

**REPORTING DEATH:
HOW THE HINDU AND
TAMILNET.COM
COVERED THE 'END'
OF THE WAR IN SRI
LANKA**

**SEMINAR PAPER SUBMITTED TO
PROF. MSS PANDIAN**

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I dedicate this work to 'Taraki' Sivaram. He was killed because he spoke the *Truth* as he saw it. He still inspires those who believe that words retain their power even in conditions where barbed wires and rifle-butts have replaced dialogue.

“Tamilnet.com’s reports are 99.9% credible.”
-V.S. Sambandan, Sri Lanka Special Correspondent for The Hindu

"Camouflaged in the name of Indian national interest, the intellectual venom, sectarian interests, dynastic interests and personal biases sadly making The Hindu into a pro-Sinhala and anti-Tamil media have to be countered socially, culturally and politically on a superior intellectual plane by bringing out public awakening locally and globally."
-A Colombo based Tamil media editor

Putting the Sri Lankan Conflict in Perspective

While the issue of concern of my seminar paper lies in the events of the contemporary past, I find it imperative to have a brief overview of the past that preceded these events. In the following paragraphs, I shall briefly try to summarize the history of the Sri Lankan conflict in postcolonial Sri Lanka.

Like any other modern state, Sri Lanka has numerous divisions, vertical and horizontal. It is not in the focus of this paper to give due attention to all. I shall try to focus on the emergence of one contradiction, the national contradiction between the Tamils and the Lankan government, from 1948, the year the British withdrew from Sri Lanka. The Soulbury Commission which devised the Sri Lankan constitution that lasted from 1947 to 1972, while consisting of few provisions for the ethnic minorities in paper, privileged the majority Sinhalese in effect. The DS Senanayake government that assumed power in 1948 passed two legislations - the Citizenship Act (1948) and the Indian and Pakistani Residents Act (1949) - which disenfranchised the whole lot of plantation Tamils or 'Indian Tamils' as popularly known. The disenfranchisement of the plantation Tamils enabled the Sinhalese to occupy more than 80% of the seats in the parliament. "From 1952 onwards, the Sri Lankan Parliament would be more like an assembly of Sinhalese notables than anything else".¹ The foundations for Sinhalese majoritarianism were laid. Likewise, the foundation of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi, or simply the Federal Party, by SJV Chelvanayagam in 1949 would challenge the developing Sinhala nationalism till the 70's, albeit through 'legal' means.

In this period, the word 'nationhood' started getting popularized in the Tamil political vocabulary. After a series of discriminatory legislations like the Sinhala Only act of 1956, which attempted to make Sinhalese the sole official language of the country, and the policy of 'standardization' which was pursued by the state in the 70's, were passed against the interests of the Tamils, the idea of separateness started acquiring a concrete and popular form. The anti-Tamil riots which occurred in varying frequencies since the late 50's, which were overlooked or even facilitated by the Lankan state, also contributed to the formation of an identity of 'Eelam Tamil' as opposed to 'Sri Lankan' which was equated with Sinhalese. As Bose points out, "It was only from the mid 1970's onwards that the Sri Lankan Tamils began to consciously define themselves as a nation entitled to an independent state, and their political organizations actively sought a clean break from the Sri Lankan state only from the 1980's on."² In 1975, Chelvanayagam declared that "the Tamil Eelam nation should exercise the sovereignty already vested in the Tamil people and become free."³ The Vadukkodai resolution was passed in 1976 by a committee of several Tamil parties declaring the right of the Tamil nation to secede.

While the political language of defining the self and the other changed radically in the

1 Sumantra Bose, *State, Nations, Sovereignty: Sri Lanka, India and the Tamil Eelam Movement*, New Delhi: Sage, 1994, p54

2 *ibid*, p46

3 Alfred Jeyaratnam Wilson, *The Break-up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict*, London: Christopher Hurst, 1988, p88

1970's, it assumed a more popular and militant form after the burning of the Jaffna library in 1981 and the anti-Tamil riots of 1983 that left over 4000 Tamils dead and about 200000 homeless. The Prevention of Terrorism Act passed in June 1979 which gave the armed forces arbitrary rights to detain, 'interrogate' and convict also contributed to the Manichean outlook that was developing among the Tamils.

After 1983, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which was formed in 1976, emerged as one of the strongest militant groups. This was also the period when India started taking up greater interest in the affairs of Sri Lanka, mostly owing to pressures from the Tamil population in its own territory and due to the refugee influx into the state of Tamil Nadu, which was geographically close to the island country. Many militant groups, including the LTTE, were given assistance from India, but India's favorite handmaiden was initially the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization and later, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front - both were pitted against the LTTE at different points of time in history and both were decimated by the same. As Sivasegaram points out, "By 1987, all but the LTTE... had surrendered their independence to their Indian patrons."⁴

What happened after that - the IPKF involvement and its defeat at the hands of the LTTE, the LTTE's phenomenal rise to power, the defection of Karuna in 2004 and internal weakening of the Tiger's structure, the military onslaught on the Tamils that began under Rajapaksa's presidency in 2006 which culminated in the crushing of the LTTE as an effective military force in May 2009, all accompanied by massive civilian casualties on the side of the Tamils - is, to use an abused phrase, history. The events that happened on and around 17 May 2009, when the LTTE announced that they have 'silenced their guns' and the Sri Lankan government declared that 'the war was over' and the coverage of these events by The Hindu and TamilNet.com forms the subject of my seminar paper.

Rationale of Choosing the Actors

In a conflict scenario, the media is as much a partisan actor as the forces involved in conflict. According to Benjamin Page, "Communications research has... thoroughly demolished the idea that news is or can be "value free." The canons of bland, "objective" reporting are perfectly consistent with the selection of quotes and facts, the framing of interpretations, and the attribution of importance (through repeated front page headlines, for example), all so as to support or oppose a particular policy position."⁵ This argument is all the more valid when the concerned media actor has political stakes in a conflict zone. The actors I am concerned about, TamilNet and The Hindu, have pretty intimate relations with the Sri Lankan war over a long period of time.

The Hindu, an English language daily, was established in 1878 by a group of 6 men, incidentally upper castes, in the erstwhile Madras province. The Hindu still operates from its headquarters in Chennai. It has a readership of about 21.59 lakh, making it

4 S Sivasegaram, *The Sri Lankan Crisis and the Search for Solutions*, Delhi: Aakar, 2009, p51

5 Benjamin I. Page, "The Mass Media as Political Actors" in *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Mar., 1996), p21

the third most widely read newspaper in India.⁶ Pursuing an Indian nationalist approach till the 80's, it acquired a 'left-liberal' slant after N. Ram took over as Associate Editor in 1977.⁷



Image 1: Prabhakaran with N. Ram

When the war in Sri Lanka intensified after the 1983 Black July riots, The Hindu showed great interest in the conflict and N. Ram personally engaged with some important Tamil political actors. (See Image 1) N. Ram was also one of the brains behind the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace accord of 1987, which was rejected out rightly by the LTTE. While this soured the relations between The Hindu and the Tamil militants, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, which was attributed to the LTTE, brought about a significant shift in the outlook of The Hindu towards the Tamil militants. Hostility towards the Tamil rebels was visible and a pro-Sri Lankan state attitude was discernable in its reportage. DBS Jeyaraj, a former journalist with The Hindu, claimed that he was fired from the organization for “exposing the atrocities of the Indian Army in Jaffna”⁸ during the IPKF interventions in Sri Lanka between 1987 and 1990. In 2005, N. Ram received the Sri Lanka Ratna award, the highest civilian award in Sri Lanka to be conferred on a foreigner, from the then President. In October 2008 -by which time the war in Sri Lanka had intensified- some activists in Tamil Nadu attacked offices of The Hindu over an article that they perceived to be against the Tamils of Sri Lanka. TamilNet has also accused N. Ram of “being 'emotionally' explicit in attacking the LTTE, nullifying Tamil Nationalism and in supporting the repressive Colombo government.”⁹

It is interesting how TamilNet covered this attack on The Hindu. In an article that mildly criticizes the attack on the media house, TamilNet gave more focus to the functioning and ideological tilts of The Hindu. According to them, “in the context of the Indian sociopolitical intricacies, the paper has always been accused of its pro-elite, especially Brahmin elite, anti-people and anti-subaltern views of thinking. It is considered as a pro-establishment organ sabotaging the social, political and cultural

6 <http://www.newswatch.in/newsblog/7983>

7 N. Ram was the Vice-President of the Trivandrum division of Student Federation of India, the students wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), in 1970.

8 DBS Jeyaraj, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/about> (Accessed 30 April, 2011)

9 TamilNet, *Attack on media: freedom, arrogance and playing with the will of people*, available from <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=27213>, 16 Oct, 2008 (Accessed 30 April, 2011)

revolutions of the downtrodden masses.”¹⁰ The ideological conflict of TamilNet towards The Hindu is obvious and by the deployment of the above terminologies at the other, it also seeks to project its own reporting as the voice of the subaltern and of the “downtrodden masses”, in our case, the Tamils of Sri Lanka. The attempt is made here to delegitimize The Hindu’s style, yet the language used is not one of direct attack. Note the usage of ‘has always been accused’ and ‘it is considered’ in the above. By attributing these allegations to other people, whom TamilNet does not specify, it is able to avoid editorializing its contents, not just to show its ‘objectivity’ but also to validate a claim that its criticism of The Hindu is verified by other sources as well. By virtue of ideological commitments and matters of organizational policy, the two outlets represent polar opposite views on the Sri Lankan conflict and yet, both seek for themselves the cover of ‘objectivity’ and hence, make ideal case studies for my paper.

The other player in my script, TamilNet, is considered by many news agencies, including the supposedly ‘neutral’ BBC and Reuters, as a ‘pro-rebel’ website. It was banned by the Sri Lankan government in 2007 and it remains inaccessible at many places in Sri Lanka even today. A June 2007 press release of Article 19, an independent human rights organization, which condemns this move of the Lankan state, states that “Although some claim it has an LTTE bias, the online paper has, over its ten-year life span, earned a solid reputation for providing alternative news and opinions with a particular focus on the North and East of the country... It is relied upon as a credible news source by journalists, civil society and the diplomatic community both within Sri Lanka and globally.”¹¹

Reporters affiliated with TamilNet have also been targeted in Sri Lanka. One Mylvaganam Nimalarajan was killed in October 2000 by one of the pro-state Tamil paramilitary groups. Dharmaratnam Sivaram, popularly known as ‘Taraki’ Sivaram, who was also one of the brains behind the establishment of TamilNet, was physically harassed and threatened several times by the government in the course of his career. Mark P. Whitaker, whose extensive analysis of TamilNet shall be engaged with in my seminar, and whose study of TamilNet was also greatly influenced by his interactions with Sivaram, notes how legal and extra-legal measures were used to intimidate Sivaram, citing how an article in a government newspaper in 2001 actually speculated the possibility of assassination should Sivaram continue with his activities.¹² Almost prophetically, Sivaram was kidnapped and murdered on April 2005.

TamilNet was formed in 1995 by Sri Lankan Tamil expatriates in the US. While the initial form was laid by K. Jayachandran and Muthuthamby Sreetharan, Sivaram’s involvement in the website from 1996 radicalized the way content was used. The initial ambition of this group was “to create a website that could counter Western press coverage of Sri Lanka that was, in their opinion, both slighting and hostile.”¹³

10 ibid

11 <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/press/sri-lanka-tamilnet-blocked.pdf> (Accessed on 1 May, 2011)

12 Mark P. Whitaker “Tamilnet.com: Some Reflections on Popular Anthropology, Nationalism, and the Internet”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Summer, 2004), p477

13 ibid, p483

TamilNet publishes articles in English, French and German and is considered as one of the leading news websites that covers the Sri Lankan conflict, from a 'Tamil perspective' though.

Yet, it is hard to brand TamilNet as 'pro-LTTE' site considering that "none of the backers and editors of Tamilnet.com are members of the LTTE, and when one became an activist for the LTTE he was asked to leave his job as a sub-editor, and did. Nor does the LTTE have any kind of financial stake in Tamilnet.com."¹⁴ While TamilNet is indeed Tamil nationalist and does support the LTTE demand for a sovereign state of Tamil Eelam as the only solution to the Sri Lankan conflict, it is also not above publishing reports that have been critical of the LTTE.

My paper shall try to prove that non-partisan reporting is impossible in a conflict zone by studying how TamilNet, through the use of 'objective' reporting styles manages to use the medium of the internet and the journalistic language of 'mainstream media' to convey a political message, that is both subjective and subversive, to a Tamil as well as a global audience, by pitting it against *The Hindu*, considered to be a mainstream newspaper in Indian markets. I shall try to do this by exploring how TamilNet and *The Hindu* dealt with the theme of death in war via the subject covered, the images used, the terms deployed and conclusions drawn. I also seek to analyse the 'death' of Prabhakaran and its representation by the two actors. The events that shall be taken into consideration will be centred on May 17th, the day when the war in Sri Lanka was popularly considered to have ended. The paper shall mostly deal with reports, generally considered to be objective, and less with editorials.

Speaking of Death - Covering the Demise of the 'Terrorist'

"It is necessary to speak of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it..."
-Jacques Derrida

In war reporting, the theme of *death* looms large in the content. Death is visible in not just the written word but also in the silences of words. The invisible *deaths* in passages often carries equal, if not more, significance than the mentioned *deaths*.

On the 17th of May, *The Hindu* carried an article titled 'LTTE has been defeated, says Rajapaksa'.¹⁵ Citing extensively from official sources and the President, the article focussed on how the LTTE leadership and cadre were confined to a tiny plot of land and that it was but a matter of hours for the war to end. The reporter from the war zone writes about the civilians who "fled" from the rebel held area to government controlled zones. The article quotes Rajapaksa, who calls it a "precise and well coordinated humanitarian operation".¹⁶ There is a brief mention of civilian casualties in the army's military operations - which is credited to the "pro-LTTE TamilNet". The reluctance to deal with the issue of civilians being targeted in the Sri Lankan army's military manoeuvres is discernable from the reportage. The focus seems more on two images - the sandwiched fleeing civilian who is running into the arms of the government that intends to save him. Two, the death of the agent who lead to the

14 *ibid*, p495

15 B. Muralidhar Reddy, *The Hindu*, 17 May, 2007

16 *ibid*

entrapment of the civilian, the rebel, the terrorist. The labels used and judgments passed are a pre-given knowledge of the reporter. "What makes such knowledge accurate or inaccurate, bad, better, or worse, has to do mainly with the needs of the society in which that knowledge is produced."¹⁷ Political interests of The Hindu in Sri Lanka apart, the reporter of The Hindu, through his work, is addressing primarily an English comprehending Indian upper middle class/upper class that needed to exorcise the spectre of terrorism as a fantasy. Memories of castration, the defeat of the Indian nation's masculine guardian - the army - at the hands of the LTTE and the parricide, the assassination of the father figure Rajiv Gandhi that was attributed to the LTTE, haunted the upper middle class psyche. The punishment of the rogue child had to be covered, in words and in images. Sanction for this had to be generated through public consent. As Chomsky notes, "The people who are able to engineer consent are the ones who have the resources and the power to do it"¹⁸, in our case, The Hindu.

The death that The Hindu was most comfortable with was that of the Tamil militant. On May 17th, just as the report of the confirmation of the LTTE's defeat was published, the paper moves to the next logical question - "And where is Prabhakaran?"¹⁹, thus was titled the immediate article after the above mentioned one. Explaining the significance of this question, Reddy writes "The LTTE is a monolithic outfit with a single leader and no second-in-command. It was only logical that it was Prabhakaran throughout Eelam phase IV which commenced in August 2006."²⁰ The end of Prabhakaran, then, alone would signify the end of Eelam phase IV. That end needed to be ascertained. And questions arose to the reporter's mind. "Would he surrender? Would he swallow the cyanide capsule he wears around his neck or shoot himself?"²¹ Spontaneous questions or deliberated remarks? The reporter actually seems to anticipate one of the two possibilities. Why not ask "Would he fight till the last?" The article seeks to restrict the imagination of the reader only to the options provided by the writer. The 'terrorist' needed to be shown as an escapist, someone who is not committed to his ethics, someone who would surrender or choose an escape route should the situation turn awry. Another possibility which the reporter explores - "The question being posed is whether Prabhakaran would have allowed one of his senior leaders to send away his family members."²² Who is posing this question? Tamil civilians and/or rebels? Or the Sri Lankan government/military/officials? The civilian families are dying but the Tamil leader's family needs to be taken to safety - by assuming that the Tamil rebels operated thus, the article brings into question the integrity of the LTTE leadership. Commenting on war reporting, McChesney writes that "reliance on official sources, fear of context, and the unstated "dig here, not there" mandate - worked in combination to make professional journalism a lapdog more than a watchdog as the drums of war beat louder."²³

17 Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, London: Vintage, 1997, p168

18 Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 1997, p25

19 B. Muralidhar Reddy, 'And Where is Prabhakaran', *The Hindu*, May 17, 2009

20 *ibid*

21 *ibid*

22 *ibid*

23 Robert W. McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*, New Delhi: Aakar, 2010, p101

On May 19th, The Hindu carried an article on its front page titled “LTTE supremo Prabhakaran believed dead” with the by line “End of Eelam War IV as Tigers are eliminated as a military force”.²⁴ The end of the war was equated with the end of Prabhakaran. Let us have a look at some of the photographs used.



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4



Image 5

Image 2, a picture of chaos and destruction, of charred vehicles and billowing smoke, represents the finishing battle scene where Prabhakaran was believed to have been killed. The image on the right, a calm image of Prabhakaran in his military attire, is a complementary to image 2. Here is the military end for a military man. Here is the image of a war torn region looming over the assertive pose of a rebel leader, who is standing by the symbolic portrayal of his ideals - his flag and a half-hidden map of the territory he is fighting for. All that remains of them is dark smoke, an image of something gone terribly wrong. Image 3 is meant to be a photograph of the dead body of Charles Antony, Prabhakaran's son. The tyrant king is dead, so is the heir and the kingdom is in ruins - the selection of these images on the first page of The Hindu seek to convey to us. These images succeed Image 5, the image of the conquering army, which was published in The Hindu on 18th May, along with an article titled “Battle at its bitter end: LTTE”, wherein the LTTE international relations head K. Pathmanathan

24 B. Muralidhar Reddy, “LTTE supremo Prabhakaran believed dead”, *The Hindu*, May 19, 2009

is quoted as saying that “We have decided to silence our guns.”²⁵ If closely observed, the flags of the conquerors are held high over a backdrop of fading smoke - signifying that the carnage was a fading past and that history, *their* history, marches on.



Image 6

Ranciere, commenting on photography, noted that photographs made the faces of anonymous people speak twice “as a silent witness of a condition inscribed directly on their features, their clothes, their life setting; and as possessors of a secret we shall never know, a secret veiled by the very image that delivers them to us.”²⁶ The above image portrays death of the militant in its stark reality. The rebel lies dead, with his tattered uniform. Bodies put in order, as if in exhibition to the world, surrounded by men in another uniform with guns. The rebel’s weapons are no where to be seen, an indication of its silencing. Lutz Koepnick points how photographs “administer mutilation and castration, cruelty and torture, not to the body of the photographed but to the time in which it once manifested itself. They aid or even produce memory by exhibiting the mortality, the painful finitude, of all that is living.”²⁷ Mutilation and mortality is an all too familiar theme in war journalism. But the key to decode it is the death that is chosen and the context that is imagined.

Images, of course, need to be seen backdrop of other narratives, discourses, images, and strategies of representation that enables them to speak in various ways about the past and its bearing on the present.²⁸ The above image was complementary to an article in *The Hindu* titled “Most of LTTE top brass killed: Army”²⁹, where in besides citing the list of names of the dead rebel leaders as provided by the army, the reporter also refers to a government statement that proudly narrates celebrations in many parts of the country after the deaths of “the Butchers in the Wanni.”³⁰ The article together with image 6 bring about a variety of other images. The listing of dead terrorists and

25 B. Muralidhar Reddy, “Battle at its bitter end: LTTE”, *The Hindu*, May 18, 2009.

26 Jaques Ranciere, *The Future of the Image*, New Delhi: Navayana, 2010, p15

27 Lutz Koepnick, “Photographs and Memories” in *South Central Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Politics and Aesthetics of Memory (Spring,2004), p105

28 *ibid*, p102

29 B. Muralidhar Reddy, “Most of the LTTE top brass killed: Army, *The Hindu*, May19, 2009

30 *ibid*

the dead bodies shown in order as if to verify that list, civilians in the country rejoicing the downfall of terrorism, the butchers themselves being butchered. What is absent are the *other* civilians, those whom the “terrorists” claimed to fight for and their reactions. One past alone is articulated - that of the terrorism of the rebels. Another is forgotten - terrorism of the state. The mystery here is this - where is that object of terror, that symbol of Sri Lanka’s anti-thesis, the body of Velupillai Prabhakaran, the elusive leader of the LTTE, who was believed dead? The image of that death was the logical succession to the above images. But before we go into that, a brief detour to an explanation of why that image is so important.

Anita Pratap, veteran journalist who has covered the Sri Lankan conflict extensively, also had deep insights on the character of Prabhakaran and what he meant to the Tamil Tigers and their supporters among the Tamils.

“There is Pirabhakaran the war hero fighting from the front. There is Pirabhakaran the incorruptible, who refuses to deviate from his goal of Eelam despite military pressure from India and Sri Lanka, and despite offer of money and power that had deflected the less resolute Tamil leaders. There is Pirabhakaran who loves and protects them. There is also the Pirabhakaran who embodies the spirit of a glorious Tamil past, a descendant of the Chola kings.”³¹

For the Tamils who supported the political project of the Tigers, the symbol of Prabhakaran had profound meaning. He was their past, present and future all rolled into one. Prabhakaran was a bridge that drew a linear connection between a glorious past of the Tamils, their oppression and struggle for justice in the present, and their hopes for a free Tamil Eelam in the future. He was the ‘titanic’ figure, the ship that led its passengers to a desired destination. Commenting on the *Titanic* as symptom, Zizek notes how the sinking of the *Titanic* had a traumatic effect, “it was a shock, ‘the impossible had happened’, the unsinkable ship had sunk”.³²

An editorial in *The Hindu* titled ‘End of the War’ on May 19th welcomed the crushing of the Tigers as a military force and the dawning of a ‘post-Prabhakaran’ era.³³ Another article equated the end of the ‘warlord’ and the ‘zealot’ to the end of the war. It pondered how Prabhakaran, “a ruthless and dreaded terrorist” still remained “an inspirational symbol to thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils”.³⁴ In the same issue, yet another article noted celebrations in Sri Lanka’s capital - “Firecrackers are going off

31 Anita Pratap, *Island of Blood: Frontline Reports from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Other South Asian Flashpoints*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2002, p102

32 Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, New Delhi: Navayana, 2010, p69. It needs to be noted here that Zizek is commenting on the apprehensions of a western elite of their ‘declining’ civilization, in other words their hegemony, that is captured in the image of the *Titanic*. Transposing this observation onto a resistance movement that is combating the hegemony of a state is being done purely on a psycho-affective basis, in that, what the loss of the leader, who is considered the epitome of the values of Tamil civilization, means to his followers.

33 *The Hindu*, ‘End of the War’, *The Hindu*, May 19, 2009

34 Special Correspondent, ‘End of a warlord & zealot’, *The Hindu*, May 18, 2009

in Colombo today because the LTTE is finally vanquished and its leader Prabhakaran is dead.”³⁵ The living had become a ghost, a ghost that a section of Sri Lanka wanted to forget, that another wanted to give life to by making it a symbol, and a ghost that The Hindu wanted portray in certain colours so that a dialogue with it could be avoided. The Hindu’s May 19th edition was abuzz with stories of Prabhakaran’s life and his ‘failed struggle’. The only thing missing was the confirmation of death, the image of the collapsed symbol, of terror for the state, of inspiration for the Tamils. The struggle for Tamil Eelam led by the LTTE had its icon in a person. If the struggle was said to be crushed, the icon’s collapse had to be captured and displayed. Zizek argues how the *Titanic’s* wreck made such an impact “not because of the immediate material dimensions of the catastrophe but because of its symbolic over determination, because of the ideological meaning invested in it: it was read as a ‘symbol’, as a condensed, metaphorical representation of the approaching catastrophe of European civilization itself.”³⁶ The catastrophe that befell the titanic symbol of the LTTE led movement, then, was symbolic of the titanic catastrophe that befell the movement itself. And it needed to be shown in frame.



Image 7



Image 8

The image of death came a day after the obituary. The conclusion was declared beforehand, the verification of the word came through the images that were published on The Hindu on May 20th. Image 7 was accompanied by an article titled ‘Troops recover Prabhakaran’s body’ on the front page of The Hindu.³⁷ Obviously, the body and the ideas it represented was of paramount importance. It did seem appropriate to the paper to show the blown-off head, supposedly of the rebel leader in his military uniform, almost as if to convey the message that he lived by the gun and died by it.³⁸

35 Nirupama Subramanian, ‘Witness to one extended roller-coaster ride’, *The Hindu*, May 19, 2009

36 Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p70

37 B. Muralidhar Reddy, ‘Troops recover Prabhakaran’s body’, *The Hindu*, May 20, 2009

38 Many have refuted the veracity of these photographs. Some have claimed that these were doctored images. Anita Pratap, for instance, claims that the pictures released by the Lankan government appear fake. “Top of the head was blown off, but

As Baudrillard said, “The media mix has become the prerequisite to any orgasmic event. We need it precisely because the event escapes us, because conviction escapes us.”³⁹ The confirmation of the authenticity of the image by Vinayagamurthi Muralitharan, ex-LTTE commander-turned-minister in the Lankan Government, and Daya Master, a surrendered LTTE cadre, is mentioned in *The Hindu*’s report so that the reader needn’t have any doubts on the same.

The reporter mentions how “people across the island nation came out on the streets to celebrate.” and burst crackers and distributed sweets after the image was flashed on state televisions.⁴⁰ Which “people”? The article also mentions that “The news was greeted with joy and relief coming as it did hours after LTTE International Relations Head K. Pathmanathan was quoted on the pro-Tiger TamilNet as saying that Prabhakaran “is alive and well.””⁴¹ Who greeted the news with “joy and relief”? Tamils? The reporter seeks to show that the ‘terrorist’ was a uniformly detested figure, whose demise was welcomed by one and all. That there could actually be sections in the country who might have mourned his demise, or felt disgusted with the repeated display of the images of death, is not a possibility that article seems to consider at this point of time. It doesn’t seem to consider that a symbol can mean different things to different people, and prefers to uniformly map out a singular narrative over different spaces.⁴² Anita Pratap notes “Precisely because he is many things to many people, LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran’s death has been greeted with joy by the Sinhalese, grief by his Tamil supporters, and relief by many who hope his death will bring peace to beleaguered Sri Lanka.”⁴³ The death, or its image, signified meanings for its viewers, and closer the viewers were to the conflict, deeper the meanings.

And as the shock, pleasant or otherwise, sets in, the reader is taken to Image 8 after a few pages. The photograph shows the dead body of the LTTE leader and the

the face was clear and the eyes wide open. Prabhakaran’s most distinguishing feature are his eyes, which seemed artificially wide, as if someone was trying to prove it was indeed him by grabbing attention to his eyes.” Read her ‘Lion, Tiger and Lies’ in <http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2009/05/lion-tiger-and-lies.html> for more.

39 Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p75

40 B. Muralidhar Reddy, ‘Troops recover Prabhakaran’s body’, *The Hindu*, May 20, 2009

41 *ibid*

42 On May 21 2009, *The Hindu* carried a small article by Muralidhar Reddy titled ‘Sri Lankan Tamils sombre’ that sought to briefly address the mood of the Tamils after the news of the demise of Prabhakaran. Noting that that there were no celebrations in Tamil localities in the capital, the reporter quotes a Tamil shop owner as saying “We have no reason to celebrate though there is no love lost between us and the LTTE.” Here again, the attempt is to send the message that though some Tamils might be sad and apprehensive about their future, they were hostile to the rebels who claimed to address their cause as well. The demarcation between the Tamil civilian and the Tamil rebel had to be shown by the paper - they couldn’t be seen to be on the same side.

43 Anita Pratap, *Lion, Tiger and Lies*, <http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2009/05/lion-tiger-and-lies.html>, May 27, 2009. (Accessed on 8th May, 2009)

domineering presence of the military boots of the Sri Lankan soldier near his torso confirms the military victory. The icon of terrorism and separatism was finally crushed under the jackboots of the Lankan army. Using John Taylor's observations on war photography, Jonathan Bignell argues that "photographic iconism is subject to the paradox that the dissemination of photographs appeals to a discourse of adequacy to the real, of evidence, while on the other hand the control over that dissemination is exercised both by the institutions which allow or withhold access to the pro-photographic event, and by photographers themselves."⁴⁴ Indeed, the media institution seeks to control the *real*, to present its photographic evidence as the *truth*. Yet, its ability to obtain the photograph from the site of the event is also dependant on its level of interaction with the officialdom - the military, in a war zone. Image 8 came with the article titled 'LTTE chief tried to save his life until the last moment, says military', which actually quoted less from the military and more from Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa, blurring the difference between the two.⁴⁵ Derivatives of the word "terror" appear 7 times in the 584 word article to describe the Tamil rebels.

This article is complemented by one 'Sri Lanka: Prabhakaran was a megalomaniac' which quotes extensively from a dossier put out by the Sri Lankan government. Besides attributing various violent acts to the LTTE leader and listing 'national' leaders who were his "preys", it also tries to portray him as a 'characterless' person who supposedly lived a luxurious life while others suffered.⁴⁶ Taken together, these two articles serve the purpose of justifying Image 8. In itself, Image 8 is a disturbing picture. But this is a man reported to be a terrorist, a tyrant, a megalomaniac, a hypocrite and a coward. He is portrayed not as a human who had his ideals, but as a beast that "preys" on humans. Placing the photograph in this created context, the paper attempts to create a sense of revulsion for the person in the image rather than for the stark violence that dominates the image. One can imagine the reactions of readers unfamiliar to the conflict... One is compelled to re-look at Baudrillard's advice "Resist the probability of any image or information whatever. Be more virtual than the events themselves, do not seek to re-establish the truth, we do not have the means, but do not be duped."⁴⁷

The Other Death - The Civilian

"Of course the dead choose us, but it is necessary first that we have chosen them."
-Jean-Paul Sartre

Truth, nevertheless, is a hotly contested terrain. More so in the age of the internet and 'free' information. McChesney said "For a press system, a war its moment of truth."⁴⁸ While The Hindu deployed certain strategies accompanied by an illusion of 'objectivity' to give its readers the *Truth* as it saw it, TamilNet used the same language of objectivity of the mainstream to report to its audience *its* truth which

44 Jonathan Bignell, *Postmodern Media Culture*, New Delhi: Aakar, 2007, p141

45 B. Muralidhar Reddy, 'LTTE chief tried to save his life until the last moment, says military', *The Hindu*, May 20, 2009

46 B. Muralidhar Reddy, 'Sri Lanka: Prabhakaran was a megalomaniac', *The Hindu*, May 20, 2009

47 Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, p66

48 McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, p98

otherwise wouldn't get space in media establishments. According to Mark Whitaker TamilNet "subtly subverts international journalistic practices by, rather surprisingly, emulating them exactly. In so doing they have produced a kind of strategic communal self-description that... is genuinely "autoethnographic""⁴⁹ The medium it chose to convey its message was strategic, considering that its political leanings and the concomitant limitations in securing offices, sponsors or advertisers would restrict it from operating as a 'mainstream' media house. Whitaker, who calls the operations of TamilNet as an "identity-resistance popular activity" claims that the cheapness of cyberspace and the possibility of uploading unfiltered information provided TamilNet the battlefield where it would resist the discourse of hegemonic media houses - using their own weapons against them. He contends that "while the dominant style of the Internet is market-popular, market-popularity has not, and will not, control access. And it is this confluence of paradoxical characteristics - market popularity in form, identity-resistance popularity in access - that the creators of Tamilnet.com noticed, and made use of, when they created their Internet news agency in 1996."⁵⁰

The *death* that The Hindu sought to focus on was that of the 'terrorist', that is, the LTTE. By highlighting the deaths of LTTE leaders and cadres, it underplayed the deaths of the civilians who were along them, and also gave credibility to the 'war on terror' discourse of the Sri Lankan state. Nadarajah and Sriskandarajah point out how the deployment of the terminology of 'terrorism' served a three fold purpose for the Sri Lankan state in that "it de-legitimised (Tamil) agitation for political independence (with which terrorism had been conflated) thereby enabling the 'securitisation' of the issue; it mobilised Sinhala sympathy for the regime and its actions; and, international criticism of rights abuses notwithstanding, accomplished the same abroad."⁵¹ TamilNet, on the other hand, subverted the argument of 'war on terror', converting it into a 'war on Tamils', by highlighting the deaths of civilians and underplaying the deaths of combatants.⁵² For political actors subscribing to the demands of Tamil Eelam, which was then represented by the LTTE "it is the notion of a civil/ethnic war narrative that can best fit the arena of national liberation and political independence."⁵³ It needed to be shown that the Sri Lankan state was not hostile just to the Tamil rebel, but also to the Tamil civilian. The purpose of this would be twofold - one, to delegitimize the claims of the Sri Lankan government to represent all the people in its territory and to counter its discourse of 'war on terror'. Two, to convey a message that the cause of the LTTE, the creation of a homeland for the Tamils, was legitimate by virtue of the fact that the Sri Lankan armed forces made no distinction between rebel and civilian during their assaults on Tamil areas, thus proving that even

49 Whitaker, Tamilnet.com: Some Reflections on Popular Anthropology, Nationalism, and the Internet, p470

50 *ibid*, p475

51 Suthaharan Nadarajah and Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, "Liberation Struggle or Terrorism? The Politics of Naming the LTTE" in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, The Politics of Naming: Rebels, Terrorists, Criminals, Bandits and Subversives (2005), p91

52 It is not as though that the death of combatants was ignored altogether by TamilNet. Its downplaying of the combatant's death is only relative to its emphasis on the civilian death toll.

53 Nadarajah and Sriskandarajah, "Liberation Struggle or Terrorism? The Politics of Naming the LTTE", p94

an ‘innocent Tamil civilian’ could not expect any rights in that country.

On the 18th of May, TamilNet carried an article titled ‘SLA spree of massacre in Mu'li-vaaykkaal’ where it alleged that “the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) is killing the wounded civilians in large numbers in the so-called safety zone, according to a reliable telephone call from Mu'li-vaaykkaal Monday forenoon.”⁵⁴ Pointing out that none of the international agencies were there at the scene to prevent the massacre, the article also claims that TamilNet does not have communication with its correspondents on the scene. Thus, the gap erases the possibility of acquiring images of death. Nevertheless, the image captured in the words used is poignant enough. Imagine this - an army killing wounded civilians in a declared safety zone. If wounded civilians, who could pose no possible threat to a well equipped army, are being killed, what fate awaits those who are mobile? If the safety zone itself is unsafe (as emphasized by the usage of ‘so-called’) for the Tamils, where can they be safe?

For obvious reasons, the free movement of the TamilNet correspondents was restricted in the war zone. The photographs of military assaults on civilians were available on TamilNet on 13 May 2009. One can presume that the restricted access of reporters to the war front prevented the site from obtaining more pictures in the days after that. A view of some of them...



Image 9

54 TamilNet, ‘SLA spree of massacre in Mu'li-vaaykkaal’, <http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29404> (Accessed 9th May, 2009)



Image 10



Image 11



Image 12

The above images came along with the article titled ‘SLA barrage inflicts carnage, makeshift hospital reports disaster’ on May 13th.⁵⁵ TamilNet reports how hospitals in

55 TamilNet, ‘SLA barrage inflicts carnage, makeshift hospital reports disaster’, <http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29351>, May 13, 2009 (Accessed May

which sick, injured and starving civilians were targeted by the army. This coverage of the humanitarian disaster counters the claim of humanitarian war that the government claimed. First, the article gives numbers of deaths and injuries. "Initial estimates varied from 200 to 500 killed within the past 24 hours... There are more than 2,000 seriously injured inside the safety zone. Around 1,000 of these patients are to be treated by the hospital urgently, but there are no medicines, the doctors said." Usage of numbers and statistics in reporting are said to lend credibility to the report, a professional touch. Following this, "The volunteer doctor killed was identified as Senthilkumaran. A hospital staff, Gopalakrishnan, was also killed. The ICRC worker who was slain was identified as Myuran Sivagurunathan. His mother was also killed in the shelling by the SLA." The reference to non-combatants with details of their death gives a human touch, a human face to numbers, thereby making it more personal to the reader. And then, "There are still 75 dead bodies, both identified and not identified, in the vicinity of the makeshift hospital. Some of the relatives have said they are unable to take over the dead bodies under the prevailing circumstances." This seeks to capture the horror of war. Damaged hospitals. Unidentified bodies. People being unable to even claim their dead in a scenario where they might themselves join the dead anytime.

Susan Sontag claims that "photographs of the victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus."⁵⁶ Images 9-12 cover all the categories that generally evoke sympathy amongst readers - women, children, the aged and the injured. These images by themselves seek to provoke the reader to question the logic behind the 'war on terror' if such a predicament befell civilians. The accusing gaze of emaciated old men in Image 9, mangled bodies strewn across a dirty floor in Image 10, a mother (?) nursing the injured child in Image 11, a weeping woman attending to the broken body of her relative while others are busy with their own pains in Image 12... a society torn, a mutilated people, devastated families and crushed individuals. The 'collateral damage' argument that usually accompanies the 'war on terror' argument, when captured in photographic form conveys different meanings and different effects. By highlighting the collateral damage in images, TamilNet challenges the *truth* of the 'war on terror' image released by the Sri Lankan government, and published by papers like The Hindu. If this is being done to civilians by the armed forces, what is the legitimacy, the ethical standing of the government that uses the terminology of 'terrorism' to designate the Tamil rebels? - The images seem to ask a larger audience, "those only nominally concerned about some nasty war taking place in another country. The photographs are a way of making "real" (or "more real") matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore."⁵⁷

Considered a site that is frequently visited by Tamils world over, there was another reason to record these photographs. Images have a greater probability of being retained in memory than words. And the memory of war on the Tamils is something that TamilNet would like its target audience to retain if at all they seek to address the political concerns of the Tamil people in the future. Going to Sontag again "Photographs of the suffering and martyrdom of a people are more than reminders of

9th, 2011)

56 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York: Picador, 2003, p6

57 *ibid*, p7

death, of failure, of victimization. They invoke the miracle of survival. To aim at the perpetuation of memories means, inevitably, that one has undertaken the task of continually renewing, of creating, memories - aided, above all, by the impress of iconic photographs.”⁵⁸

On the 17th of May, TamilNet carried an article that included Sea Tiger Commander Soosai’s criticisms of the international community for mutely watching while over 25000 civilians were injured by shelling from the army.⁵⁹ The focus in the article here is on the actions of the army and not so much on that of the Tamil Tigers, considering that it is quoting extensively from their representative. The article further says that “several thousands of civilians have been captured by the SLA, but only after first firing at them at random, causing the death and injury of many.” Thus, the Tamil civilian is safe nowhere and the army’s war to save them is a sham. So the article seeks to convey.

For all its reluctance to engage with the death of the rebel, TamilNet had to, was compelled to, engage with news regarding the death of the *rebel supreme*, Velupillai Prabhakaran. An article titled ‘Flaunting ‘victory’ to Tamils in Colombo’ published on the 17th of May notes how Sinhalese mobs accompanied by armed policemen, celebrated ‘victory’ in the streets.⁶⁰ The title itself conveys that the Tamils had nothing to do with the ‘victory’, it wasn’t theirs. Maybe, the usage of quotes might also signify an attempt to show the pyrrhic nature of the ‘victory.’ “The Tamil pedestrians are humiliated and ridiculed by this gang and by the armed personnel at security points by being specifically addressed and told that their leader Pirapaharan has been captured and everything was over”. Likewise, another article on the 21st of May comments how “Sinhala youths extort money by threat from Tamil civilians while they are walking along on main roads. In some instances they forcibly remove gold jewelry from Tamil women, and even they misbehave with Tamil women in public.”⁶¹ While The Hindu sought to project an image of the army’s military success and the death of Prabhakaran as a matter of jubilation for the ‘people’ in abstract, TamilNet preferred to be more concrete. It sought to send a message to the effect that he victory of the army was the victory of the Sinhalese, whereas the defeat of the Tamils was linked in some way to the fall of their leader, Prabhakaran.

On 18th of May, the day when The Hindu published reports to the extent that Prabhakaran was dead, TamilNet published an interview with Selvarasa Pathmanathan that claimed the opposite.⁶² Pathmanathan, who said that “our National leader” is alive

58 *ibid*, p87

59 TamilNet, ‘25,000 civilians injured to death while IC watches: Soosai’, <http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29390> May 17, 2009 (Accessed May 9, 2011)

60 TamilNet, ‘Flaunting ‘victory’ to Tamils in Colombo’, <http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29399> May 17, 2009 (Accessed May 9, 2011)

61 TamilNet, ‘Sinhala hoodlums harass Tamil civilians in the name of victory celebration’, <http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29421> May 21, 2009 (Accessed May 9, 2011)

62 TamilNet, ‘Sri Lanka lost confidence of Tamils: Pathmanathan’, <http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29408>, May 18, 2009 (Accessed May 9,

and well, also said that “It is true that many of our senior members and leaders have either given up their lives or been treacherously killed.”⁶³ This contradicts the claims of the government of the ‘cowardice’ or ‘hypocrisy’ of the Tiger leadership as published in *The Hindu* and tries to portray them as martyrs killed by a treacherous army instead. TamilNet further questions him “There are forces that talk of 'post-LTTE' and 'post-conflict' scenario attempting to regard the LTTE as a spent force at this point in time. How is the LTTE going to mobilize the people behind it and give them the necessary leadership?”. Implicit in the question is the expectation of an answer that refutes the argument of a ‘post-LTTE’ scenario and the recognition that that the LTTE alone can still mobilize people and give them the necessary leadership, probably influenced by Pathmanathan’s reply to an earlier question that Prabhakaran was alive.

Almost as if to confirm this, on the 22nd of May, TamilNet carried an article that quoted the Head of Intelligence Wing of the LTTE Arivazhagan as saying that Prabhakaran, “our beloved leader”, was alive and that “the LTTE leadership will make contact with its people at a suitable time in future.”⁶⁴ Arivazhagan also apparently “urged the global Tamil community not to trust the "engineered rumours," being spread by the Government of Sri Lanka and its military establishment.” It was already mentioned what Prabhakaran meant to the Tamils at large. The image, real or false, of the shattered icon would also signify a shattered dream. And TamilNet sought to buffer the effects of the continuous barrage of images let out by the Sri Lankan establishment and mainstream newspapers with its own exclusive reports.

Yet, TamilNet did not completely take the LTTE version of events. In an article titled ‘Claims and scepticism sans evidence’ published on 25th of May, it pointed out the contradictions in the versions of the various LTTE leaders in the diaspora, noting at least three different trends.⁶⁵ To not give space for utilization of this article by its opponents, TamilNet also mentions that “Colombo has failed in conclusively establishing the evidence for Pirapaharan's demise. It has not taken any credible efforts to verify evidence either.” It also criticizes India and other “‘omnipotent’ powers of the information age” for failing to have any authentic information whatsoever. At a glance, this appears as implying that the Tiger leaders *may* be wrong about Prabhakaran, but the opponents are *definitely* wrong. A deeper look shows that it is also subtly emphasising the mystery of the Tiger leader in life and after, who eludes one and all despite the technological prowess that the various governments possess. It concluded that being pressurized by its readers eager know the truth, it was necessary to state that “TamilNet doesn't take any responsibility for any of the stands taken, as these are beyond its independent verification.” Far from being objective, this is just a strategic refusal to engage with the theme anymore as it would just lead to a myriad of problems within the Tamil leadership itself.

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63 Pathmanathan would soon change his position, claiming that the LTTE leader did indeed die on 17th of May, 2009.

64 TamilNet, ‘LTTE leadership safe: Tiger intelligence official’, <http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29430>, May 22, 2009 (Accessed May 9, 2011)

65 TamilNet, ‘Claims and scepticism sans evidence’, <http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=29446>, May 25, 2009 (Accessed May 9, 2011)

Prabhakaran, whether alive or dead, became a ghost. The Hindu had exorcised him as a tyrant whose end heralded a new era. To TamilNet, the *Titanic* has not sunk, it has been rendered invisible, a ghost-ship. People who were meant to be its passengers and its crew might be dead or left stranded in the ocean, but the ship is still out there, but unseen and unknown. A symbol which is there without being, to provide meaning despite a situation of nothingness, to ensure that the destination will be reached, the Promised Land will be delivered.⁶⁶ Both sought to avoid him, The Hindu so that the past should be forgotten, TamilNet in the interests of the future. But as far as the Tamils and Sri Lanka is concerned, the Ghost still haunts time simultaneously...

By Means of a Conclusion: A Glimpse into The Hindu's 'Post-Prabhakaran Era'

"for terror and concentration-camps are meant not so much to frighten as to condition people."

-Hannah Arendt

The surest conclusion of a war is peace, or the illusion of it. On July 4, 2009 The Hindu carried a detailed article by N. Ram on refugee camps in Sri Lanka titled 'Visiting the Vavuniya IDP camps: an uplifting experience'.⁶⁷ Ram briefly explains its history as "a poignant human drama in which some 300,000 Tamil civilians were rescued by force of arms from a terrorist organisation that, claiming to fight for their freedom, had no compunction in using them as a human shield." After eliminating the 'terrorists' who had supposedly restricted the freedom of the innocent civilians, the army now provided them true freedom - in the camps. Camps like these, to cite Agamben, are not born out of ordinary law, "they were born out of the state of exception and martial law."⁶⁸



Image 13



Image 14

66 Incidentally, some of the Christian supporters of the LTTE considered Prabhakaran a Tamil Moses.

67 N. Ram, Visiting the Vavuniya IDP camps: an uplifting experience, *The Hindu*, July 4, 2009. One wonders whether the experience of those interned in the camps was also as uplifting.

68 Giorgio Agamben, *What is a Camp?*



Image 15



Image 16

The images, the way they have been used, show peace, order and tranquillity. Image 13, an aerial shot of camp houses, shows the transition from the earlier pictures of smoke and charred vehicles to a clear view, a god's eye view, of tranquillity. Look at the woman in Image 14 peacefully attending to her stitching. Rather than a displaced person from a war torn zone, she could have been a worker at a factory in New Delhi or Chennai for all one knows. The orderly life activities of work, education, income and food are covered in the photographs. This is the 'post-Prabhakaran era' that The Hindu welcomed on May 19th. A happy people settled in camps, "testimony to the Sri Lankan government's efforts... to care for a brave and resilient Tamil community, which will be resettled and rehabilitated".

Ram says that "Conditions in these camps are much better than what has been depicted, mostly second-hand, that is, without visiting the camps, in western media reports." Ram, the then Editor-in-Chief of The Hindu, himself has verified the *Truth*. Talking in first-person singular in what is meant to a journalistic report, he comments on "the opportunity of seeing for myself how the Tamil IDPs were being sheltered and cared for in the camps. It was an uplifting experience", thanking the Defence Ministry for its assistance to him. The terms he uses to refer to the government and its actions seem to it place in a parental position. The benevolent patriarch taking care of, providing shelter to, and thus reforming the errant child. The images speak. Ram speaking to happy, smiling Tamil girls in Image 16. The military officer at his side is smiling too. Everyone smiles in the camp. Despite the fact that the camp is a space where "power confronts nothing other than pure biological life without any mediation" since the inmate has no political status as such.⁶⁹ But the image does not cover that. All is well.

Picture 15 is rather interesting. If looked at closely, one can observe in the banner that reads 'PEOPLE'S BANK', the cloth obscures an important part of 'PEOPLE', the very beginning.

So does The Hindu.

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