

## TIGERS FACE COMMUNITY WRATH OVER RAJADURAI KILLING By D.B.S. JEYARAJ

Killing the high profile Jaffna Central College Principal Kanapathy Rajadurai has caused tremendous problems for the tigers. It was in the first place a betrayal as the principal had been promised "safety" by sections of the tiger hierarchy. Furthermore it has opened a nasty can of worms in Jaffna. Principal Rajadurai belonged to a "Dalit" or so called depressed caste of Jaffna. His foul murder is perceived by fellow caste members as a deliberate act directed against their people. The past week has seen feelings run high. It is doubtful whether the LTTE beleaguered in the East by "regionalism" can withstand the "casteism" let loose by the Rajadurai murder.

Rajadurai hailed originally from Manthuvil in Thenmaratchy, Jaffna. He and many of his siblings achieved upward mobility through education. One of his brothers Nadarajah was the Palmyra Board Chairman for many years. Another brother Rajendram is a school principal in Kilinochchi. Rajadurai an old boy of Chavakachcheri Hindu College in Sangathanai entered University and obtained his bachelors and masters degrees in education.

Rajadurai was a dynamic teacher and administrator. He had been principal of the prestigious Jaffna Central from 1996. Before that he was principal of Arunodhaya College. Rajadurai married in Atchuvely and was resident there till he became Central College Principal. Thereafter he moved to the newly renovated Principals quarters with the front entrance on Vembady street and backyard leading to the College. He was also Jaffna school principals association president and a senate member of the Jaffna University.

He was generally regarded as a go-getter with a passion to develop his school and benefit the students. This was the reason for his cultivating Douglas Devananda the EPDP leader and old student of Jaffna Central. A lot of funds for developing Central was obtained through the good offices of Devananda. Rajadurai also allowed the school to be used for educational programs over state radio.

The 2002 ceasefire allowed the LTTE to reenter Jaffna under the pretext of doing politics. The Jaffna political commissar Ilamparithy was not well disposed towards Rajadurai. Both of them were from Manthuvil and belonged to different castes. Apparently there was a caste clash in Manthuvil many years ago in which close relatives of Ilamparithy were killed by relatives of Rajadurai. Ilamparithy was only a boy then. A much younger Rajadurai was not directly involved at all. Yet relatives of Rajadurai allege that animosity was harboured by Ilamparithy due to this.

Moreover Rajadurai himself was an independent person. He spoke his mind out publicly. He was openly critical of some LTTE policies including child recruitment. Once when Centralites were conscripted by the LTTE Rajadurai opposed it vehemently. He persuaded the LTTE to return the students and got them back. With Rajadurai becoming an irritant attempts were made to transfer him out but failed.

The LTTE then began a campaign against him. Warnings against him were issued in the name of Ellalan Padai or force. The LTTE website "Nitharsanam" operating out of Oslo on Norwegian funds attacked him relentlessly calling him an adviser and stooge of Douglas Devananda. This perturbed Rajadurai. He arranged for a meeting with Ilamparithy through Tamil National Alliance MP's Sivanesan and Gajendran. The meeting though cordial was not satisfactory to Rajadurai.

A close relative of Rajadurai "Arun Master" was in the LTTE. Married to tiger supremo Pirapakarans niece Arun master is number two in the Education sector of the LTTE. His superior in the LTTE is 'Baby Subramaniam' or Iankumaran the no two in terms of seniority in the tiger hierarchy. Arun master arranged for meetings between LTTE leaders and Rajadurai. The Central principal went to Kilinochchi and met many tiger leaders including Iankumaran, Thamilselvan, Daya Master and Balakumaran.

After frank discussions the LTTE leaders accepted Rajadurais position on matters concerning Devananda. They appreciated his claim of not being involved officially with the EPDP and that he interacted cordially with Devananda only in the interests of his school. The LTTE leaders then promised Rajadurai that he would not be harmed by the tigers and guaranteed his safety. He was asked to avoid contact with Devananda as far as possible and maintain official relations to the bare minimum.

A much relieved Rajadurai returned to Jaffna happily. According to family members a burden was lifted. Some relatives who were worried about his safety had wanted Rajadurai to go abroad. Rajadurai refused saying his place was in Jaffna. He assured relatives that there was nothing to worry about as the LTTE had given him a pledge of safety.

Rajadurai also followed instructions from the LTTE faithfully. He avoided contact with Devananda as far as possible thereafter. The principal also undertook a trip to Europe where he met with Old Centralites, attended OBA functions and raised funds for the College. He returned to Jaffna only about ten days before he was killed. After Rajadurais death, Devananda has gone on record calling the principal his close friend. Devananda also said that Rajadurai telephoned him three days before his death and asked for protection. Family members however deny that such a conversation - let alone a request being made - ever took place.

When Sivakadatcham got killed there were a few politically conscious relatives concerned about Rajadurai. They communicated with Rajadurai and entreated him to be careful. The family feared that the tigers in typical fashion may kill another principal in revenge and that because of the earlier bad blood may pick on Rajadurai. The man dismissed these concerns saying that the tigers would not harm him as all problems had been cleared and an assurance of safety given. It was this confidence in the LTTE pledge perhaps that led Rajadurai to the Saraswathy pooja celebration and death.

Jaffna Central students were agitated upon hearing of Rajadurais shooting. They vacated school and mobbed the Jaffna hospital. Though he was dead around 4.25 the announcement was delayed for an hour at least to get school staff members to

the scene and help manage the students. Centralites reacted to the popular principals killing very courageously. Rajadurai while addressing students on the Navarathri third day pooja for Durga the goddess of valour had explained in detail what true heroism was. His students now showed that they too were of the stuff that heroes are made.

Students reacted and set up road blocks. Tyres were burnt to stop traffic. This spontaneous outburst has to be contrasted with the LTTE driven demonstrations for Sivakadatcham. Though students realised the killers were the tigers they defiantly demonstrated. Some female students from Vembadi and male students from Hindu College also joined forces. Rajadurai had permitted students from other schools to use computer facilities at Central. This endeared him to many non - Central students.

Some EPDP cadres were also on the scene and tried to encourage the students. The EPDP cadres retreated hastily when some members of LTTE front organizations arrived. Despite these threats and intimidation the students were not cowed down. An ugly confrontation between student demonstrators and tiger goons was on the cards when a new development took place.

As stated earlier Rajadurai belonged to a caste that had been long oppressed by the so called higher castes. Rajadurai was a role model to members of his caste. He had shown that notwithstanding the social stigma a member of an oppressed caste could reach a high position in society through education and hard work. The popular Jaffna Central College principal in that sense was an icon to his people. Members of Rajadurais caste and another related caste began gathering in large numbers upon hearing reports of his death.

The people of Maniam Thottam, Ariya kulam,, Kottady, Pandian Thalvu etc in the Jaffna municipal area are known for their pugilistic tendencies. When people from these areas began joining the student demonstrators the tigers and their acolytes knew the situation was taking a different turn. They embarked on a strategic withdrawal. The demonstrations gathered momentum. Soon they acquired an anti - tiger quality.

The LTTE realised that they had committed a blunder by targeting Rajadurai. The tigers changed tactics. They disclaimed responsibility for the murder and tried to accuse the EPDP of it. The LTTE issued a statement condemning the killing of both principals while bestowing national patriot honours on one person only. This became counterproductive. Since the tigers were denying responsibility and blaming the EPDP ordinary people could display their feelings openly. They could say that they were condoling Rajadurais death openly. This led to a qualitative change in the mourning.

So great is the resentment and sorrow over the killing that people are flocking in large numbers to the funeral house even days after the cremation. Meetings are organized where people are bravely condemning the killers and speaking well of Rajadurai. Leaflets and booklets extolling Rajadurais virtues are being published and circulated widely. The killers are being condemned explicitly and implicitly. Ilamparithy is openly condemned. A defiant mood pervades Jaffna.

This defiance has deep , caste connotations. Rajadurais community is traditionally dependent on the Palmyra and coconut trees. Their exploitation was reduced greatly by Dr. NM Perera when he as Finance Minister abolished the tree tax system. This led to a spurt of cooperative societies comprising members from the traditional tapper castes running toddy taverns and managing palmyra - coconut produce. There are about 45 such coop societies in the peninsula now. After the Palmyrah Development board was set up a further fillip was received. Also a distillery for arrack was set up in Thikkam.

This sector is now on the decline. After the mismanagement and alleged corruption of Douglas Devananda in 2000 - 2001 and Thiyagarajah Maheswaran in 2001 - 2004 the distillery was virtually defunct. Earlier during LTTE control it was functioning under restraint having to pay one - third of the turn over as tax to the LTTE. The situation worsened after the LTTE established an open and unfettered presence in Jaffna after the 2002 ceasefire.

The LTTE introduced a rapacious system of taxation based on unrealistic estimates. This has resulted in the Palmyra - Coconut Products Development Cooperative Societies being unable to cope with the exorbitant taxation. Production has dwindled and gainful employment decreased. The societies are virtually at a standstill but have to pay up regularly to the LTTE or face punishment. As a desperate measure the community voted en masse for Sivanesan of the TNA in the last election. He was from the community and promised to take up the issue with the LTTE. He failed miserably as neither Ilamparithy nor Thamilendhi the LTTE "Inland Revenue Commissioner" took heed of these concerns.

Thus the community was seething silently. The killing of Rajadurai was the proverbial last straw which broke the camels back. It was a flashpoint of the simmering tension. Now the community is perceiving the killing as part of a deliberate design to keep the community downtrodden. Traditional employment is restricted and the educated people are being killed. The LTTE did not kill Rajadurai because of his caste. But most members of the caste grouping seem to think otherwise. These feelings are spreading among Tamil expatriates. When the London based Tamil Broadcasting Corporation Radio had a phone in session to condemn the killing people from many different countries called in and condemned the tigers forthrightly.

Rightly or wrongly the community is of the opinion that the LTTE is all out against them and that the Rajadurai killing exposes that. If this opinion gathers strength it could have serious repercussions for the LTTE. It is a fact of LTTE life that most of its low level cadres are from these "Dalit" communities. Apart from Thamilselvan and Pappa no other "dalits" are in the hierarchy. Economic reasons impel some into joining. Others are conscripted easily because of the backwardness of parents. When cadres are seriously injured or maimed they are sent back to the families as "additional" burdens.

There is simmering resentment because of this. There is a viewpoint gaining ground that the LTTE is deliberately oppressing the community so that avenues for upliftment will be reduced. This will facilitate the children being absorbed as part of the tiger war machine as recruits or conscripts. If the caste oppression of old was on socio - economic - cultural lines the perceived new oppression by the LTTE is seen as having a politico - military dimension. "We are being oppressed so that they can have

personnel" is the suspicion.

The killing of Rajadurai is seen as both symptomatic and symbolic of this attitude. Also it has provided an extensive opportunity to ventilate grievances against the LTTE. One such observation is about the LTTE saying both were killed by the EPDP and giving a post-humous honor to only one. This is seen as an index of insincerity on the one hand and blatant caste discrimination on the other.

This writer listened to the TBC call in program, read some leaflets, and spoke with many members of Rajadurais community over the past few days. The anger and resentment was patently visible, audible and discernible. The LTTE is sitting on a rumbling volcano. If the hierarchy does not grasp this and respond justly and positively it could face another serious cleavage.

When the Karuna revolt began this column warned the LTTE of possible consequences and urged reconciliation and rapprochement. This was ignored. A militaristic LTTE urged on by sycophantic supporters thought it could resolve the Karuna crisis through force. The mainstream tigers failed dismally. Today they are becoming increasingly beleaguered in the East. The consequences predicted by this column are coming true. The East is becoming a lost cause for the LTTE.

Likewise this column predicts that unless the LTTE wakes up to the crisis caused by Rajadurais murder and responds positively it could have another problem in Jaffna. The sense of grievance and feelings of being oppressed are tremendous. The Karuna factor is being exploited by the powers that be to undermine the cause of Tamil nationalism. Likewise the caste factor could be exploited also. One cannot forget that several such attempts were made in the past too.

Meanwhile the tigers may be calculating on lying low for a while till the anger diminishes and then targeting the ringleaders of anti-tiger demonstrations. If the tigers try to do so there may be a short-term success. The Long term consequences could be drastic. The Jaffna social fabric could be torn unimaginably apart.

It is time that the LTTE wakes up to its series of political blunders. The Rajadurai killing was one. The oppressive taxation of the Palmyra - Coconut sector is another. Excessive conscription of youths from "Dalit" castes is a third. Together these prove an explosive mix. Force and violence is not the answer to all problems. The tigers must understand this. The Batticaloa blunder must not be repeated again and again. What is required is an urgent healing touch. Past mistakes have to be rectified. Only then will the wrath subside.

(ENDS)