

Bonding and separation after July 1983. (1993, July 25). *The Island*.

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THE ISLAND
25.7.93

There are certain landmark events in the lives of individuals and nations after which they are never the same as before. One such event was the riots of July 1983. "Are you a Sinhalese or Tamil?" I was asked when, perhaps unnecessarily, I inquired of some people on the fringes of a mob, why they were burning Tamil-owned shops. The instinct of self-preservation, and not pride, made me give my answer. Since that day I have tried to come to terms with the fact that I am a Sinhalese, that there are Tamils, and we are different. But something in me has been quite per-

tor S. Nadesan, QC, or "Appah" (and sometimes "Noddy") as we called him at home? Why do the tears of emotion well up in me when I remember him? Are they for an idyllic childhood that has passed or for a love and affection that crossed our so-called "ethnic" barriers? I think most people do not want artificial barriers to separate us. As a student in America, some of the more meaningful times I spent were in the company of the so-called "Eelam Tamils" in Boston. They were the ones who, in 1984, got the state government of Massachusetts to pass a

were students at Harvard and MIT, invited them to come for our Sri Lankan get-togethers they used to be so pleased to come fully dressed for the occasion in suit and tie (while we were in our student rags) and speak of the old days when we were all together in our island home. They wanted to be a part of us who were from Sri Lanka. I have no doubt, they still do.

Trust

In August 1987 I made my last trip northwards to Jaffna with Dr. Devanesan Nesiiah, now the Secretary to the Ministry of Environment

matters personal. Those august days were joyous ones in Jaffna. The Indo-Lanka Accord was a force and there was peace in the land. The nights were like carnivals with people all over, laughing, talking and celebrating. Along with an Amer-

ican law student, I went to see Yogi at the LTTE office. When Scott began to talk in rather unintelligible terms about the legal framework of a possible solution, Yogi turned to me and gave a

was a bond of cultural and physical similarity that reached out across the gulf of divergent ideologies. After Yogi, we went to the University of Jaffna. I tried to put out of my mind the thought that I was in Jaffna. Then I looked again. There was

no difference from a scene in the South. The boys and girls of the North had the same mix of skin complexion, facial features and zest for life as those in the South. I could not see, at

Weerasekera must have had when, in negotiating the release of the prisoners with the LTTE, he saw a genuine interest in peace on their part. Those negotiations may have failed, but it is only bonds such as these that can take us to unity and peace.

Perhaps the bond of trust was in one direction only, and that is why the police prisoners did not come home. But that is not a good reason to ridicule peacemakers and those who reach out

way bond is already more than half way to peace because it lessens the mistrust on the other side and paves the way for trust. "Bé-noc" said the poet, "and the nobleness that lies in other men sleeping but never déad will rise in majesty

to meet thine own." We can be sure that negotiations based on mistrust will never work. A successful negotiation means giving up something tangible now for something better in the

just trust. The riots of July 1983 and the subsequent reverse massacres would tell us that a recognition of our differences is also necessary if we are to arrive at peace. This calls for space.

Space

As human beings we are basically the same, but as social beings we need our separate space. This is true even of the smallest social unit, the family. It is also true of the nation. In the words of Kahlil Gibran, "Let there be spaces in your togetherness, let the winds of heaven

federal Sri Lanka that incorporates the sameness and differences of the citizens of this country. Federalism is a constitutional arrangement that gives space to communities.

But that will only be the first step, a giant step though it might be, for solutions based on an attitude of piece by piece exchange will not work. Lawyers and technicians who excel in peacemeal dealings will have to come second and not first as they have in the past. First must come the leaders with a vision of a new social order who see the whole and not

translators and so on. A united Sri Lanka, a federal Sri Lanka, is something perhaps that all the people of this country can agree to peacefully. It is probably the only such peaceful solution. They certainly will not agree peacefully to a separate state. By now we should know that talk of a separate state is only to ask for war and not peace. But of all my memories of July 1983 one remains more powerful than the others. It is of my father, who seeing the helpless Tamils of Colombo left unprotected by the security forces of the state, said