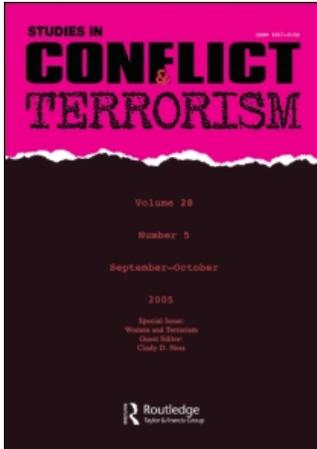


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Studies in Conflict & Terrorism

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713742821>

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Online Publication Date: 01 October 2007

To cite this Article: Roberts, Michael (2007) 'Suicide Missions as Witnessing:

Expansions, Contrasts', Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 30:10, 857 - 887

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/10576100701558638

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10576100701558638>

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Suicide Missions as Witnessing: Expansions, Contrasts

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Studies of suicide missions usually focus solely on attacks. They also have highlighted the performative character of suicide missions as acts of witness. By extending surveys to suicidal acts that embrace no-escape attacks, theatrical assassination, defensive suicide, and suicidal protest, one gains further insight into the motivations of individuals and organizations. Illustrative studies, notably the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and Sadat as well as Tamil Tiger operations, generate a typology that underlines the benefits of such extensions. The Japanese and Tamil contexts reveal the profound differences in readings of sacrificial acts of atonement or punishment by local constituencies. Norman Morrison in Washington in 1965 and Jan Palach in Prague in 1969 did not have such beneficial settings and the immediate ramifications of their protest action were limited. Morrison's story highlights the significance of a societal context of individuated rationalism as opposed, say, to the "pyramidal corporatism" encouraging martyrdom operations in the Islamic world.

Introduction

Since 9/11 in the year 2001 there has been a continuous barrage of scholarly publications on what are variously called "suicide missions," "suicide terrorism," and "suicide attacks." Some of these studies work within a highly rationalist framework and are mired in specific Western cultural assumptions that are blithely assumed to be universals. A few scholars also display a Cartesian logic and become enmeshed in an either/or approach that underestimates or excludes religious inspirations for the attacking operations by applying definitional casuistry or secularist sprays.¹

The conventional definition of suicide missions, or SMs, as "a violent attack designed in such a way as to make the death of the perpetrators strictly essential for its success"² has

Received 10 December 2006; accepted 27 January 2007.

This article was written while the author benefited from a Fellowship at the Centro Incontri Umani at Ascona in Switzerland and the author marks his gratitude to the Trustees of this Foundation for providing him with a peaceful setting for such a tempestuous topic. Special gratitude is due to Brian Victoria for several e-mail exchanges and the careful vetting of the author's reading of the events in Japan during the 1930s. The author is also indebted to the Referees of this journal and to Jacob Copeman, David Olney, Alan Strathern, and Alan Trevithick for their comments. Again, Susan Bayly, Gerald Peiris, David Cook, Geoff Oddie, Peter Mayer, Ulrike Niklas, and Jagath Senaratna provided the author with some basic data.

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the advantage of parsimony and provides a solid platform for broad generalizations about the purpose of SMs and the motivations of individual participants and/or organizations. Scholars in this field have also moved to a consensus on a major aspect of the SMs, namely, that they are performative acts of witness/advertisement that proclaim to all and sundry that the cause of the assailants is a worthy one; one to die for.

It is precisely this dimension of SMs across different political and cultural settings that leads to the argument here: in order to derive more information on the variety of motives/contexts inducing suicidal sacrifice of self for a cause, the surveys should be expanded to embrace a whole series of other actions, namely, no-escape challenge/attack/assassination, suicide-in-defense, (ritual) suicide in protest and, at the borderline of this expansion, suicide-in-grief for either the collective or an iconic leader.

SMs, Statistics, and the Case of the LTTE

The literature on SMs places considerable weight on statistical data to highlight similarities or contrasts. Such figures clearly have their place as a backdrop. But they tend to skew the analysis at times by misrepresenting the importance of suicide operations in global or locational sweep. Take this statement: “suicide attacks on average kill four times as many people as other terrorist acts.”³ This note is valid if one is considering only the operations of radical Muslims during the past two decades. But most of these global reviews also deem the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to be “terrorists.” Given such parameters, therefore, the claim is erroneous for the LTTE case, indeed, grossly so.

Since the early 1990s, if not earlier, the LTTE has developed a conventional army and won significant battles, a glaring fact that seems to be glossed over by some analysts honing in on SMs. Take one illustration from mid-July 1996: in a combined land-and-sea operation the Tigers attacked a large base camp of the Sri Lankan government (hereafter SLG) located on the north eastern coast at Mullaitivu. After knocking out the communication tower as one of its initial steps, this operation killed virtually all the security forces (mostly army), some 1,400–1,500 personnel, in two to three days. The base camp was over-run and all its weaponry, including long-range artillery, removed, while a commando rescue operation from the government side was beaten off, in fact mauled.

This was but one battlefield success involving substantial casualties on the SLG side—and sometimes also that of the LTTE. Pooneryn (November 1993), Puliyanukulam (September 1999), and Elephant Pass (April 2000) are among the place names that mark similar stories of large numbers of government soldiers killed. Set within this backdrop, therefore, the SMs of the LTTE are but one military/political weapon deployed tactically and/or strategically in order to push forward its goal of an independent state by weakening the SLG forces, conveying striking messages and sometimes terrorizing the Enemy Other within its heartland territories, especially Colombo.

Within any rational assessment, of course, one does need to be a rocket scientist to contend that statistics do not tell the whole tale. It is not how many the LTTE has killed through this or that type of attack, but whom, when, and where that counts. Indeed, the LTTE has used its SMs in the conventional infantry manner: to take out the “officers” on the enemy side off the battlefield.⁴ In their policy of total war the “officers” have included leaders of note: a president, a presidential candidate, several top commanders, and an army commander turned politician, for example.

However, SMs are not always required. The LTTE has also been quite pragmatic in its choice of weaponry. A van bomb detonated by remote control killed the Defence

Minister Ranjan Wijeratne on 2 March 1991. A sniper took out Thambirajah Subathiran, a leading Tamil dissident,⁵ in the Jaffna Peninsula in 14 June 2003 as well as the Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar on 12 August 2005. Claymore mines have been widely used recently in both smaller attacks on military personnel, sometimes high ranking officers, in Tamil-majority areas. Thus, SMs are but one mode of striking high-value targets. But whatever the method the selections of target are often of optimum value—so the significance lies beyond that of statistics. Quite often the individual targeted is a capable leader; at times he is widely known to be a hawk or may carry the taint of a person who has massacred Tamils⁶—thereby inserting a vendetta element into the choice.

Some of the LTTE suicide operations have combined strategic targeting with symbolic statements and traumatizing blows within the Sinhala heartland. The car bomb detonated, with explosives in gear box so as to maximize shrapnel, at the central bustand in the Pettah in Colombo on 22 April 1986 was not so much strategic as deliberately terrorizing in intent.⁷ The suicide truck that attempted to demolish the Daladā Maligāwa in Kandy on 25 January 1998 was directed at a religious icon of immense significance to those Sinhalese who are Buddhist (the majority) and was timed during the lead-up to Independence Day celebrations scheduled for the town of Kandy and featuring Prince Charles.

Insofar as the LTTE seeks self-determination and argues the case that Sri Lanka's independence from Britain, secured on 4 February 1948, was a false dawn for the Tamils of the island that in fact initiated a process of oppression, the 4th February is a symbolic target par excellence. In 1996 the 4th of February happened to fall on a Sunday. Thus, a suicide-cum-commando raid⁸ mounted by the LTTE on 31 January saw a truck bomb bring down the Central Bank building (CB) in the heart of the business district in the Fort quarter of Colombo, about half a mile away from one of the venues for the 4 February parade. This was a working day—probably chosen to maximize civilian deaths and to send a message to Colombo elite circles as well as state bureaucrats (for the CB is a government office with some key personnel). Thus it was symbolic act of magnified terror: 86 people died and around 1,400 were injured.⁹ One can deem it Sri Lanka's version of 9/11. The target, moreover, had strategic value. The Central Bank holds the government's gold reserves. If the truck had been able to enter the vestibule—it was halted by a barrier—the economic damage would have been more severe. As it was, the effects of this attack were as tremendous as ramifying.

The attack on Katunayake Airforce Base (23 July 2001) and the Rajagiriya Road attack (24 March 2000) were both commando raids of suicidal character insofar as the Tiger warriors had virtually no escape route. The latter, involving 10 Tigers dressed as civilians, appears to have been designed to target the Defence Minister while causing mayhem through RPG and machine gun fire. Discovered by civilian vigilance before its main target arrived on scene, the ensuing firefight resulted in the death of several civilians as well as security personnel, while the Tigers were eventually hunted down and some committed suicide by blast or capsule when cornered.

The attack on the air force base, needless to say, was primarily strategic insofar as airpower has been a major factor that provides the state with a substantial edge in the ongoing war. However, the airbase is also part of Bandaranaike International Airport. Although the Tiger commandoes timed the attack to coincide with a spell when civilian planes were not due, inevitably the firefight spilled over. Thwarted in their effort to penetrate all the defenses in the air force quarter the commando seem to have moved across to the civilian arena and blasted several expensive airliners. That task may also have been part of their original plan as secondary objective. Either way, it seems that the goal was to maximize economic damage while disarming a strategic fighting asset of the state. In

the result they destroyed several SLAF aircraft but not its whole arsenal, while the goals of severe economic disruption and maximum media coverage as witness to LTTE power were fully and dramatically secured.¹⁰ The attack not only dented the tourist trade, it had enormous downturn effects on trade and economic health in general.

In summary, then, the case history of the LTTE depicted in this attenuated description suggests that SMs are part of a mix of attacking methods deployed instrumentally with judicious timing and with multiple objectives. This is not a startling conclusion: common sense could decree this *a priori*.

Although the story of the LTTE calls into question some of the generalizations essayed about SMs, including some statistical claims, one can allow that it is an exceptional case. Indeed, the LTTE is quite exceptional: focused on a territory and demanding self-determination unlike Al Qaeda but like the Palestinians; yet far more a transnational corporation than the Palestinians and rather like Al Qaeda in its extra-local capacities.¹¹ Moreover, unlike any other group they have a brown-water navy with tremendous capacity, including speedboat suicide missions that have sunk Navy gunboats on some occasions.¹²

Beyond the LTTE: Toward Performative Witnessing

One can readily grant that the story of the “global Salafi jihad,” to use Marc Sageman’s apt phrase¹³ is *the* main arena of “terrorism” from the standpoint of those situated in the North Atlantic states and in the worldwide context in general. Hoffman’s statistical summary and the overwhelming focus on SMs are both pertinent if one is speaking of the contemporary *mujahidin* and their ultimate product, the *shahid*. Within this context, there is a broad divide among scholars. A few place the weight of emphasis on the instrumental political objectives of the Islamic radicals, both Al Qaeda and local/regional groups.¹⁴ Others emphasize multiple goals, while yet privileging the religious dimensions inspiring the Al Qaeda organization, many of its operatives, and some outlying affiliates. The leanings favored by this author, standing as an outsider beyond the West, are squarely with the latter, especially when the explanation is combined with attention to network theories of small team bonding and specific political goals shaped by local/regional particulars. That is, the present author favors the lines of argument pressed in various ways by such writers as Strenski, Benjamin and Simon, Sageman, Juergensmeyer, Cook, Hoffman, Simons and Euben.¹⁵ As significantly, on the basis of a survey that went beyond SMs to encompass self-immolations, Michael Biggs presents this sober assessment: “religious traditions are significant in shaping tacit preconceptions—the cultural background of action—rather than avowed doctrine.”¹⁶

Parenthetically, it can be noted that such approaches will garner even greater insight if they incorporate more phenomenologically oriented investigations into their case studies and their overall evaluations. Many of those who participate in suicidal missions are inspired by fervent beliefs in their cause in ways that instill steely determination and absolute commitment. This fervor of focus is an embodied engagement, involving a fusion of body and mind that maximizes capacities. This type of capacity can be honed by the routines of military and/or martial arts training;¹⁷ but where orientations toward devotional commitment or gifting-of-self to a lord, leader, or deity have been nourished through a whole corpus of cultural practices over the years one already has a population ripe for the picking, so to speak, when threats to a collectivity loom large in the eyes of an articulate segment of that collectivity. The “picking,” however, is not merely a manipulative activity pursued instrumentally by powerful figures. The powerful cultural producers and leaders are sentient

beings who are themselves enmeshed in some measure within the embodied practices and subjectivities of those whom they address. As such there are bonding foundations of an experiential and existential sort that can render their transmissions effective.¹⁸

Such a phenomenological and culturally sensitive perspective has guided my preliminary explorations of the LTTE's sacrificial donation of life as weapon (*uyirāyutam*) and the building up of a *māvīrar* (great hero) cult around their dead.¹⁹ The proof is in that particular pudding for others to evaluate. The same ground is not being traversed here. The focus of this article is far more limited. The procedure follows the comparative framework of interest that guides so many studies of "terrorism" and is especially influenced by the article by Michael Biggs (2005) referred to earlier. It is also taxonomic and thus stays within a rationalist paradigm for the most part. The argument is simple: insofar as the motivation of personnel involved in SMs is a major thread of interest, there is advantage in going beyond the conventional definition of SMs to analyze other types of endeavor that involve the death of the activist, such as, to repeat, no-escape challenge/attack/assassination, suicide-in-defense, (ritual) suicide in protest.

Like many suicide attacks, many of these acts are intended to display the moral righteousness of one's actions/beliefs and thus, where movements or organizations are involved, the legitimacy of their project. So the character of the act simply and horrendously says: "See. We have legitimate grievances. We die for a just cause." Many SMs, indeed, are grand theater, with 9/11, thus far, the grand daddy of them all. As acts of witness, moreover, in the context of the religions emerging from a Semitic heritage the suicidal assailants lay claim to the status of "*shahīd*" and "martyr."

But so, too, are the goals of many public acts of self-immolation and, within the Japanese traditions, *seppuku* or ritual disembowelment, acts of witness and sometimes a call for justice/reformation. The striking series of self-immolation initiated by Thich Quang Duc in southern Vietnam on 11 June 1963 was part of a carefully orchestrated campaign by Buddhist forces challenging a regime favoring the Catholic minority.²⁰ This was, in effect, a religio-political rebellion. The campaign also made world headlines and encouraged symbolic protest by self-immolation in other parts of the world during the 1960s, notably that of Chinnasami and others in southern India in 1964–1965, Herz and Morrison in the United States in 1965 and Jan Palach and others in Czechoslovakia in January 1969.²¹

When Kimitake Hiraoka, better known as Yukio Mishima, one of Japan's greatest novelists and a right-wing extremist steeped in the *samurai* traditions, led four members of his private army in a seizure of the headquarters of the Japanese Self-Defense Force on 25 November 1970, he could not have, from any rational estimate, expected his reading of a manifesto advocating rebellion to draw support. Thus his immediate act of *seppuku* with its adjunct violence, where one of his compatriots chopped his head off, must be interpreted as planned action, a resounding theatrical gesture of import to most Japanese people.²²

Such instances, therefore, should encourage one to spread the wings and encompass a range of violent actions that signal devotion to a particular cause through violent annihilation of body, an act that may even be construed in some contexts as a gift of self.²³ Most, if not all, the instances encompassed within this study have the potential to illuminate our understandings of motivation. This is a preliminary survey. In one or two cases the information available is minimal. In other instances there is an overabundance of material, such that one cannot conceivably grasp the situation in a comprehensive manner within a short space of time. The lack of in-depth completeness, however, does not preclude revealing juxtapositions in order to support the thrust of this article, namely, that all these categories of action normally excluded from the world of SMs provide insights into the inspirations promoting sacrificial commitment and enable one to distinguish significant differences in

context and orientation. This article shall proceed seriatim with a summary description of the types of violent attack that should be embraced in this extension of boundaries.

No-Escape Attack

The Rajagiriya and Katunayake raids in Sri Lanka, as well as the recent raid on Galle harbor by Sea Tigers masquerading as fishermen,²⁴ mark assaults where the attacking force had virtually no exit route. Such instances are not infrequent in full-scale, long, drawn-out wars. Any military historian could provide a bagful of cases from each of the major wars of the twentieth century, tales of deep penetration operations where the commando knew that none (or a miniscule few) would get out alive. In this sense persons turned suicide bomber are only a special case of elite soldiers of war, even if they are civilians become *mujahid* and sacrificial gift. The juxtaposition here is deliberate: it is meant to douse analysts with a bucket of ice water and suggest that perhaps too much has been made of SM attackers.²⁵

Significantly, the Black Tigers, a suicide strike-force constituted by the LTTE at some point around 1986–1987, are a body of elite warriors. They are carefully selected from among the best fighters, with six criteria, inclusive of overall “family circumstances,” being considered.²⁶ A semi-official statement notes that “[after] their [further] training, they serve in regular LTTE units, concealing their membership. When called up for a mission, they take routine leave and if they survive, return to regular service again. Membership is only revealed if they are killed in combat.”²⁷ This remark must be qualified. These elite soldiers sometimes parade as a unit and there seem to be suicide units within the Sea Tigers.

Defensive Suicide

Every LTTE fighter—other than those few that are forcibly conscripted—is not much different from the Black Tigers. From an early date, each recruit had to take an oath of loyalty, presumably one that involved the reiteration of the LTTE’s “holy aim” (*punita cutantiram*) and the credo that is widely proclaimed in many of its posters and publications, namely: “The task (thirst) of the Tigers (is to achieve) Motherland Tamililam.”²⁸ This rite of initiation is linked to the promise that they would carry a cyanide vial and swallow it if captured.²⁹ The cyanide vial is called a *kuppi* in Tamil. “The vial is fully and consciously exposed hanging on a chord around the neck in processions and in daily encounters [with] LTTE cadres and civilians. . . . [It] is dear to the LTTE fighters and there is even an LTTE song praising the taking of cyanide.”³⁰ Adopted around 1983–1984 this practice immediately garnered admiration among the Tamil population of all classes³¹ and gave an edge to the LTTE in their competition with other militant groups for recruits and supporters in the period 1984 to 1990.³² Indeed, Schalk notes that one-third of the LTTE who had died “up to 1992” were cyanide takers³³—truly a remarkable proportion.

Thus defensive acts of suicide meant to deny the enemy information and to proclaim to one’s constituency that one has total faith in cause, as well as the engine-of-cause, was a considered LTTE policy from an early stage. The first Tiger to swallow the cyanide *kuppi* was Selvam Pakin on 18 May 1984.³⁴ The hagiography about Tiger *māvīrar* (great heroes, also loosely translated as “martyrs” in Tamil literature) widely propagated among the Tamil peoples of Sri Lanka often dwells on such cases of sacrificial suicide in defensive mode amid other tales of belligerent daring do.³⁵

It was not the LTTE, however, who created the concept. The local “inventor” was Ponnudurai Sivakumaran. A key figure in a tiny cell of budding revolutionary nationalists,

Sivakumaran swallowed some cyanide when he was cornered by police on 5 June 1974. This event occurred before the LTTE was in existence.³⁶

It was a momentous episode. The funeral, a cremation, witnessed an outpouring of intense grief and anger. Popular action decreed the day to be a *hartal*, a shutting down of all business. Massive crowds journeyed to Sivakumaran's home village of Urumpirai. So too did venerable Tamil leaders, many of them lawyers of note. There, within the feverish fervor aroused by untimely, but heroic, death, these leaders were subject to assault by slippers—the ultimate in insults—wielded by angry young men.³⁷ Here, then was popular acclaim for devotion to the cause of Eelam, or self-determination/independence, that is, *cutantiram*.³⁸ The LTTE took up this mantle. They embraced the *kuppi*. It has been logical for them to subsequently anoint Sivakumaran by inserting him into their pantheon of dead *māvīrar* (see later).

No-Escape Challenge

Unlike no-escape commando assault, defensive suicide does not involve the killing of others. This is often the character of conventional instances of Christian martyrdom. Take the martyrdom at Cordoba in the years 850–59 CE when the Iberian Peninsula was under the rule of the Moors. About 50 Christian leaders and monks cursed the Prophet Muhammad as an expression of their faith. “This was a capital offense in the eyes of Muslims, but not in the eyes of Christians, most of whom thought privately what the martyrs said publicly.”³⁹ Waltz sums up the event thus: “the significance of the voluntary martyrs of ninth-century Cordoba was the crystallization and exemplification of an ideology that polarized relations between Christianity and Islam, between Latin-Christian and Arabic-Islamic culture into explicit and lasting ideological conflict.”⁴⁰

Here was an instance where religious beliefs of political import led individuals to seek out “circumstances in which death or suffering is reasonably certain and [where they] then allow the flow of circumstances to lead them [in stoic manner] to martyrdom.”⁴¹ It would seem that in 1980 the Catholic archbishop of San Salvador was pursuing a similar course of patent political character when he denounced the repressive policies of the military regime in that land. He was executed.⁴² Although none of these men took their own lives, they were effectively walking into the valley of death. Theirs' were striking acts of public protest, sharing many of the attributes of witness and advertisement for cause that became attached to the cases of Buddhist self-immolation in southern Vietnam in 1963. All are instances of stoic devotion to a wider cause, one of profound and meaningful import for a substantial local constituency.

No-Escape Assassinations

The killing of leaders who are deemed offensive and/or dangerous to one's nation by individuals who represent an ardent, extreme political faction is of similar import when the violent act is carried out without any escape route in view and where the assailant desires to give testimony to his cause in public. These, too, are trips into the valley of death by execution. They make up a significant type of suicide mission precisely because the testimony, like the manifesto of Yukio Mishima, is so central to the act. Indeed, from an investigative point of view most of these instances will probably provide the richest data on motivation because the subsequent court trials serve as grand justificatory arenas for the perpetrators.

There are many such instances during the last century or so, but this article will narrow its illustrations down to four: the anti-colonial “terrorist” Bhagat Singh in north India, Nathuram Godse, who killed Mahatma Gandhi on 30 January 1948, the Japanese right-wing assassins of the early 1930s, and Lt. Khaled al-Islambuli of the Tanzim al-Jihad group who assassinated Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat, on 6 October 1981.

Bhagat Singh

The case of Bhagat Singh’s act of “martyrdom” is rather unique and in left field in comparison with the other instances in this specific cluster. His penultimate and most famous act of violence (with B. K. Dutt) was not an assassination, but a case of throwing bombs without inflicting harm on anybody in the Central Assembly Hall on 8 April 1929. However, he had assassinated a British police officer in an act of political vengeance a couple of years earlier and was on the wanted list.⁴³ Moreover, he represented the Left rather than the Right in his country’s political spectrum—for he was “a confirmed atheist, socialist and communist.”⁴⁴ Although he had some admiration for anarchism and had read Bakunin, he was adamant that he was not a “terrorist” (the term widely deployed by British authorities for militant nationalists committed to violent methods). He saw himself as a social revolutionary in the Marxist lineage who had taken up the cause of national liberation in the specific context of India. The model of independent India that he espoused was a socialist one.

He enters the present scheme of things because his bomb-throwing incursion was an act of symbolic violence, public theater of magnified import. Singh and Dutt did not flee after this act but stayed in the visitors’ gallery till they were arrested, knowing full well that they would receive a death sentence. This enabled Bhagat Singh to clarify his political cause during the court case, inevitably a *cause celebre*, which followed. The “deaf,” he said then, “had to be made to hear.” It is also significant that in his early writings as a teenager (he was born in 1907) in the 1920s he was impressed by the militants who were arrested for seditious action in what is known historically as the Akali Conspiracy Case of 1921. The “fearlessness with which these men [were] ready to embrace death”⁴⁵ led him to pen these words: “What a beautiful, bewitching and pure vision it must have been. What are the heights of self sacrifice? Where are the limits to courage and fearlessness? Were there no boundaries to this commitment to their ideals?”⁴⁶

After his execution, moreover, Bhagat Singh was immediately invested with the iconic tags *tyagi* and *shahīd* in the Hindi and Urdu languages of north India, both commonly and loosely rendered as “martyr” in Indian English. So he became a resistance hero for a stream of radical and/or nationalist Indians.⁴⁷ More recently he served as one of the inspirations, together with Kattabomman, Subhas Chandra Bose, Che Guevara, and Clint Eastwood, for young Velupillai Pirahākaran in northern Sri Lanka.⁴⁸

Nathuram Godse

Nathuram Godse approached Mahatma Gandhi during one of his political fasts on the prayer grounds of Birla House on 30 January 1948 and bowed—and then shot him. Godse had been an articulate member of the extremist Hindu Mahasabha for several years. Although he took full responsibility for the killing, it is widely believed that the Hindu Mahasabha hierarchy was complicit in the act because the party explicitly contended “that Gandhi was sacrificing Hindu interests in an effort to appease minority groups [and] blamed Gandhi for the bloody Partition of India.”⁴⁹ The testimony that Godse provided during the high-profile

court case leading to his execution endorses this viewpoint. But it is his readiness to die himself, his passionate conviction and his reasoning that is striking.

Godse's testimony begins with this note: "Born in a devotional Brahmin family, I instinctively came to revere Hindu religion, Hindu history and Hindu culture." After a genuflection in favor of Gandhi's slogans of nonviolence, he proceeded to express bellicose ideas of nationalist resistance through reference to warlike events in the Indian epics and India's past (e.g., Shivāji). His vindication asserted that Gandhi and the Indian National Congress had been responsible for the "vivisection" of India; and that Gandhi had "acted very treacherously to the nation by his consenting to the partitioning of it . . . I stoutly maintain that . . . he has proved to be the Father of Pakistan." But perhaps the most significant aspect of this testimony lies here:

The accumulating provocation of thirty-two years, culminating in [Gandhiji's] pro-Muslim fast, at last **goaded me** to the conclusion that the existence of Gandhi should be brought to an end immediately. Gandhi had done very good in South Africa. . . . But when he finally returned to India he developed a **subjective mentality under which he alone was to be the final judge** of what was right or wrong. If the country wanted his leadership, it had to accept his **infallibility**. (emphasis added by author)

Equally telling is the impact of this peroration among the people in court as evaluated by one of the judges trying Godse. "The audience was visibly and audibly moved. There was a deep silence when he ceased speaking. Many women were in tears and men were coughing and searching for their handkerchiefs I have, however, no doubt that had the audience on that day been constituted into a jury and entrusted with the task of deciding Godse's appeal, they would have brought in a verdict of 'not guilty' by an overwhelming majority," said Justice Gopal Das Khosla.⁵⁰ Godse, in brief, was not an idiosyncrat.

Japanese Assassins

The handful of assassins in Japan who initiated several killings of political, military, and financial leaders in 1932 and 1935 were right-wing ultra-nationalists unhappy with the specifics of a right-wing fascist regime. They were ideologically linked to a major military uprising in Tokyo involving the Imperial Guards on 26 February 1936 in the sense that all the operations had the goal of establishing a form of agrarian-oriented national socialism under the aegis of the Showa Emperor's restoration to supreme power (a goal that Emperor Hirohito decisively rejected in 1936 by scotching the mutiny and executing those responsible).⁵¹ This goal, as Brian Victoria has persuasively revealed,⁵² was influenced by specific strands of Zen teaching.

The first wave of killings centered on Nissho Inoue and an organization that he established in 1932, one widely known as the Ketsumeidan (League of Blood). Inoue listed 20 politicians and business leaders for assassination. In the event only two were killed in March 1932 and the gunmen made no attempt to escape, while Inoue turned himself in at a police station where he was apparently treated with respect as a "patriot." All three were later tried together with other co-conspirators and the assassin who eliminated the Prime Minister (Tsuyoshi Inukai) a couple of months later. The prosecution developed into a show trial, providing Inoue and associates with "a platform from which to broadcast their ultra-nationalist views." Thus, "many in the Japanese public came to sympathize with the

aims of the conspirators, if not their methods.”⁵³ As such the conspirators were given life imprisonment rather than death sentences.

The judge’s summary evaluation of the Ketsumeidan thinking ran thus: “without destruction . . . there can be no construction . . . destruction is itself construction, and the two are inseparable”—a summary that embodies a “popularized version of the classic Mahayāna (and Zen) proposition regarding the . . . [identity] of . . . opposites.”⁵⁴ As significantly, on the morning of his intended act of killing, one of the assassins, Konuma, “sought strength from his Buddhist training . . . and finally began to practice *zazen* in the full lotus position.” Thus, in his own words, he “entered a state of *samādhi* [mental concentration] the likes of which I had never experienced before”—a phenomenon that enabled him to go through with his mission.⁵⁵ As this article will show, this was not just psychological technique, but integral to the ideological imperatives driving these men.

Along one dimension, the assassination by sword⁵⁶ of Lt. Colonel Tetsuhan Nagata (widely regarded to be the leader of the Control Faction) in August 1935 by one of his junior officers, Lt. Colonel Saburo Aizawa, was part of a factional fight for power between the Control Faction and the Imperial Way Faction. But there is another dimension: the reasoning of the Imperial Way faction and its link with the desire for a Showa restoration. Their reasoning is revealed in one of the monthly magazines, with the revealing masthead, *Essence*, published in September 1934, by the Jikishin Dōjō, a martial arts training hall in Tokyo headed by a lay Zen practitioner, Oomori Sōgen. Among other things, the lead article asserted:

- “Destroy the False and Establish the True—Risk Your Life in Spreading the Dharma—The Great Essence of the Showa Restoration.”
- “The [Showa] Restoration is a holy war to *destroy the false and establish the true.*”

The italicized phrase, in Victoria’s estimation, is a central facet in Zen thinking.⁵⁷

Significantly, leading Zen priests and lay practitioners were in direct contact with some of the key personnel involved in these violent actions. Two Zen masters headed martial arts centers implicated in two of the plots, while several of these Zen scholars testified on behalf of those accused during the trials. In a character testimony in support of Inoue and his Ketsumeidan assassins the Zen master, Yamamoto Gempō, said that “no fair and upright person would criticize the accused for their actions . . . The Buddha, being absolute, has stated that when there are those that destroy social harmony and injure the polity of the state, then even if they are good men killing them is not a crime.”⁵⁸ In sum, what emerges from Victoria’s account is a picture of a species of Mahayāna Buddhist reasoning that firmly advocated righteous violence. The emphasis was on action—action that involved *mushin* (no thought)—at a moment deemed to be in “deadlock,” a concept with a strong Zen flavor.⁵⁹ In effect, says Victoria, this reasoning “shortcircuit[ed] ethics.”⁶⁰

This influence was not confined to Japan in the 1930s. Victoria’s corpus of writings⁶¹ reveals significant Zen support for the program of imperial expansion undertaken by various Japanese governments from the 1890s onward. The power of Zen did not rest on the number of Japanese followers in Zen sects. Rather it was the presence of individuals who were profoundly influenced by Zen at strategic locations in the Japanese military machine, among them those that drafted the Field Service Code of 1941. Indeed, Victoria insists that “the extensive martial arts training that was used [in the training of] Imperial Japanese soldiers for the battlefield” was directed by “Zen-influenced Bushido ideology.”⁶²

Elliptical support for Victoria’s thesis is provided by the career of Yukio Mishima. Indeed, his theatrical rebellion in 1970 can be interpreted as a replication of the military uprising of February 1936. Although Starrs insists that Mishima’s thinking was “essentially

Nietzschean and nihilist,”⁶³ there is room to argue that the German philosopher’s influence on Mishima was merged with Zen nihilism. It is surely significant that one of Mishima’s novels, *Yūkoku* (Patriotism), centered on the incident of 26 February 1936. Moreover, his *The Way of the Samurai* is an appreciative commentary on the *Hagakure*, the famous eighteenth-century text written by Zen priest Jocho Yamamoto, which is widely regarded as an embodiment of the *bushido* code. Cast as a critique of modern society *The Way of the Samurai* contends that the *Hagakure* is “a living philosophy that holds that life and death [are] the two sides of the same shield.”⁶⁴ Thus, in effect, Mishima celebrated a powerful theme in Buddhist influenced Japanese aesthetics and philosophy, namely the “transcendence of life,” an understanding encoded in popular culture by the image of falling cherry blossoms—an image of purity, incandescent beauty and ephemerality in Japanese eyes.⁶⁵ Through Mishima, says Moeren, we are confronted with the morality of the *Hagakure*, namely, “a nice circle of ideas in which beauty = strength = death = morality = beauty.”⁶⁶

Lt. Khaled al-Islambuli

Lt. Khaled al-Islambuli (also spelt Islambouli) was an enthusiastic volunteer within the Tanzim al-Jihad, a radical, underground Islamic group in Egypt that was focused on ridding their country of the apostate “near enemy,” the existing government led by Sadat.⁶⁷ Its central figure was Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj, an electrical engineer and self-taught Islamic “theologian” from a rich, well-connected family with longstanding links with the Muslim Brothers. When the opportunity to kill Sadat presented itself, the kill was a central prong in a multi-prong rebellion seeking to gain control of a few key sites in the (fantastic) conviction that the Egyptian populace would immediately rise up in revolt against the regime. In the event, two of the other strikes were partial or wholesale failures, while the hopes invested in the Egyptian people proved utopian. But Lt. Khaled al-Islambuli succeeded in mowing down Sadat. His immediate expression of triumph was an embodied one of immense significance: Istambuli was exultant and jumped up and down “shouting: ‘My name is Khalid Islambouli, I have slain Pharaoh, and I do not fear death.’”⁶⁸ It appears that he was fully expecting to be shot in the next moment, so he was quickly proclaiming to the world his devotion to his cause and its justifiable *jihad*-kill. One is reminded here of “what is known in the Shia Islamic tradition as the *bassamat al-farah*, or ‘smile of joy’—prompted by one’s impending martyrdom.” This demeanor on the face of suicide bombers (Sunni for the most part) who were about to blow themselves up on Israeli buses has been widely reported by survivors.⁶⁹

Suicides in Protest—To Witness and Agitate

The best known and perhaps exemplary instance of public suicides in protest in recent times occurred in southern Vietnam in 1963 and 1966. Because this story is widely known and the ritual suicide by Mishimi in 1970 has been briefly alluded to earlier, the survey that follows embraces other instances of “similar” violence against self for an altruistic cause.

The method used by the Vietnamese religious was self-immolation, a use of fire that many Westerners would see as horrific even for corpses, but not one unfamiliar to Asians in contexts where cremation is a valorized, albeit expensive, way of treating the dead. This method was also deployed by a laborer named Chinnasami in January 1964 when he chose a spot beside a railway station to incinerate himself after shouting “*inti olika!*

tamil valka!”—Death to Hindi! May Tamil flourish.”⁷⁰ His was a flaming exposition of the cause of the Tamil language and the resistance of leading Tamil political forces, notably the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, to the threats posed by a program seeking to render Hindi into an all-India *lingua franca*. Whether he had taken the initiative himself or been paid to take this course, it is the impact of his action in mobilizing further support for the cause of *Tamiltay*, Mother Tamil, while even encouraging a few others to repeat the burning example of self-immolation one year later to the day, that one must attend to.⁷¹

Where the Vietnamese agitation of 1963 and that in favor of the Tamil language secured political results, and Palach’s action briefly stirred segments of the Czech population, the self-immolation on 2 November 1965 by Norman Morrison in Washington, D.C. seems to have had little effect in mobilizing the public against U.S. policy in Vietnam.⁷²

Palach was a philosophy student at Charles University, Prague in 1968 when the Warsaw Pact alliance headed by the Soviet Union invaded the country in support of the pro-Soviet Czech factions opposed to a liberalization program started by Communist reformists led by Alexander Dubcek. Local information from another university student indicates that Palach had recently been rejected by a girl.⁷³ Thus his mood of personal depression in the winter of 1968–1969 was in tune with the sentiments of politically engaged Czechs and the new, vibrant student movement seeking more freedom of expression. However, his suicide note claimed that his act of self-immolation, which occurred on 16 January 1969, was an attempt to “wake up the people of this land.” It also used the royal “we” and indicated that Palach was part of a group of “volunteers,” although subsequent investigations have not produced any evidence in support of this claim.⁷⁴

Whatever the mix of motives impelling Palach, there is no doubt that his self-immolation was a premeditated political act. Although he deployed what was an alien method of protest, he chose Wenceslas Square as his grand stage, a site that was not only a hub of public assembly suitable for theatrical advertisement, but also one which embodied Czechoslovakia’s foundational past, thus a sacrosanct place of the same order, say, as Trafalgar Square and the Statue of Liberty for their respective countries.

Palach became an instant patriot hero. As he took three days to die, important individuals, among them the dissident playwright Vaclav Havel,⁷⁵ visited him as he lay dying. At least four others emulated his *modus operandi* of self-immolation—in-protest in the days that followed. The day of his funeral, 25 January, became a “day of national mourning” and the event drew large crowds. He was deemed a martyr and compared to Jan Hus, who was burned at the stake as a heretic in 1415.⁷⁶ Considerable agitation occurred thereafter through much of Bohemia and Moravia, but, unlike South Vietnam, a regime change was not generated: indeed, Dubcek and the reformists were quickly displaced. Authoritarian repression won out. However, dissident action in subsequent decades often centered on the day of his death and the eventual challenge to the authoritarian Communist order in 1989 mobilized around his memory when external conditions in the Soviet Union opened the door for transformative challenge. Much later, when Czechoslovakia had discarded the Soviet embrace and local Communist yoke, they renamed the Square for Red Soldiers in front of the Philosophy Faculty of Charles University as “Jan Palach Square.”⁷⁷ It is such evocations over the long-run that make Palach’s ritual suicide an effective rite of witness and protest.

But it is to the Indian subcontinent and the Hindu civilizational heritage that one must turn for further explorations of ritual suicides that rival the Vietnamese immolations and the acts of *seppuku* in the Japan universe of being. The reference here is not so much to *sati*, the wifely step of immolatory immersion in the body of her dead husband,⁷⁸ but to ritual

suicides in public protest against immoral transgressions by powerful state figures, that is, kings, rājās, and lords. Although rendered edifying by the hoary Cankam principle of *vatakkiruttal*, wherein kings atone for the loss of their kingdom or for some major incident of dishonor by facing north and fasting to death,⁷⁹ in subsequent centuries it has also been associated with acts of moral protest. Here, the act of ritual suicide has been a weapon of the weak and embodied/demonstrated/witnessed the justice of one's cause. The grievances may not have been generalized ones relating to a large community; they could be an alleged dishonoring of self and/or family and/or kinship group. But the ritual suicide was a potent political protest because it was (is) an esteemed technique.

As tradition has it, the preferred method of expressing this bloody dissent in southern India was to cut off one's own head. It was, it is said, the Tamil warrior's method. Thus a Tamil medical doctor in Malaysia has recently inserted a Web description of *navakāntham*, as he terms it, which depicts an ancient statue found in the Puumaayi Amman Temple of Tiruppathur, Sivagangai District, Tamilnadu in South India. This icon is wearing a warrior vestment known as the *vattudai* and is in the process of grabbing "his hair with his left-hand [as he] smites his neck with a sword which is held with his right hand." The good doctor notes that such acts were "carried out as a fulfilment of a vow" and took place for a number of reasons, with the act itself being preceded by a "celebration" of a funerary form organized by the suicide-to-be.⁸⁰

This is not an outlandish, latter-day concoction on his part. Although some of his details may be awry, there is solid historical evidence in the Cankam literature (roughly 250 B.C.E. to 250 C.E.), other ancient documents, folk lore, and material artefacts to vindicate the general lines of this tale. Those individuals, undoubtedly few, who performed such acts in southern and western India were not cremated but buried, or rather, "planted." Their acts were then inscribed on stone memorials known as *vīragal* or *natukal*,⁸¹ that is, "hero stones" or memorial stones. The "spirit of the dead person was thought to reside" in each stone.⁸² Hart conjectures that some major temples have originated as memorial stones.

Indeed, there is clear evidence that several such artefacts were adopted by local villagers over the ages as shrines invested with the *sakti* (divine energy) of a named god or goddess.⁸³ The southern parts of India from Kerala through Karnataka and interior Tamilnadu to the eastern coast are literally awash with shrines and temples, both local and regional, which are dedicated to fierce deities, or "divinities of blood and power" as Susan Bayly refers to them.⁸⁴ These include divinities of a "demonic" kind (that is, disordered, capricious beings) called *vīrans* who are "supernatural warriors" who serve as guardian spirits for higher deities. Significantly, many such *vīrans* are said to have been human beings who met a violent death, often as victims or as suicides to redeem female honor⁸⁵—so that their punishing character can be interpreted as a form of just revenge. The presence in contemporary Tamilnadu of fierce gods originating in such a way in her field site, the village of Yanaimangalam in the extreme south, leads Mines to the following generalization on the basis of other ethnographies: "all over Tamilnadu, fierce gods are born this way, in violence and injustice." The iconography of such deities has always been in step with their character: "the violence of their origins and their vengeful natures are reflected in their murderous depictions as sword-wielding mustachioed heroes ready to fight . . . or as fanged terrifying women who look ready to bite."⁸⁶ As significantly, these fierce deities are said to be responsive to total devotion from a supplicant and not concerned overmuch about the ethics of any votive request—much like the powerful deity Murukan⁸⁷ a.k.a. Skandha (a.k.a. Kataragama for the Sinhalese further south), whose favors are said to be measured

according to the degree of devotional commitment displayed toward him by those offering gifts.

It is within this background that one has to assess the innovation adopted by the LTTE when they abandoned their initial practice (from 1982 to about 1990) of cremating their fallen; and proceeded to bury their dead warriors, preferably in sites that they controlled. These places are not seen as cemeteries, but are called *thuyilam illam*, translated as “resting places” and/or “sleeping houses;” and also described as “temples” and “holy” places⁸⁸ in contrast to the polluted terrain of a cremation ground. Thus, since then, the “LTTE never buries its dead, it plants them”; and regards the bodies as *vitai* or “seeds” that will be reborn.⁸⁹ This is understood in contemporary Sri Lankan Tamil thought as an expression of “the martial tradition of the Tamils [that was encoded within] a concept known as *Nadugal Valipaadu* which literally means worshipping the planted stone.”⁹⁰

In sum, therefore, one can suggest that through such innovative crafting anew the LTTE provides participants with the possibility of interpreting these ritual acts as a gateway to a resurrection or a fruitful crysalis for self and Eelam in the future.⁹¹ This possibility is enhanced by the probability that Catholic priests, such as Fathers Bernard, Chandrakanthan, and Emmanuel, have been influential in the molding of the *māvīrar* cult within Tiger and Tamil circles.⁹² As it is, evidence from the iconography as well as some poems cast by intellectuals and fighters indicate that there are both implicit and explicit themes of resurrection and rebirth in the LTTE propaganda work.⁹³

The LTTE also adopted the practice of ritual “suicide”⁹⁴ in protest as a form of resistance. This was not via self-immolation but by means of a fast-unto-death—inspired no doubt by Gandhi as well as the Irish martyrs of the twentieth century. On two momentous occasions this tactic was orchestrated by the LTTE. Both occurred during the period when the Indian Peace Keeping Force was in place in the north and east of Sri Lanka in Tamil-majority areas.

The Indian state became especially active in Sri Lankan politics after the pogrom of July 1983 in the Sinhala-majority districts encouraged both the federal and Tamilnadu governments to sponsor and/or permit military training camps in India. The role of protector inherent in this relationship came to the fore in the second quarter of 1987 when a state offensive was threatening the Sri Lankan Tamil heartland in the Jaffna Peninsula. India intervened with symbolic and diplomatic threat. JR Jayewardene’s government responded intelligently and signed the Indo-Lanka Pact in July 1987 permitting an Indian force to enter the Northern and Eastern Provinces to keep the peace (in effect doing the government’s job for them as the price of a little sovereignty lost).

The Indian troops received a tumultuous welcome from the Tamil people when they arrived: they were seen as saviors. However, Pirapāharan and the LTTE, by then the principal body of armed militants seeking Eelam, had reservations and were keenly alive (unlike the other armed groups) to India’s big-brother imperialism. They moved into oppositional mode.⁹⁵ A fast-unto-death begun on 15 September 1987 by Tilipan (nom de guerre for Rasiah Parthipan of Urallu) was a key step in this direction. Tilipan was an articulate and relatively senior fighter who bore an injury. He may have initiated the idea himself. He certainly went along with this tactical ploy—wholeheartedly. He instructed his minders not to give him water if he weakened and asked for some.⁹⁶

The site chosen for this “martyrdom operation” was in the open space alongside Nallur Kovil in the town of Jaffna, as sacrosanct a space as one could find, not unlike Wenceslas Square. Like instances of self-immolation this act of violence to self was heart-wrenching for those (large numbers) concerned and near. But in contrast to self-immolations this Gandhian tactic had the distinct advantage of being a prolonged affair.⁹⁷ Within its context

a more effective weapon of pressure could not have been imagined. Grapevine stories retail the harrowing ripples of grief among the Tamil people as Tilīpan slowly, ever so slowly, weakened and died on 26 September. When he asked for water, his minders, doubtless fortified by orders from the high command, refused.

The rivers of tears and lamentation in the world of concerned Sri Lankan Tamils, was not confined to those in the Jaffna Peninsula but is widely reported to have flowed in currents and tubs throughout the island and in gatherings of Tamil migrants in such places as Toronto.⁹⁸ In one not-so-swift “strike” the Sri Lankan Tamil people were turned away from India. The IPKF received the mantle of an occupying army and it took only another incident in early October 1987 to trigger the LTTE’s switch into resistance mode as a guerilla force in jungle and urban alleyway.⁹⁹ It is within this context that one must evaluate the LTTE poet laureate, Rattinaturai’s subsequent ode to Lt. Colonel Tilīpan: where (a) the hero is likened to the god Vishnu in his Visvarūpa form; (b) where the Indians are castigated as “hypocritical animals”; and (c) brought within the aegis of the famous goddess Draupadi’s punishing curse by elliptical reference to her act of loosening her hair in order to wash the tresses in her enemies’ blood.¹⁰⁰ This is but one illustration that demonstrates Hellmann-Rajanayagam’s argument that the image of “the hero clothed in immortality” is one of the outstanding themes in LTTE poetry.¹⁰¹ Likewise, as Jeyaraj has remarked recently, the “Great Heroes Day observances” provide both the LTTE personnel as well as the kinfolk of the fallen “with the feeling that by sacrificing their lives [the fallen warriors] would grasp eternity and ensure immortality.”¹⁰²

This political program was taken further by reaching out to the Tamils living in the Eastern Province when a mother of ten, Annai Pupati, launched a similar fast-unto-death and died on 19 April 1988. There are permanent memorials at the sites where Tilīpan and Pupati died. Both individuals are usually referred to as *tiyaki* (one who abandons), derived from the Sanskrit *tyagi* and associated with the concept of *tiyakam* (abandonment, sacrifice, renunciation).¹⁰³ As such, Tilīpan and Pupati enter the pantheon of *māvīrar*. Indeed, both are stars in the pantheon, being often singled out in some of the poster art and located beside Shankar, Mālati, Sivakumaran, and Miller as a Big Six of monumental example.¹⁰⁴

The days on which Tilīpan and Pupati died are now part of the annual ritual calendar established by the LTTE to commemorate their fallen and propagate the cause of Eelam.¹⁰⁵ The worth accorded to their gift of self through fast was observed in early 1990 when, after the IPKF left, a grand public debate saw two sets of debaters in Batticaloa (in the Eastern Province) contesting the issue: “who was the greater person, Gandhi or Pupati?” The result, I told my informant as he paused, was a foregone conclusion; it would be Pupati. “Yes,” he smiled. The clinching argument for the Tamil audience in his assessment was this: Pupati had actually died.¹⁰⁶

Both the fasts and the debate, of course, were organised affairs engineered by an embryonic state regime. But there can be no doubt about the popular emotional fervour that surrounded and developed from these orchestrations—much like southern Vietnam in 1963. Palach and Morrison did not have quite this type of backing, though a dissident movement of students and trade unionists provided a pertinent backdrop for Palach’s action. But they also conducted their immolation in an alien cultural setting. Fasting, for instance, is a common practice in the Hindu religio-cultural universe. Asceticism and renunciation bear high value. In burning away their previous life *sannyāsin* embody the ascetic principle and, as living “saints,” are worshipped by ordinary people as repositories of religious power. Thus, in rural South India, where David Mosse did anthropological fieldwork in a village peopled by roughly equal proportions of Catholic and Hindus, there were saints cults in the locality, including some associated with missionaries who had been martyred in the

past. These powerful but dangerous shrines were sited in what was locally understood as *kātu*, “wilderness” or “forest.” Mosse notes: “if the forest saint is an ascetic, he is also a fearful and embattled warrior.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover, fasting is not confined to “specialists,” whether saints, priest, Brahmins, or exorcists. Ordinary householders fast episodically in support of their vows, or during religious festivals or days commemorating deceased kin.¹⁰⁸ Pirapāharan fasts for one whole day prior to the final homage to his bosom friend, Shankar (and all the fallen) at 6:06 p.m. on 27 November every year; whereas Shankar himself is presented as “Tavan” Shankar, explicitly embalming him with the heat (*tapas*) and energy of a *sannyāsi*.¹⁰⁹ It is no surprise then that the imagery of ascetics threads the poetry composed by those partial to the LTTE: as Hellmann-Rajanayagam emphasises, asceticism is understood to “confe[r] special power and potency and ultimately lea[d] to salvation.”¹¹⁰

Suicides in (Public) Grief or Shame

Both cultural heritage and organizational operations were of momentous effect in persuading so many Japanese personnel in the armed forces to commit “suicide” in the face of capture or to indulge in suicidal *banzai* charges, human attack waves, when clusters were under siege and short of ammunition. The *banzai* charges, of course, were under officer direction. But there can be no doubt, to judge from the extreme reluctance, if not refusal, of Japanese prisoners of war to provide their names to the Red Cross that many Japanese servicemen felt ashamed to let their kin and peers know that they were alive, not dead.¹¹¹

In the previous paragraph the use of the concept “suicide” is bracketed in quotation marks advisedly in order to emphasize the fact, following Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, that “neither the [*tokkotai*] pilots themselves nor the Japanese public considered their acts to be acts of suicide.”¹¹² This is of critical import and helps mark the difficulties of extending our constructs into radically different cultural terrain. Other Japanese specialists confirm this point. Young’s sociopsychological study of the Japanese contends that they “conceive of the self as socially embedded” and concludes: “because suicide in Japan is viewed as a potentially honorable, virtuous, and even beautiful act of self-sacrifice expressing one’s duty to one’s group, the western perspective is quite foreign to the Japanese self-conceptual framework.” Continuing, he says: “The values giving moral legitimacy to suicide run deeper than the act of suicide itself because self-sacrifice plays an integral role in Japanese life.”¹¹³ There are three different words in the Japanese language to refer to suicide and two of them “suggest an honorable or laudable act done in the public interest.” Thus, “suicide . . . does not have the immoral connotation . . . that it has in the English.”¹¹⁴

Here, then, in twentieth-century Japan, one sees a working out and deepening of the cultural notions of honor and shame under the powerful organizing hand of successive Japanese regimes of an authoritarian kind. The process of disciplining the population through the existing strands of cultural practice began after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The *samurai* code was disseminated and popularized through educational and other institutions as a multimedia project. The military arms of state and the fascist governments of the twentieth century consolidated this process further. When the imperialistic Japanese war machine over-reached itself and found itself on the backfoot and under siege in late 1944, with the advancing American naval arm approaching the Philippines as a first step toward threatening Japan, they decided to form *tokkōtai* special operation squads, *kamikaze* as they are widely known beyond Japan. If a siege situation and military asymmetry in power was the key contextual imperative, the cultural background provided by *samurai*

traditions and its honor code, and a repertoire of nature symbols that deepened the love of country in aesthetically evocative ways, served as the penetrating currents that engendered the widespread acceptance, and the popular lionization, of *tokkotai* operations. Cherry blossoms, water chrysanthemums, and nature motifs associated with animist beliefs of the ancient past that had been incorporated into Shintoism were vital themes in the iconography of inspiration and justification encouraging self-annihilating sacrifice.¹¹⁵

Because it was considered shameful to be captured, it appears that some soldiers took their own lives through *seppuku* or some self-inflicted wound. This practice extended to some civilians in Saipan and Okinawa, with the mass act of self-extinction involving jumping off a cliff (no doubt officer driven) at Saipan serving as the most awesome incident among a host of such cases.¹¹⁶ That these sentiments were deeply etched into the thinking of military men is witnessed in the many acts of *seppuku* in Japan itself immediately before or after the official surrender on 15 August 1945. Admiral Ugaki, for instance, had been “a keen proponent of special attack operations” and he insisted on leading a last attack though senior commanders did not usually sortie. This was, clearly, a flight to die. “This is my last chance to die like a samurai. I must be permitted my chance,” he insisted.¹¹⁷ Likewise, the commander who formulated the first systematic *tokkōtai* operations in the Philippines, Admiral Onishi, committed *seppuku* on 16 August 1945, the day after the surrender, “leaving a will in which he apologized to ‘the heroic souls of the *tokkōtai* pilots.’”¹¹⁸ Some members of the Imperial Guard and a few civilians also committed *seppuku* in front of the Imperial Palace on this occasion.¹¹⁹ All, quite apparently, were acts of atonement.¹²⁰

Where, in Japan, shame arising from a powerful honor code could impel violence against self as well as SMs, so too could empathetic grief induce followers of an iconic figure to join that figure in the space of death when she or he was suddenly cut down. The phenomenon where this is seen, just occasionally, is the Indian subcontinent.

When Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards on 31 October 1984, most Indians everywhere were shocked. In Bangalore and Madras in the southern parts of India at least ten persons were so moved, and seem to have identified themselves so strongly with Mrs. Gandhi, that they attempted suicide or committed suicide. Most of them chose self-immolation as their method. Several of these individuals were known to have been supporters of the Congress Party, which Mrs. Gandhi headed.¹²¹ A skeptical view of these instances may argue that personal reasons (as with Palach, say) were the principal motive and that the Gandhi shooting triggered such suicidal action. But that was not how it was read locally before some newshounds picked up the tales and relayed them in condensed summary. It is this cluster of specific grass roots readings that is so central, not the “true” motivation of the personnel concerned.

The cultural setting must be attended to here: not just India, but that of southern (mostly) Saivite Hindu India. It was precisely within this context that the sudden paralytic stroke that hit M. G. Ramachandran (MGR), a popular film idol and leading politician, in October 1984 spurred a handful of individuals into extreme action: “at least twenty-two people immolated themselves and cut off their limbs, fingers or toes as offerings to various deities” who were propitiated to spare MGR; while more than a hundred people are said to have attempted self-immolation.¹²² Three years later when MGR, as he was fondly known, died on 24 December 1987, at least 31 of “his desolate followers” are said to have been so “unable to contain their grief” that they committed suicide.¹²³ Others in the principal Tamilian city of Madras went on “an orgy of violence” in the main thoroughfare of Anna Salai. Several of them assaulted the statue of MGR’s arch-rival, M Karunanidhi, with crowbars and placed burning tires around its neck in a symbolic killing.¹²⁴ What is more, at

these sites of violence exclamations of despair, essentialized expressions, were voiced by MGR's followers: "Why should Madras survive when MGR has gone"; and "With MGR dead what is the use of living."¹²⁵

The coincidence of regional location for these three instances of extreme reaction is surely no accident. The depths of devotional attachment to deity, idol, and leader would seem to be several bars deeper in the southern part of the Indian subcontinent than elsewhere in that part of the world. Indeed, it is arguable that they are re-enacting the expression of *vannanpu*, or "violent devotion," inscribed within the *Periya Purānam*, a widely-known twelfth-century text produced by a minister in the Cola court, which is about 63 Tamil Saiva *tontars* (servitors)—also designated *nāyanmārs* or saints—who extend unqualified devotion to Lord Siva through an orgy of self-mutilation.¹²⁶

My final illustration within this cluster of "like cases" is more idiosyncratic. It reveals not suicide in empathetic sorrow, but dying naturally in empathetic grief. This occurred somewhere in Maharashtra in western India after reports of Indira Gandhi's killing flashed across the media waves. One old lady descended into a chasm of tears in deep lament. She cried and cried and cried . . . and died.¹²⁷

Now, here too, skeptics could contend that this result was due to the woman's bodily ailments. But the point is that kin and local people, and at least one journalist, interpreted the death in the manner marked by this report. In brief, the suggestion is that her bodily alignment fused with that of her leader and icon; and she joined Indira Gandhi in the land of the dead—naturally.

In these unusual stories from India it is the fusion of Self with a particular form of Iconic Other that is significant—to deliberately present the elements in this structured relationship in abstract style. The Other in both instances is a representative of state, or party leader with statelike features in the eyes of the faithful (some of those who killed themselves in 1984, one recalls, were Congress Party supporters). This suggests to me that Bruce Kapferer's thesis in *Legends of State, Myths of People* (1988) is pertinent to this discussion. This may seem far-fetched at first sight because his study is set within the context of the Sinhalese, their healing rites and politics. However, the two universes, that of Sinhalese and that of Indians, especially Indians from Kerala, Tamilnadu, and Telangana, overlap and share many deities, theories of bodily order/disorder and *ayurvedic* practice¹²⁸ to name but a few facets of the longstanding intertwining of cultural patterns.

Kapferer's argument is that the wholesomeness and well-being of individuals are intimately related to that of the state. In the course of several healing rituals practiced in the southern parts of Sri Lanka cures of some mentally disordered patients are organized within, and through, the symbolic body of the state, usually an artifact indexing Mahāsammata, the first king, thus a primordial figure and a symbol that is archetype for the Sinhala (and Indic) concept of state.¹²⁹ It is a tale of cosmic, existential alignment or parallelism elaborated by Kapferer through a phenomenological approach utilizing a specific interpretation of the concept "ontology."¹³⁰ Further clarifications of this thesis are not required; it is adequate that this article points in his direction for those inclined to ponder on its possibilities for analyses of some Indian events, *mutatis mutandis*, through a similar approach.

The pertinence of this direction foreshadowed by Kapferer can be highlighted by juxtaposing the case of the Woman-who-cried-herself-to-Death-in-Sympathetic-Grief with the self-immolation by Norman Morrison. Unlike that of the Indian woman, Morrison's act was a violent one and a protest, and a protest carried out in a specific public space—in front of the Pentagon—meaningful to his complaint. However, the evidence points clearly to Morrison's own, profound grief arising from the victimization of so many innocent Vietnamese in the course of American air raids. As a Quaker humanitarian and pacifist of

deep conviction as well as an anti-war activist, he seems to have moved into an abyss of despair. As his wife records matters, he (and she) “agonized [over] the military’s immoral killings.” That 2nd November morning Norman, she says, was quite calm. But when she went out to pick up their two other children Morrison took their one-year-old infant girl along with him when he went on his final mission, but released her before his self-immolation.

Although, along one dimension, he was addressing Robert McNamara and the American public, after reading the brief references in Biggs¹³¹ the present author conjectured that, because of his Quaker background, along another dimension Morrison must also have been speaking to self, witnessing to self, and acting for self. This is confirmed by a subsequent finding: his wife’s affirmation that “in his daily life” he “relied on conscience and internal guidance which he sometimes referred to as the Inner Light;” and also by the suicide note he thoughtfully posted to his wife on his way to the Pentagon where he stated that for days he had been praying “only that I be shown what all I must do” and that “this morning with no warning I was shown.”¹³² In this sense one can see in his act a special twist of the Protestant ethic with all its individualistic connotations.

In this despairing act of protest, Morrison died, in large part, unsung and unheralded. His individuation was thus compounded. He was a lone crusader. The overwhelming mass of Americans did not care and/or deemed him just another freak. In contrast, therefore, with Jan Palach, Thic Quang Duc, Sivakumaran, Thilīpan, Annai Pupati, and several others referred to in this article, there is no widely noticed public statue or momentous icon for Morrison.

Morrison’s self-immolation was an act of individual protest without organizational links of note or agitation/homage orchestrated in subsequent years. The personhood in despair was an individuated self nourished in a land known as the United States where individuation in all its forms, whether materialist instrumentality, quests for solitude, egoistic grandstanding, assertion of personal autonomy, rationalist political science theory, et cetera, coexist in good measure.¹³³ Perhaps the ultimate symbol of this individuated being in the United States is the image of a shrink with a client on the couch, a highly privatized setting, an image that also expresses the weight attached to psychology and the behavioral sciences within the American social sciences.

Somatic illnesses are addressed in different ways at the grass-roots in the world of Indic civilization. The cure has to be acceptable to kin and neighbor. The rite is a public affair. Thus, in like manner, the local, kindred explanation for the death of the Woman-who-cried-herself-to-Death-in-Empathetic-Grief was a social one relating her despair, and her death, to Mrs. Gandhi’s sudden and violent, and therefore especially saddening, extinction. In my extension this was an interpretation that aligned and even fused the woman cosmically, existentially, with the icon of her political orientation. This was an act of merger encoded within localized interpretation. In this reading, unlike the death of Morrison, the woman did not die alone: she died with Indira Gandhi, for Indira Gandhi, and, in tropic terms, facing¹³⁴ Indira Gandhi. In parallel manner the contemporary Indians who donate their blood at special events centered on the sites of statues to dead celebrities, such as Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, identify their gift of blood “with the blood of the person being commemorated.” This fusion of self with a fallen spiritual force from the immediate past is seen to have the capacity to transmit their combined power into the veins of recipients in the near future.¹³⁵ Such deeply rooted subjective understandings must surely inform readings of all these acts.

Both instances, the Unknown Indian Woman-who-cried-herself-to-Death-in-Empathetic-Grief and Morrison, are, of course, events at the extreme end of each social order, utterly unusual and quite exceptional.¹³⁶ But juxtaposed beside each other as extreme cases, they mark profound differences in their social and political contexts. Such a binary

contrast may seem far-fetched to certain forms of postmodern skepticism, or they may raise the hackles of those who view dichotomies as axiomatic anathema, but that, the author holds, would be a product of epistemological or secular rational blind spots. This conclusion, then, is a tangential note that is a giant leap from a journey that began¹³⁷ as a taxonomic exercise seeking to expand the horizons of political scientists in useful, albeit rationalistic, ways.

Concluding Remarks

This article is a survey of the literature on SMs in comparative perspective that focuses on a common and significant feature in the contemporary instances of this phenomenon, namely, the affirmation of the justice of their cause by individuals/organizations deploying such methods. Insofar as these acts of witness provide evidence on the motivations of the suicidal activists, the argument is that scholars should move beyond the prevalent focus on *suicidal attacks* to embrace a whole range of suicidal operations that express justificatory testimony. Thus, the article widens the scope of its survey to encompass defensive suicides, no-escape challenges, no-escape assassinations, suicides-in-protest (both fasts and self-immolation) and even, although debatably, suicides in grief. In effect, a typology of SMs is generated.

Central to this thesis is a (1) questioning of the Cartesian rationality that guides some (but not all) studies in this field and (2) an emphasis on the different cultural settings—each in dynamic historical process—that inform the imperatives that, on the one hand, drive individuals and organizations to deploy SMs and, on the other, induce—in many instances, but not everywhere—the immediate audiences they address to respond positively to the sacrifice for collective good that is emblazoned on the act. In revealing the manner in which such cultural strands as honor codes and ascetic self-abnegation motivate and legitimize the sacrifice of self¹³⁸ for the collective good, the argument in effect challenges those scholars nourished in the West who allow their cultural assumptions of individuated rationality to blunt their comparative analyses.

Notes

1. See, for example, Diego Gambetta, “Foreword,” in Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. v, ix and Stephen Holmes “Al-Qaeda, September 11, 2001,” in *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, pp. 131–172. Although presenting a few useful points and tacking in other directions in a façade of balance, Holmes’s commentary is permeated by a materialist determination, marked by his stress on indoctrination and the manipulation of violent perpetrators by organizations that “dupe” them (2005: 134–135, 139, 147). Cf. the lessons these scholars could derive from Bruce Kapferer, ed., *Beyond Rationalism* (New York: Berghahn Press, 2004) on the one hand and, on the other, David Mosse’s work on the overlaps and parallel structures of Catholic saint and Hindu deity worship in rural Tamilnadu (“Catholic Saints and the Hindu Village Pantheon in Rural Tamilnadu, India,” *Man* 29 (1994), pp. 301–332). Mosse, for instance, reveals how the Christian missionaries and the globalizing force of Christianity have introduced “absolutes” and “essentialist” notions [in other words what I call an either/or epistemology] antithetical to the relativizing praxis of indigenous Indians; but that rural Catholics have adopted these relativizing facets in some measure. Thus, one finds “a non-contradictory relationship between Christianity as a world religion and the local (Tamil) social and cultural matrix in which it is embedded” (Ibid., p. 324).

2. Gambetta, “Foreword,” in *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, p. vi.

3. From Bruce Hoffman, “The Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” *Atlantic Monthly* 291(5) (2003), quoted by Holmes, “Al-Qaeda,” p. 158.

4. It has been estimated that the suicide attacks of the LTTE between 1987 and 2003 killed 521 people, “making it one of the most lethal proponents of such a method” (Brendan O’Duffy, “LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Majoritarianism, Self-Determination, and Military-to-Political Transition in Sri Lanka,” in Marianne Heiberg, Brendan O’Leary, and John Tirman, eds., *Terror, Insurgency, and the State: Ending Protracted Conflicts* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 266.

5. See “The Murder of T. Subathiran: Sri Lanka’s End Game,” press statement from the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), 13 January 2003, (<http://www.uthr.org>).

6. Gossip suggests that former Colonel Lucky Algama was assassinated by a suicide bomber at an election rally in December 1999 because of his commanding role during specific massacres in the Eastern Province. He had joined the right-wing United National Party on retirement and was on the campaign trail when he (and others) was killed. This selection was strategic as well for the strike occurred on the same day as the attempted assassination of President Kumaratunga. The latter effort (which maimed but did not kill Kumaratunga) was designed to facilitate the victory of the United National Party (UNP) at the parliamentary elections. If the UNP had triumphed it was likely that Algama would become Defence Minister. The failure of the attempt on Kumaratunga (many others were killed) undermined that plan—indeed, her courage in continuing the campaign with one eye permanently out-of-use secured a critical sympathy vote and helped her party at the elections.

7. Information on the nature and location of the explosives was supplied by Eric Perera, ex-police bomb specialist. There is some debate as to whether this atrocity was due to EROS or LTTE or a combined effort.

8. Besides the suicide bomber driving the truck, a few Tigers arrived in a three-wheeler and fired RPG shells and machine guns at the Ceylinco and World Trade Centre buildings opposite the Central Bank. Their escape was tagged by some civilians who guided the security forces to their hide-out where they were killed or killed themselves.

9. Figures from Jagath Senaratna and a Tamil friend with variation on the number injured. Those injured and killed included Tamils, whether recent migrants or long-resident in the city. As a pointer to the demographic context: there were 251,007 Tamils residing in the greater metropolitan area of Colombo in 2001, making up roughly 24 percent of the total population (information from Gerald H. Peiris). A few of these Tamils are staunch opponents of the LTTE, but others are quiet but firm supporters and yet others are sympathizers. As such, segments of the Tamil population in the area have been a fifth column for LTTE operations.

10. As normal with all their successful enterprises the LTTE have made a DVD of the Katunayake attack. See Gunaratna “A Wake Up Call,” *Frontline* 18(17) (18–31 August 2001) for a brief account of the attack by a 14-person squad.

11. On Al Qaeda, see especially Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). For LTTE, see Peter Chalk, “Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam’s (LTTE) International Organisation and Operation (A Preliminary Analysis),” on the Internet, Winter 1999 and as No. 77 on 17 March 2000; Anthony Davis, “Tiger International. How a Secret Global Network keeps Sri Lankan Tamil Guerilla Organization Up and Killing,” *Asia Week* (July 1996), pp. 30–38; and G. H. Peiris, “Clandestine Transactions of the LTTE and the Secessionist Campaign in Sri Lanka,” *Ethnic Studies Report* 19 (2001), pp. 1–38 and O’Duffy “LTTE,” pp. 272–273 as well as (www.uthr.org).

12. As I drafted this article in November 2006 a lead story in TamiNet announced that their naval forces had sunk two Dvoras of the SLNavy and damaged another, while capturing 4 seamen and stripping weapons from one of the Dvoras. Graphic pictures of their gains and the POWs were displayed (*TamilNet*, Thursday, 9 November 2006, 12:45 GMT). The account in a pro-state newspaper confirmed the loss of these two vessels to ramming by fast speedboats as they were escorting a ship ferrying “passengers” (i.e., troops) and the fact that 25 seamen were missing in action (Ranga Jayasuriya’s “Defence Diary” in *Sunday Observer*, 12 October 2006).

13. Sageman, “Islam and Al Qaeda,” in Ami Pedhazur, ed., *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 122.

14. For example, Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005); Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill. The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 2–3; and Holmes, “Al-Qaeda.”

15. Ivan Strenski, “Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim Human Bombers,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15 (2003), pp. 1–34; David Cook, “The Implications of ‘Martyrdom Operations’ for Contemporary Islam,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 32 (2004), pp. 129–152 and *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); D. Benjamin and S. Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam’s War against America* (New York: Random House, 2002); Bruce Hoffman and G. H. McCormick, “Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27 (2004), pp. 243–281; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Anna Simons, “Making Enemies: An Anthropology of Islamist Terror,” *The American Interest* Autumn (September–October, 2006), pp. 6–18 and 35–45 and Roxanne Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Atran is a loose cannon in this spectrum. He is alive to the power of belief and honor codes in impelling sacrificial commitment; but also stresses organizational “manipulation” and espouses a theory of brainwashing that taps into “universal heartfelt human sentiments that . . . are probably innate and part of biological evolution” (in Josie Glausiusz, “Discover Dialogue: Anthropologist Scott Atran. The Surprises of Suicide Terrorism,” *Discover* 24(10) [October 2003] and Scott Atran, “Genesis of Suicide Terrorism,” *Science* 7 [2003], pp. 1534–1539). The latter emphasis is in keeping with his presentation of self as a “scientist”—surely another demonstration of the positivist epistemology that directs his interpretations.

16. Michael Biggs, “Dying without Killing: Self-Immolations, 1963–2002,” in Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 187.

17. See M. Roberts and Arthur Saniotis, “Empowering the Body and Noble Death,” *Social Analysis* 50 (2006), pp. 7–24.

18. Kapferer has presented this argument in a different, more theoretical vocabulary associated with his concept of “ontology” (*Legends of People, Myths of State* [Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988], p. 84).

19. Roberts, “Saivite Symbolism, Sacrifice and Tamil Tiger Rites,” *Social Analysis* 49 (2005), pp. 67–93 and “Pragmatic Action and Enchanted Worlds: A Black Tiger Rite of Commemoration,” *Social Analysis* 50 (2006), pp. 73–102.

20. See Biggs, “Dying without Killing,” pp. 173, 178–180 and Mark Moyer, “Political Monks: the Militant Buddhist Movement during the Vietnam War,” *Modern Asian Studies* 38 (2004), pp. 749–784. Moyer contends that only a militant segment of the Buddhist population of some 3–4 million supported this campaign against the regime (the Catholics themselves were around 1.5 million in a country with a total population of approximately 15 million). Robert J. Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Peace Movement in South Vietnam, 1964–1966* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002) provides some background, but focuses on the period 1964–66. Note that the Buddhists *qua* Buddhists were divided into seven groups.

21. Biggs, “Dying without Killing,” *passim*; Kurt W. Treptow, “The Winter of Despair: Jan Palach and the Collapse of the Prague Spring,” in Treptow, *From Zalmoxis to Jan Palach: Studies in East European History* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1992), pp. 117–136 and details in the text to follow.

22. Data from (<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/mishima.htm>) and “The Life Story of Yukio Mishima,” in (<http://faculty.washington.edu/kendo/mishima.html>). Also see Biggs, “Dying without Killing,” pp. 193, 195; Roy Starrs, *Deadly Dialectics. Sex, Violence and Nihilism in the World of Yukio Mishima* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994) and Brian Moeren, “The Beauty of Violence: *Jidaigeki*, *Yakusza* and ‘Erodution’ Films in Japanese Cinema,” in D. Riches, ed., *The Anthropology of Violence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 104–117.

23. The LTTE presents these actions as *uyirāyutam*, or “life-(gifted)-as-weapon” or as *tiyakam* (abandonment) and it has therefore been suggested that they are not suicide because they are selfless acts for the general benefit (A. J. V. Chandrakanthan, “Eelam Tamil Nationalism: An Inside View,” in

A. J. Wilson, ed., *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and Development in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (London: Hurst and Company, 2000), p. 164 and Peter Schalk, "Resistance and Martyrdom in the Process of State Formation of Tamililam," in Joyce Pettigrew, ed., *Martyrdom and Political Resistance* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1997), pp. 74, 76, 67–68). However, unlike the context of modern Japan, the cultural milieu does not unambiguously support this claim. The southern Indian traditions seem to have valorized "ritual suicide" (see later text) and several Hindu texts celebrate the pilgrimage to death (William Bo Sax, "Pilgrimage Unto Death," in James Veitch, ed., *To Strive and Not To Yield. Essays in Honour of Colin Brown* (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 1992, pp. 200–212). Thus the LTTE position seems innovative veneer. Be that as it may, the concept of life-as-weapon has now received wider dissemination: see Christoph Reuter, *My Life is A Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

24. The LTTE used a 15-person attack team in five boats and claim to have sunk two Dvoras (www.TamilNet.com, 18 October 2006), although the Colombo newspapers only suggested limited success. It is clear, however, that all or almost all the attackers died, as at least 8 bodies were recovered.

25. Stephen Hopgood argues this effectively and validly for the LTTE ("Tamil Tigers, 1987–2002," in Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 43–76). However, he is wholly unaware of the religious backdrop that conditions the process of sacrificial gift of self for the LTTE and dismisses the force of patriotism in one magnificent wave of a cynical, rationalist, and universalist hand (pp. 65, 76). For contrary evidence, see Roberts, "Saivite Symbolism," and "Pragmatic Action," some of the poems in D. Hellmann-Rajanayagam, "'And Heroes Die': "Poetry of the Tamil Liberation Movement in Northern Sri Lanka," *South Asia* 28 (2005), pp. 112–153 and both the data and assessments in O'Duffy, "LTTE," p. 262 and *passim*.

26. Information from an ex-Tiger fighter gleaned by a Tamil schoolmate (names withheld). The six criteria were not specified. "Family circumstances" probably means attentiveness to the number of children left in the family.

27. From (www.TamilNet.com), 6 July 1997. See also Hopgood, "Tamil Tigers."

28. Peter Schalk, "Resistance and Martyrdom," pp. 63–64, 79 and Hellman-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers. Armed Struggle for Identity* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag), p. 177.

29. M. R. Narayan Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publishers, 2003), pp. 201–202, 109. Narayan Swamy says this policy was adopted in 1984.

30. Schalk, "Resistance and Martyrdom," p. 74.

31. However, there were some Tamils in the Jaffna Peninsula and elsewhere who considered the Tigers to be "fanatics" and looked askance at their suicidal ruthlessness (information from a young Tamil of that day).

32. This obvious sociological point was noted on a priori grounds in Roberts, "Filial Devotion and the Tiger Cult of Suicide," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 30 (1996), p. 262. It has been rightly stressed by Mia Bloom (*Dying to Kill*, p. 2 and Reuter, *My Life is A Weapon*), whereas Pape ("Dying to Win," p. 140) is off course here. This is not to say that recruitment was only shaped by this factor. Kin, friendship, and smuggling networks definitely came into play in the early years 1976–86 before the LTTE began the process of obliterating other groups (at a price, namely, some the generation of staunch Tamil dissidents). The Karaiyar caste is strongly represented in the leadership, forming its "nucleus" as O'Duffy notes ("LTTE," p. 268).

33. Schalk, "Beyond Hindu Festivals: The Celebration of Great Heroes' Day by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Europe," in Martin Baumann, B. Luchesi, and A. Wilke, eds., *Tempel und Tamilien in Zweiter Heimat* (Wurzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2003), p. 396.

34. Schalk, "Historicization of the Martial Ideology of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)," *South Asia* 20 (1997), p. 61.

35. For an unsolicited gem indicating widespread grass-roots impact, see Roberts, "Saivite Symbolism," pp. 77–78.

36. Note, however, that it is widely stated that the LTTE had roots in an underground outfit known as the Tamil New Tigers, whose history is shadowy. It is said to have been formed in 1972, and young Pirapaharan, Chetti Thanabālasingham, Sivarajah, and others are said to have been key figures (T. Sabaratnam, *Pirapaharan*, [http://www.sangam.org/index_orig.html], a serialized book on

the Web, 2003 et. seq., chaps. 6–9). Cf. the meager details in Narayan Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind*, pp. 34, 36–37.

37. The fullest account is now available on the Web in the work of the journalist Sabaratnam, *Pirapaharan*, chap. 7, “The Cyanide Suicide.” Also see M. R. Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1994), p. 29; Roberts “Filial Devotion,” pp. 252–254 and Schalk, “Historicization,” pp. 59–61.

38. *Cutantiram* is a term with multiple meanings in Tamil. In some contexts it refers to freedom or independence; in other contexts it means a right. Thus in one part of India it refers to the prestations from landowners to their service providers, a right to which the latter are entitled; Diane Mines, *Fierce Gods: Inequality, Ritual and the Politics of Dignity in a South Indian Village* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 75–77, 106–107, and 220.

39. Cook, “Implications of ‘Martyrdom Operations’,” pp. 139–140.

40. James Waltz, “The Significance of the Voluntary Martyrs of Ninth-Century Cordoba,” *Muslim World* 50 (1970), p. 129, quoted in *ibid.*

41. Personal communication from David Cook (e-mail note in 2003). Cook made this point during a tripartite exchange involving Basel Saleh and the present author as part of his suggestion that we should incorporate a distinction between “passive and active martyrs” within our proposed comparative survey (a venture that never got off the ground). Cf. Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, p. 26. The belligerent nature of the Cordoba Christian challenge was one reason why the present author disagrees with Cook’s conceptualization of their stance as “passive.”

42. Biggs, “Dying without Killing,” p. 174, citing Nepstad.

43. He thought he was shooting Deputy Inspector General Scott, but killed Assistant Superintendent Saunders instead, mistaking him for Scott—who was held responsible for the death of Lala Lajpat Rai (Niraja Rao, “Bhagat Singh and the Revolutionary Movement,” [www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/rdv3n1/bsingh.htm-52k], retrieved on 19 October 2006, 02:00:07 GMT).

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. Poster art lithographs is one of the modes through which his fame was disseminated. Christopher Pinney reveals the rich symbolism encoded within this mode of transmission—see “The Nation (Un)pictured? Chromolithography and ‘Popular’ Politics in India, 1878–1995,” *Critical Inquiry* 23 (1997), pp. 834–867 and “Indian Magical Realism: Notes on Popular Visual Culture,” in G. Badra, G. Prakash, and S. Tharu, eds., *Subaltern Studies* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 201–225.

48. Narayan Swamy, *Tigers*, pp. 1994: 51, 59; Sabaratnam, *Pirapaharan* [fn. 35] *passim*; and Schalk, “Martyrdom and Resistance,” pp. 55, 66.

49. From <http://www.funtrivia.com/askft/Question71898.html>. Note: “Ethnic Hindus looked upon [Gandhi] as an impediment of (*sic*) their plan to revenge the atrocities on Hindus. Godse was a child of this extremist thinking” (Chunibhai Vaidya, “Assassination of Gandhi—The Facts Behind,” available at [<http://209.85.135.104/search?q=cache:O7vUAjnRTzoJ:www.mk Gandhi.org/assassin.htm+Godse+and+Gandhi&hl=de&gl=ch&ct=clnk&cd=6>]).

50. From review of Koenraad Elst, *Gandhi and Godse: A Review and a Critique*, available at (<https://www.vedamsbooks.com/no25334.htm>).

51. For the impact of the depression and the influence of kin and localized networks in the formation of the Ketsumeidan, see Stephen S. Large, “Nationalist Extremism in Early Showa Japan: Inoue Nissho and the ‘Blood Pledge Corps Incident’, 1932,” *Modern Asian Studies* 35 (2001), pp. 533–564. This should be supplemented by Brian D. Victoria, “The Ethical Implications of Zen-related Terrorism in 1930s Japan,” AAR Zen Seminar, San Antonio, November 2004. Note: Victoria stresses that Hirohito was not hostile to the strengthening of his own power; but he came down hard on the military mutiny because he would not “sanction major land redistribution in the countryside and some form of nationalization of the *zaibatsu*’s enterprises” (e-mail note, 11 December 2006).

52. Victoria, “Ethical Implications of Zen-related Terror.”

53. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, specifically (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Blood_Incident) and (http://209.85.129.104/search?q=cache:8792EkiIpXIJ:en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inoue_Nissho). Also see Victoria, "Ethical Implications of Zen-related Terror."

54. Victoria, "Ethical Implications of Zen-related Terror," p. 15.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 5. The Vietnamese monk who initiated the series of self-immolatory protest suicides in 1963 also adopted the lotus position.

56. Aizawa, as a practitioner of Zen swordsmanship, "felt ashamed" (his words) that he did not effect the kill in one clean blow (Victoria, *Zen War Stories* [London: Routledge, 2003], p. 30). In "swordsmanship the *samurai* seeks to lose all consciousness of his self, to be 'without heart' (*mushin*), to be at one with his surroundings," thereby exemplifying the principle of selflessness that is at the center of both aesthetics and martial arts in Japanese society (Moeren, "The Beauty of Violence," p. 116). For chilling justifications of the sword strike by a Zen teacher, see Victoria, *Zen at War*, 2nd ed. (New York: Weatherhill, 2006), p. 110 (and also pp. 113, 170–171, and 187).

57. Victoria, "Ethical Implications of Zen-related Terror," pp. 25–28, 32.

58. Quoted in Victoria, "Ethical Implications of Zen-related Terror," pp. 10–11.

59. Victoria, "Ethical Implications of Zen-related Terror," pp. 31, 19–20, 21.

60. Victoria, "Ethical Implications of Zen-related Terror," p. 2.

61. See also Victoria, *Zen War Stories* and *Zen at War*.

62. E-mail message, 8 December 2006.

63. Roy Starrs, *Deadly Dialectics*, pp. 194, 6–9.

64. Quoted in Moeren, "The Beauty of Violence," pp. 109–110.

65. Moeren, "The Beauty of Violence," pp. 107, 111 and Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), *passim*.

66. Moeren, "The Beauty of Violence," p. 110.

67. Sageman, "Islam and Al Qaeda," pp. 15–17, 30–33, 134–135 and Benjamin and Simon, *Age of Sacred Terror*, pp. 74–83.

68. Benjamin and Simon, *Age of Sacred Terror*, p. 83.

69. Bruce Hoffman, "The Logic of Suicide Terrorism," Rand 2003, available at (<http://rand.org/pubs/reprints/RP1187/index2.html>). It is reminiscent too of the justificatory wrapping in which the tale of the first cyanide suicide by Pakin in 1984 is presented in the LTTE magazine, *Māvīrar-kurippetu*: "having enjoyed cyanide, he died heroically" (quoted in Schalk, "Martyrdom and Resistance," p. 75).

70. Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 1.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 231–233.

72. See later text for further details on the Morrison case. Note: a journalist has speculated that his act served as the "emotional catalyst" that converted McNamara to the view that the war in Vietnam was futile (quoted in Biggs, "Dying without Killing," p. 202).

73. Personal communication from Andrew Lass, who was a student at Charles University at that moment (Chicago, November 1991).

74. Kurt W. Treptow, "The Winter of Despair," pp. 126, 129.

75. Havel was repeatedly arrested during the 1970s and 1980s and served several years in prison for his dissident activities. By the 1980s Havel was the undisputed unofficial leader of the Czech human rights movement. In November 1989 he formed a new opposition group, Civic Forum. Later in February 1993 Havel became the president of the Czechoslovak Republic after the Communist and Soviet yoke had been removed.

76. Treptow, "The Winter of Despair," pp. 127–128.

77. S. Pfaff and G. Yang, "Double-edged Rituals and the Symbolic Resources of Collective Action: Political Commemorations and the Mobilization of Protest," *Theory and Society* 30 (2001), pp. 539–587 and Treptow, "The Winter of Despair," p. 128. Wenceslas Square was obviously too sacrosanct for its name to be altered.

78. For a starting point, see J. S. Hawley, ed., *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

79. George Hart, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 88–93, 163.

80. S. Jayabarathi, “Self-sacrifice or Navakantam,” available at (<http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/Choir/4262/navkantha.htm>), (n. d.).

81. *Vīragal* means “hero stone;” whereas *natukal* (also written as *nadugal* or *natugal*) means “planted stone.” See K. Rajam, *South Indian Memorial Stones* (Thanjavur: Manoo Pathikam, 2000) and S. Settar, “Memorial Stones in South India,” in S. Settar and G. D. Sontheimer, eds., *Memorial Stones* (Dharwad: Institute of Indian Art History, 1982), pp. 183–197. The LTTE introduced the concept of *natukal* to the Sri Lankan Tamils, where, it appears, the term was not widely known (in the meaning specified earlier) at the grass-roots level, unlike parts of country India. Also see Roberts, “Pragmatic Action,” pp. 84–85 and Figure 5.

82. Hart, *Poems*, p. 25.

83. Henry Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1921 [rep. 1981]); pp. 35, 103; Rajam, *South Indian*; K. Kailasapathy, *Tamil Heroic Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 76, and Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 27–70.

84. Bayly, *Saints*, pp. 27ff.

85. *Ibid.*, especially pp. 32–33 and David Mosse, “Catholic Saints,” pp. 301–332.

86. Mines, *Fierce Gods*, p. 133. Also see Bayly, *Saints*, pp. 30–31.

87. Grapevine information from several sources indicates that Velupillai Pirapāharan favors the god Murugan (also note Narayan Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind*, p. 110). Regarding the characteristics attributed to God Kataragama, see Obeyesekere, “Social Change and the Deities: The Rise of the Kataragama Cult in Modern Sri Lanka,” *Man* 12 (1977), pp. 377–396.

88. Christiana Natali, “Building Cemeteries, Constructing Identities: Funerary Practices and Nationalist Discourse among the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka,” Paper presented at the Conference of the British Association of Asian Studies, 2005.

89. Quotation from a LTTE leader in Schalk, “Martyrdom and Resistance,” pp. 66, 79 and (www.TamilNet.com), 6 July 1999. In the poems produced by LTTE fighters the *māvīrar* are also referred to as *vittutal*, “seed bodies”; while one also finds the “motif of the blood-soaked soil out of which new life grows,” and one of the headstones reproduced by Hellmann-Rajanayagam has an epitaph that reads: “Hush! Tread softly. Here have been put to rest the Heroes’ Bodies as Seed.” Thus, she notes, in “turning to ashes, the [sacrificial] hero fertilises the soil” (“And Heroes Die,” pp. 123–124, 139, and 141).

The LTTE have established an Office of Great Heroes and the *thuyilam illam* for the fallen are kept in immaculate order. Several were bulldozed by the army after they occupied a good part of the Jaffna Peninsula in 1995. These have been meticulously rebuilt. Also see Roberts, “Saivite Symbolism,” pp. 76–82.

90. D. B. S. Jeyaraj, “No Public Speech Ceremony for LTTE Chief this Year?” 26 November 2006, available at (<http://transcurrents.com/tamiana/archives/234>).

91. When discussing the concept of *tiyaki*, this implicit possibility was raised by a young Tamil friend from a Protestant background who was raised in Jaffna in the 1980s and 1990s. This is not entirely alien to Saivite Tamil culture. The Cankam poetry refers to *perumpayar ulakam* or “warrior’s heaven” (Kailasapathy, *Tamil Heroic Poetry*, p. 255). If this term does not appear in LTTE hagiography, it would be extremely significant. It would be significant the other way too.

92. Information from two Protestant Tamils brought up in the Jaffna Peninsula in the 1980s and 1990s (names must be withheld). A prominent activist for some time, Revd Chandrakanthan emigrated to Canada in 1995 and is one of the most uncompromising advocates of Eelam under the LTTE within the international circuit (information from the Sinhalese peaceniks who attended a peace process conference organized by the Berghof Foundation over a weekend in mid-April 2006 and also the author’s own impressions at the Geneva Call Workshop on the following Monday where

Chandranathan was one of the chairpersons). Also note the activism and writings of Fr. Emmanuel who has been based in Germany in recent years.

Mosse's data ("Catholic Saints") on the cross fertilization in patterns of worship between Catholic and Hindu villagers in parts of rural India, and the popularity of saint cults and their tombs as shrines vested with punishing power, leads to the conjecture that similar practices prevailed in northern Lanka, especially in the Vanni and in Mannar District; and thus to a second speculation, namely, that Catholics within the Tiger fold have been a central force in effecting the major transformation in the mortuary practices of the LTTE that has been alluded to earlier.

Although the example of Gandhi may have been one inspiration for Tilīpan's's fast, one must not lose sight of the possibility that the example set by Bobby Sands and 9 other republicans in Northern Ireland in 1981 may have been stressed by the Catholic clergy and/or Tiger sympathizers in the United Kingdom. Referring to the previous examples of Irish Catholic martyrdom during the Easter Rising in 1916 as well as October 1923 (the mass hunger strike of 8,000 political prisoners leading to two deaths), George Sweeney notes: "The participants in the Easter Rising and Pearse in particular promoted an archetype in which the Irish patriots' willingness for self-immolation re-enacts a redemptive and sanctifying myth, bringing glorification to both the martyr and his country" ("Irish Hunger Strikes and the Cult of Self-Sacrifice," *Journal of Contemporary History* 28 (1993), p. 432).

93. Hellmann-Rajanayagam, "And Heroes Die," pp. 145–146 re poem no. 12 by Putuvai Rattinaturai and Roberts, "Saivite Symbolism," pp. 83–86 with Figure 6 which the present author has entitled "Bodies that Fight On." Note quotation from Sweeney in fn. 92.

94. Because the LTTE refer to their self-annihilating attacks as forms of self-sacrifice that are *uyirāyutam* (life-gifted-as-weapon) and have been highly innovative in coining the term *tar-kotai* (pronounced *tharkodai*) meaning "self-gift" and a tease on the word for suicide namely, *tarkollai* (Schalk, "Beyond Hindu Festivals," p. 403), there may be a problem in extending the concept of suicide to this context. But the argument against this extension is not clear-cut. The idea of ritual suicide seems to be clearly enunciated in the folklore and literature referring to *nadukal* and hero stones in the ancient and medieval past.

Insofar as the blood sacrifices of goats, sheep, fowl, and lambs at communal propitiations at temple festivals in southern India and Sri Lanka have been usually referred to as *velvi*, the fact that the sacrificial acts of LTTE dead are sometimes called *veta velvi*, with a clear connotation of "donation" (noted in the original draft of Hellmann-Rajanayagam's article on "And Heroes Die") marks the degree to which religious rites of collective supplication provide parallels for the LTTE rituals and the rhetorics of presentation. Using an etymological dictionary and in conversation Prof. K Sivathamby observed that *velvi* meant (i) spiritual discipline; (ii) the site of a rite; (iii) service or worship; and thus a desire or offering in search of a goal. He added that it is related to the mythological image of *kalavelvi*, where the *pey* (evil spirits) dance on the battleground and make gruel (*ponkal*) from the gore of the fallen (November 2004). Both Rohan Bastin and Mazakazu Tanaka reveal how the animal sacrifice in *velvi* is vital for the major theme of renewal in all such collective rites. Bastin, *The Domain of Constant Excess: Plural Worship at the Munnesvaram Temples in Sri Lanka* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 198–199 and Tanaka, *Patrons, Devotees and Goddesses. Ritual and Power among the Tamil Fishermen of Sri Lanka* (Kyoto: Institute of Research in Humanities, Kyoto University, 1991), pp. 119, 128. In parts of rural India, even Christian villagers invested in animal sacrifice when they propitiated powerful Catholic saints-cum-martyrs whose divine, but also violent and regenerative, power was understood to emanate from their renunciatory paths and bloody deaths (Mosse, "Catholic Saints," pp. 308–313).

95. O'Duffy, "LTTE," pp. 262–263.

96. Detailed descriptions of the fast were given to me during interviews in late November 2004 by two individuals who were present, namely, Mrs. Pushpa Selvaratnam and Thiru Master, both clearly supportive of the LTTE, while the latter was one of the dozen speakers who addressed the audience at the ceremonial opening of the LTTE's new media center on 26 November 2004. Some information about Tilīpan was gathered from an ex-Tiger fighter.

97. The fast was supported and enhanced by *pada yātras*, marches on foot, mounted by LTTE female cadres in red, which traversed the length and breadth of the Jaffna Peninsula and aroused

public fervor (Anon., “Women & the Struggle for Tamil Eelam: Freedom Birds of Tamil Eelam,” available at [<http://www.tamilnation.org/women/tamileelam.htm>]).

98. Information from Vaitheespara Ravindiran of Toronto (late November 2004) to whom the author is grateful for bringing the significance of Tilīpan’s fast to his attention.

99. The incident was the capture of a boat bearing 17 Tiger personnel, including two regional commanders, Kumarappa and Pulendran, by the SL Navy. When the government refused to hand them over to the IPKF and insisted on their transfer to Colombo, on 5 October 1987 the 17 swallowed cyanide pills that, it is said, had been slipped to them by senior Tigers who visited them (Narayan Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind*, pp. 176–178). The majority, including the two commanders, died. This event galvanized the LTTE and the war with the Indians began. The atrocities of the IPKF during this second stage, some systematic and others typical army excesses, only deepened Tamil enmity.

100. Hellmann-Rajanayagam, “And Heroes Die,” pp. 141–143.

101. Hellmann-Rajanayagam, “And Heroes Die,” p. 151. Cf. Roxanne Euben, “Killing for Politics. *Jihad*, Martyrdom, and Political Action,” *Political Theory* 20 (2002), pp. 4–35. Note that Rattinaturai’s poem was crafted in 2001. Tilīpan’s Lt. Colonelship is a posthumous title as always with LTTE fighters (Pupati was not one). Few yet know what title Dhānu (the LTTE fighter in civilian dress who killed Rajiv Gandhi) has been given (not made public).

102. D. B. S. Jeyaraj, “No public speech ceremony for LTTE Chief this year?” 26 November 2006, available at (<http://transcurrents.com/tamiana/archives/234>).

103. Schalk, “Martyrdom and Resistance,” pp. 67–68, also pp. 66, 80; Hellmann-Rajanayagam “And Heroes Die,” pp. 123–124 and information conveyed by Rajesh Venugopal of Oxford (October 2004) as well as Sri Lankan Tamil informants. The concept *tyagi* was widely deployed in describing the militant Indian freedom fighters of the anti-British struggle and was loosely rendered as “martyr” (see earlier text re Bhagat Singh). As Ulrike Niklas noted (personal communication by e-mail, October 2004), the manner in which the English word was often attached to vernacular scripts suggests that in the Indic universe there is no original equivalent of martyrdom; so that words associated with the ascetic practices of *sannyāsin* and/or disciplined warriors were deployed when they were exposed to the Christian and Islamic worlds. However, note that in south western India indigenes interacted with Syrian Christians for centuries before the advent of European missionaries. In early modern times the terms used to translate the Christian concept of “martyr” in Malayālam and Tamil, respectively, were *rakthasakshikal* and *irattacāci*, both meaning “blood testimony” (Mosse “Catholic Saints,” p. 308 and e-mail communications from Susan Bayly and Geoff Oddie). *Irattacāci* appears to have given rise to the shorten form *cāci* (witness) as translation for “martyr.”

The allusion to *raksha* is highly significant because it has demonic connotations throughout India and it is in this sense of creative, fructifying blood seeds (*raktabij*) that the Nepali Maoists today deploy this metaphor to stress how their fallen “germinate the land and give birth to 100 warriors” (Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, “‘Kill One, He becomes One Hundred’: Martyrdom as Generative Sacrifice in Nepal,” *Social Analysis* 50 [2006], p. 52). Such a concept is wholly consonant with Hindu ideas of specific deities who are born in violence, that is, as cosmic forces that are an embodiment of “creative destruction” and “creative sacrifice” (David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980], pp. 90–91), thereby re-enacting a basic proposition in Hindu thought, namely that “life is born out of darkness; death itself is the creator” (Ibid., pp. 45–46, 64–65).

104. The author has a large poster calendar similar to the one gracing the vestibule of their propaganda office in Kilinochchi with pictures of the six of them around a central picture of a memorial depicting soldiers in toil. The author also has a pocket note book with their pictures on the back cover. Shankar (Selvasinthiran Sathiyānāthan) was among the earliest fighters to die, succumbing to wounds after being taken across to India on 27 November 1982 (Schalk, “Beyond Hindu Festivals,” pp. 400–401) and it his moment of death that serves as the apical moment for the *māvīrar* rite held every 27 November since 1989. Malati was the first female fighter to die in battle, swallowing a *kuppi* on 10 October 1987 when injured and about to be captured (Schalk, “Martyrdom and Resistance,” p. 72). Miller, alias Vallipuram Vasanthan, drove the truck that blasted an army camp at Nelliyadi on 5 July 1987, the first SM launched by the LTTE.

105. Schalk, "Beyond Hindu Festivals" and Hellmann-Rajanayagam, "And Heroes Die."
106. Information conveyed by Sudarshan a Tamil from India with an academic background whom the author met at the Ford Foundation in Delhi in early 1995.
107. Mosse, "Catholic Saints," p. 321.
108. Thus at the festival for the principal temple in a village "many observe fasting" during the festival period (or its central days), and the Navarattiri Festival, usually in worship of the goddess Durga, requires "nine nights of strict fasting" (K. Sivathamby, "Divine Presence and/or Social Prominence. An Inquiry into the Social Role of Places of Worship in Jaffna Tamil Society," [<http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&lr=&q=cache:y8sxdUGUOUJ:tamilnation.org/heritage/sivathamby.pdf>]). Also see Mines, *Fierce Gods*, *passim*.
109. Schalk, "Beyond Hindu Festivals," p. 401 and Jeyaraj, "No Public Speech Ceremony for LTTE Chief this Year?" 26 November 2006 in (<http://transcurrents.com/tamiana/archives/>), p. 234. Although there is no doubt that Shankar died on 27 November 1982, the time he is said to have passed away, namely, 6.06 p.m., coincides with profound cultural idioms in ways that render the coincidence quite magical! In these parts of Asia close to the equator, circa 18 o'clock is invariably twilight. Among Tamils, to speak broadly, twilight is a moment of temporal conjuncture that is deemed to be marked by enhanced ambiguity and thus pregnant with cosmic potentialities. In both Cankam poetry and Tamil cultural conventions it is also the poignant moment when heroines/wives await the return of their warrior partners—thus it is evocative of sadness generated by prolonged separation (e.g., Hart, *Poems of Ancient Tamil*, p. 233). In this sense twilight is the moment par excellence for Tamils to inscribe the sadness of parting.
110. "And Heroes Die," p. 147. Also note Schalk, "Martyrdom and Resistance," pp. 77–88. Cf. the Irish heritage: "Ireland possessed a rich ascetic tradition that encouraged deprivation and suffering" (Sweeney, "Irish Hunger Strikes," p. 435).
111. Victoria, *Zen War Stories*.
112. Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze*, p. 17.
113. Jerome Young, "Morals, Suicide, and Psychiatry: A View from Japan," *Biotethics* 2 (2002), p. 414.
114. Albert Axell and Hideaki Kase, *Kamikaze: Japan's Suicide Gods* (London: Pearson Education, 2002), p. 4.
115. Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze* & "Betrayal by Idealism and Aesthetics," *Anthropology Today* 20 (2004) pp. 1–6 and Peter Hill, "Kamikaze," in Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 1–42. Among the inspiring tales was that relating to the *seppuku* performed by the 14th-century *samurai* warrior, Kusunoki Masashiga, whose emblem is the water chrysanthemum (Hill, "Kamikaze," p. 19). Cf. the embodiment of ritual action in fragrant flowers in LTTE rites and cultural presentations (Roberts, "Pragmatic Action," pp. 87–90).
116. A documentary film entitled "Japan's War in Colour" shown on Channel Nine in Australia in February 2003(?) displayed graphic footage of this mass suicide and quoted the words of a 14-year-old survivor. Among other facets the absolute shame felt by a *kamikaze* mini-sub pilot when he was captured remains a graphic incident in my memory bank.
117. Hill, "Kamikaze," p. 31 and Bernard Millot, *Divine Thunder: The Life and Death of the Kamikazes*, trans. by Lowell Blair (New York: McCall Publishing Co., 1971), p. 223.
118. Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze*, p. 160.
119. Biggs, "Dying without Killing," p. 179.
120. Note that in 1974 Sugiwaru Gidō, the chief abbot of the Hōkuko Zenji Temple (a branch of the Rinzaï Zen sect), published a book that was entitled—in translation—*If I Die, So What*, where he not only justified Japan's post-Meiji expansionist policy, but also "argued that the ultimate spiritual beauty of Bushido [lay within] two of its uniquely Japanese practices, [namely], ritual disembowelment (*seppuku*) and seeking revenge on one's enemies (*ada uchi*)." These practices, moreover, were construed in a primordialist and racist manner as "cours[ing] through the veins of the Japanese people" (Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 187).
121. *The Hindu*, 3 November 1984.
122. M. S. S. Pandian, *Image Trap* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992), p. 18.

123. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

124. *Frontline*, 9–22 January 1988, p. 122.

125. *India Today*, 15 January 1988, pp. 25–26. Note, too, that in daily talk supporters of MGR often referred to him as *ithaya delvam* (lord of our hearts), *puratchi talaivar* (revolutionary leader), *ponmana chemmal* (golden-hearted one) and similar phrases (*Frontline*, 9–22 January 1988, p. 12 and Pandian, *Image Trap*, p. 117).

126. Dennis Hudson, “Violent and Fanatical Devotion among the Nayanars: A Study in the *Periya Purānam* of Cēkkilār,” in Alf Hildebeitel, ed., *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees* (Delhi: Manohar (1990), pp. 375–405 and Chitrallega Vamadeva, *The Concept of Vannanpu*, “Violent Love” in *Tamil Saivism with Reference to the Periya Purānam* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Religious Studies, 1995).

127. Newspaper item, a brief note gathered in early 1995 (since lost but an incident that is clearly inscribed in the author’s memory) when the author was researching communal violence, including anti-Sikh violence after Mrs. Gandhi’s assassination.

128. Kapferer’s superb summary of humoral theory and other facets of diagnosis utilized by many *ayurvedic* physicians and exorcist healers in southern Sri Lanka within *A Celebration of Demons* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983, chaps. 3–4) would apply with necessary changes to much of India. Indeed, in his study of the interaction between Hindus and Christians in one part of rural India, Mosse has explicitly drawn on one of the principles of hierarchical encompassment extracted by Kapferer in order to clarify the interaction between saints and deities (“Catholic Saints,” p. 314).

129. Kapferer, *Legends*, pp. 49, 54, 66.

130. Kapferer’s thesis has been widely, and sometimes grossly, misunderstood by many scholars, especially in Sri Lanka. His particular use of the concept of ontology (*Legends*, pp. 19–20, 46–47, 79–84, 100–103, 211–215) may conceivably be one reason for this confusion. It has not prevented such scholars as Val Daniel, Peter van der Veer, and Robert Forster from comprehending his argument.

131. Biggs, “Dying without Killing,” pp. 181, 195.

132. Anne Morrison Welsh, “Norman Morrison, Deed of Life, Deed of Death,” in *Winds of Peace, Newsletter*, January 2000, an essay written in the summer of 1998.

133. For a thesis that stresses the force of individualism in the United States in contrast with the forms of pyramidal corporatism in the Islamic world, see Anna Simons, “Making Enemies,” 2006, especially pp. 43–45. Note her emphasis: “the salience of communal or corporate identity versus individualism has been spinning societies and cultures along different trajectories for centuries” (p. 44).

134. Facing deities and cosmic sources of power is integral to the powerful and widespread concept of *darsan*, that is, seeing and being seen by a power, usually an iconic representation in stone or hard material (Diana Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Being in India* (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Press, 1981), pp. 3–9, and Mines, *Fierce Gods*, pp. 50, 227). Even where the figure of a named deity is hidden away in the dark recesses of an inner sanctum that worshippers cannot enter, the ability to catch the eye of the deity—that is, being in the eye-flow of the image—is central to worshipping and/or votive requests. This applies even to members of scheduled castes who are several chambers away from the door but seek vision of the deity from a distance. Likewise, in south India there is a long-standing tradition that warriors had to face north and die (presumably if they were succumbing to their wounds). This practice is known as *vatakiruttal* and figures in the Cankam poetry as well as modern folk tale (Hart, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil*, pp. 88–93, 136 and D. Sivaram “Tamil Militarism. The Code of Suicide,” *Lanka Guardian*, 1 June 1992, pp. 13–15 and 24).

North was the ideal direction because that was the direction of the cosmic mountains such as Meru and, in realist terms, the Himalayas. Conversely, the “direction south . . . has a number of inferior and negative associations—with Yama, god of death, and with low castes” (Mosse, “Catholic Saints,” p. 27, n. 13).

135. Jacob Copeman, “‘Blood will be Blood.’ A Study in Indian Political Ritual,” *Social Analysis* 48 (2004), p. 131.

136. Another extreme case within the American context, but at the Right pole of its politics unlike the instance of Morrison, is the action of Timothy McVeigh, the bomber who blew up a federal building in Oklahoma City on 19 April 1995, killing 168 and injuring 850. Because he had a few accomplices, he was not a “lone crusader,” but they were still a tiny handful of extremists. His operation, of course, was not a suicide mission. But when apprehended and confronted with the death sentence, he faced the public with firm anti-state beliefs and fronted up in court with equanimity and defiance: wearing his American army uniform with its Bronze Star medal for service in Iraq and thus in manifest confrontational affirmation of his position (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy_McVeigh] and Patrick Cole, “A Look Back in TIME: Interview with Timothy McVeigh,” March 1996, accessed 8 August 2006).

137. Readers must accept on faith my affirmation that this author had no idea that the article would reach this point till he was into the final stage of the first draft on the fourth day of writing.

138. There is an unexplored arena here—albeit one that I have been addressing at the level of seminars for some time. That is, the author marks the importance of different notions of selfhood, namely, concepts of “the person” or “individual,” in different cultural settings. This critical arena has been bracketed as a relevant sphere that cannot be addressed within the confines of a single article.