

TAMIL WOMEN IN THE STRUGGLE FOR A FREE AND INDEPENDENT TAMIL EELAM

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the International Women's Movement

The women's movement of today is a world-wide phenomenon rooted in the efforts to right the injustice of centuries of male domination and to secure equal rights, not simply in theory but also in practice, for human beings everywhere, regardless of sex. It has been said that women are the last colony – and that theirs is a case of unfinished decolonisation.

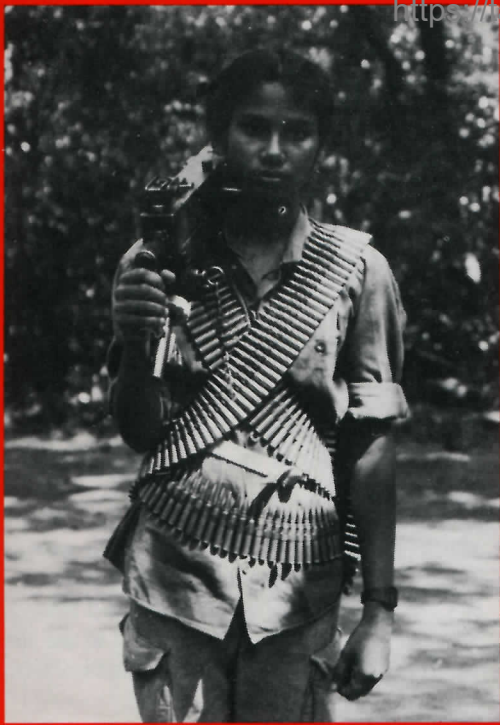
As a national liberation movement concerned with freeing the Tamil people from an alien domination, and liberating them from oppressive structures of every kind, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have at all times expressed their solidarity with, and extended their support for the struggle of women throughout the world for true equality and for freedom from male dominance.

The past several years has witnessed an increasing involvement of the women of Tamil Eelam in our national liberation strug-

gle. It is not without significance that though the armed resistance campaign of the Liberation Tigers has a history extending to 19 years, the women's wing traces its origins to around 8 years ago. The conservative nature of our social formation, its oppressive structures in relation to women evidenced for instance, by the pernicious dowry system, its pervasive gender discrimination, which was often legitimised by so-called 'cultural traditions' and its male dominance, which was justified by tales from mythology – all contributed to the delayed development of Tamil Eelam women's participatory role in our struggle.

The genocidal onslaught on the Tamil people in the island of Sri Lanka in July 1983 and the systematic and sustained repression that followed gave a fresh impetus to our people to resist. It was a revolutionary awakening which moved the women of Tamil Eelam as well. It was during this turbulent period that young





radical women came forward to join our armed struggle for national liberation.

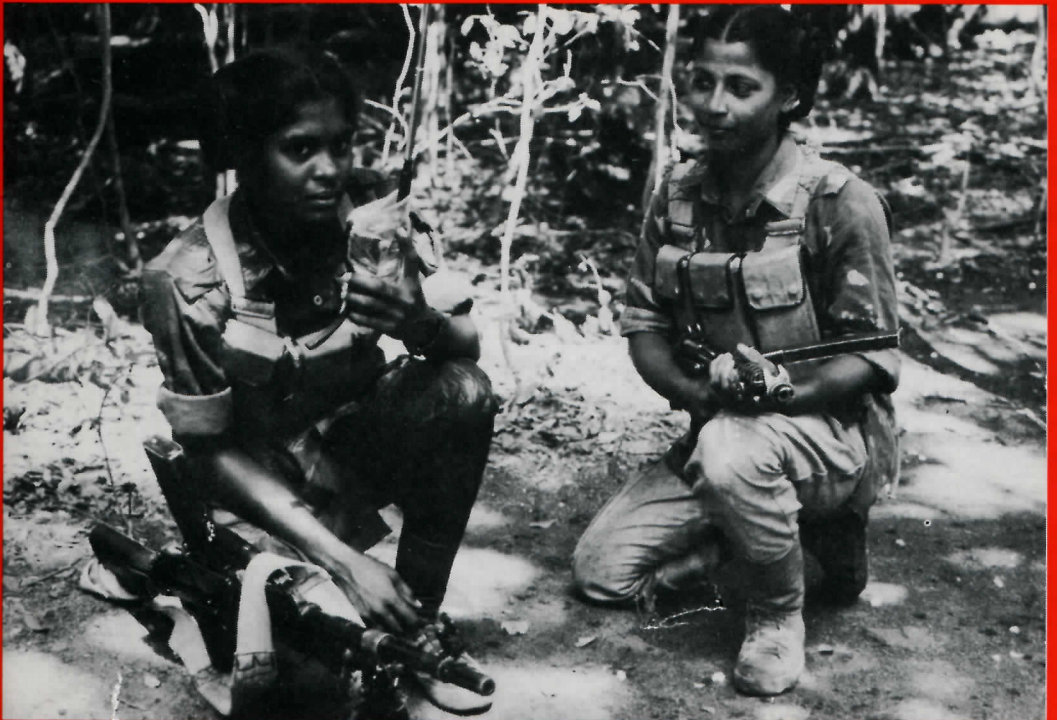
The Indian intervention from July 1987 to 1990 and the trauma created by the barbarous practices of Indian troops against Tamil women gave a new impetus to the development of political consciousness and, with it, the adherence of more and more Tamil women to the guerrilla movement and its auxiliary organisations.

At the initial stages our women cadres were mainly involved in the task of political propaganda. Later, since around mid 1984, well organised women guerrilla units have functioned as an integral part of our resistance movement. The armed cadres of our women's wing have also been involved in the task of politicisation, in campaigning against social discrimination and in emphasising the need for women's emancipation.

Our women's wing has worked closely with grass roots women organisation, trade unions, industrial training centres, health and welfare

associations and educational institutions. In protest meetings, in demonstration, in boycotts and in all forms of mass agitation launched by the LTTE, it was the women of Tamil Eelam who participated in increasingly large numbers and have often played a lead mobilising role.

On the one hand, the courage, determination and heroism of our women fighters has served to awaken their sisters and brothers, break down centuries old social barriers and ways of thinking and behaving, and is helping to restructure Tamil society on a free and equal basis. On the other hand, the women's wing of our liberation movement has contributed substantially and directly to advance the lawful and just struggle of the people of Tamil Eelam for national liberation – lawful and just, because it is the resistance of a people to more than forty years of gross and consistent violations of human rights, and genocidal attacks by the the Sri Lankan state.





Adel Balasingham, Australian-born British citizen, who joined the Tigers, edits the movement magazine *Voice of Tigers* and is adviser to the LTTE Women's Front:

"I have dedicated my life to the fight for self-determination of the Tamil people. Although I initially did not advocate the use of guns, it became inevitable and I backed it because it was the only way to protect these people.

You have to understand that this country is ruled by the power of the gun. Our weapons were the only tools we could use to defend our people from attacks by the Sinhalese security forces."

Adel Balasingham has encouraged women to join the military wing of the Tigers: *"I felt it was important for women to join since they are suffering just as much."*

At least 3,000 women cadres, known as "Tigresses" now form part of the LTTE's fighting force, a remarkable number in a Hindu-dominated society in which women traditionally represent the stability of home and family.

"It shows the strength of feeling for the struggle in the Tamil community", says Balasingham.

She regards "Eelam", the future Tamil state, as her home and speaks fluent Tamil: *"I am in this too deep. I need this community as much as they need me. I have learnt to live with guerrilla war and am prepared to die for the Tamil cause."*

Kanimolli, a young Tamil woman guerrilla was on patrol near an army position when a shell exploded. She lost a leg... still she has only one ambition:

"I need an artificial leg, and then I will go back and fight."

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE LTTE WOMEN'S FRONT:

1. Secure the right of self-determination of the people of Tamil Eelam and establish an independent and democratic state of Tamil Eelam
2. Abolish oppressive caste discrimination and division and semi-feudal customs such as the dowry system
3. Eliminate all discrimination against Tamil women and secure social, political and economic equality e.g. equal pay, equal opportunities in employment and education
4. Ensure that Tamil women control their own lives
5. Secure legal protection of women against sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence



The young Tamil women's commitment to the fight for liberation of Tamil Eelam is expressed by this young guerrilla who lost both arms:

"There was a big fight and many were badly hurt. The girl beside me was badly injured. So I pushed her down, stood in her place and started firing. When they withdrew I was still standing and shooting. A shell exploded in front of me. One piece took both my arms off. I tried getting up but couldn't. Then I saw both my arms shivering in front of me. Then the rescue team arrived and carried me away. I write with my mouth, load a rifle and throw bombs with my legs. I do everything with my legs, knees and mouth. I am not worried I've lost my arms."

Pushpa Selvanayazam, a Tamil woman leader from Jaffna, who had been a teacher for the past thirty-two years:

"The parents are all out to do their best and to bring up their children as doctors, engineers and highly educated scholars...Often they go to the camps and try to persuade their daughters to return home. But the daughters want to stay on and fight for their country and freedom. When they say that they are sacrificing

their lives for the cause, we have to accept it because it is their life and their own choice."

BBC film "Inside Story"

Malani, 27-year old political leader, who was in the second batch of women which enlisted in 1987, overseen by women who had themselves been trained by men, directly under the leader of the movement Vellupillai Prabhakaran.

"He encouraged women to join...Now I think he would even be pleased if a woman were to take over from him eventually."

Civilians like her parents have lived through years of civil war and have come to see the armed youth as their only protection from attacks by government forces.

"We are proud that our daughters have joined the struggle for independence", said the father of one Tigress.

From "The Independent", 21 September 1990

