Tamil Viewpoints
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Mr. and Mrs. Satyendra Nadesan are Sri Lankan born Tamils who now live in England. Mr. Nadesan is an attorney and the Convener of the "Working Group" of Tamil International, formed in 1984 to secure the physical well-being, cultural identity and human, civil and political rights of Tamils worldwide.

Hinduism Today: Mr. Nadesan, what is your purpose in speaking with Tamils in Australia, USA and elsewhere?

A: There is a need to mobilize Tamils living in many parts of the world, many of them, in a way, wandering nomads. There is a need for them to share, perhaps not only thoughts and forum, but there is a need for some sort of institutional frame or organization to network them.

Q: What do Saivite religious leaders advise in the Tamil crisis?

A: There is, I think, generally a tendency to say, "Well, all violence is wrong." A question I have in my own mind is that non-violence certainly is the answer, but non-violence requires a tremendous amount of courage, much more courage than violence does...Gandhi said, "There is no cause for which I am prepared to kill. But I am prepared to die for my cause."...Eventually that will come. But when a person says, "Non-violence [is the only way]," and you have the Sri Lankan government also saying, "Please be non-violent" - there is a certain credibility gap...

There is a need to stand up before...the Sri Lankan government [and say] "What you have been doing not only is wrong but seems to show a certain pattern, a certain direction..."

Q: Should religion be more central than in the Tamil effort?

A: We look back to our history and back to Tirumular's Tirumantiram, 5,000 years, and feel that the phrase "Tamilum, Saivamum; Saivamum, Tamilum," is not just a phrase. It symbolizes a marriage and the interconnectedness of the Tamils, their language and the religion. I don't think it's really possible to separate the two..."

Q: Can you tell us about your defense of the Tamil boys?

A: In September/October of 1982 I defended five militant leaders in one of the first trials under the Prevention of Terrorism Act Much of the evidence against them was on the basis of confessions which had been secured under detention, under torture, by force.

I yet remember the statement from the dock from that leader. "We are not victims of some mental disorder. Neither are we lovers of violence. We are engaged and we have been compelled to engage today in a struggle for some measure of freedom for our people."

I was quite honestly left with the feeling...that I had met persons who were clean. There was a certain purity in the way they responded to the situation...The fact is that each one of those five accused eventually was convicted, but they appealed and whilst they were in the Viman prison awaiting appeal, they were murdered in July, 1983, together with 45 other insurgents. I think there is a need therefore to look at this clearly and say, "Yes, there is a struggle. Yes, there is a need for those of us who believe in wider frames to do something about it in real terms, not just to repeat platitudes." Because too many lives have been lost, too many young lives have been lost.

Q: Mrs. Nadesan, what are your feelings?

A: When it comes to the Tamil problem it is sad to see all them killing each other

and fighting and having conflict on matters which they could have resolved a long time ago without force. What I would like in this situation is to see that they work out their differences and see the whole thing as a whole nation, without seeing it in bits in pieces.

It's only in harmony that you could live. Any form of conflict is not going to get you anywhere. To me the whole thing has to be built around a religious way. I have a feeling we are going to solve it, and the Sinhala brothers and sisters should get together with us and see it in a more detached manner. Maybe I am expecting too much, I don't know, but I only hope and pray to God that it takes place in that way.

The following interview is with Dr. Shan Sunder, a medical doctor who resides with his wife and two sons in Beverly Hills. An active member of the Tamils of California, he comments on the proposed nation called Eelam.

Hinduism Today: In establishing Eelam, would the Muslims be moved out of the eastern province?

A: No. No. They will stay with the group because they are Tamil-speaking people, too...There are a lot of Muslim freedom fighters. But the businessmen, for convenient or materialistic reasons, would like to be identified with the Sinhalese Buddhists. But the majority of them are Tamils and they identify with that

Q: Would the large number of Sinhalese there be moved out?

A; I think one of the demands even if there is going to be a federal setup, will be for decolonization, that is from 1948, from the time we got independence, and even before at the time of the Tamil kingdom, for that is the traditional homeland. Decolonization will be one precondition even at the talks. Number two is withdraw! of the armed forces, and three is release of all the innocent people who have been arrested and are being held in prison and being tortured.

Q: Would Indian Tamils of central Ceylon be move to Eelam?

A: Yes. Their idea is that they should be moved to north and east Simply the reason is that we cannot ask for that extension of Eelam into the central province. These people will be moved and they have the plan, and they'll be provided with land and settled in north and east. Already, you know, there are a lot of people who have been moved by a movement called Gandiam, after the 1978 riots.

Q: What about the issue of past discrimination by Jaffna Tamils?

A: I think this a fact. Our Tamils leaders soon after independence voted with the Sinhala leaders to disenfranchise these estate laborers who were brought by the British people to work in the plantations. That was an act of clear cut discrimination by our own people. They were denied their citizenship permanently.

That was a betrayal. And the Indian people in Tamil Nadu, the politicians, have not forgotten this. They are very very upset, although they are working fully with us and have done so much to help. This has made a big scar and will take a long time to heal.

Q: What form of government would you see for Eelam?

A: It would be a democratic government or it might be a socialist, but it will never be a communist government...It will be a free election, and it will be a democratic process. That is what in all the parties, they have told me.

Q: How much importance would the Hindu religion play?

A: Obviously the majority of the people and the majority of the freedom fighters are Hindu, and I think that is there. But, of course at this time it will be a very

sensitive issue. When I visited these people, they are Hindus, they are Muslims, they are Indian Tamils, everybody is involved and they are treated equally...We don't bring it to the surface because it might be sensitive especially at this time. The Ceylon government is trying to introduce this tactic of creating religious divisions of Muslims and Hindus and Christians. I don't think we should add fuel to the fire.