

TAMILS AND MUSLIMS IN THE SHADOW OF WAR: SCHISM OR CONTINUITY?

Dennis B. McGilvray
University of Colorado, Boulder

I RECENTLY RETURNED TO SRI LANKA AFTER A HIATUS OF FIFTEEN YEARS, A period during which the island's ethnic conflict has totally engulfed the Amparai and Batticaloa Districts on the eastern coast where I have done most of my ethnographic fieldwork.¹ My research in the 1970s on matrilineal kinship and caste organisation, and on the ethnomedical and ritual patterns of the Tamils and Muslims, had been carried out at an appropriately Malinowskian pace, with lots of cross-cutting interviews, redundant rituals, and detailed observations. The two brief research trips which form the basis for this current report, however, were certainly not a Malinowskian experience for me. In the summer of 1993, D.B. Wijetunge had succeeded the assassinated President Premadasa and the government's battle against the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) seemed to have reached a fragile and jittery stalemate in the east. There were fortified Sri Lankan army camps and sandbagged Special Task Force (STF) commando checkpoints everywhere, and although the Tigers were keeping a fairly low profile, their eyes and ears were assumed to be omnipresent. It was my first experience of what it is like to do anthropology under conditions of military occupation and *de facto* martial law. I travelled as widely as I could in the region, all the way from Batticaloa Town south to Akkaraipattu and on to Pottuvil, and also from the coastal settlements of Kaluvanchikkudy and Kalmunai inland to Kokkatticcolai, Palugamam, and Mandur, for a total of fifteen days. In July of 1995 I once again visited the east, but by this time the peace negotiations between the LTTE and President Chandrika Kumaratunge's government had abruptly

¹ In July-Aug. 1993 my fieldwork in Sri Lanka was sponsored by an Advanced Research Grant awarded by the joint South Asia Committee of the SSRC and the ACLS, and in July 1995 by a travel grant from the University of Colorado Faculty Fellowship program.

collapsed and the military situation in the east was getting hotter. My eighteen year old son and I drove straight to Akkaraipattu in the company of an old friend, stayed two days on the Muslim side of town, then spent two more days in a Tamil neighbourhood – during which time we were briefly ‘rounded-up’ by the STF commandos in a pre-dawn house-to-house raid. Then, on the sensible advice of everyone, we left by exactly the same road we had taken when we entered.

First impressions

The entire eastern coastal region extending south from Trincomalee to Pottuvil and Okanda, and especially the central coastal settlements of Batticaloa and Amparai Districts, are characterised by a matrilineal form of kinship organisation and matrilineal marriage, as well as by other distinctive non-brahman, non-Sanskritic cultural traditions which can be traced to the impact of medieval migrations from Kerala as well as Tamilnadu. However, what makes the eastern coastal zone even more interesting from a sociological and ethnographic point of view is the side-by-side development of Tamil Hindu as well as Tamil-speaking Muslim communities whose history and traditions have been intertwined for centuries. One of the long-term themes of my own research has been to explore the sources and nature of this Hindu-Muslim religious difference within the larger context of a shared language, a shared matrilineal family system, and a number of common assumptions about gender, health, diet, and everyday ritual.² A notable feature of Sri Lankan Tamil-Muslim relations in the twentieth century, and one which contrasts sharply with the situation in neighbouring Tamilnadu, has been the development of a Sri Lankan Muslim sense of ethnic identity as distinct from the Tamils.³ The past two decades of ethnic violence have only served to

² Dennis B. McGilvray, ‘Mukkuvar Vannimai: Tamil Caste and Matriclan Ideology in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka’, in McGilvray (ed.), *Caste Ideology and Interaction* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 34-97; ‘Sexual Power and Fertility in Sri Lanka: Batticaloa Tamils and Moors’, in C. MacCormack (ed.), *Ethnography of Fertility and Birth* (London, Academic Press, 1982), pp. 25-73 [reprinted in 2nd. ed., Waveland Press, 1994, pp. 15-63]; ‘The 1987 Stirling Award Essay: Sex, Repression, and Sanskritization in Sri Lanka?’, *Ethos*, Vol. 16, no. 2 (June, 1988), pp. 99-127; ‘Households in Akkaraipattu: Dowry and Domestic Organization among the Matrilineal Tamils and Moors of Sri Lanka’, in J. Gray and D. Mearns (eds), *Society from the Inside Out: Anthropological Perspectives on the South Asian Household* (New Delhi, Sage, 1989), pp. 192-235.

³ Dennis B. McGilvray, ‘Arabs, Moors, and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim Ethnicity in Regional Perspective’ (unpublished paper); Christian Wagner, ‘A Muslim Minority in a Multiethnic State: The Case of Sri Lanka’ (Paper presented at the 10th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Venice, 1988); Christian Wagner, *Die Muslime Sri Lankas: Eine Volksgruppe im Spannungsfeld des Ethnischen Konflikts Zwischen Singhalesen und Tamilen* (Frieburg, Arnold Bergstraesser Institut, 1990); D.P. Sivaram, ‘Coming to Terms with Muslim Nationalism’, *The Island*, 28 Oct. 1990, reprinted in Taraki (pseud.), *The*

deepen this Tamil-Muslim political schism at the national level. Beyond any specific ethnographic goal, my visits to the east in 1993 and 1995 were intended to survey the social landscape generally and to assess whether any features of the local-level Tamil-Muslim society I had studied in the 1970s were still in existence.

For me, one of the most astonishing things was to see the rubble of bombed-out homes and shops interspersed between settlements seemingly untouched by battle. The visible economic prosperity of the Muslim commercial centres was especially striking in contrast to the depressed or nonexistent mercantile economy of the Tamils, even within the same town – as in Akkaraipattu, for example. Both the political and the military priorities of recent Sri Lankan government administrations have insulated the Muslim merchants from the embargoes and roadblocks and military restrictions on doing business which local Tamil merchants have been forced to endure in the name of eliminating a potential economic support base for the guerrillas. Also strikingly visible to any passer-by was the reconstruction and repainting of Muslim mosques and Hindu temples. Even in villages like Kokkatticolai and Makiladittivu, poor isolated Tamil settlements on the west bank of the Batticaloa Lagoon where repeated army massacres and guerrilla engagements have occurred, and where damaged and burned-out buildings still dot the landscape, the Hindu *kōvils* are gleaming with new gateway towers and freshly painted red and white striped walls. In Akkaraipattu, the high caste Pillaiyar temple, which was suffering a sort of ritual paralysis in the 1970s due to boycotts and lack of participation by some of the lower-ranking Tamil castes, has recently been renovated at a cost of Rs 30 *lakhs* (A\$750,000) and is now a fully functioning shrine managed by a board of matrilineal clan trustees led by an energetic new Mukkuvar *ūrppōḍiyār*, or high caste headman. Immediately adjacent to the temple is a newly constructed orphanage for Tamil boys whose parents have been killed in the ethnic war. The orphanage, staffed by the Ramakrishna Mission, has been erected under the patronage of the local temple trustees, and it exemplifies an obvious connection between the unspeakable trauma of the war and the reinvigoration of Hindu religious institutions. On the Muslim side of Akkaraipattu, and in neighbouring Muslim towns such as Kalmunai and Kattankudy, I was struck by the growth of middle-class Sufi mysticism and the cult of charismatic Sufi *sheikhs*, many of them on circuit from Kerala and the Laccadive Islands. However, any direct connection between Sufism and the present-day ethnic conflict would be much harder for me to prove.

Eluding Peace: An Insider's Political Analysis of the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka, Sarcelles, France: Arts Social Sciences of Eelam Academy [ASSEAY] (1991), pp. 74-6; D.P. Sivaram, 'Tamil-Muslim Relations: Tigers Trying to Make Amends?', *Tamil Times*, 15 Apr. 1993, pp. 11-13, 28.

Three troubling incidents

I wish to relate three vivid and troubling, but admittedly partial and incomplete, ethnographic vignettes from my visits to the east coast in 1993 and 1995. The events to which these three stories refer occurred between 1985 and 1990. Two of these events and their physical sites were public, but one was concealed behind the fortified walls of a Sri Lankan army camp. I was never an eyewitness to any of these incidents, but they have now become such an integral part of local memory that, in some cases, the locations where they occurred have become mandatory stopping points on any foreign visitor's itinerary. What I was shown and was told about these events was obviously conditioned by my status as an outsider, as well as by the interests and perspectives of the various friends and acquaintances, both Tamil and Muslim, who shared their views with me. I believe, however, that these three accounts offer a thought-provoking glimpse of the ambivalence and complexity of Tamil/Muslim relations in the Batticaloa region today.

Mosque martyrs

The first event I was told about was the ghastly massacre of one hundred and three Muslim men who were gathered for prayer at the Miran Mosque in Kattankudy on the evening of 3 August 1990. Although darker theories of secret government involvement have been proposed, the Muslims with whom I spoke in 1993 clearly believed that the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) had carried out this raid, coming by boat from the west side of the lagoon. My Muslim host who had offered to show me around Kattankudy took me to this hallowed site immediately upon arrival, and I think almost any foreign visitor would be given a similar tour. The mosque has become defined as a site of Islamic sacrifice, with the names of the victims (formally identified as *shahīds*, or martyrs for the faith) listed in a roll of honour painted in stark yellow and black lettering on the wall beside the doorway. Inside the prayer hall itself one can readily see a barrage of bullet holes in the front walls flanking the *mihṛāb*, the prayer niche in the direction of Mecca, and explosive cracks in the cement floor, although all blood stains from the victims have been removed (figures 1 and 2 below). In the cemetery across the lane from the mosque, a row of simple Muslim graves was pointed out as the final resting place for these pious and undeserving victims of Tamil fanaticism.

I would not expect the bullet holes in the wall inside the mosque to be plastered over soon, if ever, for they speak more eloquently than any words of the violent attack which occurred. If the site is a text, its official reading today is that the Muslims of Kattankudy are subject to the predations of a violent and irrational Tamil movement whose motives and actions are beyond normal

human understanding. Indeed, for many Muslims I met on that trip, the Kattankudy massacre, as well as other lethal LTTE attacks on mosques in Eravur and Akkaraipattu, was sufficient to prove the vulnerability and innocence of the entire Muslim community, and served to validate an inward-looking belief that members of the Muslim community had suffered more than any other ethnic group in Sri Lanka's civil war.

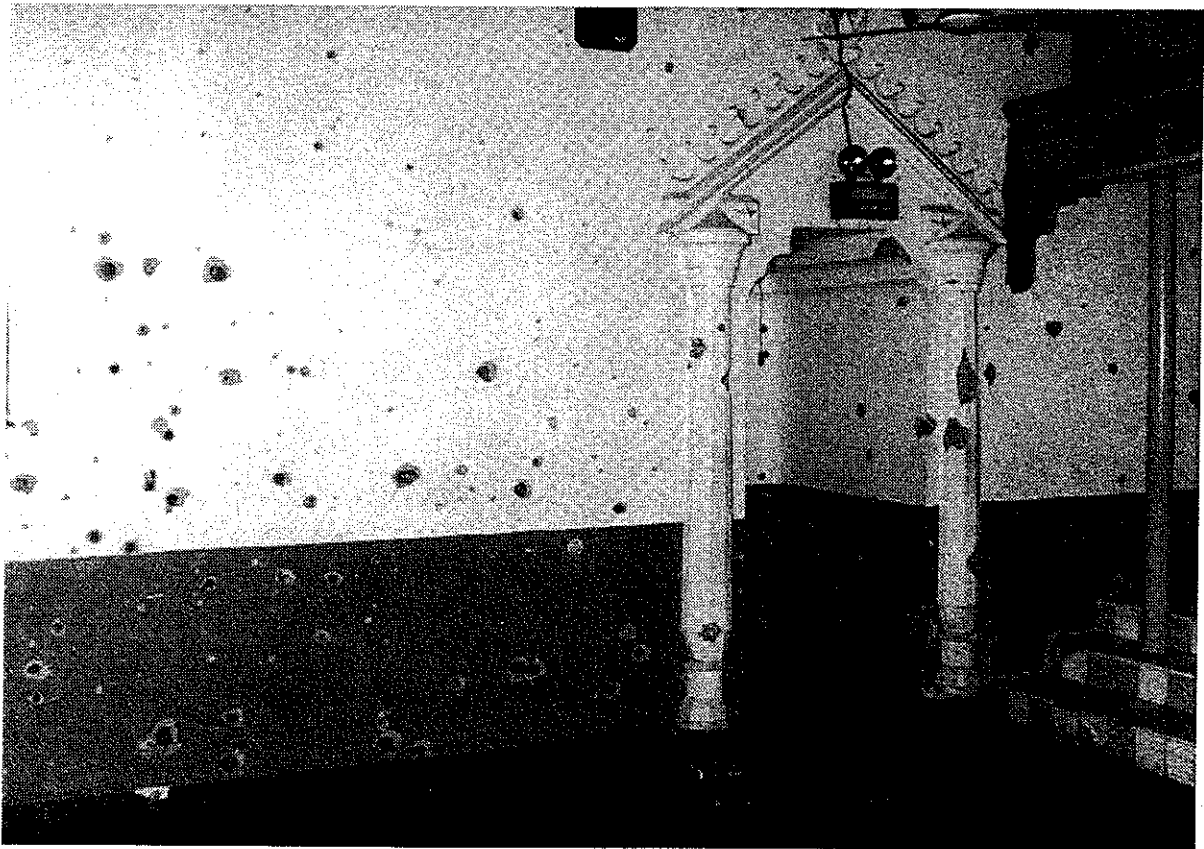


FIGURE 1. Bullet holes still scar the inner walls of the Miran Mosque in Kattankudy, where a Tamil Tiger attack left Muslim worshippers dead in August 1990.

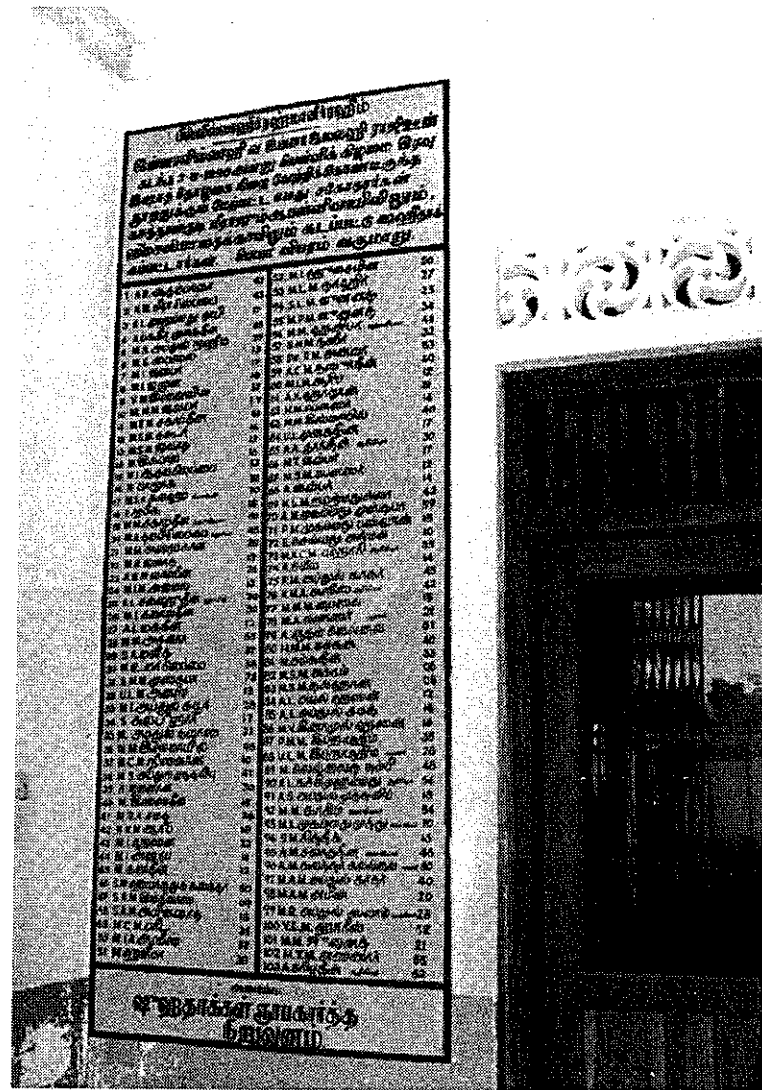


Figure 2. A list of the 103 Muslim martyrs who were massacred in the raid has become a permanent part of the Kattankudy mosque.

Destruction of a temple

Unlike the Kattankudy mosque massacre, which received world-wide press coverage when it happened, the second event I will recount was of interest only in Akkaraipattu. Yet like the mosque tragedy, it too is commemorated in architectural remains inscribed with the indexical marks of violence and utter desecration. In the 1970s I carried out a detailed study of the annual firewalking rituals at the Hindu temple to the fierce meat-eating goddess Pattirakali (Bhadrakali), located adjacent to a Muslim residential neighbourhood perhaps a quarter mile east of the main Akkaraipattu junction.

The temple was administered by, and the *pūjas* conducted by, members of the combined goldsmith and blacksmith caste who regard Pattirakali as the patron deity of their forges and anvils. However, the annual festival was also very popular with a much more diverse Hindu populace, including Tamil castes both higher and lower in the local hierarchy than the smiths. On the final days of the annual festival to the goddess, I had often noted nearby Muslim women and children peering over their compound walls to watch the sacrifice of chickens, the completion of firewalking vows, and the virtuoso flagellation which some devotees insisted on receiving while in trance. The fact that the temple itself was located a half-mile distant from the smith caste neighbourhood only made it more dramatic when nightly processions brought the icons and insignia of the goddess to be installed in the shrine.⁴

When I dropped in to visit with my old smith caste acquaintances in 1993, however, I was immediately taken to see the catastrophe which had befallen the goddess. Her temple, which had been substantially enlarged since I last visited Akkaraipattu in 1978, was now in ruins (see figures 3 and 4). Only a few walls and columns were still standing. Even the coconut trees inside the temple compound had been chopped down, and the masonry perimeter wall was perforated in many places. However, the *coup de grace*, so to speak, was the temple well, which had been filled with cattle bones, thus ritually defiling this Hindu sacred space in the most radical way possible.⁵

The culprits were said to have been Muslim mobs who attacked this temple, as well as a smaller low-caste Pillaiyar shrine nearby, in June or July of 1990 following a series of inter-ethnic attacks on religious buildings. This was at the outset of Eelam War II when the LTTE had totally alienated the Muslims by executing hundreds of Muslim policemen whom they had taken prisoner, while releasing most of the Tamil officers they had captured. I was told that first a Hindu temple in Amparai had been smashed by Sinhalese mobs, following which the local LTTE cadres sanctioned the destruction of the Sinhalese Buddhist *vihāra* in Akkaraipattu.⁶ Tamils say that the army and

⁴ Dennis B. McGilvray, *Symbolic Heat: Gender, Health, and Worship among the Tamils of South India and Sri Lanka*, photo exhibit and video, Univ. of Colorado Museum, Boulder, 1986.

⁵ I also heard one uncorroborated rumour of an earlier desecration of the temple by Muslims who, it was whispered, had murdered a Tamil devotee at the temple and secretly buried his body under the ashes of the goddess's ritual firepit. The temple authorities, however, made no such allegations of any sort.

⁶ UTHR [University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)], Report 7, *The Clash of Ideologies and the Continuing Tragedy in the Batticaloa and Amparai Districts*, 8 May 1991, pp. 26-7, gives a short account of the attack on the Buddhist vihara in Akkaraipattu in June 1990. All UTHR reports are available on the internet from <JHOOLE@THUBAN.AC.HMC.EDU>.



Figure 3. The smith caste temple for the Goddess Pattirakali in Division 1, Akkaraipattu, has lain in ruins since it was destroyed in 1990.



Figure 4. Cattle bones have been tossed into the Pattirakali temple well to further desecrate the site.

Sri Lankan police then allowed the Muslims to destroy the Pattirakali temple as an act of surrogate reprisal for the attack on the Buddhist shrine. A Tamil friend confidently assured me the goddess Pattirakali had taken revenge against seven Muslims who had helped to demolish her temple: they were all swiftly and silently bitten by cobras and died. The metal face-image (*tirumukam*) of the goddess herself had not been damaged, because it was always kept in the home of the goldsmith priest until the annual festival, but now, three years later, the cult of this once-popular goddess was clearly stalled and the future of the temple was uncertain. Smith caste elders were still pondering whether to rebuild the temple on the very same site as a matter of

principle or to move it to a safer location inside the Tamil area. Meanwhile, inter-caste rivalries have begun to erode the Pattirakali temple congregation as some young higher-caste (Mukkuvar and Velalar) devotees have started a new Pattirakali shrine of their own, unaffiliated with the local smiths, in the suburban hamlet of Alaiyativembu. The latter complain that Pattirakali has long been their caste deity (*kula teyvam*) and that her cult has always included the entire Tamil community. As I was discussing the various options with a temple trustee at the site of the ruins, a hostile prankster from the neighbourhood let the air out of our bicycle tires and we had to trudge back home in the fierce midday sun.

Given the *non*-religious roots of localised Tamil-Muslim riots in the Batticaloa region over the past half-century, it is very hard to believe that the desecration of the Pattirakali temple was primarily motivated by religious hatred. My goldsmith friends were equally sceptical of such a theory. They viewed it as an tacitly sanctioned act of revenge by the local Sinhalese security authorities against the Tamil community which also happened to give some opportunistic Muslims a way to force a prime piece of undeveloped residential land onto the real estate market and ultimately into wealthy Muslim hands. My own data on Tamil-Muslim 'mix-ups' (*kulappam*) in the Batticaloa region since the 1950s reveals that the seizure of adjacent Tamil-owned residential house sites by the Muslims has been an underlying motive, or at least a significant outcome, of many of these local disturbances.⁷ Wagering that caste rivalry between the dominant Mukkuvars and the lower-ranked goldsmiths would impede any collective Tamil response, the perpetrators chose to desecrate the property and then hope for an eventual sale, which might very well occur someday. As Michele Gamburd's paper in this volume has shown, the circumstances of any major armed conflict often provide an opening for lesser vendettas and the pursuit of hidden agendas. It looks as if the demise of the Pattirakali Temple may also fit this mould.

Ethnicity under torture

My third and final example is a very different kind of story. It is an oral narrative which recounts the violence inscribed, not on buildings, but on the body and mind of its subject, a forty-eight year old Tamil man I have known for a number of years. It is drawn from his personal retelling, at my request, of the events which transpired following the first major Sri Lankan army sweep and detention of suspected Tamil militants from Akkaraipattu in December 1985, a type of large-scale, indiscriminate 'round-up' by security

⁷ McGilvray, 'Arabs, Moors, and Muslims'; UTHR Report 7, 8 May 1991, pp. 49 ff.; UTHR Report 11, *Land, Human Rights and the Eastern Predicament*, 15 Apr. 1993, p.63.

forces which has been repeated on many occasions since then. Whereas my first two vignettes portrayed acts of reciprocal Tamil and Muslim violence, this third story implicates the army and the state security forces, largely but not entirely staffed by Sinhalese. My informant originally poured out his tale to me in 1993 when I did not have a tape-recorder to capture the vivid colloquial language of his harrowing account, but he repeated it for me in similar detail in 1995 when I had come better-equipped. His extremely detailed oral narrative runs to over an hour, but here I have the space to quote just a few passages from his full account.⁸ His story begins on the night of 27 December 1985, following the army's full-scale sweep of the Tamil side of town, when a convoy of thirteen trucks loaded with young male suspects were driven to the army camp at Konduvattuvan near Amparai.

It was raining, and the ground was slippery and we were falling down. They asked us to sit in a small hall. That night they didn't give us anything to eat. They took two fellows and shot them immediately. People who were too injured were shot. That day they had shot four people in Akkaraipattu, and they brought those bodies as well. These people had climbed coconut trees, and they were shot and fell from the trees. The army big people came, looked at the injured fellows, and said that the two fellows should be shot. We were *really* scared.

He then went on to describe how the prisoners were kept from moving or urinating. 'If you piss, you drink it', they said. Random brutality was common.

Throughout the night they would come and call at fellows who were well-built and dark, and when you asked if they were calling you, they would say 'Not you!' They called in Sinhala, *Adoo, ende!* [Hey, come here!] Some people wouldn't understand, so since I knew a bit of Sinhala, I would tell them 'They are calling you.' Then as soon as they went near, they would punch them in the nose and tell them to go back and sit. After that they would call and punch another person.

After hearing twenty minutes of his story, I realised that he had only described the warm-up phase of the more excruciating torture eventually inflicted on a smaller number of ninety-three prime suspects, of which my acquaintance was also one. He was the only person accused of belonging to the JVP, which I am told did have some Tamil and Muslim adherents at that time in the Eastern Province.

⁸ I am extremely grateful to D. P. Sivaram for translating this taped narrative.

So when I regained consciousness, one army fellow came near me. He asked me to remove the blood clots from around my nose. After a while he came and showed an ID card and asked whose it was. [It was mine.] He asked me to open my mouth and put the ID card in my mouth and then he punched me. The card was stiff plastic, so it lacerated the inside of my mouth. They asked us to get up. Our bodies were aching so much we couldn't do that. From out of the 1600 [detainees] they selected 93 people. I was the 93rd. They asked us again to get in a line and be seated in another hall, and there they separated us into different groups. There were also some [other] people there. I don't know exactly what community they belonged to, but we suspected they were Muslims. They are the ones who betray you. There were five of them fingering us. [You see,] there was this [Muslim man] and I was his good pal and he was a JVP member. So they connected me with him [as a JVP'er.]

Eventually, after daily and nightly beatings and the abrupt execution by gunshot of two more of his fellow detainees in the days that followed, my acquaintance recounted the arrival of a suave Tamil-speaking CID (Criminal Investigation Division) police official from Colombo who wore a tailored safari suit and who reassured the prisoners that they could go home after answering just a few more questions. They could choose to answer his inquiries by withholding no secrets, he said, 'just like a husband and wife', or they could choose the sort of dialogue that goes on between 'a policeman and robbers'. Needless to say, despite opting for a domestic-style conversation, my friend was treated by the CID officer to a thoroughgoing 'police and robber' torture.

We saw that people who went in [for questioning] were not coming back out walking, but were crawling like animals. And you could hear people screaming...As each person came crawling, they were pulled and laid out, and there were two CID persons doing that. These two persons were Sinhalese. ...For the next round they took me. I also got the same punishment: my feet were tied [upside down] and they put chilli fumes [in my face]. They will take a small tin and put a small amount of kerosene in it, light it, and add chilli powder, and then it will burn. Then they will quickly catch the chilli fumes in a bag and tie it around your neck while you are hanging upside-down. Once you breath that, you really suffer and you faint.

Then, just before he lost all hope, my Tamil informant was unexpectedly released from the Konduvattuvan army base and spared the dreaded trip to

Boosa Camp (near Galle) which many of the other Tamil detainees subsequently suffered. Although it was Muslim informers who had originally implicated him as a JVP member, my friend firmly believes that his eventual reprieve came because of strong personal intervention by influential Akkaraipattu Muslims on his behalf.

They beat and beat and beat us for five days like this. There was no room on our bodies to beat us more, but still they went on beating us until 10 pm. For five days it continued. I had some good friends among the Muslims, and I had worked for friendship between the communities. People like [my good Muslim chum], I knew some important Muslim people. In times of trouble I used to work for peace, so for that reason the Muslims liked me. Many of them had phoned on my behalf and had gone to the big MPs as well. So there were something like 67 phone calls about me, and they kept calling and calling my name. The army fellows were angry, so they came and kicked me and said 'Why are there so many calls about you?' I was kicked so hard I couldn't walk.

When my Tamil acquaintance was finally dumped from the doorway of a commandeered bus at the Akkaraipattu junction at around eight in the evening, he could barely stand on his feet. He nevertheless insisted on limping to his mother's house without assistance because of what he called a 'problem of honour' (*kaurava piraccinai*) in the eyes of some local Muslim youths who would publicly jeer at any Tamil boys who had got into trouble with the Army.

Tamils and Muslims in the east: schism or continuity?

Today the ethnic fault lines are plain enough to see, starting with the formal bifurcation of a once unified local government in Akkaraipattu into two separate Pradeshiya Sabhas, one Muslim and one Tamil. At the level of organised politics, there is now a Muslim party (SLMC) as well as a Tamil one (TULF). The apex of local Tamil-Muslim polarisation in Akkaraipattu seems to have come in 1990, at the outbreak of Eelam War II, when Muslims, enraged by the perfidious slaughter of hundreds of Muslim policemen, and by the summary execution of some local Muslims rowdies by the LTTE command in Akkaraipattu, turned against the Tamils. The army is said to have then hunted down and shot many Tamils at the whim of local Muslim collaborators who were apparently settling old scores of their own.

I certainly heard enough of these atrocity stories on my two brief visits to the east coast to make me wonder where all the zealots and xenophobes, the embittered betrayers and the hate-filled assassins, were to be found. I knew

that my old friends and acquaintances were not the sort to commit mass murder or to desecrate holy shrines, but I did meet a lot of ordinary people in both communities who were terrified of the unseen enemy, and who would not dream of walking alone into the Tamil or Muslim side of town after sunset. Yet, at the same time, I also heard surprisingly few accounts of inter-ethnic violence which did not acknowledge at some point the ultimate necessity of reestablishing peace and interdependency between the Tamils and the Muslims. The title of this paper asks 'schism or continuity?' and my answer has to be 'both'. In fact the secondary theme of a Tamil-Muslim rapprochement or *modus vivendi* eventually surfaced in each of the stories I recount in this paper.

In Kattankudy, after I had been led to the mosque where the LTTE massacre had taken place, I was also proudly told of a recent visit in January 1993 by a Pakistani holy man, a mystic Sufi healer named Maulana Abdul Cader, whose blessings and protective ink-writings⁹ were dispensed, along with a free lunch packet courtesy of the Kattankudy Muslim authorities, to thousands of Tamil Hindu inhabitants from nearby villages who had been invited to meet him on a special day set aside for non-Muslims. An independent UTHR account of this holy man's visits to Kattankudy and to Akkaraipattu suggests that Tamil-Muslim animosity was momentarily dissolved during these euphoric inter-ethnic encounters.¹⁰ At the same time, astute political observers will point out that in the aftermath of the Kattankudy mosque killings, local LTTE commanders and leading Muslim merchants were quick to work out the terms of a pragmatic deal which would keep both parties 'in business', so to speak.

In the case of the demolished Pattirakali Temple in Akkaraipattu, the loss to the smiths in religious terms and in terms of their caste honour is irreparable, but the ultimate outcome of the tragedy may be a profitable real estate transaction for the temple trustees and the relocation of the goddess's shrine to a more secure site. Despite the war, the Muslim economy in the east appears to be thriving under government protection and patronage. Although many Muslim farmers are still quite poor, the Muslims as a whole are now the visibly wealthier community. This markedly reverses the situation one would have found a century ago, when Tamil *pōḍiyārs* (big landlords and district chiefs) controlled most of the agricultural wealth of the Batticaloa region and were in a position to treat the Muslims as a subordinate caste. Selling land to the Muslims is one way the Tamils can now grudgingly share in the rising prosperity of their longtime neighbours. However, the future of the Pattirakali cult itself is in limbo. As Pat Lawrence's research has shown, powerful

⁹ Called *icim* in Tamil, these talismans which are frequently dispensed by itinerant Muslim Sufi *sheikhs* consist of a powerful Islamic phrase or charm written in ink on a piece of paper. The devotee later dissolves the writing in water and drinks the decoction to absorb its spiritual benefit.

¹⁰ UTHR Report 11, p. 32.

Amman goddesses have grown in popularity elsewhere in the Batticaloa region, and their *sakti* or divine power is relied upon even more strongly to protect local Tamil villages and territories.¹¹ The sacred power of their *place* has, if anything, intensified as a result of the war. But in Akkaraipattu, Goddess Pattirakali has at least temporarily lost her seat of power, and it remains to be seen whether, in this divine vacuum, another local deity will assume her fierce but protective role.

Finally, a few remarks on the torture narrative. I would not wish to present this as a unique or privileged text, since at least ninety-three other Tamil youths suffered exactly the same fate as my informant, or in the case of those who went to Boosa, something very much worse. In fact, it is sobering to imagine how many of the Tamil men one sees in a town like Akkaraipattu must also be carrying deep within them, inscribed on their minds and bodies, a similar hidden trauma. And of course this account only describes the first roundup of Eelam War I in Akkaraipattu. Three months later my acquaintance was arrested again, interrogated, and tortured once more, this time by the Special Task Force (Sri Lankan police commandos) for whom it was an entirely new project, quite independent of any Sri Lankan army interrogations. The detail and vividness of the account clearly draws upon a memory which is forever linked to the very body which endured the pain. Given the strong tendency for terror victims to protect themselves through silence and denial, it was perhaps unusual to hear such a detailed retelling of such a gruesome experience. The fact that I had shared a long friendship with this man, and that his torture had receded ten years into the past, seems to have made the retelling easier. However, it struck me as remarkable that his story never once displayed a blind, single-minded hatred directed toward a stereotypic ethnic enemy. His worst inquisitor, after all, was not a brutal Sinhalese soldier but a suave educated Tamil CID officer in a safari suit. Just as noticeable was the way he suffered betrayal by local Muslim informers and yet stated with considerable pride that his friendship and civic work with Akkaraipattu Muslim leaders had moved them to come to his rescue while in army custody. He is a more fair-minded person than most, but his story suggests to me there remains some hope for renewed Tamil-Muslim trust and cooperation if only this war can somehow be brought to an end.

11 Patricia Lawrence, 'Violence, Suffering, Amman: Questions of Agency in Sri Lanka's Eastern War Zone', in Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman *et al.* (eds), *Violence, Agency, and the Self* (Univ. of California Press, forthcoming).