

Part I

Human Rights Violations

Paper 1

Lessons from Kokkaddichcholai

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The town of Kokkaddichcholai near Batticaloa is famous for two massacres of civilians by members of the Sri Lankan Security Forces that took place there. The first massacre was in 1987 and the second was in 1991. In addition, the area around Kokkaddichcholai has been subjected for the past twelve years to repeated aerial attacks, shelling attacks, raids by ground-forces, round-ups, abductions, and fire-fights. The severity and intensity of prolonged conflict there raise questions as to how civilians survive and maintain their sanity. The paper presented here provides two civilians accounts of the effects of the massacres upon their lives and how they have carried on afterwards.

My aim for this paper is not just to provide another recitation of the horrors of the war in Sri Lanka. While you should certainly know what has happened and continues to happen there, it is more important for you to know what you can do about it, and for you to be motivated to do it. My advice is simple. Go there.

I especially recommend that you visit the town of Kokkaddichcholai. This town is in eastern Sri Lanka, a few miles south and across the lagoon from the city of Batticaloa. The multi-village area across the lagoon from Batticaloa is known as Paduvaankarai, which means "the side where

it goes down." What goes down on that side is the sun, and the sunsets are gorgeous. In fact the whole landscape is breathtaking. But some people say that Paduvaankarai has its name because so many bad things have happened there. The worst things are said to have happened in Kokkaddichcholai, and the town is famous for this reason. It is also famous because it is a so-called "Tiger stronghold." The LTTE are conspicuously present in the area, and it is reasonable to suppose that civilians who support them do so because of Army atrocities committed in the recent past. But the people of Paduvaankarai have not only been affected by things that happened precisely where they lived. They have also been affected by events happening in nearby towns, where they have, or once had, kin and friends. A few key events will be listed here, followed by personal accounts of civilians who experienced these events. I will end my account by telling you why you should go to Kokkaddichcholai.

1983 July-August: Anti-Tamil pogroms sweep through Colombo and the hill country. In Kokkaddichcholai, civilians make a straw effigy of the President J.R. Jayawardene. People beat

the effigy before burning it. As they beat it they weep. All shops are closed, and people fast.

1986 November: The Sri Lankan Army and Special Task Forces of the police come to the east to fight Tamil militants.

1987 January 27: Kokkaddichcholaï Massacre 1. More than eighty unarmed civilians are shot without warning, point blank by the STF ("Special Task Forces" of the Police) in Mahiladittivu, a village adjacent to Kokkaddichcholaï. The bodies are hauled away in tractors and are never recovered.

1987 August: The Indian Peace Keeping Forces arrive in the Kokkaddichcholaï area.

1987 October 10: The IPKF launches its military offensive against the LTTE in the north.

1989 November: The IPKF begins withdrawing its troops from Sri Lanka, leaving behind the poorly trained "Tamil National Army" (TNA) to take its place. There is heavy fighting in the East between TNA and LTTE.

1990 July: The Sri Lankan Army returns to the east. The Army and STF maintain bases in the Kokkaddichcholaï area through 1995.

1990 August 3: Kaattaankudy Meera-jummah Mosque massacre. 113 Muslim men and boys are killed while at prayer in the mosque, by Tamil-speaking men disguised as Muslims hiding automatic rifles under their robes. The LTTE is blamed for the massacre, but denies responsibility. The killers are never found or identified.

1990 August 11: Eravur town massacre. 110 unarmed Muslim civilians, including women and children, are killed in their homes at night. Again, the killers are Tamil-speaking men, again the LTTE is blamed but denies responsibility, and again the killers are never identified.

1990 September 5: Vantharumoolai campus massacre. People from the villages of Kiran, Vantharumoolai, Chengalady, and elsewhere flee the advance of the army and are housed as refugees on the campus of Eastern University in Vantharumoolai. Brigadier Karunatilake goes to the refugee camp. He selects 158 people that his men take away. All of this is observed by the other refugees in the camp. University staff keep records of everyone who is taken away, with the name of the person taken, and the name and thumb-print of the person reporting that person taken. The Peace Committee sends a letter to the SL Defense department requesting the release of the 158 people. They get a reply listing thirty-odd names of people who had been arrested, saying that all have been released the day they were arrested. But in fact no one – including none among the thirty listed – is released. Still there has been no word.

1990 September 9: Saththurukkondan massacres. In retaliation for Tamil massacres of Muslims, Muslims assisted by Sri Lankan Army attack civilians in the Tamil villages around Eravur. Many are hacked to death. Others are rounded up and taken to the Saththurukkondan Army Camp and never seen again. 184 civilians disappear in the round-up. The oldest is 75, the youngest 8 months. None of the bodies are ever recovered. Some believe the bodies are buried in a field behind the camp; they report

seeing freshly turned soil near the Army camp and a man reports finding his wife's shoes there. Some say they heard children crying inside the camp; they believe the children were kept alive and sold as servants to another part of the island. Amnesty International pressures the Army to do something about this. The Army promises a grass-roots investigation. It never happens. When the Peace Committee contacts the new Brigadier seven years later, the new Brigadier says he knows nothing about it, and furthermore considers it inappropriate to bring up such old complaints.

1991 January: Kokkaddichcholai Massacre 2. Two soldiers are killed when their tractor trips a land mine near Mahiladittivu. The soldiers following behind go on a rampage. 152 civilians are killed. A Presidential Commission subsequently investigates the massacre. Nineteen soldiers are found to have killed the civilians. All nineteen are allowed to return to Army service. As punishment they are sent to fight the LTTE in the north.

1996 January: Operation Riviresa drives the LTTE from Jaffna peninsula and displaces civilians into the Vanni. Many SLA troops are withdrawn from the east to fight in the north and the LTTE gains control of the eastern hinterlands, including Kokkaddichcholai.

1996 March: LTTE from Kokkaddichcholai attack an Army base, kill 27 soldiers, and capture weapons. The Army retaliates two days later by bombing civilian villages in the area. One civilian is critically wounded when a piece of shrapnel strikes his skull and remains lodged in his forehead. Many civilians flee their homes,

leaving grain stores and animals unguarded.

1996 July: The LTTE attacks a major Army base at Mullaitivu on the north east coast, kills over a thousand soldiers, takes control of the base and makes off with much heavy weaponry and artillery. Male and female LTTE combatants from the east, including Kokkaddichcholai, play a major role in this battle. Many return bearing fresh wounds from this battle.

1997 May: Operation Jayasikurui commences. Many LTTE cadres are sent from the East to the North to fight, including male and female cadres from the Kokkaddichcholai area. Many come back bearing wounds from the battle. Many others are killed.

1998 January 27: The Dalada Maligawa temple in Kandy is bombed. The LTTE is blamed, and the planners are said to have come from the east. Civilians from near Kokkaddichcholai are arrested in conjunction with the bombing.

1998 February 4: Sri Lankan Independence Day is celebrated. Exchanges of mortar fire between the Army and the LTTE rock the town of Batticaloa all day long. People in Kokkaddichcholai hear the explosions and go on with their lives.

1998 April: A bus loaded with explosives goes off at Maradhana Junction in Colombo. Over thirty people are killed. The LTTE is held responsible, and the bus is said to have come from the East. Again, civilians from near Kokkaddichcholai are arrested in conjunction with the bombing.

April to May 1998: Laborers from Mahiladittivu go to Polunnaruwa to work. Scores are arrested and jailed on suspicion of belonging to the LTTE. Farmers bringing back cash from selling their harvests are arrested and jailed because they are suspected of bringing cash to the LTTE.

1998 May to June: The Kokkaddichcholai *tān tōṇṇīswaran ālayam* is renewed, twenty years after its destruction by a cyclone, and a festival of blessing (*kumbābishēkam*) is held for it. Tens of thousands of civilians attend. The LTTE recruits new members from among those who come to the festival.

1998 June: At smaller temple festivals during this month, hundreds of civilians may be heard offering prayers for their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, who are fighting in the north against the Army in Jaya Sikurui.

1998 June 29: The Army attacks Kokkaddichcholai and surrounding villages. A civilian girl is disemboweled by a mortar shell and dies on the spot. Two of her kin are badly wounded. Buildings and houses are burned, looted and vandalized by the invading Army. Four LTTE members, badly wounded and trapped by the Army, take their own lives. The Army withdraws and the LTTE resumes control of the region.

1998 September 27: The LTTE captures the town of Kilinochchi in the north, ending Jaya Sikurui, at the cost of several thousand combatant lives on both sides. Fighting continues.

Ongoing: Intermittent aerial bombing and strafing by the Air Force. Round-ups and ground

attacks by the Army. Arrest and imprisonment of civilians without charge or trial by STF. Abductions and torture by anti-LTTE Tamil paramilitary groups allied with the Army, most notably the “Razeek Group” (military branch of EPRLF). Secret disposals of bodies of murdered civilians by Army and paramilitaries. Restrictions on food, medicine, and other supplies to the “uncleared areas” such as Kokkaddichcholai by Army.

1999 May 29: A suicide cyclist slays the dreaded “Razeek” and mortally wounds Razeek’s second in command. One source of terror in Paduvaankarai is removed, but reprisal slayings by Razeek’s friends are anticipated.

The events that happened in 1987 and 1991 that are known as the Kokkaddichcholai Massacres actually both happened not in Kokkaddichcholai town itself, but in the village of Mahiladittivu, adjacent to Kokkaddichcholai. When in November 1997 I came to Paduvaankarai to do research, I was lodged in a house close to the sites of the massacres. Only later did I learn from the residents of that house what had happened there. The details of the massacres and the people involved are already a matter of public record, but I have changed the names of my informants to protect them from renewed harassment. I write in the present tense, as this is the way I took my notes.

1.1 VASANTA’S STORY

I am staying with Vasanta in her house in the village of Mahiladittivu. Vasanta is a Christian. The walls of her house are decorated with pictures of children and babies and passages from the Bible in Tamil. One of them says: *itu en-raikkum nān tankum idam, itu nān virumpina-*

padiyāl inkē vācampaṇṇuvēn (“In this place I shall always dwell. In accordance with my liking, I shall make it my home.”)

Vasanta has mentioned to me several times that there was a prawn farm in Mahiladittivu, that there was a massacre of the laborers who worked on that farm, and that Vasanta’s own brother was among those killed in the massacre. I have asked Vasanta if she will narrate the whole story to me in detail. She is glad to do so and on 15 December 1997 she takes me to the cooking hut next to her kitchen, seats me at the doorway of the hut, and narrates the story to me as she prepares dinner. Vasanta’s narrative is so absorbing that I do not notice what she is doing in the hut as she talks, but after her talking is over and she brings me my dinner, she says with a smile, “This is what I was fixing while I was talking to you.” It is a moderately elaborate meal with several dishes all cooked from scratch.

Vasanta’s narrative is in mixed Tamil and English. She dictates slowly to me as I type and render the narrative into straight English. Often I stop her and ask for clarification. Except for the rendering of Tamil into English, deletion of the repetitions that happened when I asked for clarification, and small grammatical corrections introduced by me as I typed, Vasanta’s narrative is reproduced verbatim here.

“The Prawn Project was an American scheme. Earlier, an EPRLF MP, whose name was Sam Tambimuttu, had a business partnership with an American. While Sam Tambimuttu was working in this partnership, the partners bought some paddy fields for “ready cash,” cleared the bush, and put a prawn pond there. They bought those fields from poor people. They paid Rs. 2500 per acre. Out of each 2500, the poor people got 500, and Tambimuttu secretly took 2000. At that time, the people did not know. They

were poor people – they took the 500. A couple of months later, the people somehow found out, and went and told the American partner. Then, that American asked (Tambimuttu). When he asked, Sam Tambimuttu denied it. Sam Tambimuttu was ousted from the partnership. Then Sam Tambimuttu got angry. Out of anger, he had two laborers plant a bomb in the pump that was used to fill the prawn pond with water.

“After that, from the American scheme, the LTTE bought kerosene, diesel oil, petroleum. Sam Tambimuttu told the police HQ in Colombo that there was a connection between the prawn project and the LTTE. Sam Tambimuttu drew a map of the project for them. After that, the STF came here on November 2, 1986. They went and looked at the prawn project scheme. When they looked, they saw the characteristics that Sam Tambimuttu had indicated (in the map he showed the police). Only laborers were there; the LTTE had run away. Then the STF did nothing to the American partners/organizers. When the STF asked the laborers, the laborers said there was no connection between the LTTE and the company. Then the STF, doing nothing there, came into this village and did a round-up of all the men, and took them to that field.”

Vasanta nods in the direction of the empty field across the road from her house. “That very field?” I ask. “Yes, that one,” she confirms.

“There they beat them and told them to show where the LTTE camp was. The people who worked on the prawn project [who did not live in this village] were staying in two rented houses in Mahiladittivu. The STF took two or three of those people (to show them the way) and went and burned those two houses. Then they took all the men of the village to Batticaloa. When they went, they told the people to shout, ‘We don’t want Eelam, we don’t want Prabhakaran,

we want Premadasa, we want the government, we want the STF.' After that, over a period of five days, they interrogated each man individually and released them.

"After that, the Prawn Project was moved. On 27 January 1987, again the STF came here – to Kokkadiccholai, Mahiladittivu and Aracadittivu. They came by ferries, by bridges, and by helicopter. The army that came by way of the Valaiyiravu Bridge, lost thirteen men on the spot to a bomb blast. Out of anger, on the way as they came they shot civilians on both sides. Ten people were killed. After that, they came straight here, and went to the Prawn Project. There, they put all the laborers and officers on a tractor-cart, and brought them to the junction by this house. Then, on January 28 1987, the American scheme manager (his name was Bruce), who was living in Batticaloa, did not come on that day. That day was salary day and party day. The assistant farm-manager was staying in my house on that day. When the STF was here, the assistant farm manager had gone to work (on the farm). The STF had brought everyone to the junction. They took the identity cards of the permanent officers and the temporary officers.

"I had two brothers who were working on that prawn project. The STF came to my house and were cooking meals here (in this same house where we are now cooking and eating) for some of the forces. While they were cooking, I heard the sound of shooting. Then, I had two brothers working on the project, but we didn't see both brothers. They were reading the identity cards and calling the name of each person. When we heard the gunshots, we looked over to that side. The STF (those who were in the house) said, 'You don't go that way, don't look that side, don't go anywhere.' Then my fourth brother's

wife came running to this house, with her son. She said, 'My husband is there.' One Muslim man gave toffee to her child. My brother's wife said, 'Don't want.' He asked, 'Why don't want?' She said, 'My husband is there.' That soldier asked, 'What is your husband's name?' She said, 'My husband's name is Kirubhakaran.' She told him, 'Three years before he was living at Boosa Camp' (he had been captured and then released). The soldier said after thinking for a few minutes, 'I think Kirubhakaran – I don't know if he is alive or dead.' We were sad. My brother's wife was looking that side, and she said, 'He is sitting on the road near the church gate.' The soldier asked, 'Kirubhakaran – who is that?' (i.e., which one of you is Kirubhakaran). My brother did not speak, out of fear. A gun on the left (pointed at his head), a gun on his right, a gun in front (pointed at his forehead). Slowly and fearfully, my brother stood up. He said, 'I am Kirubhakaran.' They took my brother and five people back to the prawn project pond. There they took a diesel can and petrol can and old tires (from the Prawn Project pond) and brought them here to the junction. A tractor was here – a big box and tractor. STF said to put the petrol and diesel and tires on tractor cart. While my fourth brother was watching, they shot and killed my third brother. Still while he was watching, there were many dead bodies in the tractor cart. The prawn project assistant manager also. Then the STF said, 'go and sit.' "That Muslim man came to my home. He said, 'Kirubhakaran is alive. In just a few minutes, he will come to this home.' While he was speaking, that STF commander came to my home. We were crying (I, my mother, my father, my sister, my younger brother, my brother's wife with son, and an auntie with son near the house). We fell down and touched his feet. That STF com-

mander said to one of the soldiers, 'Call Kirubakaran.' Then my brother came back. That STF commander warned, 'Don't tell anybody about this incident [the killings]. If you tell, we will burn your home and everybody will be killed.'

(Just at this moment Vasanta's little baby looks up and smiles and Vasanta says to her "*cirikkiriyā*," and to me, "She is laughing." She hands the child to her mother and begins to feed her older children fish and rice as she continues her narrative.)

"The STF officer said, 'If you tell even one person we will burn your house and kill you all. Don't tell anyone and don't go anywhere.' Then, that commander came and ate his lunch and left."

(In all, 85 men were killed and the house of the prawn project was burned).

"After that, when that commander was gone, we heard some gunshots. About six or six-thirty that evening, a jeep came down the road to this junction."

(Vasanta's twin toddlers are crying and she goes to pacify them. Rocking one of them in her lap, she continues.)

"The soldiers who came in the jeep - what they said I don't know - but the jeep turned around and went back. After that, the tractor left (with the bodies in the cart). After that, where it went, what happened, what was done with the bodies, we don't know. We still do not know."

(Another woman sitting nearby on the porch makes a comment about another incident and Vasanta picks it up).

"That same day, at Kadukkaamunai village near Ambalaanthurai, five people were made to stand on the edge of a well and they were shot and their bodies fell into the well. That same

day, in that town there is an irrigation bungalow, four people were put in that bungalow and a bomb was thrown there while they were still alive and they were killed in that bomb explosion. The next day, three new STF camps were set up in Kokkaddicholai, Mahiladittivu and Ambalaanthurai. The prawns that were in that pond were taken by the STF and common people and they ate some and sold others and made a lot of money."

I ask Vasanta if the massacre was ever reported. She says they reported it to the Batticaloa Citizens' Committee who recorded the details. Also the American company that owned the Prawn Project filed a lawsuit against the Sri Lankan government. According to Vasanta, the American company won the case in 1989, two years after the massacre took place. The Sri Lankan government accepted the decision because America provides support to the government (and they don't want to lose that support). After winning the case the American company gave one lakh rupees to each of the murdered men's families.

I ask Vasanta how she manages to continue on after so much hardship (I am careful not to ask how she keeps her sanity, as I want to see whether she will voluntarily bring up the topic of madness). She tells me that the event she described, in which she lost one older brother (brother number three) is just one of a series of hardships. She lists six events, all but one directly connected with the war.

The first hardship - brother number four was captured and kept in Boosa camp. They had to search for him and had much difficulty getting him out. Eventually, though, he was released. He is now married with children. The second hardship was the death of brother number three in the Prawn Project massacre. The third was

when another brother, who was a polio victim without the use of his legs but otherwise healthy, died of shock after a bombing raid. The fourth was when her father died of a heart attack after receiving news of another massacre. The fifth was when her sister was shot by a member of the Security Forces. The sixth was when her husband left her for another woman, just a few months ago.

In addition to these personal hardships, Vasanta watched the hardships of others. In 1987-89, she says, when the IPKF was here, they raped women and tortured people very badly. They pulled out fingernails and stuck nails through hands. They forcibly conscripted boys into the TNA – there was a training camp nearby – and sent them in the front lines in attacks against the LTTE, with EPRLF and TELO behind. With IPKF in the area, women could not stay in the house alone. They had to disguise themselves as old ladies. Now under Tiger control, at least they are safe from sexual abuse.

Vasanta is not safe on the other side, however. Whenever she goes into town to buy food and supplies, she has to pass through the STF checkpoints. She does not talk to me about harassment. I see it with my own eyes. When we go through the Manmunai checkpoint together, the guards stop us and interrogate us. They go through our bags and ask such questions as, “What’s underneath your clothes?” When we return they produce objects such as medicine vials that they say they have gotten from our bags and ask us if we are bringing these things to the LTTE. People can be arrested and imprisoned, or worse, for bringing medicine to the LTTE. By experience at the Manmunai checkpoint I learn that the checkpoint guards plant incriminating objects even in my own bags. I am mocked and then released, but local Tamil civilians are not

always so lucky. One man working at that checkpoint for the Army abducted a woman with the help of the Army and forced her to marry him.

The people at that checkpoint feign concern for me, saying it is dangerous for me to cross because there are Tigers there. They say I should not go to the other side because I might get hurt if they bomb it. It is clear that they do not care if Tamil civilians get hurt. They say that all the people on that side are LTTE. They know that this is false.

Vasanta says the guards stop travellers and interrogate them because they just want to talk, they are not really interested in the information you give them. She says she does not talk to the guards, except minimally to answer their questions, as if she were friendly with the guards someone else going through the checkpoint might misinterpret this behavior and report it to the LTTE.

I repeat my question: “After experiencing so many hardships, how do you find the strength to go on, raising these three children and all. You seem so cheerful . . .”

“I am cheerful in the daytime,” she says, “but at night I think about [remember – *ninai*] these events and then I have trouble sleeping. Now I have a lot of work – with my job, and the housework, and these three little ones. When I lie down at night I am so tired I fall right asleep. This is good.”

“*ninaittal paittiyam varum*,” she concludes. Roughly translated, this phrase means, “Thinking would make me crazy.”

The day after telling me the story, Vasanta brings out a small photo album that has pictures of the Prawn Project and its workers (photos taken before the massacre). There is a photo of her brother among them. He is seated on the ground, preparing pongal, smiling up at the cam-

era. It is hard to think that this gentle-looking young man was shot in cold blood, his body thrown on a tractor with dozens of other bodies, then dumped in a hidden ditch somewhere. What if it were my brother?

There are also photos of the assistant manager, who was also killed. Vasanta shows me the pictures of some of the people she knew (she didn't know all of them; they came from all around to work on the project). All of those she knew were killed, except the manager Bruce, who now lives in Singapore, according to Vasanta, and is very rich. In Tamil she says, "He didn't like women, only men." And then in English she adds, "He was a very nice boy."

1.2 ROSA'S STORY

Rosa is Vasanta's younger sister. Presently she works as volunteer head-teacher in the nutrition center next door to Vasanta's house. This nutrition center is one of many like it sponsored by the Methodist Church. Rosa is a trained and certified teacher. There are 65 children who attend the nutrition center of which Rosa has charge. The children are five and six years old. All of them live nearby; their mothers bring them here and they spend about three hours a day, five days a week in the center. The role of the center is to give each child one square meal a day and to educate the mothers in nutrition. But Rosa also teaches the children other things. At the time I arrive, the children are practicing for a Christmas pageant. I attend the pageant on the Friday before Christmas. It lasts over three hours and there are over twenty different performances (songs, recitations in English and Tamil, and dances) by individual children and small groups of children. The performances are not for the most part Christmas related or even Christian related. The one I remember best is

eight children with wings pinned to their backs – at first I think they may be angels but then it turns out that they are baby sparrows in a nest: four boys and four girls. They do a carefully choreographed dance and sing as they dance, with coaching from behind the scenes.

Rosa and her sister both do their shopping in the Muslim town of Kaattaankudy. When Rosa needs medicine, she gets it from a Muslim clinic in that town. The Muslims who owned shops in Batticaloa have moved back to those shops. It seems that the tensions between Muslims and Tamils are greatly reduced. But still Muslims will rarely enter Tiger-controlled territory and most Muslims are terrified of the Tigers. During my stay, when a Muslim did enter Tiger territory, Rosa reports that a Tiger said to him, "If I came to your town, you would cut me to pieces."

Rosa is known around Paduvaankarai as *vedippadda* Rosa ("Rose who got [partly] exploded") or *cudappadda* Rosa ("Rose who got shot") because in the 1991 Rice Mill Massacre she was shot in the legs and both her knees were shattered. She is not ashamed of her *nom de guerre*, although she is obviously not happy to be without kneecaps.

She tells me how it happened. She says that in a church near Vasanta's house the LTTE had laid mines. Two Sinhala soldiers lost their legs. The army came here and surrounded Vasanta's father with the intention of killing him, believing that he knew about the land mines, who had put them there and so forth, but a TELO boy said he was innocent and so they let him go. The same soldiers would come to the house for water – saying these people are Christians and will not harm you. They would harass the women, including Vasanta and Rosa. The soldier who subsequently shot Rosa in the legs was among them. His name was Ratnayake.

What Rosa calls the Rice Mill massacre is known throughout the region as the Kokkaddichchulai massacre. The story is that a Sri Lankan Army tractor with soldiers in it was coming down the road when it tripped a land mine. The tractor blew up and several soldiers were killed. The soldiers coming behind went on a rampage through the village, shooting and killing more than 150 civilians in a few hours. One group of civilians sought refuge in a rice mill and all of them were killed. Rosa sought refuge in a hut nearby. She was seen by a soldier and shot and left for dead, but the next morning a village man found her still alive and she was taken to the hospital.

She was in-and-out of hospitals for 11 months after the shooting and then was on crutches for another seven months. The doctors initially advised amputation but she refused. Presently (end 1997) she walks with a hobble and cannot bend her knees fully or ride a bike or run. The bullet scars on her legs are clearly visible. She says her legs are shorter than they were before and after she tells me this I notice that her legs are indeed a little short for her body. Her pretty face and cheerful smile draw attention away from her handicap. At one point, Rosa asks me, "Do I seem cheerful (*santōsam*) to you?" "Yes, you do," I respond. "I wonder how you can be so cheerful after what you've been through." "My face is cheerful but in my heart I am hurting," she says, and goes on to tell me that this is because she can no longer ride a bicycle, or sit down on the floor, or walk long distances, or climb stairs unassisted, or run. "After the shooting, did you ever think you might want to join the LTTE?" I ask Rosa. "Yes. I wanted to join them. But my mother and sister wouldn't let me," she said. "Why not?" "They said I was too crippled to fight."

Rosa shows me a newspaper article that she has kept at the home of friends about her own testimony regarding the massacre.

It is in the Tamil daily *Virakesari*. The headline says, "An army soldier aimed at me and shot me from 25 yards away." The sub-heading says, "A teacher's testimony about the Kokkaddichchulai massacre incident before the Presidential Command Commission." The story in full reads as follows.

Batticaloa. "Seeing the soldiers, because of fear, I tried to run and hide in a small hut that was nearby. When I neared the door of the hut, an army soldier from 25 yards away aimed at me and shot me. When I was shot, I lost consciousness and fell." In these words, the twenty-four-year-old teacher (her full name is given) gave witness before the Presidential Command Commission of Inquiry regarding the events of the Kokkaddichchulai massacre. This Command Commission yesterday conducted its second day of inquiry in the Batticaloa Air-force Camp.

(Name), who was shot during the Kokkaddichchulai incident and sustained critical injuries, was taken from an ambulance on a stretcher to the place where the inquiry was being conducted.

Before the Command Commission, she continued to give information as follows:

"In Kokkaddichchulai when the land mine incident happened, I was traveling on my bicycle just a small distance from that place. Then I heard the sound of a bomb explosion. I saw that the soldiers who were coming on a tractor had been caught by it."

"When, because of fear I tried to go to my home which was a quarter mile away, I saw soldiers in the intervening space. When I tried to go back to the school by way of the road, on that route also soldiers were standing and shouting. Then I went to Mahiladittivu Colony. On the

way I saw soldiers and I tried to go to a little hut next to the road. When I neared the door of the hut, from twenty-five yards away one soldier aimed at me and shot me. When I was shot I lost consciousness and fell. When I regained consciousness I was inside the hut."

"Seeing that dawn had broken I cried out because of thirst. Then I saw somebody calling, 'Sister, sister.' When the person who called that way came near, I recognized the features of my uncle. Seeing my condition he called other people and spread out a sack and lay me upon it and carried me away. They took me to my aunt's house."

"The next day in the morning, for lack of access to a vehicle, I was taken in a bullock cart to Ambalanthurai, and by way of a fisherman's boat to the opposite bank [of the lagoon]. I was taken on a bicycle on the main road, and arrived by bus at Batticaloa Hospital. There after getting first aid, I was sent by ambulance at 3 in the afternoon to Polunnaruwa Hospital. After receiving treatment there for seven days, I was taken back to Batticaloa Hospital. After receiving treatment for 27 days there, because of the lack of basic medical facilities there, I went to a private hospital for treatment. Having returned from there I am now staying in my aunt's house."

"The surgical treatment I require has not yet been fully completed. To do it will take one and a half lakhs of rupees, the people in the private hospital tell me."

Head of the Command Commission: Can't that be done in Colombo General Hospital?

Witness: Because many people have said that in the main hospital of Colombo, not so much care is given, I have not gone there.

Command Commission Member, Judge (kalānithi) A.M.M. Sahabdeen: Did the soldier shoot you accidentally?

Witness: When I was fleeing in fear he shot me. The legal advisor Kumar Ponnambalam asks some questions.

Question: Did you work at Red Barna? [Red Barna is a Norwegian aid organization].

Answer: Yes. I was a teacher there.

Question: On a normal day, what clothing would you wear?

Answer: I wore a skirt and blouse.

Question: What was the color of your clothing?

Answer: The skirt was red in color.

Question: Did you see the tractor trip on the land mine?

Answer: I saw the tractor that tripped on the land mine being blown up (*thūkki vīciyathaiḱ kandēn*).

Question: When the Army came following behind, did they say anything about the color of your skirt?

Answer: They said something in Sinhala. I couldn't understand it.

Question: Did you see the soldier aiming at you and shooting you?

Answer: Yes.

Question: How many times did he shoot?

Answer: Two times.

Question: Were both your knees affected by the wounds?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Did you give word to the police in Polunnaruwa Hospital?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Did you say the same things there that you are saying here?

Answer: Because of fear, I said that in cross-firing I had been shot.

Question: If a classification of features and marks were conducted here, would you be able to identify the features of the person who shot you?

Answer: No.

Because the witness was unable to continue witnessing, it was stopped here.

The Kokkadicholai Rice Mill massacre happened in January 1991. The enquiry and the reporting of it happened in July 1991. When I meet with Rosa and talk with her, it is December 1997. Rosa is now able to make statements that she was unable to make in 1991. In particular, she says that she was capable of identifying the soldier who shot her, but feared doing so in 1991 because there were several soldiers who were looking for her. In all, 20 soldiers were involved in the massacre, in which according to Rosa some 152 people were killed. Friends of the soldiers who engaged in the massacre were still at large in the Batticaloa region at the time of the inquest, Rosa believes. In addition, the inquest was carried out on an army base where she was surrounded by soldiers and this was an intimidating situation for her. Given that the massacre itself was a reprisal, Rosa had every good reason to fear further reprisals if she testified in too much detail; the fact that she testified at all is acknowledged as an act of courage by many people. Rosa says that the soldiers who were involved in the massacre are no longer in the region. She says that they were not jailed or officially punished for their crimes, but were sent to Jaffna as punishment (the term "Jaffna" refers around here to all points north where the fighting is heavy).

Rosa says that the pain in her legs was so intense she begged people to give her poison so she could kill herself. She was neglected and mistreated at the Polunnaruwa hospital because she was Tamil. She did not testify to this in court for fear of making trouble.

When I ask Rosa what has given her the courage to carry on, she answers simply, "Jesus."

I wrote to Vasanta and Rosa after I returned to New Zealand in July and received a response from Rosa, dated 17 August 1998. It contained this news.

In July the Army (Army-STF) came and burnt the whole police station and courthouse, then they burnt the political office in Munaikkaadu too. And also they shot the O.I.C. of the Police Station (*kārttikā*), that heavy-set girl, and also three women police and two boys in the movement. We all left our house and ran to a storehouse in a neighboring village. The Army came to our house and broke the windows (of the new house) and plucked many coconuts and destroyed them. Also in Mullaithivu in one family a shell hit a 14-year-old girl and she died. That girl's father was wounded in both legs. Her younger sister too was wounded. Both of them are in a Batticaloa clinic. Then on the first of August in Manapiddi a bomber airplane dropped bombs. In that, one boy and nine cattle died. We are living in real fear. Yesterday the army came to Porattivu and returned at night, therefore we are really afraid. Even the children in the house are afraid.

Won't you come here again? If you come you can stay in our house. Our area is very fearful. We thought you might not have returned to your country. When we saw your letter we were really happy. There is nothing else new.

The events described in the letter happened on July 1, 1998, two days after I left for Colombo to return home. The same events (Army raid on this village, death of the civilian girl and wounding of her family members by shelling, death of four Tigers including Kaarttikkaa) were reported in the Colombo-based Tamil press the following week.

Now, why should you visit Kokkaddicholai? If you go to an impoverished area almost any-

where in the world, you will find it is ugly: buildings will be in shambles, garbage will be all around, and so forth. But if you go to Kokkaddichchulai or any place within a five mile radius of that town, excluding the Army-controlled places, you will find that it is beautiful. Homes are immaculate, the sand is swept daily, ornamental plants abound, the paddy fields are dense and green with white herons rising in swirls above them, flocks of parrots cross the sky morning and evening, the lagoon is peaceful and good for swimming (but mind the occasional crocodile), palm-fringed white sand beaches are within easy bicycling distance, and the temples are alive with gods at play. The crime rate among civilians is very low. The LTTE are conscientious administrators with environmentalist ethics, a special concern for the poor, a good sense of humor, and strong internal discipline. They will not hurt you unless you hurt them, and then the worst that is likely to happen is that they will ask you to leave. You should go to see for yourself what the place is like.

But there is a more important reason why you should go. The whole time I was there, I felt that I was in a kind of protective bubble. Mortars fell, buses blew up, the LTTE conducted frequent raids on Army and Police stations, and the Army and Police attacked the LTTE and civilians. I could hear the gunfire and explosions, but the violence and danger were never right where I happened to be at the time. The day I left, the fighting returned to the junction where I lived. Killing returned and terror returned. I learned this from a newspaper report and also from Rosa's letter.

The protective bubble was not an accident. Because I was a conspicuous "white" foreigner who had done nothing wrong and was keeping notes of all that I witnessed, nobody wanted to

kill me or hurt me, and nobody wanted me to witness killing or other misdeeds committed by their own side. That is why the Army waited until I was gone to kill more people in Kokkaddichchulai and vandalize the homes and buildings and trees that these people had maintained with such care. The Brigadier, an educated and civilized man who gave me permission to travel, must have thought I wouldn't notice. Or perhaps it was just courtesy for him to wait until I had left to send his troops in to kill my friends. But if it was courtesy, I am not grateful and so here I am telling you what his forces did under his command.

What I suggest is this. You too can be a protective bubble. One bubble is pretty much worthless, but thousands of bubbles might make a difference. Be your own private ground troops, carry no weapons, be your own private peace-keeping forces. Sri Lanka wants tourists: come as tourists. Travel to Batticaloa and from there to Kokkaddichchulai. If the Army won't let you in, be polite but persistent. Say you have friends in the East who need you to be with them now. This is the truth. Stick to it. If all else fails, find a way around the Army. People will help you. Tell them it is a matter of saving lives by being there, and let that be your mission.

About the Author: Margaret Trawick is an anthropologist specializing in Tamil culture. Her past publications have addressed issues concerning South Asian medical systems and systems of healing, Tamil family and kinship systems, medieval Tamil poetry and modern Tamil folklore. She recently completed eight months of fieldwork in Batticaloa District on the topic of children who grow up in the midst of warfare.