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Author(s)	Nagarajan, S.
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The Second World War and South Asia

— Tamils in South India and Sri Lanka —

S. NAGARAJAN

1. Bomb Scare in South India and the Second World War

Since 1940 Japan was keen on crushing British imperialism in South and South East Asia. This East Asian Giant was also well equipped to launch bombing attacks on Calcutta, Madras and other towns and cantonments of the coastal strip. And the British too anticipated the actions of the Japanese and began to mount hectic war preparations in South Asia. This drained the exchequer and even created scarcity in the midst of impending war threat.

In the midst of this tense situation the efficient propaganda machine of the Japanese was at its peak. And the Japanese, after their total victory in Burma, began their daily sorties of Japanese air fighters over the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. Especially a Japanese woman pilot known as "Red Rose" was in the lime light and her announcements used to be the attractions of these months. Everyday she would announce on the radio as to which part of east coast she would fly over unchallenged.

The British war preparations did not impress the Indians. For the skilled soldiers had been evacuated to Europe and hence India had to depend on only aged soldiers and raw recruits. And this inefficient soldiers were not in a position to defend even a small coastal landing of the Japanese. And the air raid precautions added more anxiety to the people.

From the beginning of April 1942 air raid precautions touched the life of the Madras city at all points. From April 5th the Government decided to

have black out in the Madras city everynight. This was because there was a widely held fear that Japan would take advantage of Britain's overstretched resources by threatening shipping in the Bay of Bengal and the western Indian ocean prior to a general invasion. This was considered as the dream of Lieutenant-General Renya Mutaguchi, who saw the possibility of wresting India from the British and bringing down the last vestige of the British imperial power in the Far East. Several convoys were in fact attacked and sunk by Japanese warships and aircraft along the Coromandel coast, where the Madras city was situated, and the British were powerless to retaliate.

And on 5th April, 1942 when there was a Japanese air raid on Colombo, Madras city becme panicky. The elder statesman, C. Rajagopalachari on April 5 advised the people not to get into a fright and believed that the Colombo raids were mainly intended to create panic among non-combatants and to confuse civic life. He advised the people to remain calm. The Madras Government believed that the risk of attack on Madras by sea or air had increased.

On April 6th the Madras Fortress Area Commander issued the following statement: "Enemy (Japanese) aircraft were over the northern coast of the Madras Presidency today April 6th. There were two raids on Vizagapatnam, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Both were carried out by small numbers of enemy air craft. The attacks were directed at the dock area. Damage was slight and there were few casualties. The reaction of civil population to the bombing was good. Cocanada was also bombed by five enemy aircraft". Today Vizagapatnam and Cocanada are parts of Andhra Pradesh, which separated from the Madras Presidency soon after India's Independence. The first attack on the dock area of Vizagapatnam took place at about 1.30 p.m. and the second about 5 o'clock. No bomb fell on the town proper. At Cocanada the first

attack was made by a single aircraft at 7 a.m. when a launch belonging to the Coromandel company was escorting another vessel into the port roads. The aeroplane machinegunned both ships and one member of the crew of the launcher was killed and one was injured. The first raid on land was attempted about 1.45 p.m. when five Japanese aircraft attacked the oil installations causing slight damage but there were no casualties. Here, as in Vizagapatnam, no bombs were dropped on the main part of the town. Cocanada had a further alert about half past four in the afternoon but it lasted only for about a quarter of an hour and no attack materialised.

Madras city which is the capital of the present day Tamilnadu, had an air raid alert for the first time on April 7th morning. The alarm was sounded at 4.35 a.m. and all clear signal came at 5.5 a.m. No incident occurred. Suddenly the war had come to the Indian homeland and in Madras police officers like John Harrison were ordered to co-ordinate the local fire and ambulance brigades into a make shift air raid precaution service. Although their task would be to save lives during Japanese bombing raids, they also had to lay plans to withdraw should the invasion ever take place.

“I was also told that I should take with me as much cash as I needed, and visited the office of the Financial Secretary, and the Accountant General to obtain a draft for some colossal sum. However, on presenting it at the Treasury, some one seemed to have had second thoughts; I was relieved of the draft and never got my hands on the cash. Another duty imposed on me, should evacuation take place, was to visit the Madras Broadcasting Station next door to my office and hit with a sledge hammer some vital part of the equipment. I was again disappointed and never had this thrilling experience.”

Because the Japanese raids were so sudden and terrifying they caused

more panic and confusion than actual damage. To Indian nationalists they also provided further proof of Britain's inability to halt the Japanese advance and the impotence of British air and naval forces to prevent attacks on the mainland. In Vizagapatnam a population of 75,000 was whittled down temporarily by two thirds and the municipal power station would have been shut down but for the single handed efforts of its European Supervisor N. E. Lazurus.

On May 16, 1942 *The Hindu* reported, "People stood up to it better in Cocanada than in Vizagapatnam, although in Vizagapatnam there was actually no raid at all. What raid there was occurred in Waltair, two miles away towards the city and was incidental, the Japanese planes having come over in pursuit of a ship which was trying to take shelter in the port. Nevertheless out of a population of 75,000 barely 25,000 left in Vizagapatnam before anything had happened. Soon after the raids the population had thinned down to 2000. But there was no panic in either town. The exodus appears to have been a deliberate and ordered proceeding. In Vizagapatnam the essential labour and most of the directing staff of the Municipality and the power house left. After the raid no food was on sale in the city for 4 days and all the *banias* and eating house keepers had locked their doors and home. In Cocanada as in Vizagapatnam no bombs were dropped on the main part of the town. In Cocanada raids were made on vessels entering the port but with negligible damage. This, it is said, shows that in both the towns the Japanese confined their bombing to military objectives and the general experience is that this is what they do unless they see collections of people in the open. If, therefore, town dwellers take cover during an air raid they are not likely to be affected at all and have little to fear".

As a result of the panic created by the Japanese bombing of Vizagapatnam and Cocanada, even people from the city of Madras began

to evacuate. This reaction emerged because the people believed that the British had only enfeebled military presence. Panic maximised when even the Viceroy of India and the Governor of Madras advised the people to evacuate the city of Madras. The British Government surmised that the Japanese bomb target would be the Madras Fort, the harbour and the military cantonments. Thus encouraged by the British Government the people of Madras including those employed in Government offices began to evacuate in right earnest. In order to help the scared people special trains were run to Bangalore, Vellore, Ottacamund, Coimbatore, Bellary, Anantapur, Cuddapah and other towns. People were allowed to travel in these trains freely without payment of fare and were also given food free of cost at the railway station camps.

The essential section of the Madras Secretariat offices were moved to Madanapalle in the Chittoor district. High Court with all its Staff shifted to Coimbatore. The non-essential services were transferred to Ottacamund. All the public offices, commercial firms and banks in the harbour area were shifted to the interior parts of the Madras city. Schools were permitted to be closed in the city. Only a few firms and some brave people continued to remain in Madras unaffected by the panic. Most hotels remained closed, especially because of the exodus of domestic servants, namely cooks, hotel servants and milkmen. The number of inpatients of the city Government hospitals had considerably fallen. For example the Government General Hospital had 750 beds, only there were 250 occupants.

On April 15, *The Hindu* reported that for the past six days more than three lakhs of people had left the Madras city. The net effect of this exodus was the loss of peace. The price of essential commodities in the rural areas shot upto city levels. Even the spare houses and portions of the rural locals began to fetch additional rent, hence additional income.

An eyewitness Mr. Ramabadran reports that the Madras city took on a new appearance. The already inadequately lit streets were darkened except for areas such as the famous Mount Road (now called Anna Salai) and the Marina (the location of a world famous beach). For averting danger an A.R.P. ordinance was imposed. A large number of locals were recruited as air raid wardens. And these were given a Khaki uniform and a whistle and were authorised to knock at any door and command the inmates to put out all lights, even if it was just an oil wick. All street lights had a hood over the bulb area which prevented rays of light from spreading. Similarly all houselights had to have a shade, all windows pasted with brown paper and flaps to prevent glass panes from breaking in case of bombhits. Air raid shelters were constructed in all street corners. Tunnels were dug of five feet height, which were surrounded by sandbags. These precautionary measures were only taken to help the people to run into the shelter if the warder whistled long and continuously or if the siren sang. In each locality electric siren was erected.

On April 15, *The Hindu* in its editorial stated that "It is possible that the enemy might attempt to occupy strips of our coast so as to use them as air bases against Ceylon and also perhaps with a view to preventing reinforcements being rushed from here to the island. A landing at some points along our long coastline is a contingency for which we should be prepared. The people are behaving in a disciplined and exemplary manner. There is little panic nor anti-social activities. Above all our people are demonstrating their traditional qualities of patience, fortitude and an even temper at a most critical time in our nation's history. Most of them are leaving for their native places or to stay with friends and relatives in the interior. It is all to the good that the superfluous population should leave the danger spot, but when they choose their places of refuge, they should remember that the coastal belt in the Southern Peninsula is not to be

recommended”.

Again on April 18 in its editorial *The Hindu* stated that “to a superficial observer Madras city might appear to be dead. But the fact is that practically all the essential services are functioning and the personnels have by all accounts stuck to their posts in a commendable manner. Though the exodus of the last few days has reduced the population of the city to a small proportion of its reduced strength it cannot be said that the problem of food supply to those who had to remain behind after sending away their families to safer places has been tackled satisfactorily. Practically all of the large number of eating houses which cater to the city dwellers had to close down their business owing, among other reasons, to the large scale evacuation of their employees along with the rest of the crowd. Added to this is the scarcity of the food provisions caused by the closing down of shops on following evacuation. But all these are incidental to a whole sale exodus. Unfortunately the absence of a well thought out plan to come into effect in an emergency has made the solution of the problem at this stage all the more difficult”.

V. Chakkrapani Chetti, Mayor of Madras said, “We are now in a stupendous crisis. Nearly five lakhs of the city population had left. Food stuffs were running short and hotels closed and even medicine shops and pharmacies had closed”.

The Hindu on April 22 carried the following news item: “owing to the migration of milkmen and milk cows the problem of milk supply for the remaining population is acute. Used as almost the entire population is to coffee and tea the absence of restaurants and the dearth of milk supply is a source of great inconvenience and hardship to the city dweller. The picture presented in residential area of the city is one of sombre silence. Houses remain locked up, most part of the day, the inmates having left. Whole streets virtually remain closed as owners had wound up and moved

to their native places. A few who remained behind have managed to carry on under difficulties with restricted establishments. One or two of these appear to be making arrangements to move to the interior areas of the city in the wake of customers whose offices have moved to those localities". A part of Madras University Library had shifted to Tambaram. The remainder were transferred to Coimbatore. Rare Manuscripts were transferred to Coonoor. Oriental manuscripts were sent to Tirupati.

An eye witness Mr. Ramabadran sums up the reactions of the common man of the Madras city as follows: "Perhaps it would be of some interest to learn that how lonely stay behinds felt when they lived in such a ghost city. The sun rose and set, the breeze wafted over the sea and the waves rolled on majestically along the Marina beach. The unsullied beach sands shone ever so brightly in the sunlight without any sign of a foot mark. But where were the people? They lived in small groups of 20 or 30 attending to their duties like robots. The shops which did exist opened late and closed early. As a result of the war India had a day time saving device. Indian Standard Time (IST) was advanced by an hour, the sun rose at 5 A.M. and we were at work at 9 A.M. (War time). The offices closed at 4 P.M. and we all must go to bed at real IST 7 P.M."

"How did we spend our time? Thanks to paucity of news we began to listen to rumours such as the Japanese troops had landed at Cape Comorin (southern most part of Tamil Nadu surrounded by the sea) or Talaimannar or Calcutta or that the German submarines were off the Bombay coast or at Kochi (located in Kerala State today) ready to bomb. Such talks were circulated with fear. There was no entertainments. People went for their walks across their locality after 6 or 6.30 P.M. Further one felt lost in the silent desolate streets. The temples, the solace of the pious were no longer open. Once in the morning and again in the evening the

priest made an appearance in the main shrine, lit an oil lamp, rang the bell, placed a few flowers and then closed the doors. If you were lucky he allowed you a peep and then the main doors were closed without any concession. The value of land, buildings, furniture and other assets in the city particularly in the George Town Area tumbled down. For a mere Rs.25 one could get a rosewood office table or for Rs.15 a good rosewood chair. Many rich people left the city after keeping their valuables in locker or carried with them their movable assets. Their friends and relatives who remained in the city became caretakers of their abandoned houses. Tram and bus services broke down and electric trains did not run and taxis were non-existent. Only some hand pulled rickshaws were seen. There were a few enterprising people who provided food for say 50 paise a meal, but their supply did not last long. For a cup of coffee one had to wander from one locality to the other”.

We don't find reports of the actual bombing of the Madras city by the Japanese in *The Hindu* of April 1942. This probably because the Government censored and doctored the news about the war before supplying them. Rarely the Government admitted to any air strike or land skirmish. At most it reported that two pigs, a donkey and a couple hens were killed or one or two cottages.

But in 1992 eyewitness Mr. Ramabadran reported in *The Hindu* stating that “We had many an air raid warning in 1940 and 1941. The one most remembered was on a night when the rushing wings of the Japanese bomber soared over Kapali temple in Mylapore and passed over the Fort and the Harbour on its swing. Of course no bomb was dropped. Next day people who heard the Japanese Radio were told of the progress of the love bomber with Red Rose as a pilot. It was announced that the Japanese had no intention of destroying any temple or residential locality.”

“But one moonlit night in 1942 we heard the sirens at full blast. We had

to be in our shelters. A few minutes later dull thuds were heard all along the sea front. There was a commotion. Red Rose had struck. This lone woman fighter flew low down and selected three spots to hurl her harmless bombs. One fell in the precincts of the High Court Building. The other in the ramparts of Fort St. George and the third near the Harbour. There were no casualties. All that we saw were huge craters to remind us of the bombing."

Mr. Louis Divien too informed me stating that the Japanese did not inflict much damage to the city except a bomb which fell near the Fort Station and somewhere else. Fort Station is near the High Court in the Madras city.

In spite of such Japanese bombings, *The Hindu* reveals that the Madras city life continued to flow on steadily unaffected by such bomb threats. In fact from May 1942 the city began to get back gradually its lively appearance. For example, on April 22, *The Hindu* stated that "though no one can say when the threatening danger would materialise there seems to be a growing belief that it has receded at any rate for the time being. The flow of evacuees from Madras has slowly thinned down, possibly because it reached a point of exhaustion. A section of the shop keepers and smaller dealers have shown a tendency to resume business on a skeleton scale judging from a number of shops which were open today (April 21) in China Bazar and in Pachaiyappa's area. Here and there hawkers, petty shopkeepers and *pawnwalas* who had closed down along with others resumed their activities today (April 21).

On April 23 the Government announced that immediate threat as pointed out in the Government communique of April 11, had now disappeared. Hence the Government of Madras had decided to bring back important portions of the Secretariat and most of the other offices of the city of Madras from Madanpalle, Vellore, Coimbatore and other districts,

to be completed within a month. However the black out of Madras had to continue. By April 24 the city market was slowly returning to normal. Vegetables and other commodities were now substituted by brown out. which permitted street lights and lights inside the building upto 10 p. m. This was extended to other parts of the Madras Presidency.

On May 8, 1942, *The Hindu* carried the following news item: "Conditions in the Madras city showed improvement, especially during the last few weeks after the panic. But it cannot be said that the city has returned to normal, it seems well set on its way to it. There is now no difficulty at any rate not of the magnitude that was the case four weeks back, in regard to getting supplies of household provisions, milk or firewood. More shops are open in Kotwal Bazar and other market centres and the China Bazar has regained some of its lively appearance. Hotels are plying in the suburbs as before, but in the George town area most of the larger hotels remain closed. The harbour area however continues to present a deserted appearance on account of the removal of the bigger firms from the area and comparative inactivity in the port". Infact according to Mr. R. V. Varma the bomb scare lasted for about three to four months and old normal life restarted in the city within six months, whereas according to Mr. Louis Divien and Dr. Emmanuel Divien the bomb scare lasted for about 6 to 10 months and after about a year the majority returned to Madras city. Mr. R. Ramabadran says that with the Japanese threat slowly dwindling people returned to the city from early 1943 and normality returned. In 1943 almost all the Government offices were reestablished in the city and Madras began to breathe afresh. It began to hum and roar as usual. Supplies were still scarce and rationing of rice, kerosene and cloth was enforced. Firewood was scarce and rationed. All had to possess ration cards, petrol was also rationed for a long time.

The motive of Japan, it appears, was to liberate India from the yoke of

the British imperialists. *Tokyo Mainichi* on April 4 said that "whatever the outcome of Cripps Mission one thing is certain-in order to crush the British Government's interior designs and lay bare the true nature of Sir Stafford Cripps' mission to India there is no alternative left for Japan but to display the full force of its total strength with its matchless army and navy as the vanguard and simultaneously to translate the holy spirit of universal brotherhood into practice all over Greater East Asia". During Japanese attack on India almost at the same hour Japanese Prime Minister Tojo said in a Tokyo broadcast of the golden opportunity presented to the Indian people to exert their utmost efforts for the establishment of an India for the Indians. On April 6, Prime Minister Tojo said, Japan deeply sympathises with the Indian people on their being made to suffer the ravages of war. His remarks closely followed the line taken by the Japanese newspaper *Asahi*, which around this time declared: "Japan harbours no ambition towards India. On the contrary Japanese are most ardent in looking forward to an independent India. Japan is strong enough to give Indians freedom". Japanese advised the Indian people to take advantage of this turning point and to tread the path shown by and cut out by Japan.

However the Justice Party, which later on became Dravida Kazhagam under E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, a section of the Madras Congress Party led by C. Rajagopalachari and the Communist Party in the Madras Presidency supported the Allied Forces against the Japanese and Axis powers. Infact when panic appeared the Madras Congress leaders formed a volunteer corps to organise civil defense measures. But some of the Congress leaders like Satyamurthi in Madras felt at this time that the Congress must enter the legislature and make arrangements for the defense of the area. But Rajagopalachari did not agree with this view and said that nothing could be gained by the Congressmen entering the legislature

at this juncture. "Our immediate objective", he said "is to secure a declaration from the British that they would recognise India's right for self-determination". He also said: "The Congress wished to make it perfectly clear that it would extend full support to Britain (in the war) notwithstanding its adherence to non-violence, if Britain only do the right thing". On April 23, 1942 he also passed two resolutions in the Madras Congress Legislature Party and wanted the All India Congress Committee to allow the Congress Party in Madras to take steps in its own way to form a popular government for the Presidency in order to save Madras from the Japanese invasion and to allow the Muslim League also to participate in such a popular Government notwithstanding the general policy of the All India Congress".

The Dravida Kazhagam leader E. V. Ramaswami Naicker came out with a strong approval of Rajagopalachari's proposal. Giving his own interpretation of the implications of the proposal, E. V. R. said that the proposal "recognises that it is impossible for the people to think in terms of neutrality or passivity during the invasion by an enemy power and it gives up the claim that the Congress is the sole organisation entitled to speak and act on behalf of the whole of India." Fearing further Brahmin domination he said that the new government that the Madras Congress proposed for the Presidency should consist of the representative of all the parties. Not content with this he also demanded that he called a Dravidasthan to safeguard the interests of the Dravidian people against the north Indians". "I do not understand", he said, "how the Congress can form national Government without acknowledging Justice Party's Demand for Dravidasthan". On 17.1.1943 in the Fourth Self-respect Movements' Conference he reiterated his support for the Allied Forces and criticized the Congress for not supporting and advised the people to support the Allied forces.

Rajagopalachari's proposals were finally and officially negated by the All India Congress Committee at its meeting on May 2, 1942. Only 15 members supported the proposals, while 120 members voted against them. Support to Rajagopalachari's moves came also from some worker's unions which were led by the Communists. Even though Rajagopalachari had always been an uncompromising opponent of Communism and the Communists, a curious situation arose at this time when he and the Communists found themselves on the same side on the question of war. The Communists viewing the world situation in terms of Fascists' threat to world communism which was evidenced by Hitler's attacks on the Soviet Union, decided to support the Allied powers without at the same time giving up their anti-imperialist struggle, while Rajagopalachari viewing the Indian crisis in terms of the Muslim League's intransigent attitude and of the imminent threat of Japanese invasion wished to see an immediate solution, even if it meant partitioning the country. The Communists in the Madras Presidency even began to give training to some cadres in guerrilla warfare to fight the Japanese.

Not only the Congress Party opposed Rajagopalachari's proposals, but even decided on August 8, 1942 to launch a civil disobedience movement, popularly known as the Quit India movement against the British. Rajagopalachari's raging and tearing campaign at this time of war for Pakistan and immediate office acceptance and against the Quit India movement culminated finally in his resignation from the Congress organisation itself.

The entry of Japan into the war and the consequent disruption of the Southeast Asian transport system caused a total suspension of food imports into India from Southeast Asia. Statutory rationing of rice was introduced in Madras city in November 1942 and it was extended to all other urban areas in June 1944. "Grow more food campaign" was launched

in the Presidency but without much success. Though the cloth crisis was not so severe as the food crisis was, the suspension of textile imports on account of the war, both in the Eastern and Western Fronts and the frequent strikes in the local textile mills resulted in a shortage, particularly of the mill cloth in the Madras Presidency.

Inspite of such a political climate there were Tamilians who supported the Indian National Army under Subash Chandra Bose, which blessed by the Japanese, was waging war in the Southeast Asian countries. They were led by Pasumpon Mutturamalinga Thevar in Tamilnadu.

They supported INA, joined its army and opposed the propaganda that Subash Chandra Bose was a fifth column in India. They considered the British as their enemy and accepted Japanese and Axis powers alliance to achieve India's independence. Infact their only goal was India's independence. Even many Tamil Congressmen, according to Mr. Sundarayya, the Communist leader, had sympathy for their political views and preferred alliance with Japan for defeating the British and achieving the liberation of India. Mutturamalinga Thevar said through active participation in the War Front the Tamils proved to the world that they were capable of waging war with courage and fortitude. Hence even Subash Chandra Bose appreciated their role and sacrifice and said that he would like to be born as a Tamil in his rebirth.

Not only the Forward Block led by Tamilians like Mutturamalinga Thevar but even other Tamils had similar opinions. To my questionnaire for example, the respondents, Mr. Varma, Mr. Louis Divien and Dr. Emmanuel Divien, who were young men during the Second World War, informed me that since the Japanese did not inflict much damage to the Madras city, a majority of the Tamils did not hate the Japanese. Dr. Emmanuel Divien is of the view that eventhough the Tamils feared Japaneses bombing threats, they at the same time admired the Japanese in

putting up a strong fight against the Allied Forces. Infact a majority of the respondents believe that the general image of Japan in Tamil's mind during the war period was that of an Asian power which had humbled the pride of the British Empire. Further the popular faith in the stability of British rule had reached such a low that there was a run on the banks and people withdrew deposits from post office saving accounts and started hoarding gold, silver and coins. This was particularly marked in East U.P., Bihar but it also took place in the Madras Presidency.

Conclusion

The motive of Japan in bombing South India was to make military efforts to eliminate British imperialism as well as to inspire the liberated India to embrace the holy spirit of universal brotherhood within the Japanese coprosperity sphere. Japan wanted to show and prove to the Indians that it was strong enough to give Indians freedom. But Japan had only limited Indian bombing objectives. It had only limited military target goal. It did not want to destroy temples or residential localities. It did not want to harm the people of India. Hence even during few bombings it was humane and hurled only harmless bombs without causing actual damage. Even these limited geopolitical goals of Japan changed when it did not receive support for its war aims from most of the Indians, especially from Gandhiji who was wedded to non-violence. Further American declaration of war on Japan too strengthened this changed outlook of Japan, which moved away from India.

Eventhough there was no noticeable bomb damage in the Madras Presidency the few bombings of Japan created extraordinary panic and confusion. For many months the city life of Madras, the capital of the Madras Presidency, was paralysed. Hence the mass psychology was to fear the impending Japanese air raid.

A majority were apathetic to collaborate with the Japanese.

A majority did not hate the Japanese because they did not inflict much damage to the Madras Presidency. None of the newspapers or Tamil journals gave significant coverage to Japanese bombing especially of the Madras city. Most of them, as the knowledge of this writer informs, ignored the bomb scare. This indicates that the Japanese threat to the Madras Presidency did not create revolutionary psychological change in the minds of the Madras Presidency mass-media. There was sombre silence. Generally the people of the Madras Presidency behaved in a disciplined and exemplary manner and showed even temper not only during Japanese bomb scare period but throughout the war.

In spite of tense situation and anxiety, as war progressed, especially since 1943 a majority began to believe that there was no chance of the Japanese occupying India.

In the midst of this mixed feeling many admired the courage of the Japanese in putting up a strong fight against the Allied Forces, especially against British imperialism.

As a result of the war there was precarious economic plight. Especially people suffered from the scarcity of essential commodities and such a situation prevailed even in 1945.

2. Tamils of Sri Lanka and the Second World War

The most ancient Tamils living in Sri Lanka are the Sri Lankan Tamils, who have been living there since the ancient period. Most of them live in the North and East of Sri Lanka which has a total area of 7068 sq.miles and which constitutes 28.3 percent of the total territory of Sri Lanka.

In addition we have Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka who went as plantation labourers and settled in Sri Lanka in the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1911 the total number of Indian plantation Tamils were 9,50,000. In 1963 they constituted 11.6 percent of Sri Lanka's total population.

Of the total population of Sri Lanka Sinhalese constitute 74 percent and the Tamils 25.3 percent. Among the Tamils 55.6 percent live in the North and East of Sri Lanka, 23.83 percent live in the central Uva plantation provinces, 11.5 percent live in and around Colombo and the rest 9.1 percent in the rest four provinces. More than a majority of the Tamils living in Southern Lanka live in and around the cities. Among the Indian Tamils 63.1 percent live in central and Uva plantation provinces and among Sri Lankan Tamils 72.6 percent live in North and East provinces of Sri Lanka.

During the Second World War Singapore fell on 15th February 1942, within the next month Rangoon was gone and soon the Dutch East Indies and the Dutch Fleet in Eastern waters went too. The Japanese thrust had brought Ceylon within the front line of war. As the war moved closer to Ceylon there was growing uneasiness.

From the middle of March the number of residents leaving Colombo for the hills increased. In the newspapers the rents of houses in provincial towns in land rocketed. But there was as yet no general exodus from the capital. It was noticeable, however, that at this time of the year when the heat of the coastal plain generally sets in motion the trek of the well-to-do to the hills more people of all classes were on the move than before.

Colombo's first air raid alert warning was on March 30, 1942. On Monday March 30, afternoon at a busy hour when offices were thronged and shops were busy before closing for the Holy week. Sirens wailed and the public went quietly to the shelters. This was only for a short duration and all clear sound was sounded soon afterwards. On 31 March editorially *The Time of Ceylon* stated that "India will emerge from the war a powerful nation, a mighty leader of Asiatic peoples. We are inclined to the view that the best solution for Ceylon's future is to become a part of the Indian union of Federation".

On April 2, 1942 there was second alert in Colombo, but all clear soon was given and there were no incidents. There was an raid alert again on April 4, Saturday afternoon somewhat longer than the previous ones. British planes were aloft. The attacks, however, began on the morning of Sunday April 5th when a force of carrier based bombers of Vice-Admiral Nagumo's Task Force raided Colombo from a position about 150 miles South of Dondra. It was this First Air Fleet which had crippled American shipping at Pearl Harbour. The air raid sirens had been wailing for a few minutes only when the first bombs fell. It was not a heavy raid, but it struck two merchant ships in the harbour, destroyed some part of the fish market in St. John's Road and a few buildings in Ratnamala. A block in the Lunatic Asylum a few miles away from the town was hit too.

The defences had not done badly and the fighters had brought a few raiders down. But ignorant of either the extent of damage inflicted on the town and harbour or the intentions of the Japanese, the majority of people in Colombo panicked and streamed out of the city, using any method of transport available. It was a dismal, wet, April day; the monsoon had not yet broken but there was thunder in the air and the atmosphere was full of steamy heat. By evening Colombo was silent and dead.

Four days later Trincomalie, where large number of Tamils live, was raided and oil installation in China Bay set on fire. The civilian population had run away, but the administration, inspite of numerous absentees contrived to function and the forces were temporarily in command of the situation. By contrast with the Madras Government which panicked after the raids on Vizagapatnam and Cocanada, Colombo and Ceylon were normal. Fortunately nothing happened after the raid on Trincomalie on the 9th of April. One part of the Japanese plan had been fulfilled - the demonstration of their strength to the civilian population.

However the invasion which the bulk of the population expected never took place and by the end of May those who had fled from Colombo streamed back.

The outbreak of the Second World War gave a fillip to the plantation industries of Ceylon, where the Indian Tamils in large numbers were employed, with Malaya and Dutch East Indies in Japanese hands, Ceylon was the largest supplier of rubber for Allied war demands and plantations were being "Slaughter tapped". There was also substantial increase in tea prices. Thus the plantation industries were in a far healthier condition than they had been since the 1920s.

Further the unemployment problem including for the Tamils eased considerably in the early 1940s and disappeared altogether in the period 1942-45, when the military bases established in the island under the South East Asia Command provided employment opportunities for the local population as civilian workers and in ancillary services. By 1945 as many as 83,500 civilians were employed on these bases. The demand for labour was not confined to the defense services: all sectors of the economy were affected. In 1939 the Colombo Employment Exchange had 25,000 registered as unemployed; in 1941 the number had dropped to 2000 and this had fallen to mere 1000 in 1944. By 1945 with the ending of hostilities this figure had increased again to 10,000. Thus unskilled labour all over the island found unexpected sources of money in the work provided by forces installations. Only those with fixed incomes - the urban clerk and the public servant found the war ruinous. Inflation and war time shortages increased the cost of living intolerably. Official statistics showed a 35 percent increase in the working class cost of living index between 1942 and 1945; but the actual increase in the domestic price level had been estimated at 69 percent.

Another short term effect of the war was the migration of Tamils from

Ceylon to Tamilnadu especially during the first half of 1942 after the bombing of Colombo and Trincomalie. For example *The Hindu* reported arrival of 600 evacuees from Ceylon on April 8th and 300 more on April 9, 1942. The Agent of the Government of India was authorised by the Government of India to render financial assistance to Indian evacuees for their journey from Colombo to their destinations in India. There was however a complaint that when an evacuee ship touched Colombo only 56 Indians out of a total of 851 on the boat were allowed to land and come to India and provisions of food etc. of which the evacuees were in need were not sent on board. Thus it appears the Ceylon Government was controlling the emigration of Tamils from Ceylon to India. Employment offices were established at Madras city, East Godavari, Coochabed, West Godavari, Ellore, Chilakalapudi, Guntur, Nellore, South Arcot, Cuddalore, Anantapur, Cuddappah, Bellary, Kurnool, Chingleput, Chittoor, Saidapet, North Arcot, Salem, Vellore, Tanjore, Tiruchy, Madurai, Coimbatore, Nilgiris, Ramnad, Mandapam, Tuticorin, Malabar, Calicut, South Kanara, Mangalore and Vizagapatnam for the refugees coming from Ceylon and South East Asia.

The Tamil refugees from Ceylon complained of lack of facilities for exchanging Ceylon currency and soon such facilities were extended. And due to lack of accomodation in the villages these refugees flocked to the towns in the interior. This led to a heavy strain in the resources of municipalities in respect of water supply, public health and sanitation. House rents soared up and prices increased manifold. There was a definite scarcity of many essential commodities in 1942.

A. Dharmaraj, a member of the Ceylon Indian National Congress spoke on May 13, 1942, about the disabilities of Indians in Ceylon. He appealed to the Indians in Ceylon to agitate and wanted Indians in Ceylon to be given every facility. He said Indians in Ceylon were not afraid of Japanese

bombing but were terribly afraid of local people.

Tamils of Ceylon were not considered as a part of Ceylon by many Ceylonese politicians. Debate was going on regarding this during the Second World War. D. S. Senanayake, who dominated the final phase in the transfer of power during 1942-47 was willing to view Sri Lanka as a plural society and his policies for the transfer of power were framed on that realistic basis. His guiding principles were: (1) Sri Lanka is a multiracial democracy and multiracial state without any special or exclusive association with any ethnic group or any section of an ethnic group. (2) Sri Lanka should be a secular state in which the lines between religion and State are to be scrupulously demarcated. But his views were opposed by Bandaranaike and his Sinhala Maha Sabha which viewed the Sri Lanka polity as being essentially Sinhalese and Buddhist in character and which rejected the concepts of a secular state and a multi-racial polity.

In November 1940 D. S. Senanayake led an official Sri Lankan Government delegation to discuss the question-especially that of the franchise of the Indian plantation workers with the Indian Government. But little headway towards a settlement on this occasion or in 1941 when a senior Indian official Sir Girija Bajpai led an Indian delegation to Colombo on the same issue.

Later towards the end of the war and afterwards there was a much heated discussion on Soulbury report, even though the British Labour Government informed Senanayake that the Labour Government was not committed to the conclusions in the Soulbury report and that these were to be regarded as merely the basis for discussion. Regarding the Indian population of Ceylon the conclusion of the Soulbury report was somewhat facile. It said that it would be for the leaders of Ceylon to determine how they defined their citizenship but the new constitution ought to recognise

the right of Indians who by birth or by long association have so identified themselves with the affairs of this country that their interests are not different from the rest of the population". Under the new constitution, "The Government of Ceylon (that is the Senanayake Government) will have the ability, as we already has the desire, to assimilate the Indian community and to make it part and parcel of a single nation". In its proposals the commission recommended that "Universal suffrage on the present basis shall be retained. The only safeguard for the Indians was recommendation that the Governor General, as he would be under the new arrangement, should have the power to reserve (refuse assent to) an immigration bill if it prohibited the reentry of Ceylon residents". It was little enough in the way of protection as events had already shown. In additions the commission proposed that Ceylon should adopt a bicameral Parliamentary system and this also, they hoped, would give protection to the minority by somehow sharing out the prize of power. On November 8, 1945 Senanayake stated that voting rights would be given only to registered Ceylonese citizens and would not be given to plantation labourers. In fact the Soulbury report did not solve Tamil citizenship problem, nor it clearly defined language and religious rights of the minorities.

Thus at the end of the Second World War the India-Ceylon problem remained unsolved. Around this time the Indians in India felt that to all those Indians working already in Sri Lanka full Ceylon citizenship rights should be given, even though Ceylon Government had the right to limit its immigrants as well as to put certain conditions. The Indians had contributed to the economic well being of Ceylon by their hard work and hence must be given Ceylon citizenship. Further on humanitarian basis too they should be given Ceylon citizenship. For example this was the view of E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker Periyar, the founder of Dravida Kazhagam

(*Viduthalai*, Feb. 25, 1943, P 2).

In Ceylon population growth reached the quite unprecedented rate of 25.4 percent in the years between 1931 and 1946, reflecting a continued decline in the crude death rate and a fall in fertility as well. Immigration increase was a mere 69,552 as against a natural increase of 1,28,000. There was accelerated emigration of Indian workers to India in the wake of Depression. The Tamil Jaffna region which comprised the Peninsula and groups of islands was characterised by dense settlement throughout. The relative population of this region declined from 8.5 percent in 1901 to 6.4 percent in 1946. One new demographic pattern emerged in this period. The rapid population growth in the main dry zone provinces. The North-Central Province (where Tamils live in large numbers) recorded the highest growth rate of all-43.4 percent with the development of peasant colonisation schemes, the restoration of irrigation works and the conquest of Malaria. The Northern and Eastern provinces (where nearly 56 percent of the Tamils live) recorded growth rates of 20.2 and 31.4 percent respectively for 1931-1946.

It must be also stated that the Tamils of Ceylon like the Tamils of Tamilnadu, were no longer ready to accept the overlordship of the British and other Western nations when twice in the precious half century an oriental people had worsted a European power. The example of Japan-not as the conqueror of Russia, but as an Oriental country which had done as well as any European power was often quoted by many Tamil politicians of Ceylon during the Second World War. For example Ceylon Tamil leader Sri Ponnambalam Arunachalam made a stock point of it in his speeches.

Conclusion

Both in Sri Lanka and in South India the goal of the Japanese was to eliminate British imperialism and to consolidate the co-prosperity sphere.

Hence the aim of Japan was to win over the people of Sri Lanka by demonstrating their military capability.

But in Sri Lanka too Japan had limited bombing goals. It aimed only at the damage of a few strategically important places. It did not want to cause harm to the people of Sri Lanka. Hence its bombing attempts were few and the damage caused was insignificant. This was because Japan avoided heavy raid.

However the bombing of Japan caused panic and exodus but compared to a similar situation in the Madras city, the panic caused was comparatively milder. The migration of the Tamils from Sri Lanka had their repercussions on Tamil Nadu. But compared to a similar exodus of the Tamils of Burma, the migration effect of Tamils from Sri Lanka to Tamil Nadu was comparatively negligible. But still such an exodus of the Tamils from Burma and Sri Lanka coupled with the Japanese bombing of the Madras Presidency created sensations and above all panic and confusion among the Tamils of South and Southeast Asia for many months, especially in 1942.

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Notes

Sho Kuwajima

In May 1964 I made my first visit to Madras. On 13 May my Tamil friend took me to sight-seeing and in the Fort Museum I saw a splinter of the Japanese bomb which fell on the city during the Second World War. My diary records 12 October 1943 as the date of bombing. This first knowledge of Madras bombing had been in my mind for nearly thirty years.

On 16 August 1992 two articles of the *Hindu* had again strong impact on my idea of the Second World War. One is "A Night to Remember" by Manoj Das which depicted the Japanese atrocities in the Andamans after they invaded Port Blair on 23 March 1942. This paper explained that, while commemorating the golden jubilee of the Quit India movement, we should remember that 1942 was also the year when an Indian territory came under the occupation of yet another foreign power, causing untold, if little-known, suffering to the people.

Another article titled "In the shadow of World War" by Ramabhadran recalled that Madras was a ghost city in 1942. He was an eye-witness of the breakdown of the civic life. Recently, K. Lakshmi Raghuramaiah, Patron and Permanent Trustee, All India Women's Conference, writes also in her memoir that "The Hiroshima Bomb by Enola Bay^(sic) - B-29 on 6 th August 1945 and the bombing of Madras Port which missed and fell at the back of the Medical College had decided our future programme "*(Hurricane - Autobiography of a Woman, Delhi, 1994, p. 118)*.

To the people in South Asia, it was not the matter whether the Japanese military leaders made 'sympathetic' pronouncements on the independence of India or not. What mattered was the fact that they suffered or lost their lives under the threat of the Japanese bombing or under the Japanese occupation. The discussion on the character of the Second World War and Japan's role in South Asia should start from this basic theme, how the common people saw and experienced the War in this area.

In response to our request Prof. S. Nagarajan wrote a series of articles on the problems that Tamils faced in South and Southeast Asia during the Second World War. First parts of the articles appeared already in the earlier issue of this Journal. This is a revised version of the paper read at the Association of South Asian Studies (Kansai) on 6 November 1993. Using official documents, newspaper sources and Tamil literature, he traces how the threat of the Japanese bombing in 1942 caused utmost strains to the common people in the eastern coastal area of South Asia. Prof. Nagarajan's presentation would have been more persuasive if he had used Tojo's statement and the views of the *Mainichi* and the *Asahi* critically and connected the suffering of the people with "the admiration for the courage of the Japanese in putting up a strong fight against the Allied Forces, especially against British imperialism". Now the *Mainichi* and the *Asahi* do not share the semi-official view of those days and the meaning of Tojo's statement must be

discussed in the context of Japan's whole military policy towards Asia during the War. However, it is very suggestive that Prof. Nagarajan wrote that "A majority were apathetic to collaborate with the Japanese".

A series of articles which Prof. Nagarajan prepared showed us a clear picture of 'Tamils and the Second World War in South and Southeast Asia', and particularly his writing on the destiny of Tamils in Burma with the use of Tamil sources threw new light on the theme which so far had been described in Burmese literature (Prof. Minamida Midori kindly pointed out this aspect).

Dr. Nagarajan is Professor of Southeast Asian History, and is now Head of the Department of Tamil Studies in Foreign Countries and also Dean of the Faculty of Developing Tamil, Tamil University, Thanjavur, India.