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War of Words - An Obstacle to Peace

The LTTE – an Unchanging Bloc?

When interviewing European politicians and diplomats in 2005/2006 on the conflict in Lanka, I soon realised that the propaganda of the Sri Lankan Government had been very effective in Europe. Propaganda in war is an extension of war. There is much in a word: it is also a weapon. The decision to restrict the travels of the LTTE to the EU was at least in part determined by an image of the LTTE created by Lankan diplomats.

This image was formulated in verbal anti-LTTE propaganda based on the *conjecture* that the LTTE had killed Katirkamar. It is a deterministic image according to which the LTTE is a never changing bloc of ideas and actions. Therefore, there is no hope for the LTTE. It will always recruit children, always assassinate politicians, always extort money, always stop a democratic development, always give priority to armed struggle, always deport Muslims, etc. There is then no point in letting the LTTE come to Europe and learn about civilisation.^[1] I encountered a compact inimical attitude full of stereotypes and generalisations. These counteract peace efforts. As a professor in training students in critical thinking for more than 30 years, I felt an intensive urge to scrutinise this image about the LTTE. The result is available in a popular form at www.negotiatedpeace.com. I also refer to the seminar papers in this volume by Vicuvanatan Rudrakumaran and Christian Stokke that both highlight the transformation and flexibility of the LTTE.

Do and Die?

In another paper I examined a war slogan “do *and* die”. In 1996, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Armed Forces (SLAF) tried to eliminate each other. Both parties had to mobilise their last forces. In this desperate situation, the slogan ‘do *and* die’ appeared on the battlefield. According to the SLAF, it was launched by the LTTE who allegedly fought its last battle. All should die in suicidal attacks, an ambition that we know from Hitler during his last days in the bunker in Berlin in 1945. Such an attitude was ascribed to the LTTE. The battle cry goes back to Lord Tennyson's “The Charge of the Light Brigade” from 1854.^[2] This battle cry was taken up by Mahatma Gandhi who changed it into “do *or* die”. In this changed form it reached the Indian National Army under Subhas Chandra Bose. In Tamil, the saying “do *or* die” became common. The LTTE took it up and launched it, but it gives of course another meaning than ‘do *and* die’.^[3] The use ‘do *or* die’ was later confirmed by Lt. Col. Amutap from the Charles Anthony Brigade that had taken part in 75 attacks with the motto “do *or* die”.^[4] The SLAF consciously distorted the meaning conveyed by the LTTE slogan. The SLAF was punished: it finally lost the physical battle called in Sinhala *jaya securui*, ‘victory assured’. If anything points at megalomania, it is this Sinhala name for this battle campaign. The outsider should interpret the LTTE slogan ‘do *or* die’ as a counter slogan to the designation of the SLAF’s military offensive, ‘victory assured’.

Velupillai Pirapakaran - A Sun God?

Here, I want to take up another sensitive matter, the image making of Velupillai Pirapakaran among his adversaries. I do not know Velupillai Pirapakaran and I have not even seen him. I know nothing about his character through personal encounter. My ambition here is not to whitewash or to tarnish him. My object here is not he, but his adversaries and their way of waging a war with words. They know that Ilavar, 'those who adhere to (Tamil)ilam',^[5] not only look up to him, but also imagine him to be a necessary component of the whole *iyakkam*, 'movement', (which he himself has denied explicitly). There is then a rational point in verbally attacking Velupillai Pirapakaran in the form of character killing. By this, they also attempt to undermine morally the *iyakkam*.

On Internet the statement was launched that the leadership of the LTTE made him a sun god and his fighters children of the sun god. He has allegedly consented to this image making. The statement attributes to the LTTE an inclination for megalomania. On Internet were in April 2006 no less than 20 700 entries for "LTTE, sun god", practically all ridiculing the LTTE for its alleged megalomania.

Velupillai Pirapakaran's adversaries found this alleged cult of him as sun god in an article in the official organ of the LTTE, which is the *vitutalaip pulikal* from *tai/māci* 2000. It was at the occasion of the beginning of the new millennium. A picture shows Velupillai Pirapakaran pointing with his left finger to Yalppanam on a map on the wall. The map also shows rays stretching towards and covering the contours of Tamililam.

Now we take up an important comment on Internet from a bulletin of the University Teachers of Human Rights (UTHR), Jaffna Branch. It has established a solid reputation of being anti-LTTE, which I do not criticise. Opposition is part of political life in a democracy. My comment is related to the UTHR's way of arguing. The representatives of (UTHR) are from inside Tamil culture and are expected to have an inside knowledge about it. Let us have a look at their comment written in a martial language. It is headed as "The Sun God's Children and the Big Lie".^[6] First we look at its translation of the Tamil text of the LTTE to the picture.

Where Sooriya Thevan (Sun God) points with his finger, thither the sun rays will hasten, to enfold Thamīl Eelam in the brightness of his glory!

The translation identifies Velupillai Pirapakaran with the sun god and this identification is also clear from the comments. They say that

---there was a far greater tragedy that lay unseen and was carefully suppressed. The sunrays that do the Sun God's bidding are today mainly children, often 14 or 15 years old, and increasingly girls. In specific cases we have ascertained that LTTE cadre who died during the period of the Elephant Pass battle were aged 15. One was a girl who had joined two years earlier aged 13. Two girls had joined a year earlier aged 14. What is the plight of a society which is subject to such demands? How do the parents take it? Do they spontaneously support the LTTE?---^[7]

It is evident from this comment that alleged megalomania is connected with the misuse of children. This is heavy verbal artillery. An image is here retrieved of an oriental despot as victimiser of innocent children that we know from so many Orientalist sources. Similar images are still effectively applied today by American ideologues on enemies in the Middle East. Now let us go back to the original article and read it again, this time without prejudice. The following text in Tamil was added to the picture.

I give the text in another translation made by me.

*The golden rays of the new millennium.
At the direction of Curiyatevan's [=hero Pirapakaran's] index finger, the piercing
flame of (his) eyes reach glorious Tamililam which shines.*^[8]

The headline was “forgotten” by the UTHR commentators. It indicates the situation at which the rays are emitted, the new millennium. There is nothing odd so far in the statement that the golden rays are emitted at the occasion of a new millennium.

The concept of the sun, emitting rays, is the concrete base for a metaphor, namely for *pirapakaran* which is a Tamil rendering of Sanskrit *prabha kara*, ‘emitter of rays’.^[9] It is a metaphor for the sun, but also for the moon. The LTTE has made a pictorial translation of Pirapakaran’s name. It is ‘emitter of rays’ = sun. The picture is a picture puzzle: the reader should come to the name *pirapakaran* by looking at the picture of him with rays. The article by the LTTE is not about the sun god, but about Veluppillai Pirapakaran, and it is not about him as god. True, the word *tevan* means ‘god’, but it does not always refer to a god in Tamil culture. It refers also to saints, kings, heroes, lancers, and shield bearers in classical Tamil tradition. A special referent is the husband’s bothers, and even the *mataiyan*, ‘fool’, is called *tevan*, probably because the common place ‘fool=genius’ is here envisaged. *Tevan* is also an attribute annexed to the names of members of the *maravar* caste in South India. They were classified as criminals during the British period. Nobody associates to a god in all these cases. It is just an honorific term. The LTTE has at present a well-known leader named Puli-tevan. What is godly about him? I can assure that he has not even a godly self-consciousness.

Furthermore, the Sanskrit personal name “Prabhakara” was carried mostly not by gods, but by teachers whose teachings were compared to rays. I suggest that in the case of Veluppillai Pirapakaran *curiya tevan* refers to a traditional image of a teacher who emits rays, to a *pirapakaran*, ‘emitter of rays’, to Pirapakaran as teacher. This is completely in accordance with Indian, and also specifically with Tamil culture. There is no overdoing by the LTTE within a Tamil cultural context. Coming to the LTTE’s own presentation, when I first saw the photo and the text, I thought it was a picture puzzle that we find in journals, even Western ones. It was in fact a picture puzzle, difficult to understand of course for those among Tamils who are alienated to their own culture.

We should be aware of the fact that Curiyan (Sanskrit Surya), a Vedic god, is no popular god in modern Tamil Caivam and Vainavam. If the LTTE had really wanted to identify Veluppillai Pirapakaran with a god it would have been easy and strategic to take up and inflate an already existing image of him as Murukan by some of his emotional and enthusiastic followers, who, however, have no support in the LTTE leadership. Such an inflation of this god we have witnessed before, but on the Government side. In the 1960s it promoted financially the cult of the war god Murukan under the Sanskrit and Sinhala names of Skanda and Kataragama, who is integrated in the Buddhist pantheon, at a famous pilgrim centre, at Katirkamam (Sinhala Kataragama), in the South East.

At that stage Skanda/Kataragama was made to symbolise the *balavegaya*, ‘wave of force’, of the Bauddha Sinhala lead by Sirimavo Bandaranayaka. A religious outbidding was started that still takes place: The Sinhala Skanda supported by Buddhists outbids the original god at this place, the Tamil Murukan, supported by the Tamil Caivas. This Sinhala Buddhist “wave of force”, symbolised by the leader of the gods’ army, Skanda, has resulted in the marginalisation of the Caiva god Murukan.

The Tamil and Sinhala critics of the alleged image of Veluppillai Pirapakaran as sun god could learn about the complexity of religious concepts in Tamil culture. They could also reflect cross culturally on the inflating policy of the god Skanda/Kataragama promoted by the

Lankan Government, and on religious deifying policies in the West. They were promoted by royal Courts, where kings were not only godlings, but kings were called “sun” also, a title that was transferred even to Christ, and in the modern historical period to King Louis XIV of France (1638-1715). In Lanka, among Sinhala Buddhists, was a *suryavamsa*, ‘solar dynasty’, that allegedly was connected with the clan of the buddha Sakyamuni, and several kings claimed to be born of the solar lineage. Parakkamabahu I (1153-1156) called himself “a scion of the lineage of Mahasammata, born of the solar lineage”.

SWRD Bandaranayaka, Lankas former Prime minster, was worshiped as bodhisattva by some emotional enthusiasts, (who clearly violated bodhisattva concepts of the Theravadins). How are Sinhala war heroes in the present conflict classified by some Sinhala Buddhist enthusiasts? They are classified as *marudevata*, ‘guardian gods’, which in a proper religious context is applied to Visnu, Siva, Skanda and Pattini. The LTTE leadership has not developed and reached such European and Sinhala Buddhist levels of religious enthusiasm. It just does not want to get involved in such matters.

Conclusion

The Internet entries about the alleged sun god do not become true just because they are repeated 17 700 times. All these entries are a shame to academic performance. My advice: the authors should withdraw them to re-establish respect of their academic status. These entries have, however, an important and efficient desired dysfunction: they are an obstacle to a creation of trust as precursor of peace. Therefore they will not be withdrawn. They are part of the war against the LTTE.

^[1] For the educational program of the LTTE in Europe see www.negotiatedpeace.com.

^[2] *The Poems of Tennyson*, Edited by Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans: 1969), p. 1035: “/---/Their’s not to make reply,/ Their’s not to reason why,/ Their’s but to do and die:/ Into the Valley of Death/ Rode the six hundred/---/.” In 1882 Tennyson published another poem called “The charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaclava” that ends almost in disaster for the heroes also. To this poem was added an “Epilogue” in 1885 in which Tennyson promotes the warrior’s war “to make true peace his own” and he also thinks that “---though the realm were in the wrong/ For which her warriors bleed, / it still were right to crown with song /The warrior’s noble deed/----/”. See *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1305-1309.

^[3] Peter, Schalk, “From Do and Die to Do or Die. Semantic Transformations of a Lethal Command on the Battlefield in Ilam/Lanka”. In: *Orientalia Suecana* 51-52 (2003), pp. 391-398.

^[4] “Charels Anthony Brigade Celebrates 15th Anniversary of Inauguration”, *Tamil Net*. April 11, 2006.

^[5] For this concept see Peter Schalk, *ilam<sinhala? An Assessment of an Argument*. Uppsala: ACTA, 2004.

^[6] <http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul23.htm>

^[7] Loc.cit.

^[8] *vitutalaippulikal. tai/maci 2000, p. 1: puttayirattin porkatirkal. [picture]. curiyatevan cuttu virarticaiyil/ cuttum viliccutar/ pattut tulankutu/ cotimiku tamililam.*

^[9] Professor Alvapillai Veluppillai made me pay attention to this.