



P.O.V.

Season

19

Discussion Guide

No More Tears Sister

A Film by Helene Klodawsky



www.pbs.org/pov



Letter from the Filmmaker

SPRING 2006

Dear Viewer,

Like many others who have devoted their working lives to documentary filmmaking, my passion stems from a deep desire to bring the voices of those often relegated to the margins of society to the centre. Hence, many of my films over the last twenty years have focused on women and their diverse roles and experiences. I have represented them as mothers, lovers, workers, creators, activists, immigrants, victims and heroines.

Working closely with artists, poor people and other communities who often see themselves as marginalized, I have tried to reframe “history” from multiple points of view. Whether filming impoverished mothers in the wealthiest countries of the world, gender-bending writers ahead of their time or young Palestinians and Israelis on the eve of the first intifada, I have tried to shed light on corners of experience usually hidden from public view. Over the years, I have been fortunate in finding exceptional characters, whose real lives are often more dramatic and revealing than fiction.

When I was first approached by the National Film Board of Canada to create an auteur film about women and war, I considered myself up to the task. Besides making films about other conflict zones, there was a personal connection as well. Through my mother, who survived Auschwitz (in addition to the Lodz Ghetto and other concentration camps), I have lived in close proximity to the shadows and aftershocks of war all my life. Growing up within a community of refugees and victims of torture, I witnessed both despair and formidable resilience as responses to indelible loss. Questions about wars and women’s experience within them were part of my daily vocabulary.

I was drawn to the subject of women’s experience of war in Sri Lanka—a war that scholar Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah has called the “ethnic fratricide” of his country. Sri Lanka’s conflict—raging in various degrees of intensity since 1983—has been one of the least known but more intractable wars of the postcolonial era. It has caused at least 65,000 deaths, displaced up to one million people, resulted in severe human-rights abuses, and compromised Sri Lanka’s once-promising development. In his book *Reflections On War, The Evil And The End Of History*, philosopher-journalist Bernard-Henri Lévy calls the war in Sri Lanka one of the “forgotten wars.”

I wanted to understand how ethnic conflict and nationalist struggles impact women—be they victims of war, militant fighters or peace builders. I wondered whether there was a feminist critique of both state and guerrilla violence. It was well known that both the Sri



Director Helene Klodowsky



Letter from the Filmmaker

Lankan military and the opposing Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were both guilty of torture, illegal detention, disappearances and extrajudicial executions. I wanted to explore whether women were, on one hand, torn between loyalties to their ethnic community, and, on the other hand, the community of women. Did oppressed minority women imagine fighting injustice in different ways than their male counterparts?

The story of Rajani Thiranyagama—her courageous life, unique vision and tragic assassination—offered a compelling narrative through which to pose many of my questions. Rajani’s evolution into a spirited champion of the rights of the Tamil people in the 70s and 80s paralleled the escalation of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Moved by her people’s complex struggle against ruthless state violence, she believed Tamil militancy was the answer and joined the liberation movement. But when she witnessed the corruption and cruelty within these forces, she felt compelled to document what she saw and urged her people to resist blind adherence to any leader or movement. Embracing feminism and a belief in human rights, she felt that women in particular were the primary casualties of war. Near the end of her life, Rajani wrote, “*men in battle garb, whether they come with swords or guns, on a horse or in armored cars, the price of conquest seems heightened by the violation of women.*”

I believed that by following Rajani’s life story, and the circumstances surrounding her untimely death, several themes could be explored: nationalism vs. antinationalism, the lives of women as both participants and innocent victims of war, and the belief in armed struggle vs. a critique of militarism.

Although **No More Tears Sister** is set in Sri Lanka, a similar story might have been explored in Africa, other parts of Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe or Latin America. In the 60s and 70s, Rajani was part of a generation of young political activists in postcolonial societies around the world—activists who dreamed of radically transforming their societies to achieve equality and justice for all. But this idealism was, and continues to be, ruthlessly thwarted by narrow nationalist agendas in countless countries.

I knew that creating a portrait of a slain human-rights activist would be no easy feat—especially given the fact that there were no surviving archives, few photos and, due to security concerns, no access to filming in Jaffna, where Rajani lived and worked. In addition, most of her friends, former students and colleagues were far too fearful to speak about her on camera. Almost everything would have to be constructed, but based always on careful detailed research. Hence, **No More Tears Sister** is about as far you can get from a cinema vérité documentary. Luckily, Rajani’s oldest sister and husband—who themselves were leading activists during Sri Lanka’s tumultuous years of ethnic strife—were willing to come on board. They were joined by Rajani’s younger sisters, parents, daughters and fellow activists, all of whom are now living underground.

Cinematically, I wanted **No More Tears Sister** to reflect the passion and beauty of Rajani’s ideals. Together with my talented team, including Francois Dangenais (DOP), Patricia Tassinari (editor) and Bertrand Chenier (composer), I aimed at making a film that is political, feminist and aesthetic.

Helene Klodawsky

Director, **No More Tears Sister**



Letter from Rajani Thiranagama

SEPTEMBER 15, 1989

Some times tears flow uncontrollably and I cannot work anymore. I know I want to be strong, I want to call my historical strength as a woman. I want to remember and hold on to memories of women who conquered the inability and pain. [...] I cannot leave this small country, its belly constricted by hunger and mind blurred by pain. My head tells my emotions- hold on, hold on for one month maybe two- the routine will engulf you- the need of others- disturbs the silence of the tomb. One day some gun will silence me. And it will not be held by an outsider- but by a son- born in the womb of this very society- from a woman with whom my history is shared.

They are taking all the sons of this land, making them hold guns, very soon it will be the daughters. How can this country stand? Aren't there enough dead bodies? Aren't there enough guns? Why do we squeeze the very source life by the barrel of the gun? I have no answer to all these questions, it is tearing me- the suppressed sobs and anger. If I have an answer, if we even achieve a bit of a space, a small political victory, then this pain, loneliness, depression could be handled. Nothing, love, nothing- I am going crazy sometimes, sane sometimes, but always with a mask on my face of bright smile on painted lips! Only my eyes tell the muddled mind, sometimes deadened with inability.

You know how powerful it is to prove negative that women like me have not the courage to stay and fight- I want to prove that ordinary women like me have enormous courage and power. That there are in the world steel women.



Rajani and daughters Narmada and Sharika
Photo courtesy of "No More Tears Sister"



Rajani and Dayapala with daughter Narmada
Photo courtesy of "No More Tears Sister"


For use only by awarding country

Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan

FORM OF NOMINATION

For a Commonwealth Academic Staff Scholarship tenable in the United Kingdom from October 1983 (proposer to fill in date)

SRI LANKA
AS 5/83



INSTRUCTIONS TO NOMINATING AUTHORITY

(a) This form consists of three parts to be completed:
Section A = by the Vice-Chancellor or other nominating authority
Section B = by the candidate's present or future Head of Department
Section C = by the nominee.

(b) Six copies of this form to be typewritten (preferably), or written legibly in black ink, should be submitted together with

(i) Six recent passport-size photographs, one stapled (but not stuck) to each form in the space provided.
(ii) Six typed copies of a statement of not more than 200 words as instructed in Section C, item 16. One to be attached to each form.
(iii) Six copies of a statement from an academic referee (other than the Vice-Chancellor/Principal and Head of Department) who can speak of the candidate's merits from direct knowledge of his or her studies

Rajani left for a Commonwealth Scholarship to Britain
Photo courtesy of "No More Tears Sister"



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*Filmmaker, **No More Tears Sister***

Sharika Thiranagama



Introduction

No More Tears Sister is the remarkable story of Dr. Rajani Thiranagama, mother, anatomy professor, human rights activist and Sri Lankan symbol of hope. Assassinated in 1989, at the age of 35, her life exposes the complexities of ethnic and class conflict in the aftermath of colonial rule.

Rajani began her activist's journey as an idealistic believer in equality for all Sri Lankans. Violent government persecution of Tamils subsequently pulled her towards Tamil nationalism, but as she witnessed killings on both sides of the conflict, Rajani began to differentiate between a nationalist agenda and securing basic human rights. In her pursuit of the latter, she would ultimately become an outspoken opponent of armed struggle.

Rajani's story is told with rare archival footage, intimate correspondence and poignant recollections from her sister Nirmala, a former Tamil militant and political prisoner, and her husband Dayapala, a former student activist and an unlikely



(dramatization) Rajani, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, 1976.
Photo courtesy of "No More Tears Sister"

Sinhalese Buddhist partner for this Christian Tamil woman. Their insights and reflections frame the portrait of Rajani as a woman who was revolutionary in her ideas as well as her actions.

Rajani's choices, seen as threatening to those who killed her, provide an excellent springboard for audiences to consider their own beliefs about what constitutes social justice and how best to achieve it. Her life and work encompass a wide range of intersecting issues, including gender equality, economic opportunity, education and cultural preservation—issues that continue to be at the center of struggles for human rights today.



Rajani's letters
Photo courtesy of "No More Tears Sister"



Potential Partners

No More Tears Sister is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- **Your local PBS station**
- **Groups that have discussed previous PBS and P.O.V. films relating to human rights or ethnic conflict, including *Discovering Domingo* and *The Brooklyn Connection***
- **Groups focused on any of the issues listed to the right**
- **Legislators/policy makers**
- **Faith-based organizations and institutions**
- **High-school students**
- **Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities, community colleges and high schools**
- **Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as P.O.V.'s national partners Elderhostel Learning in Retirement Centers, members of the Listen Up! Youth Media Network or your local library**

Event Ideas

Use a screening of **No More Tears Sister** to:

- **Host a debate between those who support and those who oppose using military force in pursuit of social justice or democracy. Consider the implications of each side's arguments for current U.S. policy towards Sri Lanka and towards other nations or regions currently experiencing armed conflict.**
- **Hold a benefit or public-information meeting for a local chapter of a human-rights organization.**
- **Convene a teach-in on Sri Lanka. Design a post-tsunami aid policy based on what participants learn and encourage people to share that policy with their elected representatives.**
- **Gather representatives from local women's organizations to join in a discussion of women's unique perspectives on conflict, conflict resolution and what constitutes justice.**
- **Host a discussion on nationalism. Consider the positive attributes of identifying with an ethnic group or country. What are the negative aspects? When can nationalism turn ugly?**

Key Issues

As an outreach tool, **No More Tears Sister** humanizes political struggle and because it shows that there are more than two sides in Sri Lanka's conflict, it can help viewers see beyond simplistic dualistic analysis. The film will be of special interest to people interested in exploring or working on the issues below:

- **Armed struggle**
- **Colonialism**
- **Conflict resolution**
- **Democracy**
- **Ethnic identity**
- **Families/Children in conflict/War**
- **Feminism**
- **Human rights**
- **Intermarriage**
- **Nationalism**
- **Peace studies**
- **Political activism**
- **Political exile**
- **Poverty (Economic equity in North/South countries)**
- **Progressive or leftist politics**
- **Religion**
- **Scholarship and advocacy (Student activism)**
- **Sinhalese culture/identity**
- **Sri Lanka**
- **Tamil culture/identity**
- **Violence**
- **War**
- **Women's studies**



Using this Guide

This guide is designed to help you use *No More Tears Sister* as the centerpiece of a community event. It contains suggestions for organizing an event as well as ideas for how to help participants think more deeply about the issues in the film. The discussion questions are designed for a very wide range of audiences. Rather than attempt to address them all, choose one or two that best meet the needs and interests of your group.

Planning an Event

In addition to showcasing documentary films as an art form, screenings of P.O.V. films can be used to present information, get people interested in taking action on an issue, provide opportunities for people from different groups or perspectives to exchange views, and/or create space for reflection. Using the questions below as a planning checklist will help ensure a high-quality/high-impact event.

- **Have you defined your goals?** With your partner(s), set realistic goals. Will you host a single event or engage in an ongoing project? Being clear about your goals will make it much easier to structure the event, target publicity, and evaluate results.
- **Does the way you are planning to structure the event fit your goals?** Do you need an outside facilitator, a translator or a sign-language interpreter? If your goal is to share information, are there local experts on the topic who should be present? How large an audience do you want? (Large groups are appropriate for information exchanges. Small groups allow for more intensive dialogue.)
- **Have you arranged to involve all stakeholders?** It is especially important that people be allowed to speak for themselves. If your group is planning to take action that affects people other than those present, how will you give voice to those not in the room?
- **Is the event being held in a space where all participants will feel equally comfortable?** Is it wheelchair accessible? Is it in a part of town that's easy to reach by various kinds of transportation? If you are bringing together different constituencies, is it neutral territory? Does the physical configuration allow for the kind of discussion you hope to have?
- **Will the set-up of the room help you meet your goals?** Is it comfortable? If you intend to have a discussion, can people see one another? Are there spaces to use for small breakout groups? Can everyone easily see the screen and hear the film?
- **Have you scheduled time to plan for action?** Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even when the discussion has been difficult. Action steps are especially important for people who already have a good deal of experience talking about the issue(s) on the table. For those who are new to the issue(s), just engaging in public discussion serves as an action step.



Using this Guide

Facilitating a Discussion

Controversial topics often make for excellent discussions. By their nature, those same topics also give rise to deep emotions and strongly held beliefs. Strong facilitators can create an atmosphere where people feel safe, encouraged and respected, making it more likely that they will be willing to share openly and honestly. Here's how:

Preparing Yourself

Identify your own hot-button issues. View the film before your event and give yourself time to reflect so you aren't dealing with raw emotions at the same time that you are trying to facilitate a discussion.

Be knowledgeable. You don't need to be an expert on Sri Lanka, armed resistance or human rights to lead an event, but knowing the basics can help you keep a discussion on track and gently correct misstatements of fact. In addition to the Background Information section below, you may want to take a look at the suggested websites and books in the Resources section on p. 21.

Be clear about your role. You may find yourself taking on several roles for an event, e.g., host, organizer or even projectionist. If you are also planning to serve as facilitator, be sure that you can focus on that responsibility and avoid distractions during the discussion.

As members of the group share their viewpoints, it is important to remain neutral and help the discussion along without imposing your views on the dialogue.

Know your group. Issues can play out very differently for different groups of people. Is your group new to the issue or have they dealt with it before? Factors like geography, age, race, religion and socioeconomic class can all have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles, and prior knowledge. Take care not to assume that all members of a particular group share the same point of view. If you are bringing together different segments of your community, we strongly recommend hiring an experienced facilitator.

Who Should Facilitate?

You may or may not be the best person to facilitate, especially if you have multiple responsibilities for your event. If you are particularly invested in a topic, it might also be wise to ask someone more neutral to guide the dialogue.

If you need to find someone else to facilitate, some university professors, human-resource professionals, clergy and youth leaders may be specially trained in facilitation skills. In addition to these local resources, groups such as the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) and the National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM) may be able to provide, or help you locate, skilled facilitators. Be sure that your facilitator receives a copy of this guide well in advance of your event.



Using this Guide

Preparing the Group

Consider how well group members know one another. If you are bringing together people who have never met, you may want to devote some time at the beginning of the event for introductions.

Agree to ground rules around language. Involve the group in establishing some basic rules to ensure respect and aid clarity. Typically such rules include no yelling or use of slurs and asking people to speak in the first person (“I think...”) rather than generalizing for others (“Everyone knows that...”).

Ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard. Be clear about how people will take turns or indicate that they want to speak. Plan a strategy for preventing one or two people from dominating the discussion. If the group is large, are there plans to break into small groups or partners, or should attendance be limited?

Talk about the difference between dialogue and debate. In a debate, participants try to convince others that they are right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand each other and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening to each other actively. Remind people that they are engaged in a dialogue. This will be especially important in preventing a discussion from dissolving into a repetitive, rhetorical, political or religious debate.

Encourage active listening. Ask the group to think of the event as being about listening as well as discussing. Participants can be encouraged to listen for things that challenge as well as reinforce their own ideas. You may also consider asking people to practice formal “active listening,” in which participants listen without interrupting the speaker, then re-phrase to see if they have heard correctly.

Remind participants that everyone sees through the lens of his or her own experience. Who we are influences how we interpret what we see. So everyone in the group may have a different view about the content and meaning of the film they have just seen, and all of them may be accurate. It can help people to understand one another’s perspectives if people identify the evidence on which they base their opinion as well as share their views.

Take care of yourself and group members. If the intensity level rises, pause to let everyone take a deep breath. You might also consider providing a safe space to vent, perhaps with a partner or in a small group of familiar faces. If you anticipate that your topic may upset people, be prepared to refer them to local support agencies and/or have local professionals present. Think carefully about what you ask people to share publicly, and explain things like confidentiality and whether or not press will be present.



Background Information

Sri Lanka

Independent since 1948, Sri Lanka is an island nation south of India, slightly larger than the state of West Virginia. Its population of just over 18 million is nearly 3/4 Sinhalese, with approximately 6.3% Sri Lankan Tamils, 4.9% Indian Tamils, and Moors, Malays, and Burghers (of Portuguese and Dutch descent) comprising the rest. Most Sri Lankans are Buddhist (74.2%), while 9.3 % are Hindu, 9.4% Muslim, and 7.5% Christian.

An estimated 90% of Sri Lankans are literate. Sinhala is the official national language and is spoken by more than 70% of the population. English is commonly used in government and is spoken competently by about 10% of the population, while about 18% of Sri Lankans speak primarily Tamil.

Sri Lanka's economy is mainly agricultural. The chief crop is rice, though the country is also internationally famous for its tea and is an important source of rubber. Prior to the tsunami, tourism had also emerged as a major industry.

[Source: CIA World Factbook and www.gov.lk (Sri Lankan Government)]

History of the Conflict

1948 – After 500 years of colonization by the Portuguese, Dutch and British, Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then named) became an independent nation.



Independence 1948

Photo courtesy of "No More Tears Sister"

1948/49 – The new government passed anti-Tamil legislation.

The Ceylon Citizenship Act denied citizenship to Tamils of Indian origin (roughly 800,000 indentured laborers brought by the British from South India to work on rubber, tea and coffee estates when the majority Sinhalese refused to work on foreign-owned plantations). The Tamils had been looked down upon not only by the Sinhalese, but also by the minority indigenous Tamils (who had been overrepresented in the Christian elite of administrators and clerks that the British had developed to run the country). The **Ceylon Amendment Act** disenfranchised plantation Tamils, dropping the proportion of Tamils with voting power in the new legislature.

1950s – The country's ethnic and religious conflicts escalated as competition for wealth and work intensified in the newly independent country. The Sinhalese, who felt resentful of their place under the British, wanted to reassert their culture, language, schools and Buddhist religion.

1956 – Sinhala Only Official Languages Act passed, making Sinhalese the national language and effectively reserving the best jobs for the Sinhalese. This "Sinhala only" law was partly designed to address the imbalance of power between the majority Sinhalese and the English-speaking, Christian-educated elite. When the bill was introduced, Tamil political leaders were attacked in a four-day riot that left more than 100 Tamils dead. The law limited education and work opportunities for many Tamil youth. As a result, the Tamil Hindu minority started to push for a federal system of government with greater autonomy in the mainly Tamil areas in the north and east.

1957 – BC Pact was signed to protect Tamil interests with a regional autonomy package. Brokered between Sinhala Prime Minister Bandaranayake and the Tamil leader Chelvanayakam, the pact was broken under pressure from Sinhalese ultranationalist extremists (who were, themselves, encouraged by Buddhist fundamentalist clergy). In 1959, Bandaranayake (the "B" of the "BC Pact") was assassinated by a Buddhist monk.

1958 – Anti-Tamil riots broke out when Tamils were driven away from the South.



Background Information

1971 – Worsening economic conditions set the stage for deep class divisions among the Sinhalese and an anti-government insurrection. Tens of thousands of educated, unemployed Sinhalese young adults had joined the JVP (People’s Liberation Army). In 1971, they took up arms against the government. The Sri Lankan army responded by killing over 25,000 youth. Rajani’s future husband, Dayapala, was arrested, tortured and sent to solitary confinement during this period.

1972 – Ceylon was officially renamed the Republic of Sri Lanka. The constitution formally made Buddhism the country’s primary religion. Tamil places at university were cut back—subsequent civil unrest resulted in a state of emergency in Tamil areas, with Sinhalese security forces imposing many discriminatory laws. As a result, a large number of militant Tamil groups emerged.

1975 – LTTE (the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), known as the Tamil Tigers, was formed to fight for an independent Tamil state. At the end of the 1970s, the government instituted the draconian **Prevention of Terrorism Act** and under its authority arrested thousands of Tamil youth.

1983 – The Tamil Tigers ambushed an army convoy killing 13 Sinhalese. News of fallen Sinhalese soldiers set off an anti-Tamil rampage in Colombo and elsewhere. Mobs of Sinhalese viciously killed thousands of Tamils and destroyed property in pogrom-like attacks. The army and elected officials did nothing to stop it. More than 2,500 people were killed. In the ensuing ethnic crisis, half a million Tamils left the country to seek refuge in India and elsewhere.

1986 – The government retaliated against the Tamil militants, who had been receiving arms and training from India. In April 1987 the government mounted Operation Liberation, the carpet bombing of the north and east part of the country. The government responded to criticism for countless cases of

torture and disappearances by arguing that they had to defend themselves against the militants. The armed separatist Tigers



Tamil militant
Photo courtesy of “No More Tears Sister”

emerged supreme among Tamil liberation movements by eliminating all other groups, violently when needed.

1987 – India and Sri Lanka signed an accord to bring an end to the conflict. An Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) was sent to the island to end the hostilities and supervise surrender of arms by the Tamil militants while diplomats attempted to negotiate a ceasefire. Instead, another conflict broke out, this time between the peacekeepers and the Tigers.

1987/88 – Rajani and a few close colleagues formed the **University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR)** to document human-rights violations by all sides in the conflict. They compiled their detailed witnessing of atrocities in their manuscript “The Broken Palmyra.”

1987/89 – In the south of the country there was a second JVP insurrection. In what has been described as a three-year reign of terror, many left-wing activists were targeted by government killing squads and the JVP ultra-nationalist groups, leaving an estimated 60,000 dead or missing.



Background Information

September 21, 1989 – Rajani was gunned down, just months after the LTTE had entered into a deal with the Sri Lankan government and declared a ceasefire.

1990 – The Indian Peace Keeping Forces left. The ceasefire broke down and all-out war erupted between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers. Thousands of women and child soldiers were “recruited” by the LTTE, which fought 235,000 government forces to a stalemate. The Tigers emerged as one of the world’s most feared and effective paramilitary organizations.

2002 – A formal, but fragile ceasefire between the government and the Tamil Tigers was brokered by Norway.

2003 – Ongoing peace talks broke down.

2004 – The December tsunami interrupted the downward spiral of government-LTTE relations, but only temporarily.

[Source: National Film Board of Canada]

Current Situation

In February 2006 both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government addressed the escalating violence by reaffirming their commitment to the 2002 ceasefire during talks in Geneva, but the LTTE pulled out of the second round of talks when there was a dispute over the safety of their transportation. In April 2006, the Sri Lankan government blamed the LTTE for a suicide-bomber attack on its army headquarters in Colombo, which badly injured the head of the army. In return, the government launched a two-day air strike against the rebels. The LTTE has not admitted to carrying out the suicide-bomber attack nor to assassinating Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgama in August 2005, but have been blamed for both incidents. As of May 2006, nearly 64,000 people have been killed in Sri Lanka, and 1 million displaced.



LTTE Women

Photo courtesy of “No More Tears Sister”

The United States has classified the LTTE as a terrorist group, predominantly responsible for the violence, and sees the Sri Lankan government as a cooperative partner in the U.S. war against terrorism. The U.S. acknowledges that the Sri Lankan government has deployed troops across the country solely for counter-insurgency purposes.

[Source: BBC News, <http://www.bbc.co.uk>]



Background Information

Selected People We Meet in *No More Tears Sister*

Dr. Rajani Thiranagama was born in 1954, six years after Ceylon gained independence from Britain. A middle-class Christian Tamil raised in Jaffna, Rajani's activism began while she was a medical student in Colombo, where she led student strikes advocating for the rights of both Tamil and Sinhalese youth.

At university, she met Dayapala Thiranagama, a radical student leader from a Sinhala Buddhist rural background. The couple broke ethnic and religious barriers by marrying in 1977. They had two daughters: Narmada, who was born in 1978, and Sharika, who was born in 1980.

As the violence in Sri Lanka escalated, Rajani continued to witness and speak out against the oppression of the Tamil people. She first worked as a doctor in rural Sri Lanka, but then returned to Jaffna to teach anatomy at the university. Through her sister Nirmala, a Tamil militant, Rajani became involved with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), administering care to those wounded in action.

In 1982, Nirmala was arrested and imprisoned under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The next year, while in England on a Commonwealth scholarship to do post-graduate work in anatomy, Rajani launched a major international campaign for the release of her imprisoned sister. She also joined the LTTE London Committee in order to educate human-rights groups and other international organizations about the atrocities occurring in her country, and she joined in the fight for women's rights and against the discrimination of Britain's black people.

In 1986, at a time when many Sri Lankans were fleeing the country, Rajani returned with her children to her birthplace to head the Department of Anatomy at the University of Jaffna. Her work to rebuild her community after the 1987 October War is renowned. After the Indian army stormed and occupied the university to root out Tamil militants, Rajani helped found the



Rajani and Dayapala in London 1984
Photo courtesy of "No More Tears Sister"

University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR), an organization that continues to work for human rights and peace with justice in Sri Lanka.

While almost single-handedly rebuilding the devastated Anatomy Department, Rajani also fought for the release of imprisoned students and helped establish the Poorani Women's Centre for victims of war. Based on lengthy interviews with ordinary Sri Lankans, Rajani and three others from the UTHR compiled a detailed account of atrocities committed by all sides. They called their manuscript "The Broken Palmyra."

The suffering that Rajani witnessed helped convince her that armed struggle could not guarantee human rights nor would it achieve social justice, especially for women. Many believe her outspoken rejection of the LTTE's use of violence was the reason behind her 1989 assassination by the militant group she had once supported.

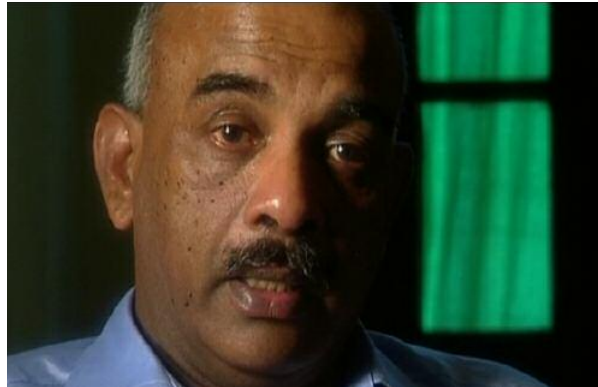


Background Information

Selected People We Meet in *No More Tears Sister*



Nirmala – Rajani's sister and former Tamil Tiger militant



Dayapala Thiranagama – Rajani's husband and anti-government Sinhalese political activist



Sharika Thiranagama – Rajani's and Dayapala's younger daughter



Narmada Thiranagama – Rajani's and Dayapala's older daughter



Sumathy – Rajani's sister



Vasuki – Rajani's sister



General Discussion Questions

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you may want to pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion.

Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can't engage until they have had a break, don't encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won't lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question such as:

- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would you ask and what would you ask them?
- What insights, inspiration or new knowledge did you gain from this film?
- Which scene(s) from the film did you find to be especially powerful? What, specifically, did you find to be compelling?



*A dramatization of sisters Rajani and Nirmala as youths.
Photo courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada*



Discussion Prompts

General

- Dayapala says that Rajani taught him “how to love another human being.” What lessons do you think others may learn from Rajani’s life? What lessons do you take away from Rajani’s life?
- Rajani says, “One day some gun will silence me, and it will not be held by an outsider, but by a son born in the womb of this very society, from a woman with whom my history is shared.” What did it feel like to hear this prediction?

- Student anti-war protests of the late 1960s/early 1970s – Rajani and Nirmala attended college during this era. What ideas did they take away that were positive? Which ideas might not have been so helpful?
- What are the key factors in your life that have shaped the ideals you hold?
- Nirmala tells the story of how her parents mistreated the woman who came to pound rice in their home. What is the impact of growing up in a culture that accepts discrimination as normal? What kind of discrimination have you witnessed? What was your response?

Social Justice and Human Rights

- After moving to the U.S. for university, Nirmala says one of the questions she came away with was “Why is [Western] society so rich and why is Sri Lanka so poor?” How would you answer that question? Is economic equity among nations desirable? A moral imperative? What is the impact of continuing inequity?
- How do you respond to social injustice? Does your response change depending on the location of the injustice, i.e., in your neighborhood or city as opposed to another state, another country or another hemisphere?
- Consider how any or all of the following influenced the particular ideals espoused by Rajani:



*Jaffna, October 1989: Commemoration shortly after Rajani’s death.
Photo courtesy of “No More Tears Sister”*

- Christian values – Rajani’s family is Christian and Nirmala points to the influence of Christian ideals of charitable living and loving thy neighbor as thyself.
- Economic circumstance – Rajani grew up in a middle-class home. How might her experiences have been changed had she grown up poor or wealthy?

- Rajani was a Tamil Christian. Her husband Dayapala was a Sinhalese Buddhist. This kind of intermarriage faced opposition. What is your view of intermarriage? How do you define intermarriage, i.e., what specific lines must be crossed to earn the label “intermarriage”? Race? Religion? Nationality? Ethnicity?



Discussion Prompts

- Dayapala and Nirmala say that they did not consider human-rights work as politics. In their view, politics was armed struggle and required declaring allegiance to one side or another, whereas human rights apply to everyone. What do you see as the intersections or conflicts between human rights and political activism?

Political Activism and Strategy

- One central goal shared by many Sri Lankan activists was the eradication of poverty. What were their choices in pursuit of that goal? What strategies would you have chosen and why? What strategies do you think would work best in your community today?

- Dayapala goes underground and describes living by hours and days, not months. What do you think it would feel like to live your life assuming that government or rebel forces were likely to end your life at any time? How would the threat influence your choices about political activism? Who would you turn to for support? Would you have the same courage that those in the film demonstrated? Would you be willing to make similar sacrifices?

- Given what you see in the film in terms of Rajani and Dayapala being separated from each other and from their children, is political activism incompatible with family life? What are the implications in terms of who is likely to be active if family and activism are mutually exclusive?

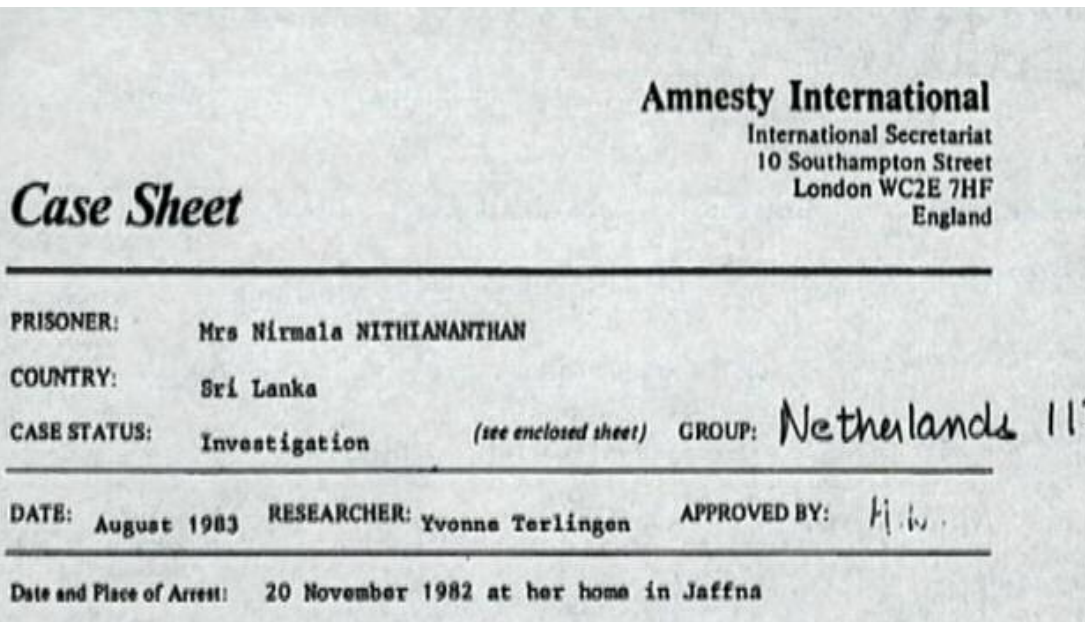
- Rajani's daughters observe that she demanded order at home "because everywhere else became so disordered." What is the impact of public disorder? How does it both spark and squelch resistance?

- In your view, why was Rajani assassinated? To whom did Rajani pose a threat? What, exactly, was she doing that was interpreted as threatening?

- After a certain point, Nirmala realizes that she didn't know much about her people's history. What barriers prevent people from learning about the history of their communities? How can this be rectified in your

community?

- Rajani stated that "the history of her people changed people like me." How does the history of your community influence you, your political beliefs and/or your choices about activism?



Amnesty International case sheet for Nirmala.
Photo courtesy of "No More Tears Sister"

- Rajani and Dayapala shared a basic goal: justice for all Sri Lankans. But they each chose a different political path. What might have accounted for the differences in their approaches? In your view, why didn't Rajani find Dayapala's strategy convincing and vice versa?



Discussion Prompts

Armed Struggle

- What are the pros and cons of choosing armed struggle as a way to resist a corrupt or oppressive government? In your view, what changed Rajani's mind about the value of military resistance? Do you share her beliefs about the value of armed struggle? Why or why not?
- The Tamil Tigers had a policy of killing anyone who tried to leave the organization. Was this a reasonable security precaution? Why or why not?
- Is armed resistance ever justified? If so, under what circumstances? Can laudable ends ever justify violent means?
- When does armed resistance cross the line into terrorism? How do you distinguish between freedom fighters and terrorists?
- At what point, if any, would you be willing to take up arms and for what issues?



LTTE militants.

Photo courtesy of "No More Tears Sister"

Gender

- Why is Rajani's mother upset that she and Nirmala have become intellectuals and political activists and that they "refuse to dress well and wear jewelry and show themselves off in society"? What role does gender play in women's abilities to become political leaders? What is the personal impact on women who do not follow their culture's proscribed gender roles?
- Rajani chooses to call her report on the atrocities committed by all sides "No More Tears, Sister." Why do you think she chose this title? What is the significance of the reference to "sister"?
- How did/does women's experience of the conflict and resistance differ from men's experience? What role does the threat of rape play?

Sri Lanka

- What do you hear from mainstream media sources about Sri Lanka? What perspectives are missing from those reports? Who benefits and who is harmed by the type of reporting available to most Americans?
- How did the policies of British colonial rulers create ethnic divisions in Sri Lanka? Do you see any parallels to colonial policies in practice today? If so, where are authorities creating divisions and what is the impact?
- Officially, the U.S. government supports the government of Sri Lanka and has declared the LTTE a terrorist organization. Given what you have seen in the film, do you agree with the government's assessment of the situation? If you could craft U.S. policy towards Sri Lanka, what would you want the policy to be?
- Do the United States and/or other wealthy Western nations have a responsibility to help developing nations like Sri Lanka? Why or why not? If so, what should the U.S. be responsible for doing?



Taking Action



Poorani Home for Destitute Women.
Photo courtesy of "No More Tears Sister"

- Investigate the status of current U.S. policy towards Sri Lanka. Given what you have seen in **No More Tears Sister**, consider whether or not that policy is effective. Arrange to meet with your elected representatives to share your views.
- Work with a human-rights organization to identify and "adopt" a political prisoner, publicizing the details of the prisoner's situation and advocating for his or her release.
- Raise funds to help women in developing nations attend international conferences on human rights and social justice.
- Arrange a speaking tour for someone from (or someone familiar with the positions of) Sri Lanka's University Teachers for Human Rights.



Resources

WEBSITES

The film

P.O.V.'s *No More Tears Sister* Website

www.pbs.org/pov/nomoretears

The *No More Tears Sister* companion website offers exclusive streaming video clips from the film, a podcast version of the filmmaker interview and a wealth of additional resources, including a Q&A with filmmaker Helen Klodawsky, ample opportunities for viewers to “talk back” and talk to each other about the film, and the following special features:

TIMELINE

History of the Conflict in Sri Lanka

After 500 years of colonial rule, Sri Lanka became an independent state in 1948. Trace the history of the conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese since then.

FIRST PERSON

In Her Own Words: Rajani's Letters

“One day some gun will silence me. And it will not be held by an outsider — but by a son — born in the womb of this very society — from a woman with whom my history is shared.” Read excerpts from Rajani's letters.

INTERVIEWS

University Teachers for Human Rights Activists Speak Out

UTHR members Dr. Sritharan and Dr. Rajan Hoole explain what the organization has been working on and how the situation in Sri Lanka has changed since the 2002 ceasefire agreement.

Jo Becker, the Children's Rights Advocacy Director for Human Rights

Find out more about the children who have been recruited for service in the Tamil Tigers army.

What's Your P.O.V.?

*P.O.V.'s online Talking Back Tapestry is a colorful, interactive representation of your feelings about **No More Tears Sister**.*

Listen to other P.O.V. viewers talk about the film and add your thoughts by calling 1-800-688-4768. www.pbs.org/pov/talkingback.html



Dayapala and Nirmala.
Photo courtesy of “No More Tears Sister”

FILM UPDATE

Dealing with the Trauma of Loss

Members of the Thiranagama family, including Rajani's daughters, ex-husband and sister, talk about how families cope with trauma and loss and the importance of remembering and memorializing the fallen.

NO MORE TEARS SISTER

www.nfb.ca/webextension/nomoretearssister

The National Film Board of Canada's web site for *No More Tears Sister*. Includes endorsements from Human Rights activists from around the world, press quotes and information on the filmmaker.



Resources

SRI LANKA

THE CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES

www.cpalanka.org

Focuses on formulating public-policy recommendations for good governance and nonviolent conflict resolution in Sri Lanka. The website includes research and position papers, including results from its monitoring of the accuracy of media reports and of factors affecting the peace process.

LINES MAGAZINE

www.lines-magazine.org

Scrutinizes the underpinnings of political debate in Sri Lanka with the intention of enabling the construction of alternative positions. The website includes ongoing updates on post-tsunami reconstruction efforts.

UNIVERSITY TEACHERS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

www.uthr.org

The Jaffna chapter of the national organization University Teachers for Human Rights was founded in 1988 with Rajani Thiranagama as a key leader. Since her assassination, the group's public activities have mostly ceased, but its website continues to provide detailed background information about the conflict in Sri Lanka.

PBS' FRONTLINE/WORLD

www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/srilanka

Features material from a 2001 documentary on Sri Lanka. Resources include helpful background information as well as unique interviews with leaders from UTHR (see previous page) and video clips.

OFFICIAL WEBSITE OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA

www.priu.gov.lk

Includes the government's perspective of the conflict as well as press releases on current peace negotiations.

LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM

www.eelam.com

The official website of the political wing of the LTTE presents the conflict in Sri Lanka from the Tigers' perspective. Information focused on the armed struggle is available at www.TamilTigers.net.

CIA'S WORLD FACTBOOK

www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html

Presents basic encyclopedia-style information about Sri Lanka from the perspective of the U.S. government.

Human Rights

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

www.amnesty.org

An advocacy organization that promotes and protects human rights. It is especially known for publicizing cases of those who have been wrongly imprisoned by governments seeking to silence opponents. Check the website's "library" (which is searchable by country) for information specifically related to the current situation in Sri Lanka.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

www.hrw.org

An international human-rights defense organization. Of special interest on its website is a summary of events in Sri Lanka since 1999: www.hrw.org/wr2k/Asia-08.htm

THE CENTER FOR WOMEN'S GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

www.cwgl.rutgers.edu

Develops and facilitates women's leadership for women's human rights and social justice worldwide.



How to Buy the Film

For ordering information on *No More Tears Sister*, please visit www.nfb.ca or call 1-800-542-2164



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and entering its 19th season on PBS, the award-

winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought over 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, P.O.V.'s Borders. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V. is available online at www.pbs.org/pov.

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P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public-television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films.

P.O.V. Interactive www.pbs.org/pov

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, P.O.V.'s Borders. It also produces a Website for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique Talking Back feature, filmmaker interviews, viewer resources, information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

American Documentary, Inc. www.americandocumentary.org

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream-media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic-engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

Front cover photo:

Sharika Thiranagama portraying her mother Rajani.

Photo courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada



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