Will Self Immolation bring solution to conflicts?

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by M.S. Shah Jahan "Thich Quang Duc self-immolated himself in protest of persecution of Buddhism in South Vietnam in 1963. I was to see that sight again, but once was enough. Flames were coming from a human being; his body was slowly withering and shriveling up, his head blackening and charring. In the air was the smell of burning flesh; human beings burn surprisingly quickly. Behind me I could hear the sobbing of the Vietnamese who were now gathering. I was too shocked to cry, too confused to take notes or ask questions, too bewildered to even think.... As he burned he never moved a muscle, never uttered a sound, his outward composure in sharp contrast to the wailing people around him". These were the words of’ David Halberstam who was at that time filing daily reports on Vietnam War with the New York Times. [The Self-Immolation of Thich Quang Duc] It was June 11, 1963 in Saigon, [today’s Ho Chi Minh City] a seventy three year old Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Duc sat at a busy downtown intersection and had gasoline poured over him by two fellow monks. As a large crowd of Buddhists and reporters watched, he lit a match and, over the course of a few moments, burned to death while he remained seated in the lotus position. After his funeral, where his remains were finally reduced to ashes, Quang Duc’s heart, which had not burned, was retrieved, enshrined, and treated as a sacred relic. Buddhist Vietnam was administered by a Christian family called Diem to who the French entrusted the reign. The Monk’s death was interpreted as a protest to religious persecution of the Buddhists and no doubt Thich Quang Duc set fire to Vietnamese struggle against the government. Political leaders are aware of the power of photographic images that would evoke both ethnocentric recoil and agonizing identification. On 27th February a young Tibetan Buddhist monk identified as Tapey in his twenties, carrying a Tibetan national flag with a picture of the Dalai Lama and shouting slogans, doused with gasoline and set himself ablaze in western China for government restrictions on religion. What prompted him? About 40 minutes earlier, Chinese authorities prevented a group of 1,000 monks from entering Kirti Monastery prayer hall to observe Monlam festival which is part of the Tibetan New Year. The security forces shot Tapey. He fell and was driven away in a van to a hospital. China still says he is recovering in a hospital but shows no evidence. China claims Tibet has always been part of its territory, but Tibetans say the Himalayan region was virtually independent for centuries and that Beijing’s tight control is draining them of their culture and identity. Media reported the massive armed force deployment in Lhasa from the 10th March when Tibetans observed the 50th anniversary of a failed 1959 uprising against Chinese rule that led to the Dalai Lama’s flight into exile. When Dalai Lama accused China it had created "hell on earth" in Tibet, China replied by saying the Himalayan plateau had become "paradise on earth". This is the trouble with human beings. What is hell to some is paradise to others. It is Hindus and Buddhists, out of the major religions who cremate dead bodies. That way their birth finally ends with fire. In India self immolation is a common act and even family quarrels lead the weaker sex to such deaths. There are cases where mother-in-law set fire to daughter- in- law on dispute of dowry or any other. Those days in certain Hindu communities there was a voluntary custom which is outlawed today, called Sati, where the widow was burnt to ashes on her dead husband’s pyre. On many incidences the women were forced to commit Sati and sometimes even dragged against their wish, crying and pleading, to the lighted pyre. It would be pathetic to see young women as second or third wife being pushed in to the pyre. In Ameer Khan’s 2007 film Mangal Pande, there was a scene where the British commanding officer William Gordon saves a young native girl Jwala from the funeral pyre of her late husband and falls in love with her. Tamilnadu plays too much with fire. Giving one’s life to the death of his passionate cine actor or party leader is a common event here. Further setting fire to one self for political cause is considered heroic. Even the concept of LTTE’s ‘human bombs’ might have born out of this theory too. The person who commits immolation attains sudden popularity through the media. Political leaders garland his body and pay respect, government issues condolence message, donates money etc. as if the person has done a glorified act. The press rushes to his residence not to convey sympathy, but to grab his photo for publication. The acts of media might induce or influence further such deaths but they would not achieve their intended purposes. On the other hand it would strengthen those politicians’ hands who would give interviews on television and print media. They would praise the sacrifice with the best of their flowery language and finally ask no one to do such things, for them to be free from allegation of inciting suicide. The self-immolation of Tamil journalist Kolathur Muthukumar on January 29 on Sri Lankan Tamil issue has triggered a big backlash. The student community got charged by Muthukumar’s death and his four-page letter, exhorting them to take possession of his body and "use it as a trump card to sharpen your struggle." His family refused to receive Indian Rupees 250,000 [SLRs 600,000] offered by the Tamilnadu government and the state too stopped offering such payments afterward where as the Eelam supporters have given Indian Rupees 300,000. In the past three months after Muthukumar, nearly10 persons have sacrificed life through fire on Eelam issue in Tamilnadu, leaving the few outside of India. The list adores Pallipatti Ravi, Sirkhali Ravichandran, Chennai Amaresan and Thiyagarajan, Kadaloor Thamilventhan and few others, including members of Congress, DMK and DMDK party members. Attempts of few including lawyers and three higher secondary school students were foiled. Last week on the 12th a student Selvam [26] when tried to jump from the 8th floor of Madras General Hospital was arrested. Nagalingam Anand [23] of Kadaloor was admitted to hospital with 95% of burn injuries. Their argument has been that the plight of Lankan Tamils was unbearable to them. No doubt the suffering of the poorest of the poor in Wanni is deplorable but it is the result of a vicious cycle. If the civilians stay with the LTTE they are subject to aerial attacks. If they try to go to government controlled area they are shot or burnt alive by the LTTE. They are between the unseen devil and Gorilla or Guerilla. Is Tamilnadu aware of an email in circulation with photos of charred human bodies under caption "Those who tried to escape from LTTE area were burnt alive"? First of all, were the alleged suiciders political pundits? In Tamilnadu majority of the common people are ignorant of the root cause of Lankan issue but get worked up by sensational media reports. Recently MDMK’s leader Vaiko blamed Tamilnadu Chief Minister Karunanithi for not honoring those who immolated for Lankan Tamil cause

and ridiculing their sacrifice as a death out of petty family disputes. ‘Dinamalar’ a Tamil daily on 08/03/2009 had a cartoon where Vaiko asking a debt ridden family that committed suicide whether they did not know about the Eelam issue? That way the daily mocked Vaiko and the self immolation taking place. Agitated Vaiko attacked the daily when he attended a book release on the 10th and said his affection to the Eelam cause is genuine and revealed that he sheltered 37 LTTE combatants in his house feeding, guarding and nursing them for 18 months even six months after Sri Perumputhur incident – meaning Rajiv Gandhi’s death in 1991. But it was his brother who was imprisoned for a year for harboring the said terrorists. In a fit of fury Vaiko nowadays utters about matters that might land him in jail. He is spared since election is around the corner and he should not get undue publicity. In the mid 1950 a freedom fighter Sangaralingam Nadar fasted unto death demanding the name change of Madras State to Tamilnadu. Congress government ignored. It was DMK leader Annadurai who obliged in 1967. Nedumaran on Tuesday expressed his anguish saying even after 10 persons died with fire, the central government took no steps to force a ceasefire. While the death of Wanni civilians itself is not making any change in the war, immolation of foreign small timers will have no impact unless leaders like Vaiko, Nedumaran, Thirumavalavan or Dr. Ramdoss test the water. Will they? Never. Karunanithi offered to die if his death can bring Eelam tomorrow. Both are improbable. For these leaders life is precious and they let others die. The same is with LTTE’s supremo too.courtesy: transcurrents.com