Chapter 2
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The Tamil diaspora are dispersed all over the world. Many thousands of them are refugees and asylum seekers. The discriminatory policies of successive Sinhalese dominated governments with regard to language, education and employment, periodical anti-Tamil riots, rise of militancy and harassment by the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces, economic hardships and the security crisis in the Tamil provinces led to migration of Sri Lankan Tamils from Sri Lanka.

The 1983 riots in Sri Lanka, which affected almost every Tamil family, was a triggering event which resulted in an armed conflict between the Tamil militants and the state. From then, not only the state discriminatory policies, but also the devastating effects of intermittent war on the society, became responsible factors for Tamil migration. To counter the guerrilla attacks, government indulged in savage and indiscriminate violence against the innocent Tamil civilians. They first went to India and then got scattered in many other Western countries especially in Canada and the Western Europe.

The unfair citizenship acts and land colonisation schemes of the Sri Lankan governments after independence affected the Tamils. The declaration of Sinhalese as the official language in 1956 was directly responsible for the loss of their employment opportunities. The discrimination of the Tamil students manifested in the Standardisation policy of 1970. Religious freedom is also restricted since the constitution gives a special treatment to Buddhism. In many of these policies, history provided enough justification for the Sinhala actions.

From the beginning of 1970s, a feeling of sense of deprivation was seen in the Tamil community particularly in the youth. They were deprived in the areas of education, use of the Tamil language, land alienation and employment opportunities
and eventually made many of them to turn violent or leave the country for better future.

This chapter attempts to analyse the causes of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and the causes that led to the emigration of Tamils. Their demographic profile and settlement patterns are also studied.

**Ethnic Polarization**

In an ethnic conflict, ethnic identity of groups is always a mobilising factor and is based mostly on language, culture, religion and territory. Language forms a major ingredient in ethnic conflicts. Even, religion brings differences among the groups and aggravates the ethnic conflict. For justifying ethnic identity, the group's identification with some territory becomes essential. The differences in their way of life are determined by their culture. Every ethnic group tries to preserve and protect its identity. Conflict situation arises when an ethnic group feels threatened by the behaviour of other groups.

The Sinhalese, who speak Sinhalese, consider themselves as the original inhabitants of Sri Lanka. Most of them follow Buddhism. They trace their roots to King Vijaya who went to Sri Lanka from North India some 2500 years ago. The Sinhalese look down upon the Tamils, who formed almost 19 per cent of the population, as invaders from South India. Dravidian by origin, they speak Tamil and embraced Hinduism, and some of them took to Christianity.

When Ceylon gained independence in 1948 it adopted a Westminster model constitution with a unitary state structure. The Tamils' demand for a communally constituted legislature based on balanced representation was rejected by the Soulbury Commission which framed the constitution at independence (Matthews 1986: 33). The Tamils' political rights depended on the benevolence of the majority Sinhalas.

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9 In Sinhala legend, King Vijaya (a grandson of the union between a petty North Indian king and a lioness), is the founder of the Sinhala race. Expelled by his father for misconduct, he is said to have arrived in Sri Lanka with a group of 700 fair-skinned Aryans in 500 BC (Ram 1989: 32). Sinha means lion in Sanskrit.
10 According to the 1981 Census, the population of Sri Lanka is: Sinhalas 74 per cent, Sri Lankan Tamils 12.7 per cent, Indian Tamils 5.5 per cent, Muslims 7.1 per cent, Burghers 0.3 per cent, Malays 0.3 per cent, various other small groups 0.2 per cent. See <worldbank.org/sar/sa.nsf/Attachments/LKCASAPP1/$file/App1.pdf>.
The first major contention immediately after independence was related to the citizenship of people of Indian origin. 'Citizenship' was not defined in the Soulbury constitution. The Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948, which was passed by a simple majority vote in Parliament, categorized Tamils as Ceylon Tamils and Indian Tamils. The Indian Tamils were disfranchised.

The effect of this move was shown in the 1952 elections, where the balance in representation between communities and areas got distorted. In seven electorates, the number of voters reduced from 40% to 80%. This led to over-representation of the Sinhalese and this distortion continued without any rectification in many elections that followed (Arasaratnam 1986: 13). The Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948, combined with the Indian and Pakistani Resident (Citizenship) Act of 1949, allowed citizenship only by descent or by strict conditions of registration. Provision for citizenship by birth was not facilitated. This legislation disfranchised almost one million Indian Tamils. It also bolstered ethnic politics.

Religion as a Factor

The ancient and medieval Buddhist texts speak of Sri Lanka as the exclusive land of the followers of Buddhism. Texts like Mahavamsa ("the great dynasty or race") and popular folklore even justify the killing or expulsion of non-believers from Sri Lankan society to protect the Buddhist order.

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11 'Ceylon Tamils' are indigenous people. 'Indian Tamils', also called 'Plantation Tamils', are those whose ancestors came from India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to work in the tea plantations.

12 Citizenship by descent required proof of or three generations of paternal ancestry. The registration of births was started only in 1985. This made it very difficult for the applicants to acquire citizenship, who thereby became stateless (Ram 1989: 36).

13 The Mahavamsa, is a Pali Buddhist text written by Buddhist monks under the editorship of Mahanama in the fifth century of the Christian era. It is considered as the first epic which gives the recorded history of the Sinhala kings (Tressidder 1960: 66).

14 The Mahavamsa mentions that the war between the Sinhalese Buddhist king Dutthagamani and the Tamil Hindu king Elara was to protect Buddhism from the Tamils. Five hundred bhikkus joined Dutthagamani’s army to conquer Anuradhapura, who finally defeated Elara. When Dutthagamani regretted the human slaughter in the war, the bhikkus consoled him saying that those who lost their lives in the fight were "unbelievers and men of evil life not to be esteemed any more than beasts." The thirteenth-century Sinhala work Pujavali, written by Mayurapada Thera celebrating Dutthagamani’s victory, declares: "The island of Lanka belongs to the Buddha himself; therefore, the residence of wrong believers in this island will never be permanent" (Vaidik 1986: 3).
D.S. Senanayake, the first Prime Minister, faced strong opposition from the radicalized bhikkhus, who demanded a closer association of the new State with the Buddhist religion and restoration of its traditional patronage. Buddhist Sangha (the Order of Buddhist monks) itself emerged as the pressure group. Though Sinhala-Buddhists dominated the cultural traditions of the country, still they suffered from sense of insecurity. On issues like the ethnic conflict, political bhikkhus have militantly manipulated the majority Sinhalese views and could influence government decisions. The disturbing issue is the repetition of this behaviour.

The new constitution brought out by Sirimavo Bandaranaike in May 1972 declared Buddhism as the country’s official religion. By guaranteeing prime position to Buddhism, other religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity got demoted. The Republican constitution of 1978 enhanced the supremacy of Buddhism further. This made Tamils to feel inferior as their religion Hinduism was relegated to a secondary position in the country.

Buddhist monks, who wield considerable political weight, do not consider the Tamil grievances as legitimate. They regard the Tamils as an unjustly privileged minority. Because of their great prestige and influence among the Sinhalese villagers and poorest urban classes, no government could ignore the opinion of Buddhist monks. Whenever the government comes up with any concession to Tamils, Buddhist monks flare up. After S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike signed the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact in 1957, the Sinhalese extremists in his party headed by a group of bhikkus organized satyagraha on the lawns of the Prime Minister’s private residence in Colombo on 9 April 1958 (De Silva 1998: 54; Senaviratne 2001: 16–17). Bandaranaike then hurriedly repudiated the pact. If it had been allowed its normal course, it may have solved the Tamil grievances then itself. Bandaranaike was assassinated by a bhikku in 1959 for signing the pact.

J.R. Jayewardene’s regime also faced great opposition when it advocated “apolitical monkhood” (Abeysekara 2001: 11). This was repeated when the Tamils’ areas were given certain decentralized powers. Though Buddhism was accorded special status since 1972, Jayewardene demonstrated a commitment to the principle of religious tolerance and ethnic pluralism. When he proclaimed that an important aspect
of his political discourse was to achieve a ‘dharmista’ (righteous) society where “multi-ethnic, pristine Buddhism exists”,\(^\text{15}\) the monks turned more aggressive to protect their political role. In a ‘dharmista’ society, Jayewardene said, the monks distance themselves from politics and lead “pure exemplary monastic lives” (Abeysekara 2001). The bhikkus demonstrated in various ways that they had a far greater political role than being spiritual leaders of the Buddhist religion. Both lay Buddhists and monks turned furious to these statements. Monks stood at the forefront to redefine their role in the changing times. They even gave a call to monks to carry out protest march to protect the nation from the Jayewardene government. Buddhist monks don’t look at the issue as ethnic conflict but terrorism and so they strongly support for its elimination to bring peace. Throughout 1980s, voices of monastic forces were loud to bring out full scale war against the Tamil extremists, holding no peace talks.

‘Sinhala Only’ Act of 1956

S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike came to power in 1956 with the election promise of adopting Sinhalese as the only official language of the country. This promise was fulfilled by enacting the Sinhala Only bill (Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956). This did not give any status of parity to the Tamil language.\(^\text{16}\) Nothing was mentioned about Tamil and the Tamils. They lost the legal protection to use the language in their official affairs. Consciously or unconsciously, Sinhala nationalism got equated with Sri Lankan nationalism. This inter-changeability of Sinhala nationalism with the larger Sri Lankan nationalism was not acceptable to the Tamils. The bill became legislation despite the Tamil Congress and the Left parties in Parliament opposed the Bill. But the presence of dominant and chauvinist Sinhala members of Parliament nullified the voices of the small parties. They cautioned the Sinhala majority of the looming danger of secessionist inclination in the country. For the first time, the majority Sinhala

\(^{15}\) Jayewardene gave similar speeches at the Hindu College in Ratmalana in April 1979 and another at the Sirimalwatte Temple in Gangoda, Mihirigama on 16 May 1981. Cited in Ananda Abeysekara (2001).

\(^{16}\) During the British period, the network of missionary schools was well established in the Tamil homeland. This helped in the spread of English education among the Tamils. So, they were well equipped for government and professional jobs. There was no significant competition from the Sinhalese till the early twentieth century. In 1946 Tamils formed 33 per cent of the elite Ceylon Civil Service and 40 per cent of the judicial service, when they just formed 11 per cent of the population. The Tamils also occupied 31 per cent of the university posts (DeVotta 2000: 62).
legislators did not understand that their decision was going to create strong ethnic strife between the two major communities in the country. No Tamil member was given space in the Cabinet. During the debate on the bill, Tamils held a silent demonstration outside Parliament. The dissenters were stoned by Sinhala mobs (South Asian Free Media Association, http://www.lankalibrary.com). The Tamil agitation against the language policy lasted two years, i.e from 1956 to 1958.

S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, leader of the Federal Party (established in 1949) challenged the legal validity of the legislation. The party made four demands, which included repeal of the legislation and the grant of equal status to the Tamil language with Sinhalese. The Tamils were asked to do all transactions in Tamil or English. Setting up of an Autonomous Tamil Linguistic State in a federal setup became a priority demand of the Tamils. Bandaranaike then held negotiations with Chelvanayagam, which concluded with their signing a pact – the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact in 1957. Bandaranaike promised to make Tamil one of the national languages of administration in the Tamil-majority regions. In protest against the pact the UNP staged a march to Kandy on 2–3 October 1957. This march was led by J. R. Jayawardene. 17 But the Sri Lankan government was successful in not allowing the march further (DeSilva 1998: 53). However, there was strong opposition to the pact even within the ruling coalition parties, with which Bandaranaike came to power in 1956. Eventually, the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam agreement of 1957 was repudiated. This resulted in fears and anxieties among the Tamils. The actions and counter-actions of the Tamils and Sinhalese gradually erupted gradually into ethnic riots in 1958.

The developments discriminating against the Tamils resulted in the migration of many Tamil professionals to Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and the USA (http://www.tamilnation.org/diaspora/index.htm). A small number of civil servants also moved out of the country because of the Sinhala Only policy (Varada Kumar, Interview, London, 14 April 2008).

17 Rejection of B-C pact at this level led to major disaster later. When J.R. Jayewardene opposed Tamils in 1956, became President after 31 years in 1977 realised the decision of official language was a major mistake a mistake that led to militancy (Ram 1989: 41).
The next government, headed by Sirimavo Bandaranaike, set January 1961 as the deadline for full implementation of the Sinhala Language Act.\(^\text{18}\) This didn’t include any modifications or concessions demanded by the Tamils after the ‘Sinhala Only’ act, though some understanding was reached with the Federal Party before and during the general election of July 1960. Tamil civil servants and security personnel were given three years to learn Sinhalese or face dismissal. The language policy applied to the private sector as well. The Tamils launched a civil disobedience campaign, which included Tamil staff striking work at government offices and the Tamils in general following a non-cooperation policy with government officials: The Tamils’ main protest was against teaching Sinhalese in Tamil schools. The government response to these peaceful activities was harsh, after which the campaign became fiercer. In February 1961, many Tamils lay down outside the building of the Provincial Secretariat in Jaffna, which prevented the employees from going in. The police and military arrived on the scene, who deprived the protestors of food and water. After large masses of Tamils thronged the place the security forces ended their operation, after forty hours (O’Ballance 1989: 4–5). In Batticaloa district, provincial administration came to a halt. In a show of force, troops paraded the streets with fixed bayonets. In March 1961, the Tamils began to protest by lying down in front of trains. In some Tamil areas, the postal services were halted. The Tamils also began their own postal service in Jaffna peninsula, selling their own postage stamps. The Tamils also formed vigilante groups (ibid.).

In 1963 the Sirimavo government reiterated its resolve to make Sinhalese the sole language of administration and fixed 1 January 1964 as the deadline for complete transition. By February 1963, 1137 public servants retired as they did not learn Sinhalese (Kearney 1964: 730). In the Tamil-speaking areas, there was growing use of Sinhalese and the presence of Sinhala staff in government offices. For example, in 1956 there were 30 per cent Tamils in the Ceylon Administrative Service, 50 per cent in the clerical service, 60 per cent of doctors and engineers, 40 per cent of the armed

\(^{18}\) The Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Regulations, which were not implemented by the SLFP governments, were later successfully introduced by the UNP-led coalition in January 1966. The SLFP and its left-wing allies, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party vehemently protested against these regulations (De Silva 1998: 56). When Sirimavo Bandaranaike came to power for the second time, she passed a new constitution in 1972 which declared the UNP regulations to implement the Tamil language (Special Provisions) Act as “subordinate legislation” (Sahadevan and Devotta 2006: 19).
forces and 40 per cent of the labour force. There was a sweeping decline in these numbers by 1970, to 5 per cent, 5 per cent, 10 per cent, 1 per cent and 5 per cent respectively (Sahadevan and Devotta 2006: 18). This made the Federal Party to renew its opposition to the ‘Sinhala Only’ policy in late 1963. The Tamil party called for “social and economic boycott” of all public service offices where Sinhalese language was being used in the administration of Tamil areas (Kearney 1964).

**Standardization Policy**

This 1972 Standardization Policy, of Sri Lankan government which discriminated Tamils in respect of University admissions in Sri Lanka instigated a second wave of migration of Tamil professionals. They emigrated not only to secure future for themselves but also to provide adequate education for their children (Gunaratna 1999:115).

The educational policies along with special consideration for the Sinhalese language in the 1972 constitution made many Tamils to believe that they were treated as a marginal community. No segment or section of Tamil society was left out. This was transparently visible in the discriminatory policy called Standardisation policy. The district quota schemes with ethnic cut-off levels to institutions of higher learning. This policy enabled less competent Sinhalese students to occupy seats in the higher educational fields which till then Tamils used to obtain on merit. A further discrimination against the Tamils was that students answering examinations in Tamil had to gain a higher percentage of marks than Sinhala students in engineering, medicine or science. With the implementation of the standardisation and quota system as the determinants of eligibility, their number reduced radically. The Tamil students who failed to get admission in these schools either turned violent or became depressed. The latter reason was responsible for increase in suicides among Tamil youths.

To the already agitated Tamils by the language policy, the radical policy of standardization in education further fuelled their anger.
Land

According to the 1981 Census, Sri Lankan Tamils were concentrated in the North and East provinces, mostly in the northern districts of Jaffna (42 per cent) Mannar, Vavuniya and Mullaitivu (a newly created district). Even in the eastern districts, particularly Batticaloa, the majority were Tamils. They are a sizeable minority in Trincomalee and Amparai districts too. About 512,000 Sri Lankan Tamils were living outside the region that the Tamils claim as their homeland (Kearney 1985: 900–1), but after the 1983 riots many Tamils in southern Sri Lanka migrated to the northern and eastern provinces.

Soon after independence the Government of Ceylon resorted to colonization of Tamil-dominated areas by resettling Sinhala farmers there, which the Tamils perceived as an insidious encroachment on their traditional homeland. It also appeared to them that the State was deliberately attempting to marginalize them for electoral gains. In terms of demographic dispersal, while most of the Sinhalese live in the South, the North Province is mostly inhabited by the Sri Lankan Tamils. The Eastern Province comprises a mixture of population including Tamils, Sinhalese, Muslims, Burgers, etc. Indian Tamils are situated mostly in the central Highlands. The politics of land and ethnicity was played in the North Central Province and the Eastern Province. The dry zone (see map) was sparsely populated. The government resettled Sinhalese farmers from the densely populated southern areas to these provinces. Till 1970, the colonization of the dry zone by the landless Sinhalese from the wet zone continued to be a priority for all governments (Peebles 1990: 37). These colonization schemes resulted in the distortion of the ratio of the local people to the advantage of

20 Patrick Peebles has made a detailed study of Sinhala colonization (Peebles 1990, “Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka”, Journal of Asian Studies, 49(1): 37). The amount of capital spent in creating vast irrigation schemes in these areas was disproportionate to the outlays made. On the lines of the Sinhalese kings who displayed their pomp through creating huge irrigation schemes, governments in modern Sri Lanka have spent large sums of money in building dams, extension of reservoirs and clearing huge forest area. By the end of the 1960s, the government allotted 300,000 acres of land to 67,000 people. The Goll Oya Valley in the Eastern Province has the biggest such scheme, where a multipurpose project was implemented (Peebles 1990; Arasaratnam 1986: 15). In between 1948 and 1952, this project created an area of irrigation for more than 120,000 acres. The UNP government shaped a Water Resources Development Plan or Master Plan for river development. The plan covered 900,000 acres, 650,000 acres of it being newly developed land, to be irrigated over a period of thirty years. Paddy production has increased with the development of the dry zone but not to an extent to justify the expenditure. A World Bank mission visiting Sri Lanka in 1966 criticized the project severely.
the Sinhalese. Over 1134 Sinhalese families were resettled in the Tamil homeland (Chattopadhyaya 1994: 26). The success of the colonization schemes is reflected in the successful creation of Amparai district out of Batticaloa district in the East, where the Tamils were a majority even at independence. By the 1960s, when this district was created, it comprised nearly 80 per cent Sinhalese (Devotta 2000: 61).

**Boundaries: Dry Zone and Wet Zone**

![Sri Lanka, Administrative Districts at the Census of 1981](image)

**Violence against the Tamils**

Ten years after independence, there was large-scale ethnic violence against the Tamils in May– and early June 1958. Both the State and Sinhalese mobs participated in this ghastly affair. The year was marked by massive killing and torturing of Tamil civilians in the Sinhalese dominated areas. They were mercilessly burnt alive. At least
150 Tamils were killed the anti-Tamil riots of 1958 (Sahadevan and Devotta 2006: 14). Around 10,000 Tamils were displaced and either took shelter in refugee camps or migrated to the North (Arasaratnam 1986: 33). There was major destruction of Tamil property. The police remained passive spectators in many areas. The government declared an internal emergency only after four days of rioting. Ironically, the Sinhalese society regards this as an event to be proud of. Barely, there was any one who expressed sympathy to the Tamil victims (But, there are intermittent cases of Sinhalese providing shelter to Tamils to save them from Sinhalese rioters). Tamils, being a minority group is treated submissively by the majority Sinhalese. Whenever Tamils tried to get some socio-political concessions, the pride of Sinhalese used to suffer. By employing the instrument of violence, the behaviour of Tamils was checked (Uyangoda 1996: 122).

These 1958 riots in Sri Lanka started a new pattern of ethnic politics and mob violence. Tamils realised their vulnerability in a majoritarian society. The unfair response of the state in such a situation and its relationship with a particular ethnic community made them understand that they cannot rely on law and order anymore for protection. Unfortunately, 1958 riots provided the beginning for many such incidents to come. The Tamils faith in the Sri Lankan state plummeted further in 1961. When the Sinhala Language Act came into force in January 1961 with no concessions to Tamils, there was immense dissatisfaction and fear among the Tamils. In February 1961, the Federal Party organized a satyagraha in opposition to this implementation of language policy, which brought the North-East administration to a standstill. The government response was to attack the satyagrahis and impose emergency rule. The Federal Party was banned for a year and the party leaders were also detained for over six months. Emergency rule in the northeast gave enormous powers to the military. Their liberty and highhandedness in operation was manifested in the harassment and tactics that it employed during this period (Sahadevan and Devotta 2006: 18). In the following years, Tamils in the northern Province were humiliated in variety of ways. They were harassed, beaten and stoned by soldiers in the mobile military vehicles. Tamil women were occasionally raped. All these incidents made Tamils to perceive Sri Lankan army as a ‘Sinhalese occupation forces’ inclined to suppress Tamils (Sahadevan and Devotta 2006: 19).
The next major attack on Tamils by the state machinery took place in Jaffna in 1974.

Even the Sri Lankan police of the state machinery made its contribution to violence against Tamils on the last day of the fourth International Conference of Tamil Studies or World Tamil Research Conference. This conference stirred an unusual amount of popular interest as the Tamils were becoming more conscious of the threat to them as citizens and to their culture in Sri Lanka. It was a peaceful gathering. Without provocation the police lobbed tear gas on the audience. In the ensuing stampede nine persons were killed and many were injured (Matthews 1986: 30). The following night the police assaulted and terrorized people for several hours, thronging the streets in their jeeps (Arasaratnam 1986: 61). When Tamils demanded the government to make an enquiry into the incident, not only was it ignored but the government promoted the Assistant Superintendent of Police who orchestrated the attacks (Sivarajah 1996: 129). This angered the Tamils who took it as an attack on their culture. As those killed included mostly youths between 14 and 26, it made greater impact on the thinking of Tamils mostly the youth (Arasaratnam 1986:62).

The ethnic upsurge on 13–15 August 1977, just a few weeks after the general elections, is said to have been inflamed by the shooting of two policemen by Tamil youths in the North. Provocative speeches made by the Tamil leaders and expression of the desire for separation by the Tamils also are believed to have been the reasons. Around 400 Tamils were killed in the countrywide riots (Somasundaram 1998: 40). About 200,000 Tamils migrated to the North and the East for safety. More than 40,000 plantation workers were rendered destitute. The Sansoni Commission, which was appointed in November 1977 to report on the causes and circumstances that led to the communal disturbances, reported that there were “widespread killings, assaults, rapes and damages to Hindu temples in almost every area of the island” (Sivarajah 1996: 130). After the riots of 1977 many Tamils left Sri Lanka.

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21 It is an international academic and cultural movement started in 1966 to bring together scholarly interest in the study of the Tamil heritage in conferences held periodically in countries with large Tamil population or where Tamil studies are well established. The earlier conferences were held in Kuala Lumpur (1966), Madras (1968), and Paris (1971) (Arasaratnam 1986: 61). Bruce Matthews (1986) has referred to it as World Tamil Research Conference.

22 One Sivakumaran tried to kill the officer but failed, and committed suicide (Sivarajah 1996).
In 1981, again state violence was unleashed against the Tamils in May. During a local election campaign to the newly established District Development Councils, certain Sinhala units of the police got involved in riots in Jaffna city. Six weeks later, violence erupted again in the South.  

The decision of the TULF to participate in elections to the District Councils (scheduled for 4 June 1981) as a step towards autonomy was opposed by the Tamil extremists who felt it as a compromise on their demand for a separate state. There was a hope that the Tamil radicals espousing violence would become isolated when more Tamil activists saw the advantage of these new councils in providing decentralization to Tamil areas. Since the SLFP and the Left parties decided not to contest, only the UNP, the TULF, JVP and some independent parties were left in the fray (Wriggins 1982: 177). Shortly before the election the Tamil militants shot dead the UNP candidate for Jaffna Development Council. After a week, four police officers were shot at a TULF rally (Kearney 1985: 907). The Jaffna public could not provide information to the police about those responsible for the killings (Wriggins 1982: 177). This enraged the police. A mob, allegedly including off-duty Sinhalese policemen, rampaged through Jaffna town. Individuals were attacked. Hundreds of Tamil shops were looted and burned in the central market. A Tamil newspaper office, TULF offices and the house of a Member of Parliament were also targeted (Arasaratnam 1986: 83). The Jaffna Public Library, which had a priceless collection of Tamil books and manuscripts, was burnt down. Even Sinhalese scholars considered this as an attack on the heart of Tamil cultural foundations. The Sinhalese have no culture, that was why this attack happened on Tamil culture, exclaimed a Sinhalese expatriate (Interview, UK, 14 April 2008). On 2 June 1981, two days before the election, the government declared emergency and temporarily installed the army. The election was considered to be the first scandal since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1931 (Kearney 1985: 907). Voting irregularities and mishandling of ballots characterized the election.

Intermittent acts of violence persisted for the next three months. In the end of July 1981 there was another upsurge of communal riots, with the Tamil militants killing

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another policeman. In the debate in Parliament some members of the opposition made vehement speeches to the effect that the government had given much to the TULF through negotiations for the Development Councils. There was a strong outcry from the Sinhalese backbenchers. Their anti-Tamil rhetoric gave a signal to the Sinhalese radical youth, who attacked Tamil shops and homes. For the first time, large number of estate Tamils were also attacked in the interior at Ratnapura. The official sources recorded killing of seven Tamils and 200 instances of arson. Thousands of Tamils were displaced, some of whom took refuge in temples and jungles (Wriggins 1982: 177).

None of the Tamils who were attacked in the Sinhala areas in the South had anything to do with the demand for a separate state. The demand for ‘Tamil Eelam’ is basically a phenomenon in the Northern Province. It is quite clear by now that for many Tamil youths, the future appeared bleak living amidst the majority Sinhalese.

**Loss of Confidence in Democratic and Peaceful Means**

From the beginning, ethnic politics and fears of discrimination galvanized Tamil politicians to demand federalism. As early as the 1950s, the Tamil political parties were demanding more political autonomy in the Tamil-dominant areas. In the 1960s, the response of the Tamil leaders to the pressing issues of language and colonization still continued within a democratic context. The Federal Party, from 1949 to 1972, worked as a primary voice of Tamils. It tried to protect the rights of Tamils by occasionally signing agreements and organizing protests, basically non-violent. Though it could not achieve much by these means, the Tamils in the North and East provinces supported them. Even till the 1977 elections, the TULF enjoyed majority support among the Tamils.

Many times, devolution of power was perceived as a solution for reducing tensions. Many pacts were signed for the devolution of power. They included The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact of July 1957 and the Senanayake-Chelvanayagam pact of 1965. By B-C pact, he agreed to examine the decentralisation of power through Provincial Councils which are linked to the Regional Councils aimed at creating a unit of local self government in the north and east Provinces where Tamils are dominant. Both the pacts were annulled. After 1956, the two major Sinhalese
political parties – UNP and SLFP – competed with each other to attract the vote of the Sinhalese majority. The influence of Buddhist ideas on governance was also growing.

The failure to implement these proposals made Tamils to demand separation, abdicating federalism, which was the demand till then. Lack of will to implement these agreements resulted in the loss of confidence in democratic politics. Even in 1972, when the United Front government was designing an indigenous constitution for Sri Lanka the Tamil politicians failed to get their voice heard through democratic means. The Tamil United Front (TUF), which was formed on 14 May 1972, campaigned in the North stating that “with the present distorted electoral pattern, and the denial of elected representation to one million Tamil plantation workers, the Assembly was by no means a microcosm of the nation” (Warnapala 1973: 223). The TUF which was formed with an objective to assert the freedom, dignity and rights of the Tamils further argued that censorship on the press and the emergency regulations were hindering dialogue between the people and the authors of the constitution. The three months' period in which the TUF MPs decided to get the constitution amended after calling off their boycott in June 1972, did not produce any results. Earlier, they threatened to launch a non-violent struggle if the government fails to amend the constitution. As such, on 2 October 1972, the TUF started its campaign of protest and to get back the freedoms and rights of the Tamils. Next day, the TUF leader, SJV Chelvanayagam resigned from the National State Assembly (Warnapala 1973). These actions did not make any political impact on the Sinhalese in the south.

The loss of confidence in non-violent means changed the thinking of many. The Tamils, disenchanted with the poor results that their non-violent struggle had earned for them, argued that Mahatma Gandhi succeeded in India with his concept of non-violence as he was leading a majority against a minority. But in Sri Lanka the Tamils were a minority fighting for rights from the majority (Swamy 2002: 19). Every time they resisted, they faced suppression by the majority Sinhalese government. After certain point, a shift in Tamil politics from the commitment to parliamentary democracy to commitment to militant struggle became obvious.

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24 TUF comprised the Tamil Federal Party, Tamil Congress, Ceylon Workers Congress, Elathamilar Ottumai Munani (C. Sundaralingam's Tamil Front) and the All Ceylon Tamil Conference.
In May 1976 the TUF was rechristened as TULF. At its meeting held in Vaddukoddai for the occasion, the Tamil body passed a resolution to the effect that the demand for a separate state was the central tenet of its struggle. Meanwhile, the UNP in its election manifesto in 1977 proposed to provide considerable devolution of power and local autonomy to Tamils, including substantial use of Tamil language in government sectors. The government attempted to implement devolution through District Development Councils in 1981. Though there was some cynicism among the Tamil parliamentarians of these councils, a certain degree of hope too was there that they'll satisfy some Tamil concerns. The councils were not adequately financed or given enough time and so failed within two years (Matthews 1986: 31).

The sixth amendment passed by the government in July 1983 disqualified anyone advocating separatism from membership in the legislature. With this move, fourteen TULF MPs were made to resign (Matthews 1986: 33–4), which created a political vacuum in voicing the Tamil aspirations. The Tamil militant groups, which had surfaced in the Sri Lankan society by then, started occupying that space.

**Rise of Tamil Militancy**

The marginalisation of the minority community in Sri Lanka led to the rise of militancy. The moderate Tamil political parties failed to redress their grievances through peaceful and political parliamentary means. The perpetration of violence by the state and its agents against the minorities turned them helpless. Sense of deprivation and repression among the Tamil youth necessitated the formation of militant groups. in the mid-1980s, as many as 37 militant groups were formed in Sri Lanka. Many of them were active in the beginning, but gradually faded due to the problems of leadership, manpower, finance or internal rivalry. Competition among them for absolute power also led to their extinction. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a supreme militant outfit, remained in-exhaustive over the decades in its fight for a separate State.

An analysis of the conflict since independence revealed absence of violent approach. In the beginning, the Tamils used parliamentary means to register their protest. *Satyagraha* was one of their popular means of protest. But, through parliamentary participation and peaceful negotiations, Sri Lankan Tamil leadership
got little dividend. The Sinhalese leaders were apathetic to their concerns. They were under the constant influence of Sinhalese majority. Such an attitude of the majority can be understandable in a parliamentary form of government. But unless the majority is empathetic and respects the basic rights of minority ethnic group, the whole concept of modern state system needs to be changed. In a society such as Sri Lanka, which is essentially pluralistic, the majority has no right to brush aside the legitimate interests of the minorities. If it does, the minorities have the right to self-determination, as recognized by Article 1(2) of the Charter of the United Nations (Thomas 1995: 23).

The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), a Tamil political party was involved in mobilisation of people against discrimination. Tamils first demanded a federal constitution and equal linguistic rights. When the government did not pay heed to their demand, the goal became a separate state. In the 1950s and 1960s, Tamils did not resort to violence. Peaceful and democratic expression of grievances by the Tamil political parties were suppressed and ignored by the state. According to the LTTE, “the TULF did not have a concrete programme of political action to liberate the oppressed Tamil Nation as well as the attitude of the traditional left parties which collaborated with the Sinhala capitalist clan and ignored the Tamil national struggle” (Thomas 1995:22). The TULF’s failure to achieve the Tamil rights created a space for the emergence of LTTE.

Thus, the state is one of the main culprits in aggravating the ethnic relations in Sri Lanka. The State has drifted from secular to sectarian. This led to interruption in the balance and harmony of social and political make up. Minorities who are marginalised are driven to the state of desperation.

In addition to the frustration caused by their inability to get their grievances redressed, there were other conditions which fostered the rise of Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka. Among these were the JVP insurgency and the creation of Bangladesh (Sivarajah 1996: 129; Matthews 1986: 31). In the JVP insurgency in 1971, the unemployed rural Sinhalese youth made an unsuccessful attempt to capture power through violence in a one-day revolution. But, this made Tamils to realise that there is one more path open to them to redress their grievances. The LTTE learnt from their mistakes. The brave struggle of the former East Pakistan against the domination of West Pakistanis and military dictatorship, which gave rise to the new nation of
Bangladesh, also inspired the Tamils. Thirdly, the Sri Lankan Tamils were provoked by the atrocities of Sri Lankan Police. Many Tamil youth who were active in the youth organisations were kept in detention without any charges. During 1972 and 1975, police arrests and harassment of Tamil youth increased. The police humiliation of members of many youth groups of Tamil political parties after the 1974 World Tamil Research Conference also instigated many (Matthews 1986:30).

Many Tamils consider the 1977 anti-Tamil riots as the turning point. After these riots, the Tamil youth became more determined to achieve Eelam.

All these conditions made youth to be at the forefront of the politics of violence as they suffered the most. Deeply motivated youth opted for violence when their grievances were unresolved and found no other way to register their protest. The signs of exasperation were seen in the black flag protests in Jaffna by the Tamil students who were excluded from the university because of the discriminatory standardisation policy. At every stage of the conflict, the Tamil opposition was met by the highhanded tactics of the government or by the Sinhala groups. These factors ultimately provoked them to turn aggressive. Tamil students affected by the unfair education policy, stoned government buses and property. Tamil students made bombs with chemicals stolen from the educational institutions (Swamy 2002). It is these students who provided the ground and leadership for militant struggle with the goal of achieving a separate state of Eelam. The Tamil Manvaar Peravai (Tamil Students' Federation) was formed on 23 September 1970 as a platform for Tamil students to agitate against the discriminatory government policies. Satyaseelan, the leader of TSF was a university student, who campaigned in various Tamil schools and mobilized students for a black flag demonstration in Jaffna against the Standardization Policy. Thereafter, the TSF took up armed struggle, encouraging active participation of youth (Satyaseelan, Interview, UK, 21 April 2008).

Thus, by the mid-1970s, not only the means but also their ends changed. Federal autonomy was no longer their demand. With the formation of the LTTE in 1976, the approach became violent and the goal was to achieve the right to self-determination. The leader of the Tamil Tigers, Velupillai Prabhakaran, was a member of the TSF (Satyaseelan, Interview, UK). The LTTE demanded a separate state comprising the North and East Provinces, the regions considered as the traditional homeland of
Tamils. The separatist movement has been basically limited to the Sri Lanka Tamil community (Kearney 1985: 258). The Indian Tamils, who live mostly among the Sinhalese in the interior highlands, have not by and large joined in the call for a Tamil state, but many of them also were victimized in the 1977 and 1983 riots. In the interest of personal survival, they became more vulnerable living among the Sinhalese. To lead secure lives, most of them migrated to South India, the land of their ancestors.

The violence at home had lot of impact on youth. Because of the rise of Tamil militant activities in the early 1970s and the increase in the Tamils’ involvement in smuggling, bank robberies and intermittent killings, the government started targeting the Tamil youth for hostile action. Since 1977, people started emigrating for mere survival, to escape army and police brutality. They were looking for many young people under those circumstances. So, the parents wanted to send their children out of the country, mainly boys at the beginning. From 1977 up to 1990, mainly Tamil boys were going out of the country, while the girls stayed back. Many parents sold their lands to send their children away to secure countries (Manoharan, Interview, UK, 15 April 2008). During 1973–77, when Satyaseelan was in prison, the Tamil students who applied for emigration were taken to the notorious fourth floor of the Investigation Department to identify him; those who recognized him were denied emigration (Satyaseelan, Interview, UK). Even writers and theatre personalities felt insecure and migrated.25

The 1983 anti-Tamil riots finally plunged the country in to civil war forcing more people to migrate.

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25 A.C. Tarcisius produced a play in Sri Lanka in 1977, which the extreme Sinhalese interpreted as advocating division of the country. He was taken to the fourth floor of the Investigation Department where they said, “You got the Presidential Award and you don’t deserve to be here. We will let you go.” An acquaintance in the security establishment informed him, “They let you go only to find out what you are going to do. Leave the capital as early as you can.” Tarcisius migrated to the UK in 1985 (Tarcisius, Interview, UK, 26 April 2008). Tarcisius is now active in Sri Lankan Tamil media in Europe.
The Pogrom of 1983

The anti-Tamil pogrom of July 1983 in Sri Lanka is a watershed event in the ethnic politics of Sri Lanka, which blatantly exposed the vulnerability of minority Tamils to the majoritarian politics of Sinhalese. Though riots have been taking place intermittently between the Sinhalese and Tamils since independence, the communal flare-up that raised in 1983 has traumatized the entire country. Almost every Tamil family in Colombo became a victim of murder, destruction or displacement. The bloodshed got spread to other parts of Sri Lanka too. The failure of the Sri Lankan political leadership to genuinely retort the gruesome turn of events made Tamils insecure. The structured organisation of brutal massacre created fear and sense of alienation among the Sri Lankan Tamils and this apprehensiveness compelled them to leave their homeland and migrate away to even far off lands. Most of the Tamils went to Tamil Nadu. They also travelled as far as Europe, Canada and Australia.

The spark that set off the massive violence was the ambush and killing of thirteen Sri Lankan soldiers at the Palaly army camp on the night of 23/24 July 1983. K.M. De Silva (1998) says that this ambush coincided with the TULF convention and served as a warning that any conciliatory response to the government’s proposals would be against the interests of youth in the North. A government-initiated round table conference was to be held at the end of July. The government, which was bilaterally dealing with the TULF on ethnic matters in 1981 and 1982, called an All Party Conference and kept the TULF in confusion. The date 23 July was also the sixth anniversary of the UNP’s return to power in 1977.

Anita Pratap (2001) is of the view that the LTTE attack was in retaliation for murdering Charles Anthony, who was considered as Prabhakaran’s right-hand man, in July 1983. Another perception is that the attack was to retaliate for the abduction and rape of three Tamil girls by Sri Lankan soldiers.

Whatever the reasons were for LTTE’s killing, this incident instigated Sinhala anger and vengeance to immeasurable heights. The Sinhalas launched horrifying anti-Tamil riots on 24 July 1983, spreading in to the succeeding weeks. Around two thousand Tamils were killed (Black July Video, www.germantamil.de). Some of them were burnt alive. Thousands of Tamils were hiding or taking shelter in refugee camps.
Large number of Tamil homes and businesses were looted, destroyed or burnt down (Black July Video, www.germantamil.de).

The bodies of the soldiers were brought to Colombo for mass burial at the main cemetery. A large crowd of mourners had gathered. Some of them vented their fury by attacking Tamil properties in the vicinity of the cemetery (Spencer 1990: 616). This provoked many at the funeral to attack. Moreover, the breakdown of law and order is worst during 1983 riots when compared to the previous years of violence. For almost a week, the government was not able to restore its authority and peace. There was a total collapse of law enforcement machinery. The security forces turned indifferent and ignored their role which otherwise would have saved many lives. In some cases, the security forces were well aware of the mobs’ intended targets of destruction, they simply told the Tamils to shift to refugee camps to avoid the mob fury (Spencer 1990: 617).

Roman Catholic areas in the north and north-west of the city and Catholic suburbs and towns situated between Colombo and Negombo were also among the worst victimized (De Silva 1998: 190). The attacks also targeted areas where Indian Tamils were concentrated, including Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya and Trincomalee.

Though the government declared that the death toll was 387 (Kearney 1985: 908, citing Government of Sri Lanka, The Facts and The International Commission of Jurists Report on Ethnic Violence in Sri Lanka), between 2000 and 3000 Tamils are estimated to have died in the pogrom (Spencer 1990: 616). There were more than 8000 cases of arson (Samarasinghe 1984: 253). Approximately 100,000 Tamils were displaced in Colombo alone (Suryanarayanan 2003).

Government not only failed in its duty to protect the Tamils but permitted and encouraged its supporters and representatives to spread violence. The mobs comprised political elements, including the supporters of the UNP (De Silva 1998: 191). Even

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26 This violence is attributed to the wide gulf that developed over the years among the Catholics themselves, and between the Sinhala Buddhists and the Tamil Catholics. Some of the younger and activist Tamil Catholic clergy in the northern province were sympathetic to the separatist cause (De Silva 1998).
government vehicles were used to transport the rioters. Buddhist monks and at least one cabinet minister headed the mob (Sahadevan and Devotta 2006: 21).

Only after three days of the riots, President Jayewardene imposed curfew. In any case, curfews had little meaning in the circumstances (a state of emergency was in force since the middle of May 1983) (De Silva 1998: 192). It was a carefully organised violence as the mobs made not only an armed attack but were very precise in their targets. They roamed the streets with addresses of every Tamil-owned shop, house or factory. In Wellawatte, Dehiwela and Bambalapatiya, they referred to voters’ lists which they had obtained (Suryanarayan 2003). Even when the situation reached heights of intolerance, the President didn’t even address the nation immediately. When the President finally addressed the nation, he justified the violence as a response to Tamil militancy in the Northern Province. It was the same President who, after the 1981 riots, expressed anguish and even threatened to resign from the party’s leadership if helpless and innocent Tamils were attacked again. To quote:

What is the example we as leaders of the governing party are setting to our followers and the rest of our countrymen? ... I must have reason to be proud of the party of which I am leader. If I cannot it is better for me to retire ... and let those who believe that the harming of innocent people and property that has happened recently is the way to solve the problem that faces this multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-caste society take over the leadership of the party (Wriggins 1982: 178).

In 1981 he even expelled the UNP member from Ratnapura for his role in the violence in his region. But just after two years, when the most gruesome attacks were made against the Tamils in an organised manner, he sounded apathetic.

The anti-social elements involved in the mob violence in 1983 were considered to be “goondas” or “thugs” nurtured and maintained by the UNP (Spencer 1990: 617). Like its precursor SLFP in the 1970s, the UNP was believed to be relying on this private army of hooligans since it came to power in 1977. The Jayewardene regime’s increasing dependence on these elements to use violence against its opponents became more obvious during the 1982 referendum, when the life of Parliament was extended for another term through majority vote in a referendum, the UNP depended

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27 Spencer says that this trend of politically powerful figures controlling illegal operation in the shadow of the State was seen even in the colonial period. Even after independence, it continued, but more channelled through party lines. But, this reliability was more clearly seen since 1970s.

more apparently on these unlawful forces. The illegal tactics of violence and intimidation employed by these supporters helped the party to survive in the government. This excessive dependence of the UNP on them, which in fact, was not seen to that extent in any regime to survive, was responsible for their un-controllable behaviour in July 1983 (Spencer 1990).

Not only political, the psychological understanding of the atmosphere in which these 1983 riots had taken place needs attention. For some months before the riots, a fear psychosis was developed in the minds of Sinhalese of the possible attacks by the Tamil Tigers in the south. This can be attributable to the Sinhala press. Even the distant rural areas could catch this anxiety. Jonathan Spencer (1990) details the situation as follows:

In the remote village where I was working people reported to me that they had 'seen' Tigers in the area. With the imposition of curfew and censorship and the apparent breakdown of the civil administration, rumours about the Tigers grew and developed dramatically-how they were on their way to attack the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, how they were going to poison the water supply of major towns, how they had travelled south from Jaffna hanging on the underside of trains (for 300 miles in a week when the trains were not running) or dressed in military uniform under a disguise as priests.

The militant behaviour of the LTTE in the north created more panic in the south. With the raise and explosion of rumours, a state of insecurity was developed among the Sinhalese who considered the 1983 riots as protective actions. In many cases of violence against the Tamils, there was a belief in the Sinhalese crowd that they were attacking the Tigers. Where Tamils resisted the attacks, they were identified as militants on that basis and the police or army was called to assault them. Spencer cites one such example. In the highland town of Badulla (Spencer 1990: 618). In July 1983, when a mob attacked the houses of Tamils on a particular street, the families living there desperately called for police help. On receiving no help, a renowned Tamil merchant living on that street fired a shotgun in the air to scare the mob away. Immediately, soldiers arrived on the street, who killed the Tamils who had survived the mob attack. The soldiers told the merchant’s wife to fetch the remaining Tigers and weapons. Such incidents assured the local people that the Tamils they were attacking were really militants (Spencer 1990: 618).
Neil DeVotta (2000) makes an interesting correlation between the post-1977 economic reforms in Sri Lanka and the 1983 riots. He says that the success of many Tamil traders and industrialists with the initiation of open market reforms created relative Sinhala deprivation and led to Sinhala chauvinism and racialization of politics. In the pre-1977 period, Sinhala industrialists, big and small, and traders and shopkeepers could take advantage of their ethnic identity in procuring quotas and licences. They had relatively more access to scarce resources. But with the structural adjustment reforms, the subsequent economic changes helped Tamils to utilize their ethnic and business connections with Indians and move upward. Their Sinhala counterparts could not compete with the cheap and finer imports flooding the Sri Lankan markets. Reporting cryptically on the economic consequences of the riots on the Tamil entrepreneurial class, *The Economist* in its 6 August 1983 issue said, “Two weeks ago Tamils owned 60 per cent of the wholesale trade and 80 per cent of the retail trade in the capital. Today that trade is gone” (Quoted in DeVotta 2000: 64).

In the Welikade high-security prison numerous Tamil political prisoners were lynched by the inmates. Doughlas Devananda, an eyewitness, vouches that 35 political prisoners were killed on 25 July and 18 more two days later (2005 www.lankalibrary.com).

The *London Daily Express*, dated 29th August 1983, published an eye witness account of the massacre by a Norwegian lady who was travelling with her 15-year old daughter in Sri Lanka during these riots. On going back home to Stavanger in Norway, Mrs. Eli Skarstein admitted:

A mini bus full of Tamils was forced to stop in front of us in Colombo. A Sinhalese mob poured petrol over the bus and set it on fire. They blocked the car door and prevented the Tamils from leaving the vehicle. Hundreds of spectators watched as about 20 Tamils were burned to death.

The laws brought in response to these riots also worked against the Tamils. The torture and killing of hundreds of civilians made the government to introduce Emergency Regulation 15A. This gave power to the security forces to bury/cremate people shot by them even without revealing their identities or making enquiries.

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(Bloom 2003: 64). In early August, the government amended the constitution (sixth amendment) to ban the advocacy of separatism. Implementing this, it arrested 5000 suspected persons (Samarasinghe 1984: 253).

James Manor reports on the post-pogrom situation:

Many small shopkeepers whose businesses were wrecked have taken their insurance money and departed. Those who remain appear to be operating normally but have moved their families and liquid assets out. They buy in one day’s stock at a time and maintain only a very tenuous link with their locality. Tamil public employees have largely returned to their posts but feel insecure. They are demoralised and lonely without the support of evacuated families. Tamil estate labourers are seeking transfers to safer places higher in the hills or to jobs in the Tamil north or abroad. The appearance of a rapid return to normality is distinctly misleading, for most Tamils believe that the violence of 1983 changed things fundamentally, probably irreversibly. (Manor 1984)

Thus, the situation in Sri Lanka was no more the same in Sri Lanka. The ethnic relations between the Sinhalese and Tamils severely got affected. A feeling of insecurity and diffidence pervaded the Tamil community. They felt threatened to live amidst them. With the beginning of military battle between the LTTE and Sri Lankan armed forces after the 1983 riots, the life of Sri Lankan Tamils was further endangered.

**Outbreak of Civil War**

The conflict caused massive destruction of land, infrastructure and resources. Education and health services were impaired. The presence of landmines reduced the land available for agriculture. Many private properties were destroyed and thousands were rendered homeless. Some areas were under army occupation. The economy of the war-ravaged region was further crippled by the economic embargo imposed by the government in the North and East provinces in 1990 (lifted in January 2002). The LTTE’s administrative set-up in the North and East and the nature of the LTTE’s economic policies also made many Tamils migrate. With the large-scale displacement of the people, the region virtually became a no-man’s land.
In the twenty-five years of armed struggle between 1983 and 2008, there were numerous attempts for peace. However, both during war and peace, the behaviour of the government and the LTTE threatened the lives of the civilians and led to large-scale displacement. The innocent people got entangled in their continuing clashes. Many local and international organisations including Amnesty International and UN treaty monitoring bodies recorded large scale human rights violations by both the parties in the Sri Lankan conflict.

Violence Generated by the Civil War and Migration

The Tamils were already frustrated with the discriminatory policies and state violence over the decades. The civil war further worsened their lives as they find themselves sandwiched between the state and the militants. In the Sri Lankan government’s attempt to flush out the militants, the innocent civilians became victims in the hands of security forces. The continuing arrests of Tamils and the fear of long detention and torture at the hands of the security forces induced many Tamils to migrate out, even borrowing from moneylenders or relatives to migrate to the West (SLM, February 1994). Many Tamils also left to escape getting into the LTTE’s clutches. Fishermen of Trincomalee town had no assurance of safe return because of the aerial bombardments. Many Tamil fishermen lost their lives in the civil war (Pumidivadi, Sri Lankan Tamil fisherman, Interview, Puducherry, 19 January 2008).

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30 In July 1987 an agreement was signed between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India and President Jayewardene of Sri Lanka to end the fighting. This Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement required the rebels to surrender their arms to accept a political solution. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), which was sent to Sri Lanka to implement the agreement, could not fulfil its function because it came in the crossfire of the contending parties, who were jointly hostile to it. After the withdrawal of the IPKF in 1989, official peace talks again resumed between the Premadasa government and the LTTE in Colombo in 1990, but failed after fourteen months of negotiations. When the People’s Alliance came to power in December 1994, there were some expectations of peace but even these faded away with the LTTE rejecting the devolution proposals put forward by President Chandrika Kumaratunga. In its press release on 14 August 1995, the LTTE claimed that the government was firmly committed to a military solution and these concerns led to the breakdown of the talks. Again in 2002, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe’s government could secure a cease-fire with Norwegian mediation and entered into peace talks. Despite all the efforts of the international community and the SLMM, an atmosphere conducive to peace has not been created.

31 Trawick (1999: 145) cites an incident narrated by an innocent Tamil youth, who was badly tortured by the Special Task Force of the Police as part of their village round-ups to find suspected Tamil cadres.

32 In June 1990, when the LTTE was accused of killing Muslims and Sinhalese in the East, the armed forces decided to aerially bombard the Tiger-controlled North (Singer 1991: 142). In this episode, hundreds of thousands of civilians became shelterless. Before bombarding a place, the government would drop warning leaflets to enable the civilians to get out of their homes. But civilians dared not return, fearing more bombing.
Also, the fight between the LTTE and its rival groups has accentuated the situation even more. Harassment and abductions became a daily affair. There was a serious shortage of food supplies in the conflict-affected region. In 1990, Tamil sources claimed one million Tamils in the North to be refugees, which was more than half of the population (Singer 1991: 142). The fight between the LTTE and its rival groups worsened matters for the civilians. A further complicating factor was the breaking away of Karuna group from the LTTE.

Though the LTTE and the GOSL agreed for peace talks after the CFA-2002, it didn't pave way for enduring peace. Violence has escalated at a large scale since the beginning of 2005 as a result of the assassinations and injuries to people belonging to the GOSL, LTTE and other political groups. Overall, there was a severe humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka causing great anxiety among the Government and the international and national NGOs.

In 1979, the government passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) which gave enormous powers to arrest and detain citizens. Large-scale arrests and long-term detentions, without bail or trial became a normal feature in the country. Hundreds of Tamils were killed extra-judicially. Torture of civilians by the security forces was reported daily. The UN Committee Against Torture continually raised concerns about the torture of women and children and their death in custody. The UN Working Group emphasized that Sri Lanka remained the country with the second-largest number of unclarified disappearances in the world, next only to Iraq.

Security forces undertook large-scale round-ups of Tamil civilians, mostly after LTTE attacks, who were detained for over 48 hours. If Tamil youth produced documents showing their birth in Tamil areas or if they could not give an authentic reason for their presence in South Sri Lanka, or if they had any visible scar, they were detained for further investigation, suspected of LTTE membership (Manoharan, Interview, UK, 15 April 2008).

After President Premadasa was assassinated by an LTTE suicide bomber in May 1993, the security conditions worsened. The 100,000 Tamil refugees who fled to the
South since the June 1990 war became vulnerable to police threats. The Colombo police arrested some 15,000 LTTE suspects since the President's assassination. While around 2000 remained in custody, another 2000 were arrested in police round-ups in mid-January 1994 (SLM, January 1994: 1). The Centre for Human Rights and Development, a human rights organization in Colombo, has reported that 18,000 arrests were made in 2000 (BRC Report 2001).

Army trucks surveying the Tamil villages for possible militants went in large numbers, hand-picking suspects. On 20 February 1985, 14 or 15 army trucks entered Pesalai in Mannar district (Sakkharias, Interview, Chennai, 17 January 2008). A few fishermen or boatmen who had taken Tamil refugees to India in their boats the previous week were taken into custody. Three youngsters were shot dead for staring at the army trucks; a fleeing youth was also shot. A servant working in the house of Sakkharias' mother was taken into custody because he did not have an identity card.

The whereabouts of many Tamils taken by the security forces are not known (Sakkharias, Interview). Amnesty International reports that though many Tamils who were tortured under custody approached the national Human Rights Commission (appointed in 1996), it has rarely used its powers. When questioned about the disappeared Tamils, the security forces responded that they might have joined the Tamil Tigers or that the Tamils who died earlier also were simply being reported for compensation purpose or that even the disappeared person had left the place (Grenier 1997). All these disappearances panicked the Tamils.

Sometimes, the security forces vented their frustration on hapless innocents. In 1986, for example, when the army personnel were searching for LTTE cadres in C Sundaralingam Building campus in Vavuniya and the persons they interrogated could

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33 The Colombo police believed that hundreds of LTTE suicide squads mixed with the Tamil refugees in the capital, seeking high-profile targets (SLM, January 1994). Since 1990, when the North began to be controlled by the LTTE, it was estimated that more than 150,000 Tamils migrated to Colombo. There were already some 350,000 Tamils living in Colombo. It appeared that almost 25 per cent of the population of the capital were Tamils (Grenier 1997).
34 Sakkharias migrated to Chennai and is working with the OFERR.
35 From the early 1970s, the government started issuing ID cards to all citizens above 18 years of age (Sakkharias, Interview).
not provide information, they killed 22 Tamils (Veliathan, Sri Lankan Tamil refugee, Interview, Tamil Nadu, 19 January 2008). 36

Many Tamil women were gangraped and murdered by the security forces in the North and East provinces. There were many instances of Tamils who faced sexual violence and torture at the hands of the armed forces.

The government also maintained severe restrictions on the movement of Tamils within Sri Lanka. For travelling in certain parts of the country, civilians had to apply for travel permits, after undergoing a lengthy bureaucratic exercise. The Tamils had to obtain permission from the Defence Ministry to travel to Jaffna.

With the rise of Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan government also suspected the intellectuals and educated Tamils’ support behind the militants’ power. This caused fear among the Tamils working in the government too. Feeling the heat of Sri Lankan army’s harassment and killings, there were many educated Tamils who left the island to protect their family and themselves. For Sakkharias, who was an Assistant Commissioner of Labour and was based in Pesalai in Mannar district, the moment of truth came when, returning from work in mid-1984, he was taken in to army camp for interrogation. 37

There are some Sri Lankan Tamils like Murugesu who got sandwiched between both LTTE and the Sri Lankan Armed Forces. He was a district sports officer in Jaffna but took voluntary retirement in 1986 at the age of 52 (though the retirement age was 65). As his job nature was to impart physical education and training, he was afraid that the Tamil militants would forcibly involve him in their movement; at the same time, the government also could suspect him of helping the LTTE and stop his

36 Veliathan was a stenographer in Vavuniya court. He was in C Sundaralingam building when the tragedy took place. He escaped from being shot by pretending to be dead. He claims that the security forces personnel snatched away his gold chain. His mother also got injured in the incident. After taking her to the hospital, he sent the entire family in a plastic boat to India. He lived in the Middle East for two and a half years and joined his family in Tamil Nadu in 1989 (Veliathan, Interview). Veliathan is currently working as a field coordinator for OfERR.

37 The Talladi camp comprises 3000-4000 army men. Generally, Tamils taken to that camp hardly escape death. Fortunately, his friend Captain Ediri Singhe (he was temporarily there as army officer in Voluntary Corps), was working in the same department. Sakkharias could make his interrogators call Singhe on the phone. His intervention saved Sakkharias’ life (Sakkharias, Interview, Chennai).
pension, as it already was having a sharp lookout on Tamil sportspersons. He migrated to India in 1990. 38

So, not only Tamil youth and vulnerable groups like women and children, the security crisis in Sri Lanka also led Tamil intellectuals, government servants, artists, sportspersons and various other Tamil sections to migrate as they felt their lives threatened.

Not only the government, the Tamil militant groups were also accused of human rights violations. PLOTE and TELO, which were working closely with the Sri Lankan armed forces in the 1990s, were also accused of human rights abuses like harassment, involvement in extortion and killings (Grenier 1997). But it was the LTTE which has done maximum damage.

The LTTE has been involved in grave human rights violations, including assassinations, extortion, abduction of children for recruitment, detentions, extrajudicial killings and disappearances and torture. By murdering all political rivals of the Tamil movement and by intimidating and threatening all cultural, social and human rights activists in the North-East, the Tigers removed the possible rise of alternative sources of leadership in Tamil society and voice of dissent to their cause of Tamil Eelam. The LTTE by threatening and assassinating the Sri Lankan political leaders, intelligentsia and other opposition groups, created an environment of intimidation and fear in the Sri Lankan society. The LTTE controlled the movement of Tamils in the northern Vanni region, when the region was under its control. The Tamil Tigers rarely used to permit young men and women out of their area.

The LTTE was also accused of having used civilians as a cover to escape from army attack. When the SLA was advancing into Jaffna on 30 October 1995, the LTTE decided to withdraw its forces from there, and to avoid being defeated, forcibly

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38 Murugesu is taking care of the education of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in OfERR, Chennai. His family is in Canada. He still draws his pension every three months through the Bank of Ceylon (Murugesu, Interview, Chennai, 17 January 2008).
evacuated the civilian population in Valikamam.\textsuperscript{39} Rajan Hoole described the plight of these people:

During the night in pouring rain, people jam-packed the exit roads jostling, cursing and pushing each other. Elderly died of exhaustion, and infants dropped by weary mothers perished in flood waters. Apart from privation and starvation, people suffered loss of identity, basic human self-esteem, and lived with enormous guilt over parents, elders and domestic animals they left behind. As they fled the LTTE broke into their homes, looted their goods and transported them out in lorries. At one point it made the civilians going on foot to use the railway bridge, so that LTTE lorries carrying their looted goods could use the road exit without hindrance. The experience left the civilians angry, humiliated, and utterly helpless. (http://www.uthr.org)

Apart from the security conditions, the economic situation of the Tamil provinces also led to migration of Tamils.

During 1990–95, the government had no control over the northern region as the de facto state of Tamil Eelam was operational. Almost the whole of the North except a few pockets of land (encamped by the Army or Navy) was under the administrative control of the LTTE (Wilson 2000: 167; www.janes.com). The LTTE levied taxes on the citizens in the territory under its control.\textsuperscript{40} By means of this control over the territory, the LTTE started instigating Tamil people to support the Tigers by providing finance and cadres to the organisation (http://www.janes.com).

The LTTE taxed farmers, fisher folk, small shop owners and others with regular income.\textsuperscript{41} The LTTE tax collectors apparently had every detail about the income of their targets: salaries, bank balances, assets, liabilities. Those singled out by the LTTE had to visit its office in nearby Kokaddicholai. Those who refused to pay were imprisoned. Apart from demanding money or gold, the LTTE also was forcing the Tamil people to legally transfer their property like houses and paddy lands, etc. in the names of people proposed by the Tigers (Muttukrishna 2003). The north-eastern

\textsuperscript{39} At 6 p.m. the LTTE issued a threatening order to the civilians to vacate within ten hours and threatened to blow up the connecting bridge over Chemmani lagoon. The LTTE said that those who remained would have to face the implications of incessant war (Hoole, www.uthr.org).

\textsuperscript{40} The government continued to supply basic commodities to citizens in these areas. This was to prevent a humanitarian crisis. But the political institutions were not functional (Muttukrishna 2003).

\textsuperscript{41} The LTTE did not consider the income level and household size of the taxpayers. In the same way, small-scale manufacturers and service providers were also taxed monthly.
economy, already crippled by the economic embargo, deteriorated further with this extortion.42

For extortion, the LTTE used the term ‘donation’. Some families also made payments to the LTTE in order to escape the conscription of their children to the movement.

Demographic Profile and Settlement Patterns of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora

Most of these Tamils who had gone out of Sri Lanka generally were expected to return to Sri Lanka after pursuing their education or other economic tasks. But with the large scale communal eruption in 1970s, especially after 1983 riots, they cited the violence at home as the reason to stay back (JONES, 1985).

The migration of Sri Lankan Tamils out of Sri Lanka is not necessarily the deprivation or actual discrimination, though it is one aspect. The violence resulted out of the civil war made more damage and created difficulty to stay. Discrimination continued with accompanying violence. Possibly, diaspora would not have been so big without this violence.

Thus, the major flow of Tamil migrants to the outside world is the result of violence erupted in the anti-Tamil riots of 1983 and the subsequent emergence of civil war. There are three different categories of Tamils who migrated after 1983: refugees seeking political asylum, students and professionals, and those sponsored by the Tamil expatriates already established abroad.

Tamils traditionally have had an inclination for geographic mobility for upward social and economic mobility. In the 1920s and '30s, Jaffna Tamils moved out as postmen and station masters in Malaysia and Singapore (Rajanayagam, Interview, UK, 30 April 2008). Along with these reasons, the migration is also because of the Tamils’ search for avenues for economic prosperity. The war conditions at home

42 The economic embargo imposed by the government in 1990 included a range of consumer goods, including fuel, food and medicine. As a result, an informal market for these goods was created. This resulted in a dual economic system. The LTTE pursued a command economic model for twelve years of the economic embargo. Some of the important features of such a command economy were “severe shortage of essential and other consumer goods, rationing, hyperinflation, and LTTE-run transport, trade and productive enterprises” (Muttukrishna 2003: 1844).
catalysed this propensity for geographic mobility. The international tolerance for refugees encouraged them all the more (Rajanayagam, Interview, UK).

Rajanayagam, the editor of Tamil Times, explains: “There have been many conflicts in the world and we didn’t see such large number of people going abroad like Tamils.” Even after all this violence, many Tamils live in southern Sri Lanka. The element of traditional inclination to move out of their presently described factional war has been a factor in this explosion of diaspora (Rajanayagam, Interview, UK). This explosion has even changed the ethnic demographic dynamics in Sri Lanka. Numerically, Sri Lankan Tamils are said to have become a third ethnic group in Sri Lanka, after the Sinhalese and Muslims.  

In the UK, Germany, France and Switzerland, students and professionals dominated the Tamil diaspora before 1983 but after 1983, the presence of Tamils is also seen in countries such as Cambodia, South Africa, Burma and Botswana (Chalk 2000). The migration of Tamils rises during war conditions at home and subsides in conditions of relative peace.  

According to official figures in December 1995, 400,000 of the 950,000 people formerly living in the northern province were settled outside Sri Lanka. But in 1997, unofficial sources estimated a total of 700,000 Tamil expatriates living abroad (Fuglerud 2001). UNHCR estimates that there are more than 800,000 Sri Lankan Tamils living overseas – Canada 400,000, Europe 200,000, India 67,000, the United States 40,000, and Australia (30,000. Approximately 80,000 Tamils are spread in a dozen other countries. (Ember and Skoggard 2005: 493)  

Many uneducated people went abroad with travel agents’ help. Huge sums of money were paid by the parents to the travel agencies to send their sons out of the country. Immediately after 1983, Tamils paid 5000-6000 pounds to the agent, and the

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43 Rajanayagam says this is one reason for the LTTE’s refusal to hold a census in Sri Lanka.  
44 The Tamils scattered across the world are not only the result of oppressive Sinhala rule, but also those settled during the nineteenth century due to British colonial policies. In different British colonies, Tamils worked as contract labour. In the 1840s, Tamils went to Trinidad, Guyana and Mauritius; in the 1860s, to Natal, a British colony in South Africa; in the 1870s, to the Dutch colony of Surinam and to Fiji in the 1880s. Other Tamils migrated to the French colony of Reunion and some to Burma. Tamils from north Sri Lanka migrated to Malaya and Singapore searching for white-collar employment (http://www.tamilnation.org/diaspora/index.htm).
commission in the later years and decades was even increased to about 15,000 pounds per person (Manoharan, UK, Interview, 15 April 2008).

INDIA

After the 1983 massacre, the immediate destination for many Tamils was India, because of its geographical proximity and cultural linkages. A number of Sri Lankan Tamils who went to Tamil Nadu before 1983 were from the middle and upper-class background who had some savings and assets (JONES 1987). Between the 1983 riots and the 1987 India-Sri Lanka Agreement, there was a major outflow of Tamils with the intensification of the ethnic conflict. Though India was not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, the Indian government provided refuge to the Tamil refugees. During this four-year period, more than 130,000 Tamil refugees sought asylum in India (Nirmala Chandrachasan 1989). By 1987, some 29,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees were living in 170 government camps. Another 106,000 were either living with friends, relatives or in rented accommodation (BRC Report 1999).

Whenever violence erupts in Sri Lanka, many poor Sri Lankan Tamils opt for India as their immediate shelter because of India’s proximity to Tamil Eelam. Also, India does not ask them to prove their refugee status (Chandrachasan, Interview, Chennai, 17 January 2008). At the beginning of the civil war, even the Sri Lankan government urged them to migrate to India to avoid the war-related violence. When there is relative peace, they return to Sri Lanka. Pumidivadi, a Sri Lankan fisherman from Trincomalee, is an example. He migrated with his family to India in 1985, when the war was in full blow. But the peace evolved in the island after the signing of Indo-Sri Lanka accord encouraged them to return to Sri Lanka in 1988. When, with the withdrawal of the IPKF and the break of the LTTE-Premadasa talks in 1990 violence was again unleashed, Pumidivadi returned to India (Pumidivadi, Interview, Pondicherry, 19 January 2008). Like him, some 150,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees again reached the coast of India by the end of 1990 (BRC Report, 1999). After Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination in 1991 by the LTTE, Pumidivadi returned to Sri Lanka in 1992, but the frustration with violence compelled his family to seek survival in India again in 2004.

India, which gave a warm welcome to both refugees and militants in the 1980s turned hostile in the early 1990s with the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.
(Chandrahasan, Interview). In between January 1992 and till the suspension of the repatriation programme in 1996, over 54,000 Sri Lankan refugees were repatriated from India (BRC Report 2002; SLM, November 2005). The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, who implemented this policy, was convinced that this was the only way to reduce LTTE infiltration of southern India. Currently, there are about 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamils living as refugees in Tamil Nadu (Chandrahasan, Interview).

Most of the Sri Lankans migrated to Tamil Nadu were poor Tamils like fishermen or farmers. But, educated Sri Lankan Tamils who mostly pursue Engineering, Medicine, Accountancy and Law could readily opt for the Western countries for better economic opportunities. In this context, the asylum in Western countries gained more importance for the Tamils.

Also from 1983, year by year, more Tamil people mainly from Northern Province migrated mostly to the West European countries and Canada. Many Sri Lankan Tamils went mostly to the European countries through visa offices in Chennai (Jones 1987). Nearly 70,000 Tamil asylum seekers went to Europe and North America during 1983–87 (Nirmala Chandrahasan 1989). Fewer went to Australia and New Zealand (Manoharan, Interview, UK, 15 April 2008).

**WESTERN EUROPE**

Earlier, there were hardly any Tamil expatriates in France, Germany, Switzerland or in other West European countries other than few professionals who went for employment (Varada Kumar, Interview, UK, 14 April 2008). In the UK there was a reasonably good number because of the presence of Sri Lankan Tamil students and professionals from the 1950s and 1960s who settled there. They provided the link for Tamils to migrate to the UK after 1983.

But, to the poor and uneducated Tamil refugees, who mostly were migrating through travel agents, migration was not that easy. In the 1980s, many Tamils entered Europe through Germany. That was during the cold war and Germany had relatively liberal asylum policies. At this point, foreigners can easily enter in to West Germany because of the lax immigration procedures. After getting into West Germany with the
help of middlemen and Tamil networks, the Sri Lankan Tamils migrated to cities like London, Zurich, Paris, Bonn, etc. (Satyaseelan, Interview, UK, April 2008).

According to UNHCR statistics, the number of Tamil applications received by Europe in the three years before 1983 (3.8 per cent) was relatively small, while the periods 1984–85 (16.6 per cent) and 1989–92 (31.1 per cent) saw the biggest clusters of applications (Sriskandarajah, http://www.tamilnation.org).

UK. In 1981, the Home Office received only twelve applications from Sri Lankan asylum seekers. This number increased to 2306 in 1985. In 1984, 400 Sri Lankan Tamils applied for asylum in the UK, according to the European Consultation on Refugees (Jones 1985). Rajanayagam says that the number of Sri Lankan Tamils in the UK was not more than 20,000 in the 1970s (Interview, UK, 30 April 2008). They could get the family members to migrate out of Sri Lanka. The students, on acquiring the qualification and professional skills could get employed in the same country. As many of them are English-educated, settling in the UK became an effortless choice. Scarcity of doctors in the UK also encouraged many Tamil doctors to settle in the UK. Chiefly, a professional background in Medicine, Engineering and Accountancy helped in easy migration. Currently, the UK accounts for anywhere between 125,000 (Keegel, SLHC, Interview, UK, 24 April 2008) and 250,000 (Varada Kumar, TIC, Interview UK, 14 April 2008). But the SLHC sources in London keeps the UK Sri Lankan Tamil population at 1,25,000 (Keegel, SLHC, Interview).

As explained by Daniel and Thangaraj (1995), migration of Tamils to Britain took place in three main waves. The first wave was around and after independence in 1948. They were mostly professionals and students hailing from the upper-class and upper-caste backgrounds, who went seeking university or professional studies. With the increase in the discriminatory policies against the Tamils, there was another stream of Tamils to Britain, mostly after the passage of the 1956 Sinhala Only Act. The migration accelerated in the 1960s. With the intensification of the ethnic conflict in the early 1980s and the civil war after the pogrom of 1983, England received the third flow of Tamils. These migrants include professionals who used their social capital and networks to enter Britain; those who had enough money to travel and

could relocate themselves through education, re-training (e.g. as nurses), family union, or limited sponsorship schemes; and finally, the poorer people who escaped the war at home as refugees, migrated especially after 1983. As in many other countries, the last group of refugees dominated the Tamil migration to Britain.

The earlier migrants are dispersed broadly all over Britain. In London the Tamils are mostly concentrated in East Ham, Southall, Wembley, Tooting and Croydon (Kuhanendran, Manoharan, Sivalingam, Interviews, UK, April 2008). The Tamils in the first two stages of migration are well settled. Those who migrated after 1983 got into various fields but mostly into small businesses like retail (ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) University of Oxford report 2004).

Tamils who went to the UK may be much better off than those who migrated to other European countries. This was because of their established links with their relatives or friends who already were well settled in the UK. Their proficiency in the language also helped them in advancing their professional career.

Germany. It is estimated that more than 50,000 Tamils live in Germany. More than half of them reside in North Rhine-Westphalia (Zunzer http://www.berghof-center.org). In 1977, when the TSF leader Satyaseelan migrated to Frankfurt, there was no requirement of even visa. There were just around 21 to 27 Sri Lankan Tamils living in Frankfurt and Hamburg. Even those Sri Lankan Tamil students who went to Germany in 1975 had a limited visa and they were not asylum seekers. Satyaseelan helped the youngsters in Germany in acquiring political asylum. His political and prison experience was useful in advising the Tamil students in Germany on drafting the statements to apply for political asylum through a lawyer. During that time, Sri Lankan Tamils were shy to reveal their asylum status. They gradually brought their relations, purchasing even their air tickets (Satyaseelan, Interview, UK, 21 April 2008). In 2003, around 40,000 Tamil families were living in Germany. In Bern, one in every 20 residents was Tamil (Guha 2003: 12). Also, with the initiative taken by Satyaseelan, many Sri Lankan Tamils started settling in other parts of Europe, especially the Western countries.

46 The official figure for the Sri Lankan population in Germany was 60,330 in 1998, which is not divided on ethnic lines (Zunzer).
Today, Sri Lankan Tamils are also substantially seen in France, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries.

**France.** Tamil migration to France started since the 1977 riots in Sri Lanka and the emergency that followed. During 1977–1986, approximately 20,000 Tamils sought asylum in France, of which 10 per cent were approved. They live mostly in Paris and were settled in unskilled jobs (Jones 1987).

**Switzerland.** Switzerland’s friendly attitude has attracted many Tamils (Srisknandarajah, cited in McDowell 1996). There were some 45,000 Tamils in Switzerland in 2003. One in every 80 Sri Lankan Tamils lives in Switzerland (Guha 2003: 12). Switzerland’s productive tourist industry attracted Tamils for employment (SLM, November 1989).

**Norway.** Similar to Daniel and Thangaraj’s explanation of migration to Britain, the demographic profile and settlement pattern of Tamils in Norway can also be understood from the three phases of Tamil migration provided by Oivind Fuglerud (2001), based on his field study in Norway. The first category of Tamils includes migrant workers who left Sri Lanka during 1968–80. The Cey-Nor development assistance project, established by a Norwegian NGO in Jaffna in the mid-1960s, provided the basis for many Tamils to migrate to Norway. Though this project was essentially for developing the local fisheries in Jaffna, the local workers took the help of the Norwegian management to find work in Norway. After Norway enforced the ban on immigration in 1975, the younger relatives of migrant workers still could go to Norway through the Folkehoyskole. These are private high schools for which visas were acquirable. Before 1975, the number of Tamil migrant workers was only around 50. The number of Tamil students in the Folkehoyskole was 286 in 1986 and 338 in 1987. The second category of Tamil migrants left Sri Lanka during 1980–86. They are the early refugees who had been active in the LTTE at home. In fact, this category has a small group who are just around five to ten individuals and was given refugee status. But they are significant as they established the LTTE network in Norway based on the supporters. The third category of Tamils are the asylum seekers who left Sri Lanka after 1986. They were not accepted as refugees but were allowed to stay on
humanitarian grounds. In total, there were 1881 Sri Lankan citizens in 1987, which increased to 3662 in 1999. Among them, the majority were Tamils.

**Denmark.** Denmark, according to the European Consultation on Refugees, had 249 asylum seekers in 1983-84. In 1986 it received 2000 Tamils. Denmark showed a magnanimous attitude to 37 Sri Lankans stranded in Cairo by accepting to grant them political asylum as they were threatened with return to Sri Lanka (JONES 1987). Herning, a small town in Jutland, and not Copenhagen, has surfaced as the ‘Tamil capital’ (Sriskandarajah, *Encyclopaedia of Diaspora*: 494). This happened because of the Danish government’s policy of dispersing asylum seekers. Denmark, Sweden and other countries had only a small number of Tamil asylum seekers in 1984 (JONES 1985).

**Other West European Countries.** The Netherlands, Austria and Italy also accommodate the Sri Lankan Tamil population. According to the European Consultation on Refugees, there were 900 Sri Lankan asylum seekers in the Netherlands in 1983-84 (JONES 1985); the total of refugees and asylum seekers accounted for 1300 Sri Lankan Tamils in the Netherlands in 1984. The figures were the same in 1985 and 1986. Still, there were 4500 Sri Lankan Tamils alone in the Netherlands in early 1986 (JONES 1987).

**NORTH AMERICA**

**Canada.** By 1994, with many West European countries adopting stringent asylum policies against the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, most Tamils started looking at Canada as the “most favoured destination” (SLM, July 1994: 4).

Canada has the highest concentration of Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. Supposedly, in between 1990 and 1999, the Sri Lankans (mostly Tamils) were the single-largest asylum seekers in Canada (Sriskandarajah, *Encyclopaedia of Diaspora*: 493). Initially, most of the Tamils settled in Canada went from Germany with the German government’s refugee policy turning hostile to the Sri Lankan Tamils. Applications by the Sri Lankan Tamils seeking asylum were rejected by Germany. The German government also acted against the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in its territory, and acted to send them out of the country at the earliest possible opportunity. This
made many Sri Lankan Tamils migrate to Canada (Satyaseelan, Interview, UK, 21 April 2008). In August 1986, 155 Sri Lankan Tamils suddenly appeared in lifeboats on the Canadian coast of Newfoundland, who were actually dropped nearby by a ship from West Germany (JONES 1987; Satyaseelan, Interview). From there, they started migrating to Toronto, which was considered suitable for the Tamils (Satyaseelan, Interview).

Sri Lankan Tamils are concentrated mostly in Toronto. Tamil students who went to Canada also provided a link for the Tamils in Sri Lanka to migrate (ibid.). In the meantime, with the aggravation of the conflict at home, the Sri Lankan Tamils already settled in Europe and Canada facilitated further migration of the people of their community. Statistics Canada 2001 reports that out of the 92,010 Tamil-speaking persons in Canada, 72,715 lived in Toronto (Zunzer berghof-center.org). In between 1996 and 2001, the Tamil community in Toronto has grown by 38 per cent, the fastest growing population group in Canada. For the Greater Toronto Area of Ontario, the estimates range from 92,010 to 2,50,000 (ibid.). The language of English made it easy for the Tamils to easily absorb into the Canadian society.

USA. When compared to the countries like Canada and the UK, America has lesser Sri Lankan Tamil population. This is attributed to the tough US policy does not recognize Sri Lankan Tamils as refugees from Sri Lanka. Also, the strong support of the US to the Sri Lankan government affected the Tamils’ choice to seek asylum in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan Tamils are well settled in California, Los Angeles and New York Metropolitan Area. There are also scattered Tamil populations in New Jersey, Staten Island, Queens’ counties and also around Maryland and Washington DC (Ahilan Kadirgamar, Interview, New Delhi, 12 January 2009). Starting from summer 1983 till the beginning of 1985, the American government received around 130 applications for political asylum from Sri Lankan Tamils. The US though recognised that the Tamils had genuine complaints of discrimination and human rights violations, most of the applications were rejected. The US considered that the Sri Lankan Tamil intention to seek asylum was for economic reasons (Jones 1985).
OTHER REGIONS

Australia. Initially, the Australian Sri Lankan Tamil population consisted mostly of professionals and students who later provided a base for other Sri Lankan Tamils to migrate (Satyaseelan, Interview, UK, 21 April 2008). Australia has a sizeable Sri Lankan Tamil population in Sydney and Melbourne and most of the Tamils there migrated after 1983 (Ahilan Kadirgamar, Interview).

Malaysia. Among the Tamil diaspora, Malaysian Tamils also play a role in sustaining the Eelam movement in Sri Lanka. About 1.7 million, i.e. 10 per cent of the total Malaysian population are Tamils, who are actually descendants of the plantation labourers brought by the British (Ramasamy sangam.org). During the colonial rule, a very small section of Tamils were also brought by the British from Ceylon to fill the clerical and supervisory posts in their administration in Malaysia. The descendants of this population are popularly known as Ceylonese or Jaffna Tamils (ibid.). Though there were socio-economic differences among the two groups of the Tamils earlier, the civil war in Sri Lanka united them.47

Though the Tamil migrants cite physical security as the main drive for leaving the country, ultimately their focus is towards kinship obligation. Most of them concentrate on the economic obligation to raise enough dowry for their sisters. Their immediate concern on reaching a foreign land is to find a suitable educated boy settled in the Western countries for their female family members for marriage (Fuglerud 2001: 204). After getting economically established, the sons and daughters concentrate on bringing the parents out of Sri Lanka. Most of the elderly people that this author interviewed in the Sri Lankan Tamil Day Care Centre in North London (1 May 2008) were brought by their children especially during the 1990s. An elderly woman said: “I have been living here for fifteen years, because children are here. We have to send the children first; they don’t want us to be there all alone.” Another inmate has all her seven children settled abroad, six sons in the UK and a daughter living in Canada. In this way, they brought their other family members also and established a Tamil society abroad. Some of the parents who went to visit their children remained in that country on account of conflict situation at home.

47 Ceylonese Tamils keep themselves distant from Indian Tamils on class lines. They also dislike the Indian Tamils’ once close association with the British (Ramasamy, http://www.sangam.org).
So, the exodus of young Tamils happened in the 1980s while the elderly family members migrated by the 1990s. The Sri Lankan Tamils who are permitted to stay till the ethnic problem is solved automatically acquire British passport on five years of living. They have family members and relatives settled all over the world (Interaction at the Day Care Centre, UK, 1 May 2008). Even the Colombo Tamils who hardly faced discrimination or violence, migrated out of Sri Lanka (Rajanayagam, Interview, UK, 30 April 2008). This established group of Tamil diaspora became an asset to the LTTE, which mobilized them for political and financial support for its Eelam movement at home.

The Sinhalese also migrated, giving false Tamil names to seek asylum in the Western nations. The Sinhalese who went in the early 1960s and '70s were mainly professionals. Many students who went abroad for education returned to Sri Lanka. With the influx of Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers, around 5000 to 6000 Sinhalese also went out of Sri Lanka in disguise. Most of them were unqualified cheap labour. The largest concentration of Sinhala diaspora is in Italy as Italian immigration policy was not efficient in enforcing laws. The Sinhalese also settled in France and Germany. Some Sinhalese after migrating, found it easy to take in others (Upali, Interview, UK, 29 April 2008). After 1994, when the war between the LTTE and the Chandrika government escalated, the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils were going to the UK. Some Sinhalese went to the UK citing persecution by the Tamils as a reason.

Conclusion

The Tamil community in Sri Lanka has genuine grievances arising out of its minority status and discrimination by the majority Sinhala governments since independence. The peaceful and democratic approaches to solve their acute problems were crushed by the majoritarian attitude. The resultant sense of powerlessness and the emergence of the LTTE and the subsequent bloodshed and violence led to mass migration of the Tamils. Though some patterns of migration were seen among the Tamils after independence, the 1983 ethnic riots actually drove them out of Sri Lanka. The beginning of the civil war in 1983 and the associated economic and security vagaries of the Tamils made them migrate to lands as far as Europe and Canada. Arrests, detentions, disappearances and torture at the hands of the security forces and also the
violence by the LTTE created fear among the Tamils. In the beginning, many Tamils migrated to India because of its proximity. Initially, young boys and then girls migrated. With their comfortable settlement in the West, they also could arrange for the other family members to migrate, especially the parents. Familiarity with the English language helped the Tamils in settling more easily in the UK and Canada than elsewhere.