

INDO-LANKA RELATIONS IN THE 1980s AND THE ETHNIC CRISIS IN SRI LANKA

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Introduction

In South Asia, the domestic issues have always played an important role in shaping bilateral relationships. In the 1980s South Asian countries have tended to get involved in each other's domestic political conflicts. For example, Indian allegations that Sikh extremists were given sanctuary in Pakistan and Pakistani allegations of the systematic ill treatment of Indian Muslims by Hindus have led to a sharp worsening of Pakistan-India relations. The influx of Bangladeshi refugees to India through the common border and the decision taken by New Delhi to erect a barbed wire fence along the Assam border, which has drawn protests from Dhaka, have created misunderstanding between India and Bangladesh. The treatment of immigrants in Nepal and anti-Indian feelings among middle class Nepalese have caused anxieties in India. The three million Afghan refugees encamped in Pakistan pose long term challenges to good neighbourly relations between Islamabad and Kabul. India's involvement in Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis also offers us a good instance of the above mentioned trend.

In Sri Lanka's foreign relations, India occupies a significant place. This is not only because of its geographical proximity and disparity in size but also because Sri Lanka is culturally and socially connected to India. "From a geographical point of view, two influences in the Indo-Lanka relationship stand out as important: the locational factor, and disparity in size, population and power between the two countries".¹ Another important locational factor is the natural harbour situated on the east coast of Sri Lanka facing the Bay of Bengal at Trincomalee. This strategic harbour had in the past attracted the attention of many western colonial powers. "Although Trincomalee no longer plays a role as a naval base, its strategic location makes it a matter of much international concern, and India which has no comparable natural harbour on its east coast, is most concerned about its potential status and uses".²

As Sri Lanka is located at the southern tip of India and separated from her only by a narrow stretch of water, India has "exerted a determining influence on the course of the island's history".³ In population, economic resource-base growth potential and military strength India supersedes every other state in the

1 Kodikara, S.U., (1982) *Foreign Policy of Sri Lanka — A Third World Perspective* (Delhi Chanakya Publications) p. 22

2 *ibid.* p. 22-23

3 *ibid.* p. 22

South Asian region. Therefore, the Indo-Sri Lanka power equation can be described as a big-power — small state equation.

Although the relations between India and Sri Lanka have been cordial since both gained independence, a few outstanding problems have hindered closer relations between the two, namely (i) the unresolved maritime boundary problem with India (ii) disputed possession of the tiny Kachchativu island situated in the Palk Bay (iii) and the citizenship question of people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka. However, India and Sri Lanka could find amicable settlement to the above mentioned problems. "In comparison with some of the other neighbouring states," as Urmila Phadnis has noted "India's relationship with Sri Lanka was characterized by cordiality marked by negotiated settlements on bilateral irritants e.g. the question of Kachchativu as well as the political status of the "Indian" Tamils in Sri Lanka".⁴ In recent years however, another problem has affected the relations between India and Sri Lanka, namely, the demand for a separate Tamil state put forward by the Sri Lankan Tamil leaders in the 1970's and the Indian attitude to this demand.

The demand for Eelam (a separate Tamil state) by the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in 1976 and the five major Tamil militant groups, not only challenged the unitary character of Sri Lanka's constitution but also the very integrity of the island. Moreover, the major Tamil militant groups have been engaged in a guerilla war against the Sri Lanka armed forces with the aim of creating a separate Tamil state. "The Sri Lanka Tamil youth who campaign for a separate Tamil State in the island are alleged to have centres for training guerillas in Tamil Nadu. This became a most controversial issue between the two countries during the years 1983 and 1984".⁵ Thus, the spill over effect of the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka has affected the relations between India and Sri Lanka.

The nature of the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka affects India's domestic politics as much as that of Sri Lanka. There are nearly fifty million Tamils in the State of Tamil Nadu in India who belong not only to the same ethnic stock as the Tamils in Sri Lanka but also speak the same language and follow the same cultural patterns. "Whenever communal riots between the Sinhalese and the Tamils take place, the 50 million Tamils in the Indian State of Tamil Nadu press the Government of India to take up the matter with Sri Lanka and do something or redress the wrong done to their brethren in that country".⁶ As the people of

4 Phadnis Urmila, (1986) "Sri Lanka: Stresses and strains of a Small State" in India and its Neighbourhood ed. Bajpai (New Delhi: Lancer International) p. 267.

5 Nissanka, H.S.S., (1984) Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy: A Study in Non-Alignment (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House (Pvt) Ltd., p. 355.

6 Khan, Ashan Ali (1984) "The Tamil Question in Historical Perspective: Its Impact on Indo-Sri Lanka Relations". Pakistan Horizon Quarterly. Vol. 37, No. 2, p.58.

Tamil Nadu have a close ethnic link with their brethren across the Palk Straits, Tamil Nadu has become a determining factor in shaping India's relations with Sri Lanka in the recent years. In this paper an attempt will be made to examine Indo-Sri Lankan relations since 1983 against the backdrop of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. This study will be directed to finding answers to:

- (i) how the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka affects Indo-Lanka relations.
- (ii) what kind of relations prevails between the Tamil militant groups and the Government of Tamil Nadu
- (iii) how the Tamil Nadu State influenced Delhi on the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka, and
- (iv) how Tamil Nadu has become a deciding factor in the relations between India and Sri Lanka.

Linkage Politics

In his "Linkage Politics" James N. Roseneau⁷ has attempted to define and identify linkage between national and international systems or "policy external environment linkages" as he calls them. In order to distinguish between the initial and terminal stages of linkages, Roseneau referred to the former as an input and the latter as an output. Taking linkages as the basic unit of analysis he defined it as any recurrent sequence of behaviour that originates in one system (national or international) and is reacted to in another. In other words, input from national environment has a significant impact upon international politics and vice versa. Writing on linkage politics S.U. Kodikara said that "We refer to "linkage politics" to mean the process by which compulsions of domestic politics enter into and often become integral with the formulation and conduct of foreign policy."⁸

Tamil Nadu Politics and the Tamil Problem in Sri Lanka

Many factors contributed to the emergence of the Dravida Kazhagam (D.K.) under the leadership of E.V. Ramaswami Naicker in 1944. E.V. Ramaswami Naicker resented the dominant position of Brahmins in Tamil Nadu politics and society as they formed only 2 per cent of the population. Being a rationalist Ramaswami Naicker started a self-respect movement and attempted to prove that the *varna* system was alien to Tamil society. The D.K. also attempted to

7 See Roseneau, James N. (1968) *Linkage Politics* (New York: Free Press).

8 *The Island*, (26th July, 1987), p. 5.

kindle the Dravidian consciousness not only among the Tamils in Tamil Nadu but also Tamils outside, and purify the Tamil language from the clutches of Sanskrit. In the political sphere, D.K. put forward the demand for an independent Dravida Nadu comprising all the Southern Indian States - Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Due to ideological and personal differences, one of E.V. Ramaswami's disciples, C.N. Annadurai left D.K. and formed the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in 1949. The D.M.K. effectively utilized the media, especially the cinema, for the propagation of its political ideologies to the film crazy masses. Both M. Karunanidhi, the present leader of the D.M.K. and M.G. Ramachandran, the leader of All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) were involved in the film industry. M.G. Ramachandran was sponsored as a hero in films projecting the D.M.K. ideologies and simultaneously portraying M.G.R. as a do-gooder, and an opponent of evil and a protector of women. Soon M.G.R.'s *rasigar manrams* (Fan's associations) were started (1954) in many parts of the state.

Although D.M.K. was the first regional party which adopted separatism as its major policy in post-independent India, it abandoned it in the aftermath of the India-China war. But it continued to appeal to the Tamils on two major issues. (i) opposition to the imposition of Hindi, and (ii) the demand for more power to the State or provincial autonomy. With the anti-Hindi agitation, the DMK effectively mobilized the Tamil Nadu masses and defeated the Indian National Congress in 1967 and 1971. M.G.R.'s *rasigar manrams* played a major role in DMK's electoral triumphs.

The Sinhalese leaders in Sri Lanka view D.K. and its off-shoot D.M.K. as potential threats to the integrity of Sri Lanka. With 50 million Tamils living across the narrow Palk Strait in Tamil Nadu, the Sinhalese have developed a "minority complex" in a wider geo-political sense. "There is a popular feeling among the Sinhalese that though they are in the majority on their island they are in fact a minority in the greater Tamil community stretching across India's Tamil Nadu State".⁹ The invasions of South Indian Tamil kings in the distant past have been viewed by the Sinhalese as attempts of the Tamils to bring Sri Lanka under their sway. When D.M.K. captured power in Tamil Nadu State in 1967 it supported the Federal Party's (F.P.)'s demand for autonomy for Tamil dominated areas in Sri Lanka. The leader of the D.M.K., C.N. Annadurai and the present leader M. Karunanidhi organized meetings in honour of S.J.V. Chelvanayagam and other FP leaders and accorded them official honours whenever they visited Tamil Nadu during the D.M.K. rule.

The Tamils in Sri Lanka have been influenced by the ideology and agitations of the Dravidian Movement in Tamil Nadu, especially by the anti-

9 Tusker, Rodney (21st February, 1985), "Brink of Civil..." Far Eastern Economic Review, p. 36.

Hindi agitation of the DMK. In this connection P. Spratt has noted that:

The fervent Tamil nationalism of the DMK has an appeal to the considerable communities of Tamils in Ceylon, Malaysia and Singapore. DMK leaders have visited all the three places... In Ceylon the Federal Party, which represents Tamil minority was a partner in the ruling coalition, and after the success of the DMK in Madras, the leader of the opposition of Ceylon warned her followers against a supposed plan whereby DMK would lead a secession from India, and the Federal Party would lead a secession from Ceylon, and the two would then join to form a United Tamil nation state.¹⁰

In an interview with a Ceylon newspaper C.N. Annadurai, however, denied any connection with any party abroad and the DMK leaders during their visits abroad had insisted that the Tamils' loyalty should be hundred per cent to the countries where they live.¹¹ Nevertheless, the suspicions among the Sinhalese continued.

In the 1970s another split occurred in the Dravidian Movement and the powerful film idol M.G. Ramachandran left DMK and formed the All Indian Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). "His films invariably carried a political message. This naturally won him many admirers, especially the poor and women in the state."¹² With the help of M.G. Ramachandran's *rasigars* *Manrams*, AIADMK swept into power in the elections of 1977 in Tamil Nadu and M.G. Ramachandran installed himself as Chief Minister.

Over the years, the influence of Congress (I) in the State has been declining. In order to improve the image of the Congress (I) Mrs. Indira Gandhi forged an alliance with DMK and in fact dismissed the AIADMK government in 1978. But in the 1980 Elections, AIADMK routed the DMK — Congress (I) alliance and returned to power in the State. As a result Indira Gandhi broke the alliance with DMK and formed an alliance with AIADMK. Tamil Nadu has become an increasingly important factor to Delhi for the following reasons: (i) AIADMK and its popular leader, "who is politically allied to the Congress (I) has kept at bay the more militant brand of Tamil Nadu nationalism and separatism, which is espoused by the DMK party led by M. Karunanidhi."¹³ Though out of power, the DMK's leader is still a powerful force in Tamil Nadu. Out of four South Indian States only in Tamil Nadu has the Congress I a powerful regional party as

¹⁰ Spratt P. (1970) DMK in Power Bombay: Nachiketa Publications Ltd., p.65-66

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 65.

¹² *The Island*, (17th May, 1987).

¹³ *The Island*, (26th July, 1987).

its coalition partner and through coalition ruling Congress I is trying to regain its lost political prestige and support.

As DMK is out of power in Tamil Nadu it has been attempting to mobilize the support of the people on the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka to strengthen its position. DMK has tried to portray AIADMK as having betrayed the Tamil cause and attempts to show the Tamils that it alone is the real champion of the Tamils. The AIADMK while maintaining cordial relations with Delhi tries to claim to be the champion of the interests of the Sri Lankan Tamils. The July 1983 racial riots and the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka gave an opportunity to both DMK and AIADMK to boost their images. At the same time, there is no doubt that other than political calculations, both parties have an abiding interest in the well being of their fellow Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The Reaction of Tamil Nadu to the Racial Riots of July 1983 in Sri Lanka

The July 1983 racial riots in Sri Lanka was a watershed in the case of Tamil Nadu as far as the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka is concerned. A wave of spontaneous indignation swept throughout Tamil Nadu and life in that State came to a virtual standstill as all joined in public processions and meetings against the killings of Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran convened an all party meeting on 28th July 1983 in Madras which condemned in no uncertain terms, the killings of Tamils in Sri Lanka.¹⁴ It was decided at the meeting to send a delegation to New Delhi to seek India's intervention to end the ethnic violence in the island. M.G. Ramachandran not only sent a telegram to Indira Gandhi urging her to take up the matter in the United Nations Organization (UNO) but also led a delegation to New Delhi on 31 July 1983 representing different political parties in Tamil Nadu. The delegation submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister which stated among other things that:

the grim and inhuman killings in Sri Lanka cannot be dismissed as the internal affairs of the country. We definitely feel that the time has come for the Indian government to intervene effectively, actively and urgently to save the Tamils in Sri Lanka.¹⁵

Further, the memorandum demanded,

the immediate appointment of a team of international observers from UNO to catalyse restoration of normalcy in the civil administration and to

¹⁴ The Statesman (New Delhi), (29th July 1983).

¹⁵ Memorandum presented to the Prime Minister of India on the genocide and violation of Basic Human Rights of Tamils in Sri Lanka. Unpublished typescript p. 3-5.

ensure the safety of Tamils in Sri Lanka, raising of the issue in the UNO and the Security Council for putting an end to the massacre, of sending UN troops to Sri Lanka, convening of the NAM meeting and sending of a high level international delegation including the Indian External Affairs Minister for Defence and a few representatives from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka immediately."¹⁶

The Speaker of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly moved a resolution on 24th October, 1983, "expressing the condolence of innocent Tamils who died in Sri Lanka.¹⁷ DMK with the co-operation of Tamil Nadu Gandhi Kamaraj Congress under Nedumaran and Kumari Ananthan advocated in the Tamil Nadu Assmebly the theory of intervention and argued for "Bangladesh type of action against Sri Lanka on 25th October 1983. However, the ruling All India Anna Munnetra Kazahagam, (AIADMK) was not in favour of such a course of action. It was and has been in favour of a non-aggressive policy on the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka. AIADMK's stand became clear when S. Ramachandran, then a Minister of Electricity and the present Minister of Food, of Tamil Nadu Government made a speech in U.N. Special Political Committee. (He was included in the Indian delegation to UNO in 1983). In the course of his speech on the Sri Lankan Tamil problem he said that:

As has been stated categorically by our PM, India does not want to intervene in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka or indeed any other country. India does not support or condone resort to violence of any kind... We confine ourselves only to the extent of the flow of refugees from Sri Lanka.¹⁸

The DMK, on the other hand conducted a signature campaign and collected ten million signatures to send to the UNO with a request to call upon the government of Sri Lanka to grant the right of self-determination to the Tamils in Sri Lanka.¹⁹ Moreover, the DMK's General Secretary resigned his post of Leader of Opposition in Tamil Nadu Assembly in protest against the State Government's failure to bring pressure on the Centre regarding the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka.

The DMK has formed an association with the help of pro-Eelam political parties in the State to help the Tamils in Sri Lanka, namely the Tamil Eelam

¹⁶ *ibid* p. 5-6

¹⁷ Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, Resume of Business, 7th Assembly, 1984, p. 4.

¹⁸ Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, (26th October, 1983), Debates, vol. III No. 3, pp. 233-34

¹⁹ *ibid*. (25th October, 1983), vol. III, No. 2, p. 135.

Supporters Association (TESO). TESO believes that only through the creation of Eelam, could the problem of the Tamils in Sri Lanka be solved. It advocates an armed intervention by Indians in Sri Lanka along the lines of Bangladesh. But what is more important is that both AIADMK and DMK apart from their sympathy towards the TULF have their clients among the militant groups. DMK has been promoting the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) led by Sabaratnam, while the AIADMK has been supporting the powerful Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) led by Velupillai Prabhakaran. Writing on Tamil militants in July 1986, Marguerite Johnson observed that

Tamil Nadu also harbours 39 rebel camps, in which an estimated 3,300 guerillas are undergoing training. New Delhi has not shut down the rebel camps, but Indian authorities keep a sharp eye on the guerilla organizations.²⁰

In May 1986, The Tamil Eelam Supporters Organization (TESO) organized a conference in Madurai in which Bharatia Janata Party President A.B. Vajpajee, DMK leader Karunanidhi, Lok Dal chief H.N. Bahuguna, Akali Dal leader Balwant Singh Ramoowalla, Telugu Desam chief P. Upendra and P. Unakrishnan of Congress (S) along with the Andra Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao took part. In his welcome address M. Karunanidhi said that the purpose of the Conference was to mobilize public opinion across the length and breadth of the country towards the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka. "He condemned the Government of India for not raising the issue in international forums, and declared that the Conference pledged solidarity with the Sri Lankan Tamils and expressed its deep national concern over the continuing intensification of the crisis in the island".²¹

The Tamil Problem in Sri Lanka and the Response of the Government of India

As New Delhi was not in a position to ignore the sentiments expressed by the political parties and leaders of Tamil Nadu, as well as the people, the former Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi was forced to take some steps to placate Tamil Nadu opinion. In addition, "Mrs. Gandhi saw in the ethnic crisis a golden opportunity to change into a direction she wanted, the Sri Lankan government's pro-Western foreign policy".²² India also wanted to assert her regional supremacy in the South Asian Region. Further, Indira Gandhi, "in particular, appears to have believed that the United States was engaged in a strategic action

²⁰ Marguerite Johnson (July 1, 1986) "Island at War" Tamil Rebels mount a bloody campaign for justice. "Lanka Guardian vol. 9, No. 5, p. 7.

²¹ Mervyn de Silva, (May 15, 1986) "Political Pressure on Rajiv" Lanka Guardian, vol. 9, No. 2, p. 6.

²² The Island, (25th January, 1987)

designed to sandwich India between China, on the one side, and the smaller pro-Western States of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, on the other side.”²³ Therefore, she took the following steps:

- (i) Mrs. Indira Gandhi told the delegation from Tamil Nadu that “the Centre was dealing with the Tamil question in Sri Lanka as a national issue”.²⁴
- (ii) She rushed her Foreign Minister, Narasimha Rao to Colombo to ascertain facts on the spot during the racial riots of July 1983;
- (iii) She offered India’s good offices to promote a dialogue between President Jayewardene and the TULF;
- (iv) Indira Gandhi’s special envoy, Parthasarathy, was sent to Colombo to further advance the process of reconciliation;
- (v) In her telephone conversation with Sri Lankan President Jayewardene, she told him that “India could not be regarded as “just another country” as every development in Sri Lanka affected India also”.²⁵

At the same time Indira Gandhi declared that India stood for the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. On 5th August 1983, Indira Gandhi “took the opportunity of bringing on record before the Lok Sabha... that the other countries appreciated India’s position in respect of the situation in Sri Lanka and acknowledged India’s special interest in the whole matter”.²⁶ It is interesting to note that during the height of the ethnic violence in Sri Lanka, “the Heads of a large number of foreign missions in New Delhi were called to the Foreign Office and asked to tell their respective governments to keep their hands off Sri Lanka”.²⁷ This was done as a reaction to Sri Lanka’s request for military assistance from the United States, Britain, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Colombo Government, however, denied that it ever solicited assistance from any country. “The Sri Lanka Foreign Minister also made a statement to set at rest Indian suspicions.”²⁸

23 The Island. (28th June, 1987)

24 Ahsen Ali Khan, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

25 *ibid.* p. 62.

26 *ibid.* p. 62-63

27 *ibid.* p. 61.

28 *ibid.* p. 61.

Although President Jayewardene accepted India's good offices, in an interview to the London based Sunday Times, he saw no useful role for India until the TULF gave up its secessionist demands. This showed that President Jayewardene had second thoughts on India's role in the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis.²⁹

On the initiative and mediation of Indira Gandhi's special envoy, G. Parthasarathy, the President of Sri Lanka agreed to convene an All-Party Conference (APC) in December 1983. As a result of discussions in Colombo and New Delhi, a proposal was prepared by G. Parthasarathy for consideration by APC. The APC, however, lost its all-party character after the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), withdrew from the Conference which was convened by the President in January 1984. The President, therefore, invited the religious organizations to participate in the deliberations. The proposals put forward by the President at the last meeting of the Conference in December, 1984, fell far short of the proposals prepared by G. Parthasarathy also known as Annexure 'C'. Therefore, the TULF expressed its inability to accept it. The proposals made by the President provided for co-ordination of the already existing District Development Councils. He did not spell out the delegation of powers to these bodies.

The SLFP, Buddhist Religious Organizations, and some prominent members of the ruling United National Party (UNP) also opposed the proposals on the score that it promised too much for the Tamils. President Jayewardene, however, blamed the TULF for the collapse of the APC and announced that he would have no more talks with the TULF unless it gave up its call for a separate state.

Until mid-1985, the ruling UNP politicians and Sinhala opinion in general viewed the active diplomacy of India as an intervention in Sri Lanka's internal matters. But this opinion changed after the Anuradhapura incident. In May 1985, at Anuradhapura, the capital of ancient Sinhalese Kings and home of the sacred Bo-tree, an unidentified Tamil militant group attacked civilians, including Buddhist monks and nuns, in which about 150 innocent Sinhala people died. As a result, Sinhala opinion wanted President Jayewardene to talk to the Prime Minister of India. As Indira Gandhi was assassinated in December 1984, her son Rajiv Gandhi had become the Prime Minister of India in January 1985. The new Prime Minister in an address at the National Defence College, New Delhi, in October 1985 said that:

We are for friendly co-operative relations with all our neighbours with good well established lines of communications... We have to build a

29 *ibid.* p. 64.

confidence in the small countries in the region that we do not wish any Indian hegemony to spread.³⁰

President Jayewardene met Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in New Delhi in June 1985 and held discussions on the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka. As a result, what appeared to be a workable compromise on a political settlement of the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka emerged. The talk also paved the way for cessation of hostilities between the armed forces of the Sri Lanka Government and the Tamil militants followed by two rounds of peace talks at Thimpu, capital of Bhutan, between the representatives of the Sri Lankan Government and the Tamil groups.

In the first round of talks at Thimpu, the Sri Lanka government delegation merely reiterated the proposals put forward before the aborted APC. They were not acceptable to the Tamil groups. The Tamil delegation insisted that the following basic principles are cardinal for a settlement of the Tamil problem: (i) recognition of the Tamils as a distinct nationality; (ii) recognition of their "traditional homeland namely the Northern and the Eastern Province in Sri Lanka areas, and (iii) recognition of the Tamils' right of self-determination; and (iv) granting Sri Lankan citizenship to all Tamils in the island. The Sri Lanka delegation, however, argued that recognizing the above principles was tantamount to conceding Eelam. For example, in his opening statement at the second round of talks at Thimpu, H.W. Jayewardene, leader of the Sri Lankan government delegation said:

The third principle of the right of self-determination, in so far as it implies the right of secession from and out of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the right to create a separate State is totally unacceptable and in this form rejected....³¹

But this second round of talks collapsed because the Tamil groups staged a walk out in protest against the violation of the cessation of hostilities and alleged killing of Tamil civilians by the Sri Lankan army. The action of the militant groups and their advisers, however, provoked New Delhi and it ordered deportation of Dr. A.S. Balasingham, the adviser of the LTTE and N. Satyendra, the official spokesman of Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and S.C. Chandrahasan, son of the former President of the TULF S.J.V. Chelvanayagam. Within 48 hours of the deportation order, the Tamil Nadu Opposition parties took to the streets. The Hindu reported the protests in the following manner:

³⁰ Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, (September—December, 1985) Statements on Foreign Policy, (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 1985) p. 14.

³¹ Ministry of State, *The Thimpu Talks: The Stand taken by the Sri Lankan Government* (Sri Lanka: A Ministry of State Publication, n.d.) p. 8-9.

Angry protests flared in this South Indian city today over India's deportation of three senior Sri Lankan Tamil separatist leaders.³²

The leader of the main Opposition group the DMK, Karunanidhi, presided a six kilometer route march against the deportation order, and about 15,000 people participated in the march. "Opposition groups in Tamil Nadu, whose 50 million Tamils have close cultural and religious links with Sri Lanka's minority, have asked New Delhi to consider the expulsion of Tamil separatist leaders....."³³ In fact K. Veramani the leader of D.K. went to the extent of warning Delhi that "if the orders are not withdrawn, Gandhi will face agitations like Punjab and Assam and we will not allow any North Indian to set foot here."³⁴ Faced with mounting opposition, in Tamil Nadu, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was forced to withdraw the deportation orders. The above episode shows that Tamil Nadu political opinion has increasingly become important to New Delhi. As one writer pointed out MGR has become vitally important to Rajiv Gandhi since 1983 and even earlier when AIADMK formed an alliance with Congress (I).

There is now no doubt in the minds of the government that it is the Chief Minister, and not Rajiv Gandhi, who plays the most vital role in determining the Indian actions in relation to the search for a solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis.³⁵

At the same time we cannot under-estimate the Indian Prime Minister's genuine attempts to find a solution to the ethnic issue in Sri Lanka. In his address at the National Defence College in New Delhi, the Indian Prime Minister said that "in the ethnic dispute, we have helped get both sides within Sri Lanka together, and we are hopeful that a solution be found".³⁶ As S.U. Kodikara points out "there can be no doubt about the sincerity of his search for a political solution to the Sinhala-Tamil problem in Sri Lanka."³⁷ He also argues that the Tamil Nadu has a legitimate interest in the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka because it is the Tamil Nadu State "which has to bear the brunt of sustaining the Sri Lankan refugees about 150,000 of whom fled to South India in the wake of the events of July 1983"³⁸ Therefore, he thinks that the Tamil Nadu exercises an

32 Mervyn de Silva, (September 1, 1985) "Understanding the slogans and signs from Madras". Lanka Guardian, vol. 8, No. 9, p. 3.

33 *ibid.* p. 3.

34 *ibid.* p. 4.

35 The Island, (17th May, 1987)

36 Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, (September—December, 1985) Statements on Foreign Policy. (New Delhi Ministry of External Affairs, 1985) p. 14-15.

37 The Island, (26th July, 1987)

38 *ibid.*

influence on Indian foreign policy over the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka. But what is important in this connection is that Sri Lanka maintained that India provides in Tamil Nadu training and sanctuary to the Tamil militants from Sri Lanka. India while accepting that there are Tamil refugees in India from Sri Lanka, denied any such camps on Indian soil. However, in March 1984, "India Today", a journal published from New Delhi highlighted the presence and activities of the Tamil militants in Tamil Nadu. The report said that the Tamil guerillas have set up training camps along the Indian coast of Tamil Nadu. "South", another journal published in London, gave full details of the location of camps, period of training and numbers trained in Tamil Nadu and in North India. The Government of Sri Lanka accused "Indian intelligence agencies of advising two main terrorist groups, providing them arms, ammunition and declared it was the greatest obstacle to the peace process."³⁹ Thomas A. Marks confirmed the above accusation in a paper presented at the second bi-annual of the American Federation of Sri Lanka Associations held at Los Angeles. In his paper, Marks pointed out that:

Now Delhi equivalent of the CIA, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), took the lead in this effort assisted by the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) and various para-military forces. Later, as the National Government attempted to distance itself from the insurgents, Tamil Nadu itself greatly increased its financial and material supports. New Delhi turned a blind eye to Madras' activities.⁴⁰

The fact is that though India did not directly train the Tamil militants, they were allowed to perfect their guerilla techniques on Indian soil by themselves, through their hired persons. But when the efforts to persuade the LTTE leader and his advisers during its Summit Meeting of the South Asian Regional Association for Regional Co-operation in November 1986, to accept the offer of President J.R. Jayewardene's proposal failed, the Government of India ordered the disarming of the Tamil militants. Within three hours on 8th November, 1986, all militants were disarmed". Over 5,000 AK 47 (automatic self-loading) rifles (also known as Kalshinkoys), surface to air missiles (SAM), Uzi machine guns, rocket launchers, rocket propelled grenades, land mines, anti-tank guns, RPG 7s, G3s etc., along with their ammunitions (their total worth, according to reliable militant sources, works out at over Rs. 40 Crore) were seized".⁴¹ Although the Tamil militants protested against the humiliations and insult, the people of Tamil Nadu did not take notice. One major reason was that the DMK leader M. Karunanidhi had become disillusioned with the Tamil militant

39 The Sun, (6th May, 1987)

40 The Island, (28th June, 1987)

41 The Island, (17th December, 1986)

groups, because the cadres of the group he supported and its leader Sri Sabaratnam were killed by the LTTE in the previous month in Jaffna. Another reason was that there had been growing disenchantment over the anti-social activities of some Tamil militants in Tamil Nadu.

The Government of India continuing its efforts to find a political solution to the ethnic issue in Sri Lanka sent a team to Sri Lanka in May 1986, headed by Minister P. Chidamparam. The talks between the Chidamparam delegation and the Sri Lankan Government paved the way for two rounds of talks in August between the TULF and the UNP government. From these two rounds of substantial talks emerged the proposals for the setting up of Provincial Councils. These proposals also provided for the devolution of power from the centre. President Jayewardene convened a Political Parties Conference (PPC) on 25th June 1986 to discuss the above proposals and sent copies to the Government of India with slight modifications as well as to the Tamil militant groups. Though invited, both the SLFP and the MEP did not participate. All other parties except the TULF participated and welcomed the proposals. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) was not invited.

In mid-December, an Indian delegation led by Minister P. Chidambaram and Minister of State Natwar Singh visited Colombo again. As a result of talks between the Chidambaram delegation and the UNP Ministers new proposals were evolved, which came to be known as the December 19 proposals.

The proposals essentially involve formation of a new Eastern Province by excising Sinhalese majority areas (Amparai Electoral District) from the existing Eastern Province, and creation of two Tamil Provincial Councils in the Northern and the reconstituted Eastern Province. The two Councils would have institutional linkages for co-ordination between the two so as to make them acceptable to all concerned.⁴²

Although the Sri Lankan President supported the above proposal, the Sri Lankan Government "expressed reservations and resiled from the December 19 position."⁴³ As a result, India could not proceed with its mediatory efforts on the basis of the above proposals.

The ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka entered a new phase when the Sri Lanka Government imposed an economic and communication blockade on the Jaffna Peninsula in January 1987. This caused considerable hardship to the civilian population in Jaffna. "The Sri Lankan authorities claimed that these measures

42 Exclusive, (Part 2), "The Sri Lanka Conflict an Indian Perception" Lanka Guardian (June 15, 1987), vol. 10, No. 4, p. 17.

43 *ibid.* p. 17.

followed a virtual setting up of a parallel administration in the North Province by the LTTE".⁴⁴ As the situation in Jaffna continued to deteriorate, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi sent Dinesh Singh as his personal emissary on March 13, 1987 to Colombo. He met President Jayewardene and expressed India's grave concern. As a result the situation in Jaffna improved in March 1987 and in April 1987, Sri Lanka announced a unilateral ceasefire for 10 days. However, the violence escalated by mid-April, "with the brutal massacre of over 200 people on 17th, 18th April 1987, the Colombo Bomb Outrage on April 21, and retaliatory and indiscriminate bombing and attacks by Sri Lanka forces from 20th April...."⁴⁵ The Government of India strongly condemned the aerial attacks and other military actions of the Sri Lankan armed forces in Jaffna. With the escalation of violence in Jaffna, the Tamil Nadu opinion once again came on the scene. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M.G. Ramachandran said in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly that he would allocate 3.2 million U.S. dollars to "Freedom Fighters" in Sri Lanka to be used for food, clothing and medicine. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu further said that "he would not channel it through the Sri Lanka Government, but give it to Sri Lankan Tamils in Tamil Nadu to be distributed to Sri Lanka".⁴⁶ The Government of Sri Lanka viewed the above announcement not only as a clear violation of normal relations between countries but also as an open and direct military assistance to the LTTE. Faced with mounting pressure from the hard line Sinhalese and fundamentalists, J.R. Jayewardene launched the "Operation Liberation" in the Jaffna Peninsula in May 1987. The President said: "We have decided to fight them and that will go on until they win or we win".⁴⁷ Commenting on the operation in the North the Minister of National Security said: "We will prove to them that they cannot possibly achieve their aims by violence and, by doing so, hope that they will see the wisdom of political settlements."⁴⁸ The primary aim of the operation was to secure Vadamarachchi, the North-Eastern corner of the Jaffna Peninsula. The government imposed a 72-hour curfew on 25th May 1987, and the troops after over-running Valvettiturai—a coastal town—the birth place of LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran, slowly advanced towards other parts of Vadamarachchi, the main strongholds of the Tamil militants, amid heavy fighting which "left 27 soldiers killed and 150 wounded, 126 terrorists and several civilians have also been killed."⁴⁹

44 *ibid.* p. 17.

45 *ibid.* p. 18.

46 *ibid.* p. 18.

47 Andrew Tarnowski, "Military Option" (June 1, 1987), *Lanka Guardian*, vol. 10, No. 3, p. 3.

48 Mervyn de Silva, "UNP: Offensive in the North and Defensive in the South" (June 1, 1987) *Lanka Guardian*, vol. 10, No. 3, p. 3.

49 *The Island*, (30th May, 1987)

The response in Tamil Nadu was immediate. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu sent a telex to Gandhi expressing fears that thousands of civilians would be killed "at the hands of the Sri Lankan army... notorious for its indiscipline and cruelty," and described the Sri Lanka government's attack on Jaffna as "inhuman, uncivilized and constitutes a serious violation of fundamental human rights."⁵⁰ He urged Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to prevail upon Colombo to suspend the offensive. Consequently, Indian External Affairs Minister, Narain Dutt Tiwari in a statement warned Colombo of the long-term dangers of carrying out the operation. He said the government of India strongly condemns the massive assault by the Sri Lankan security forces against the entire civilian population of Jaffna."⁵¹ The six day Operation Liberation ended on 31st May with heavy civilian casualties in Jaffna and the entire Vadammarachchi area came again under the control of Sri Lanka armed forces. On 1st June, India's High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, J.N. Dixit called on Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Shahul Hameed and said that "the Government and the People of India propose to send urgently needed relief"⁵² by sea to Jaffna city starting June 3, 1987. A note handed over by the Indian High Commissioner said:

The population of Jaffna, already suffering extreme hardships under the five month old economic blockade imposed upon them by their own Government are now becoming the victims of an all out military assault as part of what has been described as a 'fight to finish.' Thousands have already been killed in the ethnic conflict and hundreds more are dying.... Although attempts have been made to keep this tragic story from the world by a communication blockade and by sealing off Jaffna from the rest of the world, reports are already filtering out of large scale civilian deaths, property damage leaving thousands homeless and acute shortage of food, medicines and shelter... In response to this tragic situation, and motivated by humanitarian considerations, the Government and people of India propose to send urgently needed relief to Jaffna...⁵³

The Sri Lanka Government decided to oppose India's plan to send a flotilla of relief supplies to Jaffna and issued a statement which said that:

The Government of Sri Lanka denies the allegations contained in the two paragraphs of the message from the Government of India dated 1st June....

50 News Background, "India Condemn anti-terrorist thrust in Jaffna" (June 1, 1987) Lanka Guardian, vol. 10, No. 3, p. 9.

51 *ibid.* p. 9.

52 The Weekend, (1st June, 1987)

53 The Island, (3rd June, 1987)

While pointing out that the tragic situation in Sri Lanka would not have become acute as at present but for the patronage of separatist terrorism by the State of Tamil Nadu, a Constituent of the Republic of India, the Government of Sri Lanka wishes to point out that neither has Government of Sri Lanka solicited any humanitarian aid nor does the situation in the North require any assistance....⁵⁴

In spite of the Opposition of the Sri Lanka government a flotilla of 19 boats carrying food and medicine came towards Sri Lankan territorial waters on 3rd June 1987 at 6.00 p.m. But Sri Lanka's surveillance command ship "Edithara" commanded by Captain Mohan Samarasekera stopped the flotilla and advised the captain of the Indian ship to go back. After three hours of discussion the captain of the Indian coast guard vessel "Vikram" yielded to the request and went back. The next day 4th June, Indian Government para-dropped 25 tons of food over Jaffna Peninsula leading to a train of events unparalleled in the history of independent Sri Lanka and culminated in the signing of a peace accord between India and Sri Lanka on 29th July 1987.

Indo-Lanka relations entered a new phase of reconciliation and friendship with the signing of the Peace Accord between President Jayewardene and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. This accord is considered as an attempt by the parties to put an end to the ethnic crisis which has troubled the island for several years and to bring peace between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The Accord signed between India and Sri Lanka recognizes the need to preserve the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka as well as the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious society, where "each community has a distinct cultural and linguistic identity which has to be carefully nurtured."⁵⁵ It also recognizes that "the Northern and Eastern Provinces have been areas of historic habitation of Sri Lankan Tamil speaking peoples, who have at all times lived together in this territory with the other ethnic groups."⁵⁶ Further the accord stipulates the following: (i) A cessation of hostilities will come into effect all over the island within 48 hours of the signing of this agreement."⁵⁷ Militant groups will surrender all their arms; after which the army and other security personnel will be "confined to barracks in camps as on 25th May 1987"⁵⁸ (ii) The President will grant a general amnesty to political and other prisoners held in custody under

54 The Island, (3rd June, 1987)

55 Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement to Establish Peace and Normalcy in Sri Lanka signed between the Prime Minister of India and President of Sri Lanka, (July 29, 1987), p. 1.

56 *ibid.* p. 1.

57 *ibid.* p. 3.

58 *ibid.* p. 3.

the Prevention of Terrorism Act and other emergency laws; (iii) Indian territory will not be used for activities prejudicial to the unity, integrity and security of Sri Lanka; (iv) the Northern and Eastern Provinces will form one administrative unit, having one elected Provincial Council. Such a unit will have one Governor, one Chief Minister and one Board of Ministers. However, there will be a referendum on or before 31st December, 1988 to enable the people of the Eastern Province to decide whether the Eastern Province should remain linked to the Northern Province or to have a separate Provincial Council; (v) Elections to all Provincial Councils in the island will be held before 31st December 1987.

The second part of the accord, namely the annexure to the Agreement spells out the above arrangements as well as the role of the Indian Peace Keeping Force to be invited by the Sri Lankan President.

The third part of the accord is the "Exchange of Letters" between the Prime Minister of India and the President of Sri Lanka. These letters, cover matters affecting Indian security concerns such as "the employment of foreign military personnel" in Sri Lanka, the use of Trincomalee and other ports and the use of facilities granted to "foreign broadcasting organizations" to ensure that they are not used inimically for military and intelligence purposes. Further "the work of restoring and operating the Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm will be undertaken as a joint venture between India and Sri Lanka."⁵⁹

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) the strongest among Tamil militant groups, under pressure from New Delhi, reluctantly agreed to abide by the accord and did surrender some of their arms. Later it indicated its willingness to participate in the interim administration to be set up in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. As a result, peace and normalcy returned in the North and East. But the peace did not last long. Thirteen out of seventeen top ranking members of the LTTE who were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy in mid ocean committed suicide when they were about to be airlifted to Colombo. The LTTE accused India of failing to retrieve their members from Sri Lankan custody. Large scale disturbances followed in the Eastern Province and hundreds of innocent Sinhalese were massacred allegedly by the LTTE. Consequently there was tremendous pressure from both the Sinhalese and the Muslims against the inaction of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to protect the Sinhalese and the Muslims in the Eastern Province. Tension between LTTE and the IPKF had been mounting since early September 1987 but the IPKF action to disarm the LTTE began only on 10th October 1987.

The people of Jaffna who welcomed the arrival of Indian soldiers initially found them being subject to an "Indian Peace Keeping Force barrage that left

⁵⁹ *ibid.* p. 9.

over an undetermined number of persons killed which some estimated at a minimum of two thousand, several hundreds injured nearly half a million people displaced and at least over three billion rupees worth of property damaged.⁶⁰ The IPKF has lost 350 men and 1,100 wounded in the Operations.

The DMK organized demonstrations in front of the Central Government office in Tamil Nadu to protest against the IPKF operations in Jaffna. Some 7000 DMK members were arrested on 28th October 1987. Further the DMK leader M. Karunanidhi announced on 7th November that unless there is an immediate ceasefire between LTTE and IPKF in Jaffna the DMK will start large scale demonstrations in Tamil Nadu. To satisfy the Tamil Nadu opinion, the Indian Minister of External Affairs, Mr. Natwar Singh announced a unilateral 48-hour ceasefire in the third week of November 1987. But the LTTE did not respond favourably. The LTTE set some pre-conditions for surrender of arms which were not acceptable to New Delhi. Meanwhile, the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M.G. Ramachandran who returned from the USA after medical treatment expressed his co-operation for the implementation of the Peace Accord. The sudden demise of M.G. Ramachandran on 24th December 1987 not only created a political vacuum in Tamil Nadu politics but also a set-back to the implementation of the peace accord. With the arrival of 9000 more Indian troops in January 1988 the total number of Indian soldiers in Sri Lanka increased to 46,000.⁶¹ But the process of disarming the militants is not completed yet.

The opposition parties with the exception of the traditional left are opposed to the Indo-Lanka accord. In an interview with "The Island" Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike said that the so-called peace accord amounts to sacrificing our independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, and she observed:

Why should the Government of India dictate our foreign policy. If the Government of India has problems with the UNP Government, solutions must be sought and not imposed. The S.L.F.P. foreign policy did not pose any threat to India. But this Government bungled on its foreign policy so now India is forcing and dictating Sri Lanka's foreign policy.⁶²

The SLFP is also against the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces into one Unit, proposed under the Provincial Councils Act.

During the six-day stay in India as Chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations, President Jayewardene had three rounds of talks with Prime

60 The Island, (29th November, 1987)

61 The Sunday Times, (31st January, 1988)

62 The Island, (18th October, 1987)

Minister Rajiv Gandhi on several aspects of the implementation of the Peace Accord, as well as on the draft proposals of a friendship treaty with India. During these talks, return of refugees to the Northern and Eastern Provinces and the preparations to conduct Provincial Council elections figured prominently. After his return from India, President Jayewardene announced that the elections to the Provincial Councils would be held on May, or June 1988.

From a contingent of 6,000 soldiers - which constituted the IPKF when the accord was signed - the strength has now risen to 46,000 men or more and "the IPKF is conveying the impression that Jaffna is under control and the situation is returning to normal.⁶³ But is it possible to completely disarm the LTTE and make them support the Peace Accord. If not how are the Elections to the Provincial Council in the North and East to be held in mid - 1988? Already commentators have started drawing parallels between India's involvement in Sri Lanka, and America's involvement in Vietnam and USSR's involvement in Afghanistan. But India's role in Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis should be viewed from India's regional power status. India wants to assert its regional supremacy. Therefore New Delhi feels that its operations in the North and East are a worthwhile exercise. "Informal Indian sources however are confident of winning over the now alienated Tamil population after disarming the Tigers."⁶⁴

Conclusion

The available evidence shows that the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka has been a major factor in shaping the relations between India and Sri Lanka since 1983. At the same time the evidence also indicates that New Delhi attempts to use the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka to its advantage - to change Sri Lanka's present pro-western foreign policy to suit India's interest. More importantly "India believes its security problem to be exacerbated in the North, the more sensitive does India become to what it perceives to be security problem on its Southern flank".⁶⁵ Thus, both Tamil Nadu pressure on New Delhi as well as security and interests of India have played equal importance in shaping India's relations with Sri Lanka. However, the major question before us is the future of the Indo-Lanka relations. A quick withdrawal of IPKF from North and East after disarming the Tamil militants and Provincial Council elections will be in the interests of both India and Sri Lanka. Although the immediate objective of the IPKF may be to ensure the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord it has a long term strategic interest: to establish finally - and firmly - India's pre-eminence as the regional super-power. Tamil Nadu's interest in the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka has been

63 The Island. (17th January, 1988)

64 The Island. (20th December, 1987)

65 The Island. (12th July, 1987)

decreasing since the signing of the peace accord between India and Sri Lanka. An opinion poll conducted by the Hindu in September 1987 in urban Tamil Nadu indicated overwhelming support for Indian Peace Keeping Force's operation against the LTTE in Jaffna.⁶⁶ But, the sudden demise of the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.G. Ramachandran on 24th December 1987 has placed Delhi in a quandary. "With MGR's death, the Congress I has thereby lost its only powerful ally in South India capable of effectively countering the anti-Indo-Sri Lankan accord sentiment in Tamil Nadu"⁶⁷ Although Mrs. Janaki Ramachandran who was appointed as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu by the Tamil Nadu Governor recently declared that she would continue to follow MGR's policy on the Indo-Sri Lankan accord, she changed her stance when her government was dismissed by the Centre in January 1988. In a statement read out by Mrs. Ramachandran in a recent meeting in Madras she said that "the Union Government would be urged not to permit the IPKF attack innocent Tamils in Sri Lanka"⁶⁸. If the Janaki faction of AIADMK succeed in whipping up popular anti-Delhi passions in the state on the Sri Lankan question, New Delhi would find itself in a difficult situation.

66 The Sunday Times, (1st November, 1987)

67 Anita Pratap, S.H. Venkatraman, "MGR's demise — a unfillable void" (January 15, 1988) Lanka Guardian, vol. 10, No. 18.

68 The Hindu, (4th February, 1988)