

Voice of Shakthi Thursday 26 April 2001

In this week's Voice of Shakthi" we wish to talk about two topics. The first is the just concluded ANZAC Day [celebrations](#).

As usual, this year too the ANZAC day was commemorated with the usual mixture of solemnity, passion and nostalgia. If anything, the national participation was even bigger than last year. Heroism was celebrated, sacrifices honoured and mateship remembered. The media hype - as usual - was quite pronounced. The whole nation, or at least mainstream Australian society, seemed to be soaking up the ANZAC spirit.

No worries. There is much to celebrate about Australia service personnel and their services. This nation has arguably produced some of the toughest and most heroic fighters the world has known and their values of service, sacrifice and comradeship are worth celebrating and handing down generations. But it is also important not to over do the celebrations. As some less-publicised research has shown, there were also many ANZACs who do not measure up to the heroic mould projected by the media and populist historians. There were many who took flight and refused to fight. There were also instances of brutality towards non-combatants and POW's which not very far behind the atrocities committed by US troops in Vietnam - revealed in all their gruesome detail by a former US senator only last week. What is important to remember is that the ANZACS were human beings first and ANZACS only after that.

It is also important to remember that the ANZACs heroism was rarely used to defend their land. Many wars in which the ANZACs fought - notably the First WW, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, were fought to serve the needs of the powerful friends and not to safeguard the land and the people. That should never detract from the sacrifices of the Aussie men and women at the front but it pays to remember in whose service their sacrifices were made.

What makes this even more important is the fact that mainstream Australian society seems to be quite oblivious to the war heroism of another section of Australian society. This is the heroism of the original inhabitants of this land. They did not die in a war between well-organised and equipped forces, but in countless skirmishes and massacres in jungles deserts, mountains and creeks. And they died to safeguard their land, their families, their way of life, not to save the British Empire or the American Way of Life. The number of Aborigines who died in this manner has been estimated by historians to be around 20,000 - more than the Australian war dead in all the conflicts other than the two World Wars.

Yet no parades are held to celebrate and remember their sacrifices. No moving Dawn Services, no flowery speeches, no holidays. Nothing. The government cannot even bring itself to say sorry to the aboriginal children removed from their parents. We realise there is considerable sympathy in the mainstream Australian society for the plight of the Aboriginal people but the willingness to share the disgrace of the past pales in comparison to the eagerness to share its glories.

The other matter we wish to talk about is the recent wounding of a foreign journalist by the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Sri Lankan government's response to it. The government, which initially threatened to sue the journalist for breaking the law later softened its stance and even went so far as to provide her with the best medical help available. The president even sent flowers. Now we hear that the two poor Tamil peasants who escorted the White woman to the Tigers are to be charged. We also recall how just a few months ago Her Majesty Chandrika Kumaratunge's government treated local journalists who went to report on an opposition protest rally. What a difference the colour of the skin makes! Maybe Sri Lanka too should seriously consider celebrating ANZAC Day!