaffna Public Library' – Colombo Telegraph, February 2, 2013)

For the government, the defeated LTTE is not quite dead. The government sees a tiger in everyone who criticizes it over any of its actions. One does not have to be a Tamil to be a tiger in the government's eyes. Even Shirani Bandaranayke was accused of being a tiger lover because she had a Tamil lawyer. In that sense, the government has achieved reconciliation of sorts, the wag might argue. Recently, the government received an unexpected shot in the arm for its tiger paranoia with a revisionist attribution of the burning of the Jaffna Public Library to the LTTE.

Through the genre of a memoir a retired police officer has leaked for the first time what must have been the best-kept police secret for thirty two years: that it was the LTTE that burnt the Jaffna Public Library in 1981. The revisionist revelation has moved the emotionally vulnerable to fire-walk down memory lane with flailing arms and chanting mea culpa. There is no need for those of us who lived through that period and contributed to the recording of the sad events of that time by organizations such as MIRJE and CRM, to bother with exposing the spuriousness of a belated police leak. My purpose, rather my question, is something else. What hope in hell could there be for any kind of reconciliation, when even long gone events are revisited for the purpose of falsifying without any sensitivity at all to the hurt and humiliation that it will cause to those who suffered those events and have survived the war?

(Colombo Telegraph, February 2, 2013)

Burning Of The Jaffna Public Library: Whodunit?

Tassie Seneviratne

Who burnt the Jaffna Public Library (JPL)? This has been a vexed question ever since this most unfortunate incident took place on that fateful night of May 31-June 1, 1981, exactly 33 years ago.

Different versions have been put forward and various academics and 'righteous' persons have been accepting versions they were gullible enough to accept or believe what they preferred to believe for questionable reasons. I am urged by a sense of duty to my country to make known what I have come to know in this regard as misleading reports have been coming up of late.

How I came to know what I know is like the question and answer in the famous nursery rhyme:

“Who killed Cock Robin?”

“I,” said the sparrow, “with my bow and arrow”.

It was a police sergeant who was attached to the Jaffna Police Station who told me that he poured petrol from a barrel and ignited the fire with a match stick at the Jaffna Public Library. This Police Sergeant who had worked with me in Colombo earlier, kept in touch with me thereafter. Long after the fateful incident, he found it hard to contain this act on his part within himself, and realising that he was misguided, became quite remorseful and confided in me. More recently I came to know that he had confessed it to another Senior Police Officer (who retired in the rank of DIG) with whom we had mutual ties. I did not press the Sergeant to tell me who else was behind it. It was a well-known and accepted fact that some Government Ministers and Senior Police Officers, sent for election work, were behind the mayhem that was created during the Jaffna District Development Council elections when the burning of the JPL took place.

Now a new dimension has been brought in to the issue of the burning of the JPL in a much belated 'Intelligence report,' that has been gobbled down by interested parties to suit their own agendas. According to the intelligence report

of Retired Senior DIG Edward Gunawardena, the burning of the JPL was the work of the LTTE with a view to implicate the Sinhala people and win the sympathy of the international community. This is the first time such a report has been put forward, and that too by a person, who on his own admission, had been accused of complicity in the arson.

Did not these academics of the likes of Dr. Carlo Fonseka and Gunadasa Amarasekara consider the principle of ‘conflict of interests’ – when a report comes from an interested party? Are they now trying to pursue a line different to what their earlier motives suggested? So fickle even academics and ‘righteous’ people can be! The danger is that they mislead the people with their sanctimonious talk. My Police mind makes me even wonder if this ‘intelligence report’ is not conducted after the act!! The importance of the JPL to the Tamil people would only have struck academic minds. The thought of destroying it would have been conceived only by sick academic minds.

Furthermore, will the Tigers, given that they were the most inhuman murderers of all communities including Tamils, fighting for Tamil Elam, destroy the strongest and most precious cultural possession of the Tamil people — the records of the very cultural claims they were making? Inconceivable by any stretch of imagination!!

**The writer is a retired Senior Superintendent of Police*

(Colombo Telegraph, June 01, 2014)

May 31-June 4 1981: Five Days of State Terror in Jaffna

Santasilan Kadirgamar

(Santasilan Kadirgamar is the former President of the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality, Jaffna branch, and a founder member of Jaffna Citizens Committee. This article is first appeared in Transcurrents on June 4, 2011)

Two years after the end of the war in Lanka, without a political solution in sight, it may be appropriate to look back at events that occurred 30 years ago. 31 May to 4 June 2011 marks the 30th anniversary of days of violence and arson in Jaffna that aggravated relations between the Tamils and Sinhalese majoritarian state and eventually led to prolonged warfare.

Although mercifully loss of lives was minimal, the extensive damage to houses, shops and institutions was unprecedented sending shock waves within the Tamil community.

This led to a total loss of confidence in the state and its law enforcement agencies. The events of May/June 1981 hardened attitudes on both sides and propelled the drift towards extreme Tamil nationalism and the emergence of Tamil youth militancy and a ruthless response by the state and its security forces. In remembering what happened in 1981 one recalls Benedette Croce, the Italian historian's dictum that, "all history is contemporary history".

Little appears to have changed in 30 years. The ultra-nationalist mental make-up that went into these horrendous happenings has changed little since then.

Documenting and reporting these events at that time was the Movement for Inter- Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) which was formed in 1979. It was a coalition of trade unions, secular and religious organisations and people's movements in the country. The Jaffna branch, of which the author was the founding president, organised meetings, documented the violation of human rights and sent information to key members of the movement in Colombo and Kandy.

The membership of MIRJE was multi-ethnic and multi-religious reflecting the diversity of Lankan society. The leadership came from outstanding professionals, many of them from the majority Sinhalese community.

MIRJE published three major reports: "Emergency" (1979), "What Happened in Jaffna: Days of Terror" (1981) and "Torture and Tension in Vavuniya" (1982). The second report came after Regi Siriwardene, distinguished writer and intellectual with impeccable credentials, had spent several days in Jaffna and did an in-depth study of what happened.

Jaffna is the primary city of the Lankan Tamils and their cultural centre. Both the city and the larger Jaffna peninsula did experience, in the context of deteriorating relations between Tamils and the state, occasional acts of violence in 1961, 1974, 1977 and 1979. Jaffna, known for its quiet ways of life and non-violent forms of dissent and struggle, was never the same again after the days of terror in 1981.

By April 1981, there had been sporadic acts of violence on individual Tamil policeman and politicians who were pro-government. The Neerveli Bank robbery had taken place in April by a group of armed Tamil youth constituting the largest haul at that point in time. The District Development Council (DDC) election had been announced and nominations had been accepted.

The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) had swept the parliamentary polls in 1977 in the Tamil areas on the secessionist Tamil Eelam demand. But its popularity was on the wane. Having made that extremist and adventurist demand, departing from what was a realisable federal or regional councils programme, the TULF had no credible programme. While indulging in the rhetoric of liberation in actual practice the party had made compromises in accepting a diluted devolution package hoping to make step by step progress towards greater autonomy.

In the process, defections took place from the TULF and it lost several of its firebrand platform speakers. The editor of the party's paper the Suthanthiran and some leading lights of the party had formed the short-lived Tamil Eelam Liberation Front. Meanwhile, the TULF's hegemony was challenged by a gradually growing and highly secretive underground movement committed to armed struggle.

The ruling United National Party (UNP) had not won a seat in Jaffna from 1956 and it hardly had a party structure in this district. But President J R Jayewardene was determined to fight the elections with handpicked Tamil candidates backed by state patronage. Under a democratic political system any political party no doubt had the right to contest elections in any part of the country. But here was a delicate political scenario with the national question having defied solution

since Independence in 1948. Passions had been aroused and there was a growing climate of violence spearheaded by youth born in the 1950s, the infamous decade of “Sinhala Only”.

Among the UNP candidates was Thiagarajah, a retired school principal and former member of parliament. In April 1981 Thiagarajah was assassinated by Tamil militants. Lesser-known candidates were also assassinated or intimidated into withdrawing their candidacy. The state retaliated with arbitrary arrests under the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The Jaffna branch of MIRJE sent desperate messages to the headquarters in Colombo to send a fact-finding delegation to Jaffna. A five-member delegation arrived on 11 May 1981, all Sinhalese with the exception being Paul Caspersz, president of the national movement and of Burgher descent. The delegation reported their findings to the movement in Colombo on 2 June. But events had moved too fast in Jaffna.

The acts of “state terrorism” in 1981 took place on the eve of the DDC elections on 4 June 1981. The DDCs took shape after intense negotiations between the TULF and the UNP government headed by president Jayewardene. They were meant to devolve limited powers and the TULF, much against the will of its youth wing and dissenting sections within the party and in Tamil society, had agreed to contest the DDC elections and accept office thereafter.

On 31 May 1981 there was a TULF election meeting in the vicinity of a well-known temple in the city of Jaffna. An unidentified gang attacked the policemen on duty. It was generally believed that the perpetrators of this attack were members of the People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Elam (PLOTE) that had broken away from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). A Sinhalese and a Tamil policeman lost their lives and a Muslim policeman was injured. The mayor of Jaffna who presided at the meeting disbanded the gathering.

As stated by Amirthalingam, leader of the opposition in parliament on 9 June, Within half an hour, jeep-loads and truckloads of policemen, some in uniform, some without uniforms, arrived at the venue of the meeting. They entered the temple itself. They damaged what are called ‘Vahanams’... Then they [ran] riot. They set fire to shops and houses, cars and other vehicles. The violence continued throughout the night, as more shops in the heart of Jaffna city, the market and more houses were set on fire.

Noteworthy was the destruction of the office of the TULF. Witnesses to the event stated to MIRJE activists that the attackers were dressed in shorts, carried guns and iron rods and all spoke Sinhalese. The MIRJE report went on to state

“most dastardly of all on this first night was the complete destruction of and the senseless arson of the house of the Member of Parliament for Jaffna”.

It was fortunate that the Jaffna member of parliament, Yogeswaran and his wife were able to escape. The report further alleged that sections of the police in Jaffna had targeted and made an attempt to eliminate the popular and outspoken member of parliament for Jaffna.

Ironically, Yogeswaran together with TULF leader Amirthalingam were assassinated by the LTTE in 1989 in Colombo, Yogeswaran some years later when she assumed duties as mayor of Jaffna, while refusing to accept police protection, in one of the most shameful and cowardly attacks ever carried out by the LTTE, was assassinated in Jaffna.

Thousands gathered to see the damage done to the city but quickly dispersed. There was no retaliatory violence. The police and the armed forces were nowhere visible. Members of Jaffna MIRJE had compiled a report on the damage done and drafted an appeal to be telegraphed to president Jayewardene only to be told by officials in the Jaffna post office that no telegrams could be dispatched to the president without prior approval from his secretary.

This left them with no alternative but to go to the press. The editor of the Eelanadu agreed to publish the contents of the report. As they were at the press at 7 pm that evening, the city of Jaffna was plunged into darkness as the lights went off. They hurriedly left the scene only to be informed the next morning that within minutes of their departure, the press had been burnt down and that the editor had been hospitalised with severe injuries.

The Eelanadu press (Tamil) founded in 1961 was the only daily newspaper published outside the city of Colombo. The most internationally publicised event was the burning and total destruction of the magnificent Jaffna Public Library on the night of 1 June 1981. The library project was initiated by a committee appointed in 1934, and old documents including Ola Leaf manuscripts were collected opening a small library in 1936. The construction of the larger library began in 1953 led by reverend Fr Long, principal of St Patricks College in Jaffna with the assistance of Indian experts in library science and Dravidian architecture. The library collection of 95,000 volumes contained 10,000 handwritten manuscripts including colonial documents from the 16th century.

Five bookshops were reduced to ashes; three of them owned by Poobalasingam, veteran member of the Communist Party committed to a united Lanka. His bookshops were a rallying point for those committed to a left agenda, providing the best of reading material, books, journals, periodicals and newspapers from the

Sinhalese south and India, especially Tamil Nadu. As repeatedly acknowledged by visiting Sinhalese educationists and distinguished visitors from abroad, education was the very ethos of Jaffna society. The magnificent Jaffna Public Library was a visible symbol of this commitment to excellence in education.

These acts of commission and omission on the part of the state at this critical juncture have confronted observers and analysts with an intriguing question. What were highly placed members in the government up to? What exactly was the political agenda of the then president and his cabinet? Three senior ministers among others were present in Jaffna when these horrendous acts of violence took place.

Jaffna gave the sight of a bombed-out city, though the destruction took place using relatively primitive means compared to the more sophisticated modern weaponry used in aerial bombings and shelling with multiple barrel guns that wreaked havoc in the last decade of the war that ended in May 2009. In 1981, buildings were torched after being doused with petrol pilfered from neighbouring petrol stations, by gangs in jeeps and several on foot when the streets were deserted late in the night.

The inability on the part of the state to restrain and control its own security forces sent a powerful message to the Tamil people, that a substantial degree of self-government was the only solution. In the midst of this incredible situation, concerned citizens consisting of businessmen, professionals and university academics came to the Roman Catholic Bishops House. Deeply agitated they called for some kind of protest in Jaffna. Bishop Deogupulle, who for years refrained from adopting a political profile, led this citizens' delegation to the Kachcheri (the administrative headquarters in Jaffna) and protested directly to the commanding officer of the armed forces in Jaffna brigadier Weeratunga. The army commander, absolutely courteous to the bishop, excused himself. He had been called by the president to Colombo for urgent consultations.

The members of the delegation met ministers and other officials and conveyed their concerns, protesting in the strongest terms and demanded that the police be confined to barracks. A comment made by a senior minister is worth recording here. He told us that we must bear in mind that this was the third body of a Sinhalese victim they were carrying back to Colombo!

This writer, responding as one of the spokespersons on behalf of the delegation, said, "We do not condone such killings but such comments do not help. We want an immediate halt to the violence and steps taken towards a meaningful political solution".

The group returned to Bishop's House and formed themselves into the Jaffna Citizens' Committee. Consisting of politicised and apolitical persons, it was agreed

that the Citizens' Committee would not take a political position pertaining to the overall demands being made by the Tamil people. Each member of the Citizens' Committee was entitled to his or her political views, but as an organisation their primary task was to contain the situation, maintaining direct links with the army headquarters in Jaffna. A little known fact is that eventually members of the Citizens' Committee joined army patrols on the five main roads in the Jaffna peninsula.

The police were confined to barracks and the situation contained. The army commander had stressed to visiting human rights delegations from Colombo that his task was to contain the situation, and that it was the task of the politicians to arrive at a political solution.

Citizens' Committees came into existence in other towns. Politicians and partisan politics were excluded and for sometime did good work. But in the course of time their activities were stifled as the LTTE attempted to make them into front organisations. The original Citizens' Committee and the Jaffna MIRJE ceased to exist as the conflict escalated in 1987.

The events of 1981 marked a watershed in that it effectively internationalised the conflict in the country. Journalists, human rights activists and academics from various parts of the world began visiting Jaffna.

The first to arrive six weeks after the events was Francis Wheen from the London-based *New Statesman*. Salamat Ali, a Pakistani living in exile in New Delhi, covered the events for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

David Selbourne from Oxford University spent four days in Jaffna doing an indepth study of the emerging conflict and wrote for the *Guardian*, the *New Statesman* and the *Illustrated Weekly of India*. Venkat Narayan, journalist, reported the events for the *India Today*. Two distinguished academics from India, the late Urmila Phadnis from Jawaharlal Nehru University came separately and thereafter became deeply engaged in studying and commenting on the crisis in Sri Lanka.

Visitors came from Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and one significantly from Beijing. Others came from several European countries and the US to report on what was happening in this little known part of the world. Visitors from India included Kalyanasundram, senior leader of the Communist Party of India and Nedumaran, member of the Tamil Nadu legislative assembly, then of the Kamaraj Congress.

Many delegations came from the rest of the Island, almost all Sinhalese, among whom were members from the left movement, academics, and Christian leaders and most significantly some Buddhist monks. The last to arrive as late as November, nevertheless worthy of mention, were S D Bandaranaike (cousin of S

W R D Bandaranaike) and Vijaya Kumaratunga from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, then in the opposition in parliament.

They came to express their concerns to the devastated people of Jaffna. They were all given a warm welcome. While their sympathy and concern was appreciated, as this writer on behalf of Jaffna MIRJE stated to a visiting Christian delegation, “We do not ask for charity. We want justice.” The need to identify and expose perpetrators of these crimes was stressed. In short the citizens sought accountability on the part of the state.

The allegations against the police and the government by both Amirthalingam and Yogeswaran were placed on record in parliament on 9 June, when the events of 1981 were debated. The TULF had a sweeping victory at the DDC polls, cashing in on outraged public sentiment to the days of violence.

The chief spokesman for the government Gamini Dissanayake admitted, “Some damage had been done by the police... we do not deny and cannot contradict ... that the house of the hon. member for Jaffna, Mr Yogeswaran had been burnt by the police.” He also admitted that they were “concerned with the morale, the psychology and behaviour patterns of the police”. “The atmosphere was one of terror; the police were not easily confined to barracks”, he concluded. The state never appointed a commission to go into the happenings of 1981 nor has an appropriate apology been made for those five days of arson to this date. Neither has adequate compensation been paid.

In this flashback to 1981 and reflecting on the contemporary situation one goes back to the often quoted words of George Santayana, “Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it”.

(Colombo Telegraph, February 3, 2013)

Parliamentary Debate 09.06.1981

Incident in Jaffna District

(Hansard Volume 15(1), 1981 June 9)

A.Amirthalingam (Kankesanthurai): Sir, I wish to place before this House certain matters concerning the tragic events that have taken place in Jaffna during the last one week or more. To be precise, from the 31st of May upto yesterday, a number of events have taken place which call for serious consideration and action by every person interested in peace and harmony. I hope hon. Members will give me the indulgence of permitting me to state fairly fully the events that have taken place in Jaffna.

At the very outset I wish to say that neither we nor any law respecting person will condone certain acts of violence that took place in Jaffna. I take this opportunity to place on record our unreserved condemnation of those acts of violence. Whether they be acts of shooting, or robbery, or violence of any type, we completely dissociate ourselves from such acts and we have condemned them in unequivocal terms.

Mr. Speaker, on 31st May, at an election meeting in support of the candidates of the TULF presided over by the Mayor of Jaffna at a place called Nachchimar Kovilady, a certain incident took place. Unfortunately I was not in Jaffna on that day. I was away in Trincomalee. After I returned to Jaffna on the 3rd, I did my best to investigate for myself in order to find out the truth with regard to the shooting of four policemen, two of whom have since died as a result of the injuries which they sustained on that occasion. There seem to be conflicting versions of that incident. I learnt from the family of Sergeant Kanagasundaram who died that he had stated to them that he was shot by another police constable, and I understand that the statement he made to the House Officer of the Jaffna Hospital – I do not know how far that is true – is to the same effect. But on the other side on hearing of this, from Trincomalee I immediately contacted the I.G.P.[Inspector General of Police] at 2 a.m., and he told me that some youth had shot this policeman. I am unable to speak to the veracity of either of these versions. That is a matter that has to be investigated and the truth ascertained, and whoever was responsible for that should be punished.

We do not for a minute condone any person whoever he may be, who was responsible for these incidents, and if it was the action of any civilians, it is certainly the duty of every Member on both sides of this House to see that the offenders are brought to book. Whatever hon. Members may say, I, on behalf of my party, wish to state categorically that we want, and we are very keen, that whoever was responsible for that shooting should be found out, arrested and brought to trial. In fact, no one in his senses will think that we could have been a party to an incident of that nature, to disrupt our own meeting and to disturb the elections to the District Development Councils on which we were so very keen.

The Government is aware that in the teeth of opposition by certain sections of our own party, certain sections of our own youth who even went to the extent of showing their resentment by setting fire to the jeep of the hon. Member for Manipay [V.Dharmalingam], we stood firm on our acceptance of the District Development Councils. We were anxious to have democratically elected District Development Councils in our areas and we were putting forward candidates and campaigning for them. But, immediately after that incident what happened was this. Somebody had shot these police officers and one of them rushed up to the platform with a gun in his hand and fired a few shots in the air. The Mayor Mr. Viswanathan who was presiding asked him, 'What are you trying to do, Mr. Kanagasunderam?' He said 'I have been shot. Ask these people to go away, close the meeting and send me to hospital'. The Mayor closed the meeting and the people dispersed. Then he got down a car and saw to it that this officer was sent to hospital. When the crowd dispersed, it was found that another police officer had been shot and was actually dead. There were two other police officers who had sustained injuries, who had of course on their own left the venue of the meeting. All these people were taken to hospital.

Within half an hour, jeep-loads and truck-loads of policemen, some in uniform, some without uniform, in civilian clothes arrived at the venue of the meeting. They entered the temple itself. They damaged what are called 'Vahanam', the figures of animals which are used for carrying the deities. **(Interruption)**. Hon. Members, if they do not know, if they are ignorant of it must not shout. Anyone who knows anything about the Hindu religion will tell you that what are called 'Vahanam' are figures of various animals on which the images of deities are carried on festival occasions.

These policemen had entered the temple, broken some of those figures, broken the bell, damaged the gate, set fire to the Kopuram, and tried to set fire to the chariot. Fortunately only a portion of it was burnt because it was, I think, covered. Then they had run riot in the neighbouring houses and set fire to two cars, including the car which was returning after having taken those constables to the hospital.

Another car was also burnt. They had set fire to four or five houses in the vicinity.

Then they had proceeded to the bazaar and commandeered a bus driver by a driver named Appiah. They had gone first to a liquor shop belonging to Suppiah and Sons, broken it open, consumed large quantities of liquor and removed all the bottles. They had then gone to the bazaar and set fire to the entire row of shops right from Hospital Road to Power House Road, stretching right across the length of the bus stand. All those shops were completely burnt. They had broken open Autos Ltd, broken a petrol pump, taken out a sprayer, filled it with oil (**Interruption**). Some hon. Members – I will not say that all of them are so unconcerned with what has happened – think this is a matter for laughter, a matter for joking, a matter about which they can make light remarks in a spirit of levity. Whatever that may be, it is our duty to place these facts before this House and the country because these events have not been reported and the people at large are not aware of what happened.

As I was saying, they had set fire to a number of shops in the new market. The old market was burnt down. They had set fire to a row of shops next to Rane Theatre on Power House Road. Then they had gone in a bus, halted it at the junction – the hon. Member for Jaffna [V.Yogeswaran] is here and he will speak to the facts in so far as he was personally concerned – got down from the bus, some of them in uniform, Mr. Speaker, some in civilian clothes, fired a shot to open the lock with which the gate to the house of the hon. Member for Jaffna was closed, entered the house of the hon. Member for Jaffna, and set fire to everything in the house. And the hon. Member for Jaffna and his wife had to scale a wall behind their compound in order to escape from the hands of these murderers. (**Interruption**). These laughing jackals can go and see the damage done. (**Interruption**).

G.V.Punchinilame - Deputy Minister of Regional Development: He cannot call hon. Members of this House, jackals. He must withdraw the word. (**Interruption**)

A.Amirthalingam: I withdraw the word 'jackal'. (**Interruption**)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please! Hon. Member please allow the House to carry on with its functions. I am allowing you to make remarks, but not always.

A.Amirthalingam: I think hon. Members will realize the gravity of it only when a thing like this happens to them. It can happen to them any day. (**Interruption**) We will wait and see.

Anyhow, Sir, I expected hon. Members of this House, when the home of a colleague of theirs had been invaded in this manner and the whole house reduced to a complete shambles, to ashes – there is not even a door-frame or a window-frame left intact – to show some concern. Such a huge house like that! Immediately that

night, on hearing of what had happened, I contacted the Hon. District Minister at his residence in Jaffna and told him, 'It is reported that this has happened', because I was very worried about the safety of the hon. Member for Jaffna. So I asked the Hon. District Minister to go and see what had happened to him, and he said that he would look into the matter.

Now, Sir, that house was completely burnt down. There were men armed with rifles standing right along the road to shoot down the Member of Parliament for Jaffna if he came out from the front door on to the road. They pulled out his jeep from the garage, took it on to the road and burnt it. There was a car belonging to a friend of his which was parked under the porch of the house. That too was completely burnt. The hon. Member for Jaffna and his wife were left with sarong and the wife in her petticoat. Every item of clothing was burnt. Even their jewellery was burnt. Every piece of furniture, every book, every paper, everything that was in the house was completely burnt by these policemen.

Then these same men had proceeded to the headquarters of the TULF and done the same thing: the entire place was reduced to ashes. They stood there with their guns to prevent anybody from coming there to put out the fire.

I am told that the Hon. fair Minister was in Jaffna on this night. **(Interruption)** No, I do not expect her to go out in the midst of all this. On the 31st night she was in Jaffna, and I am sure that as a fair-minded person she will be able to speak the truth with regard to the crime that was brought on the people of Jaffna by these policemen on that night **(Interruption)**. One need not be an eyewitness to speak to facts. That is an elementary principle. I am not giving evidence here.

Mr. Speaker: Please do not get involved in these interruptions.

A. Amirthalingam: Very well, Sir.

This matter was brought to the notice of the authorities. I myself telephoned the IGP from Trincomalee, and he said that he was already aware of it and that steps were being taken to bring the situation under control. He admitted to me that as a measure of retaliation for the shooting of the policemen, the policemen had gone on a rampage and done all these things. He also told me that His Excellency the President was also aware of these facts.

The next day the IGP himself had gone to Jaffna. I think Brigadier Weeratunga was sent there, and some of the higher-ups from the Defence Ministry also went to Jaffna. The most curious thing is that when the IGP and all these people were there on the night of the 1st [June] these same men got out armed with weapons, armed with torches, and set fire to the Public Library of Jaffna, which was only

about 50 yards from the police station. I think 95,000 volumes - **(Interruption)**. They cannot understand the value of books, Sir.

M.Sivasithamparam: They do not know what a torch is. It is the *pandam* that you hold!

A.Amirthalingam: I do not want to cast aspersions on anybody's knowledge of the English language. A torch does not mean an 'Eveready' torch. A torch is what is called a *pandam*. If you do not know that I can only feel sorry for you. Anyhow 95,000 volumes of books, both in the reference and in the lending sections of the Public Library of Jaffna, were burnt down. Not one page of these books was left. Of course, one wing where some magazines were kept was not burnt down, but the wing in which the reference books and the lending section of the library were housed was completely burnt down. This library had been built up over the decades by eminent scholars. The Rev.Fr.Long and various others have contributed to the building of this library. There were some very rare books, copies of which cannot, I think, be found anywhere else. Books which were printed in Tamil and English by the American Missionaries early in the last [19th] century were all there. They were all completely burnt. And curiously, Sir, this is an indication of the depths to which people in this country can sink.

At the height of the [2nd] World War, when Hitler went to ravage Britain, when German planes were bombarding Britain every half hour, strict instructions were given to the pilots that Cambridge and Oxford should not be bombed, should not be attacked. Similarly, the British gave instructions to their fighters that they should not attack or in any way destroy Heidelberg University in Germany. Even in the height of war, they realized, civilized men that they were, that the seats of learning, the centres of education, should not be touched, should not be damaged.

But here, with the IGP in Jaffna, with Hon. Ministers in Jaffna, these policemen go and set fire to the Public Library in Jaffna. If anyone is trying to find excuses for the policemen who did all this, I think one has only to sympathize with such person.

These men not only set fire to the Public Library. There is a newspaper printed in Jaffna founded by Mr.K.C.Thangarajah, the former Chairman of the Paper Corporation. This was the only daily newspaper published anywhere outside Colombo – in fact the only daily newspaper published in the provinces. This had been in publication for nearly 25 years. They went and completely destroyed it. They had kept tyres under the machines and set fire to the whole place. They had heaped up the bicycles, the motorcycles and other vehicles belonging to the employees of this press and set them all on fire. The manager of that press, a nephew of Mr.Thangarajah and one of the sub-editors, who were working upstairs, were

also badly burnt in the process. One has to only see the damage done to this press to realize the extent of the vandalism some of these policemen have resorted to. They would have put the barbarians of 2,000 years ago to shame.

Mr. Speaker: The Sitting is suspended for half an hour. **(Sitting accordingly suspended till 5 pm and then resumed. Deputy Speaker Mr. Norman Waidyaratna in the Chair.)**

A. Amirthalingam: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was dealing with the incidents that took place in Jaffna on 1st June. I referred to the burning of the Public Library and the Eelanadu press office and the entire building. One of the saddest incidents in this connection was the death of Reverend Father David, one of the greatest scholars in Jaffna. He was a disciple and student of Reverend Father Gnanaprakasar, one of the greatest etymologists that this country has produced, in whose memory stamps were issued in Germany in the early 'thirties. He was such a great scholar. Father David was continuing the work of Father Gnanaprakasar and he was a linguist who knew 32 languages. When he heard the news of the burning of the Public Library, this old priest got such a shock that he passed away. He knew the value of books and he was so horrified at the idea of any human beings setting fire to such a valuable collection of books, that he died of shock. That is one of the matters that I am constrained to mention in view of the spirit of levity in which some hon. Members are inclined to treat this horrifying incident which anybody will think is a blot on the history of Buddhist Sri Lanka.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these were not the only two buildings that were burned that night. A row of shops right in front of the Chunnakam Police Station, just across the road, on the other side of the Police Station, were also first looted by the Police and then burned. In fact, we had information, which we passed on to Brigadier Weeratunga who was in charge, that some of the looted articles were there in the houses of certain police officers attached to the Chunnakam Police Station. I do not know what action he took on that matter.

Then, Sir, on the [June] 2nd the same men in khaki went and set fire to a big business establishment called Pillayar Stores on Manipay Road in the Jaffna town. Two lorries, two vans, one car, a large quantity of grain – he was a dealer in cereals, aerated waters and various other things – and thousands of bottles of aerated water were all completely burst or broken and destroyed in that house. The following shops were looted and burned on the 2nd night; Pushpa Jewellers, Murugan Stores, a furniture shop, a pawn shop, the petrol shed adjoining Veerasingham Hall, four shops on Hospital Road, including Royal Pharmacy – one of the biggest drug stores in Jaffna – right opposite the hospital – Usha Cream Cabin, a row of seven shops from S.M. Muttiahs to E.A. Bhai, even this Esmailjee Adamjee Bhai's shop was looted and burnt.

A member : By whom?

A.Amirthalingam : By the police!

G.V.Punchinilame : I rise to the point of Order. Can the hon. Member accuse the police without an inquiry?

A.Amirthalingam : You hold the inquiry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker : Order, please! He takes responsibility for what he states.

A.Amirthalingam : I take full responsibility.

G.V.Punchinilame : An inquiry is going on, and it is not fair by the police.

M.Sivasithamparam : You defend them if you want.

G.V.Punchinilame : We are not going to defend the police. We are not certain whether the police did it.

A.Amirthalingam : I say with a full sense of responsibility that all this was the work of the police and none other.

A member : What about the bakery boy who was murdered in Jaffna?

A.Amirthalingam : I will come to that.

M.Sivasithamparam : Investigate that also.

A.Amirthalingam : On the night of the [June] 2nd (**Interruption**). I do not know. It is for the police to find out. It is for your police to find out. But I know who burnt the jeep of the hon. Member for Jaffna. It was burnt by your police.

M.Sivasithamparam : And, we also know what happened to our election office.

Cyril Mathew : Your police, police recruited by you.

A.Amirthalingam : We know that all these were burnt by your police- (**Interruption**). Usurping the functions of the Commissioner of Elections – that is what you were doing.

Cyril Mathew : He is making certain allegations against me.

A.Amirthalingam : I will prove them. We are going to move a Vote of No Confidence on you and the Minister of Lands and Land Development. You arrogated to yourselves the functions of the Commissioner of Elections (**Interruption**). Disgraceful episode! Fifty years of universal franchise! – (**Interruption**) The Minister of Lands and Land Development has taken a lesson from Hitler. I am surprised that he did this.

M.Sivasithamparam : We are going to prove what we say on the Floor of this House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker : The hon. Leader of the Opposition surely knows –

A.Amirthalingam : Why did he open his mouth and interrupt me? That is why I have to come out with all this. You cannot blackmail me as you did Mr.Duraiswamy. He may be your stooge, but, take it from me, I am not a stooge of yours. You two Ministers will be put on the mat in this House.

K.Thurairatnam : Democratic world!

A.Amirthalingam : Democracy? What democracy for you? Take 39 bus-loads of thugs and planting them as SPOs and peons who cannot do anything other than paint the fingers –

G.V.Punchinilame : I rise to a point of Order. The hon. Member cannot make that accusation. He must withdraw that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker : Order, please! This must stop. Any allegations made against an hon. Member of this House should not be done in this fashion.

A.Amirthalingam : Very well, Sir, We will do it in the proper way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker : I would request the hon. Member to address the Chair. If he does that he will avoid all this trouble.

A.Amirthalingam : Sir, hon. Members here should understand the depth of feeling of the Tamil people over what has happened. No doubt we sympathize with the policemen and their families. It is a crime for anybody to have shot them. We do not for a moment deny that. We sympathize with them. In fact, we attended the funeral of Sergeant Kanagasundaram and extended our sympathies to the family of that poor police officer.

A Member : How about Punchi Banda?

A.Amirthalingam : We have condemned the shooting and extended our sympathies to his widow.

Mr. Deputy Speaker : Please address the Chair. Then you can avoid all this trouble.

A.Amirthalingam : On the night of the 2nd, right along KKS Road, between Chunnakam Police Station and Tellipallai junction, around 8 or 8.30, a number of people were assaulted by the police. One man, a shop-keeper by the name of Navaratnam from Mallakam junction, died as a result of the assault. Another boy who was returning from the cooperative hospital, the son of a lawyer by the name

of Thambirajah, who was the acting Magistrate of Mallakam at that time, was assaulted on the head by the police. He is yet in hospital. Fortunately he did not die.

That same night a person by the name of Attapattu was admitted to the Tellipallai hospital by one Piyasena with a history of having been knocked down by a motor bicycle. He was then transferred to the Jaffna hospital and he died. This same Chunnakam police who were responsible for assaulting these two persons had sent a message here to headquarters that this man was shot or killed by some Tamils. The bed-head ticket at the Tellipallai hospital may be gone into. In fact, when I was in Colombo on that day, the 3rd morning when this was brought to my knowledge, I immediately contacted a responsible person, former Senator Nadarajah who lives in Mallakam, and asked him to check up on the circumstances of Mr. Attapattu's admission to hospital. He informed me that he had been admitted with a history of having been knocked down by a motor cycle. So I immediately telephoned the Hon. Prime Minister and told him, 'This is what I hear about this incident. Please get them to check on it.' I felt that if any such thing had happened, it was a serious matter and one has to take serious notice of it. I also told the Hon. Prime Minister on the 3rd, about the other two incidents, namely, the assault on Navaratnam and his death, and the assault on Mr. Thambiratnam's son and his being hospitalized as a result of police attack.

On the 3rd, the Emergency was declared and there was a curfew in Jaffna within the Municipal limits, from 5 p.m. to 6 a.m. At Kankesanthurai, a gang of 100 policemen, some with rifles, had gone and set fire to a row of shops. One Chelliah's shop was completely looted and burnt; in fact they can check up on it – a part of the building that was burnt belonged to their UNP candidate, Mr. Balamoorthi, of Kankesanthurai. The entire row of shops was burnt. (**Interruption**) Hon. Members may think that they are being very clever when they say that this is the work of the TULF and so on. I think they should make remarks in a more responsible way. I think the Government can find out from Mr. Balamoorthi, their own candidate, as to who was responsible for the burning of those shops. In fact, a studio right opposite the Kankesanthurai police station was also burnt down on the night of the 3rd.

Now, Sir, I come to a rather interesting chapter which I leave to the hon. Members to decide whether it is important or not. I reached Jaffna only on the 3rd night. Suddenly, at 2.45 a.m., that is early on the election morning, an A.S.P. [Assistant Superintendent of Police], some army officers and the O.I.C. [Officer in Charge] Chankanaï, all came to my house. The A.S.P. Mr. Donald Mendis told me, 'I have been told to arrest you.' I asked him, 'On what charge?' He said, 'The Competent Authority has directed me to arrest you on a charge of disrupting the democratic process.' So I asked him, 'What is this? Under what law is this offence?' He said, 'I do not know, Sir. Do not ask me about these things. I have been asked

to bring you. I will have to take you. Please do not argue with me.' Then I asked him, 'Have you brought a detention order?'

G.V.Punchinilame : Not for our security. That is for your security.

M.Sivasithamparam : Thank you very much. We will look after ourselves.

G.V.Punchinilame : You would not have been here to tell your story to us if they did not take you in.

A.Amirthalingam : Later, a news report appeared under the name of the good, and I dare say, really honourable Minister of Information, which statement I say is absolutely an untruth.

I am surprised that they should have sought to add insult to inquiry. They said I was taken into protective custody. If that was necessary that officer could have told me, 'I am taking you for your own protection.' He merely said that I was arrested for disrupting the democratic process. **(Interruption)** Why are you shouting?

G.V.Punchinilame : Get down that officer here and ask him?

A.Amirthalingam : I cannot make you understand, hon. Deputy Minister. Please do not interrupt me. Please do not get into fields which you do not understand. Please know your limitations and keep quiet. You should know your limitations. You seem to know a lot about law!

Mr. Deputy Speaker : Order! Please address the Chair.

A.Amirthalingam : I think that the statement that was issued to the press is an insult to us, not only to me, but to the hon. Members for Nallur, Chavakachcheri and Manipay who were brought to the army camp at Palaly and kept there. Even His Excellency the President who spoke to me on the telephone at 8.30 did not say that we were taken into custody for our protection. You must understand that. You may ask His Excellency if you want to verify that. **(Interruption)** When the hon. Member for Point Pedro was not in his house, his house was searched. Every room was searched. In order to give us protection, they wanted to search every room to find out whether we were hiding anywhere. **(Interruption)** Do not make fools of yourselves. Let not the hon. Members stultify themselves by making remarks like this. They are only making fools of themselves when they make remarks like this.

I will tell you who the people were who took this decision to arrest us. It was not one man who took this decision. There were two responsible Ministers, one Deputy Minister, the Secretary to the Cabinet and Brigadier Weeratunge. They were there when this decision was taken. I want to ask them, and also ask hon.

Members, when the Leader of the Opposition is taken into custody, should not somebody at least inform the Head of the State, inform the Hon. Speaker that they are taking him into custody on the eve of the elections? And for anybody to pretend that it was for our protection (**Interruption**). How do you know all this? How do you know why we were taken into custody? Do you not know that you are making fools of yourselves by shouting like this? (**Interruption**) If not for the fact that this is fraught with such serious consequences one might say that the continuance of democracy in this island appears to be a comic matter. But it is a very serious matter if you value the rights of Members of this House. I wish to know from the two Hon. Ministers, who are now present in this House, who were a party to this decision to arrest us –

G.V.Punchinilame : Not to arrest you.

A.Amirthalingam : Shut up. You do not know anything. (**Interruption**)

Mr. Deputy Speaker : Order, please! I think it is justifiable for hon. Members to make interruptions.

A.Amirthalingam : How many times do the Members shout?

Mr. Deputy Speaker : I have no doubt the hon. Member will withdraw the word he used, but I request the hon. Member for Ratnapura (Mr.Punchinilame) also to limit his interruptions.

A.Amirthalingam : Sir, I withdraw the remark, but let the hon. Member for Ratnapura (Mr.Punchinilame) please keep his mouth shut and allow me to speak.

G.V.Punchinilame : There, again he goes on.

A.Amirthalingam : That is permitted in Parliament.

Mr. Deputy Speaker : The request of the hon. Leader of the Opposition is to permit him to carry on with his speech. I dare say that any hon. Member is entitled to make certain remarks, but not to interrupt.

G.V.Punchinilame : With due respect to you, Sir, I do not like to be dictated to by another Member of this House. So, he should withdraw that remark.

A.Amirthalingam : I have withdrawn it, but I have requested you to keep your mouth shut and permit me to speak. That is all.

Mr. Deputy Speaker : I wish the hon. Member for Ratnapura takes that advice.

A.Amirthalingam : So, we were there in the Army camp and at about 8.30 some Army officers came and told us that His Excellency wanted to speak to me on the telephone. **(Interruption)** For breakfast we were given some godamba rotti with sambol. I am glad that somebody thought of my breakfast!

Thereupon, I had to go some two or three bungalows away to speak to His Excellency over the telephone. He said, 'It has been a mistake. I have ordered the release of you and the other Members of Parliament. I am sorry about it.' That is all His Excellency said. Even at the time, let the hon. Members of this House take note, His Excellency never told me that we were taken into custody for our protection. He never told me that. Instead of asking us to bring the police officer, they might ask His Excellency about it.

Then, I ask in all earnestness from the Hon.Minister of Industries and Scientific Affairs and the Hon. Minister of Lands and Land Development, who, to the best of the information that I had, were parties to this decision to arrest the Members of Parliament of the TULF on the eve of the election, whether they deny that, or whether they admit that they were parties to this. **(Interruption)** I know that the Hon. Minister of Industries and Scientific Affairs loves me more than anybody else.

M.Sivasithamparam : He is the dearest friend we have in the world!

A.Amirthalingam : After being the guests of his Excellency's Government for about six hours from 3 o'clock to 9 o'clock, we were released and allowed to go. I would request the Hon. Minister of State who is in charge of information and who is a fair-minded person, to tell us whether the Government admits that it had made a mistake. They must not try to tell the world –

Anandatissa de Alwis – Minister of State : That was a mistake, admit that.

A.Amirthalingam : Thank you.

Anura Bandaranaike : The only honourable Member on that side!

A.Amirthalingam : This attack on people had continued throughout the night of the 3rd, on the eve of the election, and a number of people had been killed on the roads in Jaffna. At Kopay, one Parameshwaram, a Cultivation Officer, was taken into custody by the police at about 8.10 pm on the night of the 3rd. His body was found shot a few hundred yards away from the place where he was taken into custody, on the Kopay-Neervely Road. That is on the Point Pedro Road.

Shortly before that, a dhoby and a boy were returning after work on a bicycle on the Urumpirai-Kopay Road. The police threw the bicycle on a side and took these two men into the jeep. The body of the dhoby was found thrown on the road

with gunshot injuries, and the body of the boy was recovered at a different spot very much later.

That same night at about 2.45 or 3 a.m., some army personnel had got into the office of the hon. Member for Nallur (M.Sivasithamparam). There were some young men, election workers, who were sleeping on the verandah. A boy by the name of Balajothy, who had completed his training as a seaman in the Hon. Minister's training school at Trincomalee and who had just got back, was there sleeping on the verandah of the hon. Member's office. These army men had rushed in at 2.45 a.m., jumped over the parapet wall and entered. These boys had run in all directions. The army men shot, and on the verandah of the office of the hon. Member for Nallur, this boy Balajothy was killed by a rifle bullet which had gone through his head. **(Interruption)** I do not know whom they were looking for.

Anyhow, Sir, this does not complete the tally of deaths that were caused on the night of the 3rd, on the eve of an election. What was the purpose? Was it to further democracy? Was it to inspire confidence in the democratic process among the people that all these shootings and killings were done on the roads of Jaffna four or five hours before polling was due to start?

I do not want to speak of what happened in respect of the polls. I will tell you, Sir, that we intend giving notice of a Vote of Censure on certain responsible Ministers for the way they interfered with the functions of the Returning Officer and the Assistant Commissioner of Elections in Jaffna and destroyed democracy as far as these elections went. I will not speak on it today because the results of that election have not yet been declared. I understand that the Commissioner of Elections has now decided to ask the Returning Officer to count those votes. Of course, the bulk of the votes had been counted in the respective polling stations, but about 40 to 45 boxes had been taken without counting in spite of requests by counting agents that they should be counted. Whatever that may be, I do not want to deal with that aspect of it. That is a very, very serious matter, not for us alone but for everybody in this country who values democracy and the elective process as a means of changing or installing governments in a democratic way. I will not deal with that now, Sir.

Even on the following day, with army petrol, a liquor shop was broken open at Inuvil. One can verify from the employees of the Inuvil hospital that it was done by army personnel. They broke open the liquor shop, which is opposite that hospital, and removed the liquor that was there. They have done the same thing at Nelliady, in Point Pedro **(Interruption)** I now that this is the raw material for your type of elections!

Now, Sir, I do not want to narrate at length all these things, but I would like to say that the Tamil people in this country cannot continue to be treated in this way time after time. This is not the first occasion that this has happened. So, on behalf of our people we have to place certain demands before this Government to punish the offenders and to guard against a recurrence of events of this nature. These are the demands that we are placing before this Government.

- (1) That the police force responsible for this havoc be sent out immediately and the Government should see to it that at least 75 percent of the police force and all officers in charge of police stations and senior police officers in the Tamil-speaking areas are Tamils or Muslims.
- (2) That a system of home guards be established in each district under District Development Councils to act in conjunction with the police to safeguard the lives and the property of civilians.
- (3) That the army responsible for the killing and looting be withdrawn immediately, and whatever limited number of armed personnel are necessary for purposes of security be confined to barracks.
- (4) That the Government should permit an appropriate international organization like Amnesty International or the International Commission of Jurists, to make a full inquiry in to the events of the last few days, from 31st May to 8th June, and the violations of human rights in Jaffna and to report on what action should be taken on them and to prevent recurrence of similar events.
- (5) That the miscreants be identified, and punished adequately and immediate redress be given to the victims.

On behalf of the TULF, I wish to say that we are placing these demands for the serious consideration of the Government and hon. Members. We ask that an international organization like Amnesty International or the International Commission of Jurists should inquire into these incidents because we have lost all confidence in Select Committees and Commissions of Inquiry which go on for years and years and produced nothing but abortions.

Sir, unless and until adequate measures are taken to meet these demands the TULF Members of Parliament will not attend the Sittings of Parliament and will not participate in the legislative process except to expose the Government on a Vote of Censure on the conduct of the District Development Council elections in the Jaffna district which we intend giving notice of in conjunction with other Opposition parties.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we have committed any offence, I invite the Government to put us on trial. We are prepared to face any trial anywhere. Let the normal process of law be complied with. In the same way, in the case of three policemen

who committed these murders, arson and looting, merely because they are in uniform let not the Government condone these actions and for all time keep the Tamil people at the receiving end of these heinous attacks and crimes. Thank you.

Gamini Dissanayake- Minister of Lands and Land Development and Minister of Mahaweli Development: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition in the course of his speech referred to the conduct of the poll in the Jaffna Development Council elections and he said it was the intention of his party, in concert with the other Opposition parties in Parliament, to introduce a Motion of No. Confidence against the Hon. Minister of Industries and myself. I take it that on that occasion we would be in a position to discuss this matter fully, and I certainly shall adduce before this House certain facts which I do not intend to refer to now but which I would have if this No Confidence Motion was not going to be introduced, because I think they are relevant to this discussion today.

I wish to place on record certain matters leading up to the incidents which were referred to by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. The hon. Leader of the Opposition referred to certain dates. He mentioned the 31st May when four policemen were shot at a Tamil United Liberation Front meeting. Then he said that of the four policemen shot at, two succumbed to death and the other two have survived. Then the hon. Leader of the Opposition referred to the fact that on the 1st of June the house of the hon. Member for Jaffna was burned down.

V. N. Navaratnam-Chavakachari : On the 31st May, early morning.

Gamini Dissanayake : Sorry. He said that the hon. Member's house was burned down on the 31st May and on the 1st night the Public Library was burned down, and on one of these dates, I think, the headquarters of the TULF-

K. P. Ratnam: On the 31st night.

Gamini Dissanayake: I wish to say this: I saw the house of the hon. Member for Jaffna, and whatever views that were expressed in the House in the course of the debate, I wish to say how sorry we are that this sort of thing could have happened to a Colleague of ours in this Parliament. I hope that this will not happen to any Member of Parliament of any party in this country. So, if the hon. Member for Jaffna seeks an apology from us, I wish to tender an unreserved apology for what happened to him, and I hope that it will never happen to any Member of this House, whatever his political views may be.

I wish to refer to a statement made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition and reported in Hansard of 6th May 1981. He says this is the course of his speech dealing with the conduct of the armed forces in the Jaffna Peninsula;

"I wish to say, however that the local police, the Jaffna Police are not giving any trouble to the people."

A. Amirthalingam: At that time.

Gamini Dissanayake : This was on the 6th of May-approximately 26 days before the incidents complained of occurred, unfortunately, in the Peninsula. Then, who were these people? Who were the officers? Who came there?

A. Amirthalingam : May I interrupt you? About 300 men were brought and housed in the Durayappah Stadium, palpably for election duty. It was this army that moved into action.

Gamini Dissanayake : I do not want to contradict in anyway. I wish to say that, therefore, these people who were responsible for the activities complained of on the 31st, and on the 1st, 2nd and the 3rd were people who were not within the category mentioned by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, in the debate which took place in this House on 6th May. In other words, they were not men of the Jaffna local police. They were men who were brought from outside thereafter for whatever the reason was.

Then, Sir, after this incident took place on the 1st, His Excellency the President sent, among others, his Secretary for Defence, Colonel C. A. Dharmapala; the Additional Secretary for Defence, General Sepala Attygalle; the Secretary to the Cabinet, Mr. G. V. P. Samarasinghe, to Jaffna to report back to him the matters on which very serious representation has been made to His Excellency the President by the hon. Leader of the Opposition and other Members of Parliament. I think, on that occasion this team was accompanied by the Hon. Minister for Fisheries, Mr. Fetus Perera. Sir, they visited Jaffna on the 1st. They went to, I think, the police barracks and what they saw was a sorry sight of indiscipline, of discontent and complaints. They had apparently said that 19 police officers from 1977 had been killed, and those who were responsible for it had not been brought to book! I do not want to dwell on this matter anymore. They had found that they were living in fear and the team visited Jaffna on the 1st asked His Excellency for further time till the 2nd. They promised His Excellency that they would come on the 1st night, but they had asked for a further date so that they would be able to meet these people, discuss matters with the Commander of the Armed Services, Brigadier Weeratunga, discuss matters with the D.I.G of the area, and then recommend to them a certain course of action.

Let me assure you, Sir, and the hon. Members of this House that there is no doubt whatever that there was a very serious situation in Jaffna because the Police Force was on the verge of a virtual mutiny. On the 2nd or the 3rd, virtually 200

policemen had deserted their posts, and since they were responsible for some very serious events which needed an answer, His Excellency the President ordered- one possibility was that these people were going to attend the funeral of Police Sergeant Punchi Banda who was shot in the head- that any of these constables of police officers who are proceeding to this funeral should be apprehended so that they would be made to answer as to what happened in the course of the 31st and the 1st. Not all were apprehended. In fact, some had got news that the I. G. P had given such an order, and we still do not know their whereabouts!

But, Sir, what the Secretary, Defence; Secretary, Cabinet; the Army Commander and the Additional Secretary, Defence, reported to His Excellency the President on the 2nd was interesting. They said that according to them the conditions necessary for the conduct of a poll did not prevail in Jaffna. Please understand that. It may be something that you can laugh at. But the fact is that Dr. Thiagarajah whom I had come to know as an hon. Member of Parliament from 1970-1977, a very old man- (**Interruption**). I have no respect for you also if you told me- no respect for you also if you ask me. I will tell this House what you told me some time ago. You just listen. The question of my respect or no respect does not arise in this matter because that man is not alive now, and I hope I can join with you in the sentiments you have expressed about this late Dr. Thiagarajah.

Dr. Thiagarajah lived in the Jaffna peninsula even after his political defeat in 1970. There was no serious objection to his living in the Jaffna peninsula till 1977. There was no serious objection to his living until 1981. But the moment this gentleman is sponsored as a candidate of the United National Party and placed number one on the list he is not fit to live the few years that are left to him. He is shot dead. (**Interruption**). I do not want to impute any mala fides to the hon. Leader of the Opposition when he says that he unreservedly condemns shooting, robberies and violence. I am glad that, though belatedly that unmitigated condemnation has come from the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

That is not all. It is not only Dr. Thiagarajah who had been shot dead. I visited the Jaffna peninsula a few months ago and I had the courtesy of having a very friendly discussion with the hon. Leader of the Opposition. They might get up in this House and censure me. I will defend myself. The Hon. Minister of Industries and Scientific Affairs will defend himself. I have gone out of my way to do everything possible in certain emotional, social and political matters which come within the purview of my Ministry. Never have I turned them away even where I had to reverse the decisions of the previous Government, even where I had to postpone certain development matters. I had accommodated these hon. Members because I feel that they mean well and that they are seriously trying to work out a methodology of working together with the Sinhalese people. I know that.

As I said I visited Jaffna on a particular day. What happened? The previous day a certain young Tamil boy- I will not call him a man because he was in his early twenties- crossed over from the TULF and joined the U. N. P. He used a phrase in the Tamil language and said, “If I can live with the wife why should I live with a mistress?” What happened to this man? He was decorating the road when he was shot dead. He was killed. Up to now the killers have not been caught.

Then, I was told by the security personnel not to come to Jaffna. My entire itinerary was arranged. I was to be there for four days. I discussed the matter with His Excellency the President said, “Gamini, you must go,” and I went. When I went to Jaffna I was told, “The situation is so tense. Please do not go to the house of the man who had been killed.” But I thought that this man could have been shot dead because he believed in our party. However ignorant or however clever he was, I felt I should go to that funeral house and I did go. Similarly, when Mr. Thiagarajah was shot dead that wound hurt the heart of every United National Party member in this country. Are you seriously saying that we in the United National Party cannot contest elections in the Jaffna Peninsula?

M. Sivasithamparam : Who said?

Gamini Dissanayake : Not “Who said?” Are you seriously saying that?

M. Sivasithamparam : Yes. And you will lose your deposit. You will see the results. **(Interruption).**

Gamini Dissanayake : My honourable Friend should remember that in politics the fashion changes; that their followers might not be with them for ever.

M. Sivasithamparam : They do not change to green.

Gamini Dissanayake : Are you so sure about that?

M. Sivasithamparam : Yes.

Gamini Dissanayake : Maybe so. But please give them the option of changing which you do not give.

M. Sivasithamparam : Very gladly we will give. **(Interruption).**

Gamini Dissanayake : Therefore, Sir, the fact is that there has been a build up in the Jaffna Peninsula over the years in which it was no longer possible to practice the tenets of democracy as we know it, because those who take to politics opposed to the Tamil United Liberation Front, run the risk of death. Unfortunately that is the situation which we have to face.

Then Sir, this report from the Secretary to the Ministry of defence, the Army Commander, the Additional Secretary to the Ministry of defence, was presented to His Excellency the President, wherein it was stated, "Please do not go through with the poll". On the 2nd of June a conference was called at which the Secretary of the Jaffna District Ministry, the Government Agent, was also present. He said that nearly 300 medical certificates had been sent by people who have been assigned election duties, saying that they are physically unable to go to Jaffna. Then His Excellency wanted to know whether the large number of people who go to Jaffna – 2000, 3000, 4000 maybe, and ultimately there were about 4000- can be housed and fed. It was the view that they cannot be fed because Jaffna had become a deserted town. No shop was open. No bakery was open.

K. P. Ratnam : There were no shops to be opened.

M. Sivasithamparam : Thanks to what happened. Why do you not say that also? They were looted, they were burnt.

Gamini Dissanayake : You say "Thanks to what happened." But I say "unfortunately for what happened." Of course they were looted, they were burnt. I know it. I accept what the Hon. Leader of the Opposition said.

M. Sivasithamparam : Say it well.

Gamini Dissanayake : I do not want to enter into an argument. **(Interruption)**. Please, we do not want to enter into polemics, on this matter. We are tracing back certain matters which happened. We need to work from that point onwards. And I say that it is not for us to discuss today whether 'X' did it or 'Y' did it. But the fact is that it has happened and I agree with the hon. Leader of the Opposition that some damage had been done by the police. I do not deny that and we cannot contradict when he says that the house of the hon. Member for Jaffna (Mr. Yogeswaran) had been burnt by the police. It is subject to enquiry. We do not know who did it. We cannot contradict him when he says that the TULF headquarters was burnt down by the police. But, Sir, we do not wish to be pontifical about this matter. I cannot say 'X' 'Y' or 'Z' did it. All I can say is that I did not go to Jaffna to have a holiday. A very serious situation prevailed there. They said that it would not be possible to conduct the poll, it would not be possible to give an end. But His Excellency the President decided, "We must go through with the poll. We are not going to postpone this."

Then, Sir, His Excellency the President was also concerned with the morale, the psychology and the behaviour patterns of the police. Two hundred police officers had left the station. We do not know who was with the government who was against

the government and I do not go by government, politically, but in relation to the overall objectives of conducting a peaceful poll in Jaffna. I saw in that situation, it was correct that the Secretary and Additional Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, the Secretary to the Cabinet that I went to Jaffna.

I want to ask you, hon. Members of the Opposition, “Can you make an allegation here that anyone of you, who went from Colombo was responsible for killing anybody, for burning a house, for looting, for burning? On the contrary it was only after we visited Jaffna that we are in a position to tell the Army Commander, “Do not expect any more trouble from the Police” because I myself went and addressed those people, and they were not easy people to talk to. The Hon. Minister of Fisheries will explain that when he went to the barracks he was welcomed by a loud hoot. What they said will be the subject matter, perhaps, of what we would say in this House when you bring this Motion of No Confidence. I do not think, Sir, that either of us is in any way affairs to meet this Motion of No Confidence because we have nothing to hide.

I have got here the documents which were legally issued by the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, wherein he gave certain instructions. The mayhem in Jaffna is something which you should know. There was no transportation, there was no food. The Jaffna Kachcheri was not in a position to give a single packet of food because even the caterer who had undertaken the catering order to give packets to the regular people who came to conduct the poll, had backed out saying that he had no provisions. Thanks to my Hon. Colleague, the Minister of Trade, we were able to airlift the food that was necessary.

Therefore, Sir, I do not wish to be emotional about this matter- about the poll. I will defend myself and the Hon. Minister for Industries and Scientific Affairs will defend himself, but in relation to what I wish only, but in relation to what the Leader of the Opposition said, I wish only to say that those who ride the back of the tiger very often end up inside the tiger. Please remember that. If any one of these crimes was happening in my electorate- if people were killed- my party branches would be in a position to provide the information to the Government.

A. Amirthalingam : Because they must be the people who did it.

Gamini Dissanayake : That may be one reason. I do not want to enter into polemics with you. But, Sir, if a hub cap of a car, a windscreen wiper or a dust cap for that matter, is stolen in Panchikawatte, in half an hour the man is apprehended. Here, nineteen police officers have been killed; anyone who joins the UNP is also killed.

A. Amirthalingam : Not all.

Gamini Dissanayake : No. Not all- **(Interruption)**. That is something which they would like to forget- the death of Mr. Duraiappah, the attempt on the life of Mr. Kanagaratnam-

A Member : Mr. Duraiappah was not UNP.

Gamini Dissanayake : But he was not TULF either. Therefore, Sir, I do not say that these hon. Members are responsible for any of these things in any way- **(Interruption)**. Please do not say that. But the point is, somehow, over the years, there has been a hard core of people built within the framework of the political process in the Jaffna peninsula where they have become so intolerant that they reward with a bullet those who oppose what they consider to be their Eelamist policies.

It is in this context that the election for the Development Council of Jaffna was contested. I am happy to say that we were in a position to inform His Excellency the President that in so far as the police was concerned we have brought the situation under control. Whatever the hon. Leader of the Opposition has mentioned by way of demands from the Government, I think could be considered by His Excellency, Hon Prime Minister, the Cabinet Ministers and if necessary by Government as a whole. But I wish the Hon. Members of the Opposition to understand that in as much as they are concerned about the situation in Jaffna, we are also concerned about the situation in Jaffna because Jaffna is not a separate Eelam yet. It is part and parcel of our country. And everyman in this country has a right to go to Jaffna and to come back from Jaffna. He has a right to work there, he has a right to live there, just like they come here from Jaffna and to any part of the country. And are, citizen of this country, whatever political beliefs. Has a right to be there until he dies by natural causes.

It is in the background of the deaths-the deaths of the United National Party candidate who was No. 1 on the list, the death of the police officers- that these unfortunate incidents have take place. We do not wish to minimize in any way the gravity of what has been done, the untold damage that has been done to the hon. Member for Jaffna (Mr. Yogeswaran) because no amount of house building is going to give him back the house in which he grew up, the house in which he lived and the house from which he had to run away like a criminal. I saw it and I was shocked. That is why I say in sincerity that I hope that this kind of thing will never happen to any body in this House. But in fact that if you visit Jaffna you will see the terror, the tension, the atmosphere that prevails in Jaffna. I met a Jaffna Tamil who said, "what this nonsense? We cannot be supporters of any other party here because we live in fear." They do not blame the TULF, Members of Parliament.

That is not a matter I want to discuss here. I think it is a very serious problem and I think that this terror group, whoever they are, wherever they live, whether in the North or in the South, must be removed forever.

And all I am saying is that, although verbal formulations have been offered in this House, there has never been a condemnation of their activities until today by the TULF. And I also say, very regrettably that amount of cooperation which is absolutely necessary from an organized political party to deal with a situation like this, has never been forthcoming from the Tamil United Liberation Front. I am sorry to say that.

A Member: Shame!

Gamini Dissanayake : I am not blaming anybody. I know the situation that prevails in Jaffna because I saw the dead body of that young man who joined the United National Party and who was shot the day before I went. That is the situation that prevails in Jaffna. And I think that people who are emotionally charged, these police officers who fall outside the category of those who are regular officers of the Police, have run berserk. There was a virtual mutiny situation in the police, and I hope that we will be able to bring that situation under control. The Secretary of Defence is going through the records of all those officers who were sent to Jaffna, because some have very devious backgrounds. Some were recruited by the hon. Member for Attanagalla (Mr. Lakshman Jayakody) when he was in office. Some have been recommended by certain Members of Parliament in the previous Government, whose connections with well known ultra-leftist movements are well known.

In fact, when I spoke to some police officers there I must say that I found it very difficult to carry on a conversation with them. Some of them were brazenly insulting; they were so heated up that their attitude seemed to be "Well, if you cannot deal with the situation we will do it ourselves." No government can allow paramilitary forces to function on their own. This is something which His Excellency the President has in mind. And I wish to say that when you bring a Motion of No Confidence, I will address my mind to whatever charges that you bring in this House.

I am sorry for the violence that was perpetrated in the Jaffna peninsula. I think we are all responsible for it. You too are responsible for it. Do not run away from responsibility because when you deal with people who do not believe in the democratic process they behave in a certain way, and every conduct is followed up by a counter course of action which one never contemplated. I do not think the Inspector General of Police when he sent these police would cause him such problems. I do not think that the Inspector General of Police ever anticipated that on the 31st at a TULF meeting four police officers would be shot dead. At least, whoever is doing this must realize that till the elections are over their gun-toting

activities must stop. It just shows that there is somebody in Jaffna, may be outside the parliamentary Group of the TULF who does not want this poll to go through, who does not believe in the democratic process. And is the hon. Leader of the Opposition seriously saying that those police officers who run berserk believe in democratic process? No. The hon. Leader of the Opposition will know the mentality of certain police officers who are Tamils. You made very serious complaints about Bastianpillai. Who was Bastianpillai? Bastianpillai was a Tamil and Bastianpillai was gunned down. Guruswamy was shot. They were Tamil officers. Sir, this is not a racial matter.

We have serious political problems. You want Eelam. We do not agree on the principle of Eelam. You say that you do not want the methodology of the gun, the bullet. We say so. But outside the framework of what you and we are discussing there is another group who are letting loose emotion, a series of events, over which unfortunately neither of us seem to have any control. I do not think that you seriously say that those who burnt down the house of the hon. Member for Jaffna are UNP supporters. I do not think that you seriously say that those who burnt down the TULF headquarters are UNP supporters. I think that from 1977 the UNP has been at the receiving end of this whole exercise. It is our supporters who got killed; it is those who wanted to cross over to the UNP who were dealt with. It is the SLFP flag bearer Mr. Duraiappah who was shot dead. I can remember how the hon. Second Member for Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya was moved about the death of Mr. Duraiappah. I think he was in Nuwara Eliya when he got the news. I know how moved he was because he was a personal friend of his. Whatever it is death moves us. Looting and arson hurt us and these are things that we would not like to tolerate.

But, I wish to say on the Floor of this House that whatever you preach about democracy or of your anxiety to conduct a peaceful poll, those conditions did not prevail in Jaffna and do not prevail in Jaffna. If you mean a peaceful poll through the process of terror people going and marking the cross against the suriya of the TULF. I say it is not a free poll. You do not want to have a free poll for that. We will tell his Excellency the President, "Please pass a law and say that only the TULF can represent Jaffna." We will raise our hands here if only to save a few innocent lives. That is something that we can discuss at a much more honourable level. I did not go to Jaffna to get shot by a 'tiger' and do not think that I went there for adventure either.

I was given a mission under grave circumstances, great difficulties. Even the Hon. Minister of Industries, with whom who have had very serious emotional battles here, charges and counter-charges. I must say was very restrained. And let me tell you, the Hon. Minister of State, whatever phraseology he uses, cannot

judge the circumstances under which hon. Members of Parliament were taken into custody. And we certainly were not going to come here and face His Excellency if one single person was shot dead. We were not going to take the responsibility for that. Those who were responsible for Defence were there- the Secretary for Defence, a former Army Commander, and the present Brigadier who is the Chief of Staff responsible for the peacekeeping operations in Jaffna. They came to certain conclusions. If those conclusions were wrong, and if you say that untold hardships have been caused to you-

M. Sivasithamparam : No. We never complained about the arrests. Please go ahead and arrest as much as you like.

Gamini Dissanayake : We are not keen to take you into custody, but in the meanwhile you must try your level best to stop this mad, wanton murder of innocent people by terrorists.

M. Sivasithamparam : You also stop your police murdering people.

Gamini Dissanayake : Of course we will do that.

Then Sir, I wish to place on record some matters which the hon. Leader of the Opposition who is a good friend of Brigadier Weeratunga can himself verify. Prior to his being taken into custody, or what I would call protective custody-

A. Amirthalingam : There was no protective custody; it was arrest on a charge of disturbing the democratic process.

Gamini Dissanayake : Do not take too seriously what that man told you. The hon. Leader of the Opposition should verify why Brigadier Weeratunga's car was shot at. Was that also by the police or the army?

A Member : Your people!

A Member : When?

Gamini Dissanayake : On the 2nd.

M. Sivasithamparam : By the police during the curfew.

Gamini Dissanayake : Sir, this effort to paint a picture like in a James Bond story is not warranted. I think. The fact is that there has been a series of killings in Jaffna from about 1977 right up to the DDC elections, leading to the death of the person who was right on top in the UNP list. Then, police officers were killed. Certain incidents took place, and I joined the hon. Leader of the Opposition in condemning what had taken place. But please do not try to paint a picture to show that the

conditions in Jaffna are such that you can have full freedom to practice democracy in all its glory. That freedom is only for the TULF. It does not exist for any others. That is the situation; that is the truth-

A. Amirthalingam : Hon. Minister, if that is the freedom that we have, why should you take me into custody to protect me, as you say? Can you not see the contradiction in what you are saying if that is the freedom we have?

Gamini Dissanayake : Why does the hon. Leader of the Opposition forget that 200 police officers had virtually mutinied?

A. Amirthalingam : Your men!

Gamini Dissanayake : There is no 'your men' or 'my men.'

A. Amirthalingam : Is not the control of these policemen the Government's responsibility? Is the Government taking responsibility for law and order and for the control of these policemen?

Gamini Dissanayake : That is exactly what I am telling you, hon. Leader of the Opposition. The duty of maintaining law and order is the responsibility of the Government, and the police force is an arm of that process, but when the police force is shot at and people are killed the behavioural patterns of those police officers who are shot at is something we cannot be responsible for.

A. Amirthalingam : Why not?

M. Sivasithamparam : If the police force is a disciplined force, can it behave like that? In what civilized country do you get that?

Gamini Dissanayake : That is exactly why I said that there was so much of tension in the Jaffna Peninsula, there was so much of irrational behaviour on the 31st and 1st and perhaps thereafter which we were concerned with. And His Excellency the President decided to carry on with the poll. It is in that context that all the incidents in Jaffna must be considered. So, if there were any irregularities in the poll, let the Commissioner of Parliamentary Elections report on that matter. If the matter has to go to court, let it go to court. If it comes to Parliament by way of a Motion of No Confidence, we will face it, and I have no doubt that hon. Members of the TULF will make the charges that they have to make against Ministers or Members of Parliament on that occasion. But I wished to mention the circumstances which led to this unfortunate incident in Jaffna. I wish to say once again before I sit down that, having been in Jaffna, having observed what took place in Jaffna, there was no atmosphere there for free polls. The atmosphere was one of terror; the police were not easily confined to barracks, and I think many of us who were

there were concerned with the situation. The Deputy Minister of Defence was there, the Secretary for Defence was there, the Army Commander was there and we were concerned. And if we have made any errors according to you in what we have done, we are prepared to face the consequences and take full responsibility for our actions.

Thank you.

Mr. V. Yogeswaran- Jaffna : Mr. Deputy Speaker for 1977 onwards I have participated in a number of debates on the Floor of this House. Today my voice is my own but my clothes are all borrowed. The verti I am wearing is a gift from the hon. Member for Tricomalee, the national banian is borrowed, the banian I am wearing under it is my father's. So, as I told you at the outset only my voice, is my own.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the last few days I have had plenty of time to think to myself on the events and the incidents that had taken place. I thought to myself that the Tamil community, the Tamil nation must learn certain lessons from the events of the 1st to the 8th, and the Sinhala nation must learn certain lessons from the incidents from the 1st to the 8th. I learned some lessons from the incidents from the 1st to the 8th.

As regards the Sinhala nation, after listening to the reactions of the House and the speech of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, I think they have learned nothing, they have forgotten nothing.

As regard the Tamil nation. I am sure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and everyone in front of me that the Tamil nation has learned the lesson correctly. They have drawn the correct conclusions and the correct inferences from these actions. I assure you of that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, today I am sat with nothing. I have no worldly possessions of my own except my heart which is beating within me. It is working quite correctly, quite firmly. And I am more than ever convinced, more than ever determined, more than ever resolved to free my people of this tyranny, this tyrannical rule. I am more than ever determined about that.

I told you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the lessons the two nations must learn, which one nation, bitterly, has learned and the other has bitterly learned. As for me, before I could account the incidents which happened at my residence, they have been defined graphically by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. As far as I am concerned, the lesson I have learned is this.

You have let loose- the Government, one half of the Government has let loose- an unarmed people violence unparalleled in any civilized country during peace

time. My personal view as God wanted me to live, and miraculously I escaped. Even that day as I was running I and my wife, "This is the end of the story." But God had willed that this should not be the end of the story. Perhaps, He has inflamed all my clothes, He has burned my house. I have no worldly possessions, nothing of my own. Perhaps, He has told me. "You speak eloquently of freedom for your people but at times you dress too flamboyantly; do not do that. You live to a certain extent luxuriously; do not do that." I have learnt those lessons. These two nations must learn. I have learnt the lesson.

As I told you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the fateful 31st night I never expected to survive. I never expected my poor wife to survive. Standing here today I sometimes wonder whether I am taking part in my own obituary reference. I force myself to say, "No I am addressing this House on a very important debate."

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has described graphically the events that took place. I will only tell you about the dastardly attack on my house. This must be a unique instance of a parliamentary representative living in the electorate with his people, living among the people whom he loved and perhaps loved by them in return, having had to hide, to hide from house to house. From whom? The custodians of law and order!

G. V. Punchinalame : (rose)

V. Yogeswaran : I will deal with you before I conclude!

G. V. Punchinalame : You wanted Rs. 30 lakhs from the Government for 17 perches. Just now you said that you did not have anything.

V. Yogeswaran : That is my father's. He bought that property from his sweat.

G. V. Punchinalame : It is written in your name.

V. Yogeswaran : It is my father's hard-earned money. He has honourably made that money. You are backing the racketeer, the tenant. I know, I will deal with you!

Mr. Deputy Speaker : Order, please! Please address the Chair.

V. Yogeswaran : I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I was telling this House about the incidents of the 31st. I had gone to three or four meetings, the last meeting at a place called Tellipallai to support the TULF candidate, and I was returning home. I went to one of the meetings in the Jaffna Electorate, and the meeting was over by a quarter to nine. I questioned one or two persons standing there. Nobody else was there they told me that the police

had come and disturbed the meeting. I came home and wanted to attend another meeting. My wife told me there had been some trouble and asked me not to go as most likely the other meeting had also been abandoned at that stage. From my house I could see the flicker of flames from the bazaar area. Immediately my wife told me, "I think they will attack our house". Of course, being a parliamentarian, I thought they might come and shout but would not enter the house as I was a Member of Parliament who was elected by the people and lived with them. I tried to contact the District Minister. He was not there. I telephoned his Private Secretary and told him, "the police are burning some portions of the town." (Laughter). Mr Deputy Speaker while they are laughing the whole world is laughing at them! You have burnt a part of a great city and you show nothing but your derisive laughter! Those who read this Hansard will look down upon you. Do not do that. Do not laugh. This is a serious matter.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I tried to contact the G.A., Jaffna, also but could not get at him. I booked a few calls, one to the Deputy Minister of Defence with whom I had talked over this matter even earlier. I even wanted to talk to the Hon. Prime Minister I booked a call to Trincomalee where my leader was. I was waiting for those calls.

Just opposite my house there is a fairly important junction- the Point Pedro Hospital Road Junction. From the junction I could hear loud noises. My wife told me that they would definitely attack our house. I say, "No. They might shout and go away. Let me get through to the Hon. Prime Minister and the Deputy Minister of Defence and tell them what is happening." She was adamant that we should go away, but I did not go. I opened my office door. Through the office window I could see my front gate. I saw 50 to 100 people, some in khaki uniforms, some in white banians and khaki shorts, some in sarongs, some armed with rods, some with swords and some with rifles standing near the gate. I really could not comprehend what the situation was. They tried to open the gate forcibly. The gate was locked at that time. Those people were terribly intoxicated. Before they came into my house they had looted foreign liquor shops and consumed "White House" whisky and "Hennessy" brandy. This was liquor that was alien to them and it had gone to their heads. They could not open the gate. They pushed the gate. It did not open. I saw an officer shoot at the lock. Then I told my wife that it was not safe to wait there any more and we both ran. We jumped over two or three walls and got to safety. Then they opened the gate. They poured something on all the doors and set fire to them I climbed over the wall and escaped. My wife also climbed over the wall. After that I missed her.

Forty five minutes after I had hidden in my neighbour's house I scaled the walls and wanted to look where my wife was. There was one police officer in banian and

khaki shorts. He got hold of me by the hand, but as he was intoxicated- I told you earlier that most of them were intoxicated- I was able to wrench myself away and again scale over the wall and escape. Till about 3 or 4 o'clock nobody knew where my wife was. Then we went and searched in the neighbourhood and found her.

In my premises the jeep was securely parked in the garage, and the garage was locked. They pushed the jeep out of the garage, hammered the jeep with iron rods, pushed it on to the road, poured petrol on it and set it on fire. The jeep was reduced to cinders. There was a Peugeot 404 car which, a friend of mine had parked there. They set fire to that car too. I presume they must have looted some jewellery, but all the jewellery was burnt or missing; I have not seen a single item yet. The typewriters and all the office equipment I had were completely burnt. I am an attorney-at-law and a notary public. All the deeds, protocols and originals of hundreds of deeds were also burnt. About 12 or 13 young boys had given me their passports to alter them from "Middle East" to "All Countries." I told them that I would attend to it when I came to Colombo on the 8th or 9th to attend Parliament. I had told them that they did not need to come. All those passports were burnt. Really my wife was left with the gown she was wearing and I was left with the yellow sarong I was wearing at that time. That is all I have in my possession now. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the protection some hon. Members spoke about.

That morning I went to my father's house. He is a doctor. He lives about 300 yards away from my house. My father and mother live there. I have had to live incognito in my own electorate and among my own people. I went and stayed elsewhere. That day at 5pm some army men had gone to my father's house and wanted to know where I was. He had told them: "I do not know where he is. You have to give me one or two day's time. I can contact him." They said: "No need. If we want we will come tomorrow morning." At 2am about 7 or 8 officers had come and scaled the walls of my father's house. Both my father and mother are very old. These policemen had scaled the walls, banged at the door and shouted, "open up; we are police officers." They opened the door and the policemen asked, "Where is your son?" They had said "We do not know where he is. He is staying with some of his friends." Then they asked, "Can we search the house?" They searched every room and under every bed on the first night they had come to offer protection. What did they want? They were searching under the beds. They wanted to give protection not at my house, but at my father's house. They harassed these poor people. I feel sorry that I entered politics and gave room for my parents to be harassed at this age. But there are certain duties and rights that we have. We also do our duty by our people. So that is that Mr. Deputy Speaker, they went and harassed my father. My father had said, "I do not know where he is." They searched every inch of the house and they went off.

So, Sir, this whole question of offering protection is all eyewash. As I told you earlier, it was really a miracle that I escaped. They had gone to my father and harassed him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is another small matter which I want to refer to since the Hon. Minister of State is here. During this period my father-in-law died of a heart attack. This incident also contributed to his heart attack. The newspapers did not publish his death notice. My father-in-law's relatives thought they would make a radio announcement about his death. In that announcement they had said, "So-and-so, father of so-and-so and father-in-law of so-and-so, M P. for Jaffna." But what did the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation do? They cut "M P. for Jaffna." The people are electing a Member of Parliament for Jaffna, but the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation deletes the words "M P. for Jaffna." They did not like it. But I think they would have charged for the total number of words- I do not know.

So, Sir, one arm of this Government had unleashed terror on unarmed, innocent people-violent, unprecedented terror. **(Interruption)**. They will teach you-**(Interruption)**. You laugh now. But they will teach you.

I ask the Hon. Minister of Lands to see what trials and tribulations the British soldiers are subjected to in Ireland. But do they go and burn the houses of Members of Parliament or of the ordinary people? **(Interruption)**. Your duty is to restrain them. They must be a disciplined force. Let the police force be disciplined.

I have my own idea of the reasons why these persons were sent to Jaffna that day. I will deal with that later. There are a large number of speakers to follow me. I only related the incidents concerning the attack on my house. There are a number of incidents which have to be placed on record. Perhaps, other speakers will do so.

The Hon. Minister of Lands and Land Development said, though belatedly, that he was extremely sorry for what happened in Jaffna. I accept that. Speaking for myself, as I told you earlier, one arm of your Government has tried to do untold damage to property and to myself, but it has failed. What future plans that arm of Government has in store for me I do not know. Whatever plans they have I think somebody will foil such plans. I have full confidence in that. In spite of all the trials and tribulations we undergo we have a commitment to God which we will pursue with determination and resoluteness.

Thank you.

Mr. Cyril Mathew-Minister of Industries and Scientific Affairs : Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the outset I like to express to the Member of Parliament for Jaffna. (Mr. V. Yogeswaran) our deepest regret at the damage done to his property. At the same time I am happy that he is not altogether destitute in that his parents have had the

foresight to leave him more than Rs. 5 million worth of property in the Colombo City.

Before I came to the subject of this debate. I would like to deal with a matter the Member for Nallur (Mr. M. Sivasithamparam) raised-**(Interruption)**. I can never forget any one of you; even in my dreams I see you.

M. Sivasithamparam : We never forget you!

Cyril Mathew : I refer to Hansard of 8th May 1971, Column 2672. In fact I have written to the hon. Member about this. He said, "If you say that Mahatma Gandhi never approved of violence, never approved of acts of so called terrorism, I think you do not know the facts." I like to tell my hon. Friend that he does not know the facts and I intend to show him today from the very book that he quoted that he has not read it.

M. Sivasithamparam : Have you read Volume 3 carefully?

Cyril Mathew : It was not only that. The Hon. Minister of Trade and Shipping said "I am also talking of Mahatma Gandhi and I say that he haver (never?) condoned violence." But the hon. Member for Nallur said he did. I have with me the book on Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi from which he quoted.

A. Amirthalingam : I am glad you have started reading the book on Mahatma Gandhi.

M. Sivasithamparam : Whereas you practice violence!

Cyril Mathew : Before I sit down I shall prove to you, in this House and to this country that the TULF and the Tiger Terrorist Movement are one and the same.

M. Sivasithamparam : Very good. You have tried it a number of times but failed.

Mr. T. Sivasithamparam- Vavunya : This is about the fiftieth time you are saying it.

Cyril Mathew : Even if I say it for the thousandth time, these are stark, naked facts.

A. Amirthalingam : You believe in naked things, I think.

Cyril Mathew : In page 93 of this book Mahatma Gandhi was referring to the murder of the police inspector and the sentence of death passed on Bhagat Singh. He said,

"But I want you also to realize Bhagat Singh's error. If I had an opportunity of speaking to Bhagat Singh and his comrades, I should have told them that the way they pursued was wrong and futile, I declare that you cannot bring swaraj for our famishing millions, for our deaf and dumb, for our lame and crippled by way of the

sword. With God as witness I want to proclaim this truth, that the way of violence cannot bring Swaraj. It can only lead to disaster.”

M. Sivasithamparam : Why do you not read the A.I.C.C. resolution?

Cyril Mathew : I will read it. You have already read it. Please listen to me. I did not disturb you when you spoke.

Absurd and ridiculous tales – The burning of the Jaffna Library

Maj. Gen. (Retd) Lalin Fernando

"The moving finger writes and having writ moves on, none of all thy piety or wit shall lure it back or cancel half a line. Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it "

(Omar Khayyam)

Retired DIG Edward Gunewardene's (EG) book 'Memorable tidbits and the burning of the Jaffna library', launched recently marks a chronic trend in autobiographies. It is a shock and awe WMD type attack on the sensibilities of the readers. It has speculative assertions unsupported by verifiable facts. It appears to be based on personal agendas, festering prejudice and conjecture. The author's rank service in the SL Police acts as an impressive spring board from which to pounce on the credulity of readers. The result? His police colleagues especially and most citizens believe silence is golden – which is also a telling response.

People in SL from June 1981 believed with very good reason that the Jaffna library was burnt down either by the then UNP government supporters from Kurunegala in retribution for the killing of Tamil UNP candidates for the DDC elections or state security personnel for the killing of three policemen on 31 May 81. Significant parts of Jaffna town were torched but brought under control by the Army and the SL Navy. No one had said anything different ever since. Until EG did.

Former President Premadasa in 1991 famously accused two of his own ministers of the wanton act. He said "During the DDC elections (1981) some of our own party members took many people from other parts of the country North and created havoc and disrupted the elections in the North. It is the same group of people who are causing trouble now also. If you wish to find out... you have only to look at the faces opposing us" The Jaffna District Minister UB Wijekoon stated unambiguously that "the library was set on fire spontaneously and not pre-planned after several UNP candidates were shot and killed" (Sunday Times) . The Hartley College and Valvettithurai libraries were later burnt in 1984. (BBC report 2010). Minister Champika Ranawaka when visiting Jaffna (24 June 2010) said it was the work of

'goondas'. He said 'I have to apologize and beg pardon of the Tamil community'. President Rajapaksa is quoted as having said "The UNP is responsible for large scale riots and massacres against the Tamils in 1983, vote rigging at the DC elections and the burning of the Jaffna library".

Despite above EG has 31 years after remarkably concluded that it was a 'diabolic perpetration' of the LTTE. This must be based on pure speculation and no less diabolically.

According to EG (page 349) "The tactics the LTTE adopted to confront the police reached a crescendo on the night of June 1 (1981) ... to give them the maximum propaganda. There was nothing else for the LTTE to destroy in Jaffna than the public library. To the world the Jaffna library was symbolic of Tamil Hindu culture...and the Vellala aristocracy. But the world knew little of the rigid caste structure that dominated the social fabric of Jaffna. It was certainly not an institution to be admired or venerated by non Vellala Tamils. What better target for destruction". Was he so advised by the non Vellala Tamils or is this purely vintage EG? Certainly none of his colleagues present there told him that.

EG now rivals Channel 4 for damaging reports on SL. Nothing could have been more appropriate to harm communal relationships, energize the GTF and convince the international community than this blatantly untrue story by a senior police officer who also had a stint in Police Intelligence. It kicks the eminence granted to the LLRC report in the teeth.

He had apparently sat on his theories for 31 years while SL was left to rot being called 'barbarians' for this and other apparently dastardly acts. Yet EG kept mum. Was this then a confession of professional negligence or culpability that he had hidden? What compelled him to maintain silence for so long and then shatter it with what has to be the somersault of the century?

Did he then report his 'findings' to the IGP? No. He knew personally at least one DIG who had gone directly to President JRJ bypassing his IGP before. That however turned out with the EQD's help to be something more revealing or was it embarrassing? So why did he not do the same with this? It was surely information of great import that would have taken SL more quickly off the international pariah list.

EG did not even inform any of the later IGPs he served under about this 'revelation' either. Neither did he tell his buddy the next President, Premadasa, who gave him chairmanship of the Lotteries Board in retirement. Presidents DB Wijetunge, Chandrika BK or even the present President was not taken into his confidence. This alleged war crimes exploit of the LTTE was all stored for his 'tidbits'.

Had EG died before he wrote his piece, this wondrous tale would never have surfaced. SL would have been deprived of his life's most profound work, if it was not found reckless. His 'exposure' may if it is believed bring the police specially its special branches which had thought otherwise for the same length of time, contempt and ridicule as never ever before. It surely has not. Is it because it reflects only on the former DIG? His naivety is beyond belief. His credibility is questionable. He has like many politicians, mistakenly taken the people of SL to be unrivalled country bumpkins.

EG wants readers to believe that it was the LTTE that burnt down the 93,000 book Jaffna library. The same LTTE that the world was told was venerated as saviours by all but a few of the over 30 million Tamils of SL and India, that had fought with tremendous courage that drew admiration even from its foes and which finally died fighting to the last man. Would separatist insurgents anywhere and not just this 'most formidable terrorist organization in the world' (CIA) that fought even the Indian army to a standstill, burn down the very symbol and pride of their people on 'caste' grounds and still retain its support and image as a savior? EG must think it could.

EG turned up in Jaffna just a few days before both the fatal DDC elections and the 'burning' took place. What took EG there when the DIG Jaffna, the enormous and jovial 'Brute' Mahendran, a Tamil, had been in situ from 1980. A formidable UNP civilian strike force was also sent to Jaffna at the same time. Two or three cabinet Ministers too arrived. Their names are known. Were these arrivals a mere coincidence after the fact?

(WWW.Island.lk February 9, 2013)

“Gota War” Intensifies: Kumara Welgama Says Gamini Lokuge is the Man who Burned Down Jaffna Library

Kumara Welgama

Intensifying the internal power struggle within the Joint Opposition, JO Parliamentarian Kumara Welgama hit out at his party colleague Gamini Lokuge saying the latter was responsible for burning down the Jaffna library.

“A person who went to a school would never burn down a library,” Welgama said speaking to media on the current tug-of-war among JO members over the Presidential candidate of the alliance. Welgama has said in no uncertain terms that he will not support the candidacy of Gotabaya Rajapaksa as the latter does not possess a “democratic mindset”.

Lokuge, a senior Parliamentarian of the Joint Opposition, is a supporter of Gotabhaya Rajapaksa’s candidacy.

Welgama also launched a veiled attack on former President Mahinda Rajapaksa saying there were “two types of people” around him.

“On One side, there are people whose lands are tainted with blood. On the other side, there are people who destroyed the statue of Bandaranaike, who stripped our party activists naked and slapped our electorate organizers in the presence of senior Pollice officers. They also mercilessly assaulted Maduluwawe Sobhitha Thera and Prof. Ediriweera Sarachchandra in public. Do I really have to talk further about their conduct?” Welgama asked, referring to his party colleague Lokuge.

“It is due to their conduct in Jaffna,” Welgama said, “the LTTE terrorism escalated and former President Rajapaksa had to spend so many years fighting the war.”

Lokuge, a long-standing member of the UNP, crossed over to the UPFA during the Rajapaksa presidency.

Ranil apologizes for burning of Jaffna library

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe today apologised for the burning of Jaffna Library in 1981 and urged the Joint Opposition to apologize for what happened during that time as well.

“The public library in Jaffna was burnt during a United National Party (UNP) Government in 1981. We know it was wrong and tender an apology for it,” he said.

“You too should tender an apology for the wrong things which your Government did,” he told the Joint Opposition MPs, who was heckling at him at that time.

This House turned noisy when Mr. Wickremesinghe rose to answer a question posed by TNA MP M. A. Sumanthiran, who opposed the move by the Ministry of Resettlement and Rehabilitation to construct per-fabricated houses in the war affected regions.

“We want to see that 80 percent of the houses in the North are reconstructed and are willing to discuss matters with the Northern representatives,” the Prime Minister added. (Yohan Perera)

(www.Dailymirror.lk of 12.06.2016)

Ranil apologises for the 1981 burning of the Jaffna Library

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe apologized for the burning of the Jaffna Library, in a significant statement that came while the House was in a state of uproar over the controversial 65,000 houses project for the North and East.

“The Jaffna Library was burnt during a UNP Government. That was wrong. We regret it, and we ask forgiveness for it,” the Prime Minister said.

Given that the intervention came amidst disruptions from the Joint Opposition about the housing project and the Government’s focus on Northern development and the UNP's past sins against the Tamil people they were now claiming to champion, Wickremesinghe also urged the members of the pro-Rajapaksa faction to seek forgiveness for its misdeeds in the North during its tenure in office. (DB)

(www.ft.lk article/584534/Sumanthiran-Vs--Swaminathan-on-65-000-houses-in-NE)

Who Burnt One of South Asia's Biggest Libraries?

Jaffna 1981: Occasion; DDC election - Billion Dollar Question

K.K.S.Perera

Retired DIG Edward Gunewardene [EG]'s speculative allegations sans provable facts on the Jaffna library inferno in June 1981, stirred up a hornets' nest six years ago when he accused the LTTE rebels of the crime. A memoir by the retired police officer, leaks a best-kept police top secret for three decades—was it the LTTE that torched the Jaffna Public Library? Built in stages starting from 1930s, as a private collection, the Jaffna library soon became a full-fledged library and a repository of archivals. With original copies of regionally important historic documents, political history and newspapers published hundreds of years ago in Jaffna, it became a place of symbolic importance. Considerable parts of Jaffna town, business establishments, State institutions, theatres and print media offices were burned down by a group of policemen along with mobs transported from South by two Cabinet ministers during the infamous Jaffna DDC elections under JR Jayewardene. Mobs rampaged without any hindrance [in fact police joined them]. The raging fires were doused and brought under control by the forces men from Navy and the Army. The TULF headquarters, office of 'Eelanaadu', the Tamil news sheet, cultural and religious figures were also destroyed. For 30 years, all parties agreed on this point, until respected former DIG Edward Gunewardene wrote his memoir, relating a totally different story accusing LTTE of the crime. The library first functioned as a private property; it was declared a public asset in 1959 by the then Mayor, Alfred Duraiappah, who was the first victim, in the hands of Prabhakaran, the Tamil chauvinist in 1975.

Chauvinists in JR Regime

JR, the Executive President, decided to contest, rather fight the elections to Jaffna DDC with specially selected Tamil candidates backed by state support. General perception among Sri Lankans in the North and South was that the unprecedented retaliatory act was in retribution for killing of three policemen in June 1981. Since April 1981, there had been infrequent violent acts on pro-government Tamil

policeman and politicians. D.G.Mahindasoma, the District Minister for Vavuniya was severely assaulted in Vavuniya on May 25. The slaying of Tamil UNP candidate for the DDC elections on May 27, the former Federal Party Parliamentarian A. Thiagarajah [The Tamil politician from Vattukkottai was shot by an unknown gunman as he was leaving after addressing a meeting held in support of his candidature and succumbed to his injuries the next day in hospital.] A few other UNP candidates were either assassinated or frightened, compelling them to withdraw their candidacy by militant youth. An unidentified group attacked three policemen, a Sinhalese, a Tamil and a Muslim, who provided security to a TULF election meeting; two died of fatal injuries sustained in the attack, in the vicinity of Nallur temple on May 31, 1981. Maj.Gen. (retd) Lalin Fernando writing to a newspaper on February 10, 2013 refers to EG's version of the Jaffna library under the title "Absurd and ridiculous tales - The burning of the Jaffna Library, states, "... It appears to be based on personal agendas, festering prejudice and conjecture. The author's rank service in the SL Police acts as an impressive spring board from which to pounce on the credulity of readers. The result? His police colleagues especially and most citizens believe silence is golden – which is also a telling response...."

District Development Councils and SLFP

The SLFP led opposition rejected the District Development Council system and refrained from contesting the June 1981 election, thereby giving the UNP a walk over in many districts that included, Monaragala, Kurunrgala, Kegalle, Kandy, Matara, Nuwara Eliya and Ratnapura. The election held on June 5, 1981 was peaceful in the South, while in North it was marred by violence, intimidation and mass scale vote rigging by UNP. To say the least, several ballot boxes went missing in transport from polling booths to counting centres in the city, a few of them surfaced later from under the beds of the hotel where the ministers and their close cohorts occupied during the week of horror and revulsion.

Ten years from the knowledge hub inferno, former President R. Premadasa in 1991 accused two of his former senior colleagues in JR government of the criminal act. He blamed Gamini Dissanayake and other notorious chauvinist minister, Cyril Mathew for taking a train load of people from Kurunegala to Jaffna for creating mayhem during the peak of DDC election campaign and organizing vote rigging on the day of election.

"DIG [Rtd] expects us to believe that it was the Jaffna rebels led by V. Prabhakaran that torched the 93,000 books, new and old, valuable collection of manuscripts including Ola-leaf varieties"

They led the UNP 'goons' creating havoc and disruptions in the Northern district. UB Wijekoon, Jaffna District Minister making a statement said "it was set on fire unexpectedly and not pre-planned after one of senior UNP candidates were shot and killed". On the night of June 3, the police arrested A. Amirthalingham, leader of Tamil United Liberation Front [TULF] for no apparent reason, but released subsequently after receiving orders from Colombo. 1981 in Jaffna and 1983 in Colombo followed a series of acts of violence from extremists of both sides, the attacks on Dalada Maligawa, Sri Maha Bodhiya, Kebithigollewa, Central Bank continued until the terrorist were annihilated in 2009.

Who committed Arson?

A day prior to the election, authorities air lifted 10,000 lunch packets, 2000 loaves of bread, 1000 tins of canned fish and 5000 bananas to feed the miscreants transported from South in a special train that left the Kurunegala railway station on June 2; all at the cost of poor tax payer.

Government declared a state of emergency effective 5.00 pm on election day, also imposed curfew restricted to the District of Jaffna. The good DIG [Rtd] expects us to believe that it was the Jaffna rebels led by V. Prabhakaran that torched the 93,000 books, new and old, valuable collection of manuscripts including Ola-leaf varieties; the symbol and pride of Tamils of North Sri Lanka. He based his inference simply on caste factor.



They torched 93,000 Books

We remember the infamous Dedigama Bye-election held in 1973 to fill the vacant seat of one of the noblest men in politics the Late Dudley Senanayake, who passed away prematurely at the age of 62. The SLFP government led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike, and supported by Marxists, LSSP and CP made Kegalle rest house out of bound to public and housed a temporary Police station with two hand-picked Assistant Superintendents of Police drawn from other areas during the election campaign to facilitate the SLFP hooligans who terrorised the opposition. On election day they went on a rampage rigging votes in open daylight—the local police watched helplessly while the make-shift police under the two ASPs provided the necessary cover for the government thugs. However, people of Dedigama resisted with the blessings of their great leader; UNP won the battle, though they tried the same tactic in their turn and lost Jaffna eight years later.

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumarathunga and her loyal Minister Mangala Samaraweera made some commendable work towards neutralizing the unpardonable criminal act by Sinhalese goon squads, by launching ‘pothai-gadolai’ (book and brick) project to rebuild the library. They collected large amount of money and books from the South in an effort to help re-construct the library and initiate a reconciliatory process through it.

‘Reichstag fire’ in Germany

“Jaffna library, was one of the largest libraries in South Asia; 38 years is now past and the UNP which was in power which slashed the electoral process is out of power. The Library inferno preceded the rigging, all that failed. Rev. Fr. David, the scholar and community leader who treasured the collection of valuable material died of a heart attack a couple of days after the tragedy. The ‘Reichstag fire’ in Germany, an arson attack on the home of the German parliament in Berlin named Reichstag, took place on February 27, 1933, exactly four weeks after Hitler was sworn in as German Chancellor. Hitler’s government accused communist agitators in general. Nazis used the fire as an excuse to claim that communists were conspiring against the government, and the happening was considered key to the founding of Nazi Germany. Mysterious are the ways destiny moves to downgrade the responsible to the dustbin of history. Have we learnt our lessons?

(WWW dailymirror.lk - 16 December 2019)

Rising from the Ashes

Tragic Episode of the Jaffna Library
(A Reference Guide for Researchers)

N. Selvarajah



N.Selvarajah is well known in Sri Lanka and all over the Tamil Diaspora as a librarian and renowned bibliographer of Sri Lankan Tamil books. To date he has produced fifteen volumes of 'Nool Thettam' - a bibliography of Tamil books by Sri Lankan Tamil writers from home and abroad, which has about Fifteen thousand entries and constitutes the Sri Lankan Tamil Central Repository of modern literary work.

This massive project more the work of a university or National Library, is being undertaken by a single man with a love for books. This 'one man project' is unparalleled in it's scope and undertaking. He is also involved in the compilation of a Bibliography for the Malaysian and Singapore Tamil Writings.

Selva was born in Anaicoddai, one of the earliest known human settlements in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. He was educated in Negombo and Jaffna and began his career as a librarian at Ramanathan College, Chunnakam. He later served as the chief librarian for the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in the Jaffna District.

During 1981-82 he went to Indonesia to serve under the United Nations Development Programme. Whilst there he developed a Model Rural Community Library System in the village Marengmang, near the provincial capital Bandung, which was later adopted in the rural areas of that country.

On his return to Sri Lanka in 1983, he became the Chief Librarian at the Evelyn Rutnam Institute for inter-cultural Studies, affiliated to the Jaffna College. In 1990 he became an advisor to the Department of Hindu Culture under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in Sri Lanka. In 1991 he was made a consultant to the Jaffna Public Library.

Residing in Britain for the past 30 years, it is his unwavering love of the profession and his single mindedness which has written over 58 books including the fifteen volumes of his Bibliographical Compendium. This labour of love continues - this could go on infinitum.

Currently he serves as the Founder Director to the European Tamil Documentation and Research Centre, in the UK.