CHAPTER IV

SRI LANKA'S ETHNIC CONFLICT: INDIAN PERCEPTION

There exists a considerable body of literature on the ethnic problem and conflict in Sri Lanka. These works deal with different aspects of the issues involved, and include both full length studies and papers. Therefore an attempt has been made here in this study to avoid repetition as far as possible, and to concentrate upon those aspects which are pertinent in the context of this study.

BACKGROUND OF ETHNIC PROBLEM IN SRI LANKA

Two facts are cardinal for a proper understanding of the conflict, the course it has taken, and to visualize and explore the possibilities of its management and resolution. One of the facts is so very obvious that it has been a matter of common knowledge; it is the overwhelming majority of Sinhalese who constitute a segment as large as 74 percent of the population with 12.6 percent Sri Lankan Tamils, 5.5 percent Indian Tamils and 7.1 percent Sri Lankan Moors, Burghers 0.3 percent, Malays 0.3 percent and others 0.2
percent.¹ In today's world with the physical boundaries ceasing to be physical barriers under the impact of science and technology, even traditionally established monolithic societies in terms of race, culture, language and history have been turning into pluralistic ones. The problems and conflicts that arise naturally enough in this process, have remained within manageable limits. But such a development has not been possible in Sri Lanka, and this brings to the fore the second cardinal factor. This factor is the almost endemic chauvinism characterized by a high degree of rigidity and inflexibility. Often, its intensity has bordered on the pathological ever-ready to pay any price for sustaining itself. What makes it really very extraordinary is that the Sinhalese do not have the kind of social, cultural and historical impetus which either the Greek or Turkish Cypriots have. In case of Sri Lanka there is neither a Greece or Turkey behind the conflict, and the Indian concern in their conflict may be viewed as intrusive and hegemonistic by either the Sinhalese or by a third party, but it cannot be likened to the kinds of the roles played by Greece and Turkey in Cyprus.² As a matter of


² Chapter III ante.
fact, India itself has paid a very heavy price in its endeavour to preserve the integrity and unity of Sri Lanka and to restore and establish peace there. For some, the Indian initiatives and actions have not been entirely altruistic, given her geopolitical proximity and demographic affinities with Sri Lanka.

The historical depths of Sinhalese chauvinism can be easily traced back to the 1930s. The Sinhalese have assiduously nourished their sense of grievance against their Tamil countrymen with the help of their historical memory in which the necessary distortion of historical past has taken place to feed and facilitate this sense of grievance without which their chauvinism would lose nearly all of its justifications. The scholars/students in their respective studies of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka have made references to this historical memory. Although not much emphasis seems to have been laid on this beyond its rationalising role in the making of Sinhalese mind-set. Even if this is more like a myth it needs to be understood and tackled. M.M.Fernando writes "The Sinhalas kingdom which controlled the entire Island most of the ancient times entered into relations both of alliance and hostility at various periods with the Chola, Pandya and Chera kingdoms of South India. There were frequent invasions from these kingdoms and also frequent
alliances and intermarriages between four royal families." It is important to note that invasions, alliances and intermarriages went together. This was true over any large geo-historical unit. The kingdoms within India frequently fought and as frequently entered into alliances and intermarriages. The extension of this pattern over a narrow sea-gap into Sri Lanka or Sinhalas deep/dwip was not in the least unusual in those times. The same pattern at the same time is to be seen in Europe as well. The medieval states were not the nation-states of the post-renaissance times in Europe or anywhere else. What has happened in this case, is that a medieval situation has been interpreted on the basis of a much later criterion, i.e., in the light of a modern concept or political idea. The Sinhalese effected a mismarriage between the modern political concept of nation-state with the hostilities dating back to medieval times. This anachronism has had, as so widely known, tragic consequences for Sri Lanka, which neither the Tamils nor the Sinhalese have been able to escape, although this has been a common phenomenon in the post-colonial days to which much of the otherwise avoidable conflicts owe their intractability.

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3 Goran Lindgren and Peter Wallensteen, Third World Dimensions in Conflict Resolution, Report from the 1989 Advanced International Programme Conflict Resolution, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, p.97.
and even origin.

Ceylonisation

In the present century the discrimination against Tamils began with the recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission in 1928. The recommendations of this commission were incorporated in the 1931 constitution, but the government was pressurised by the Sinhala to modify it and consequently the provision of universal adult franchise was modified in a manner that it resulted in the prospect of denial of citizenship to a substantial proportion of Indian Tamils. The number of registered voters dwindled from 225,000 in 1939 to 168,000 in 1943, a decline of 57,000 voters. This pattern of discrimination continued to be followed in other areas as well. Between 1930 and 1939, 9000 government employees lost their jobs. Most of them were Indians. Similar discriminatory legislations were made in other occupations like land-settlement, fisheries and transport, but such exclusions were not applied to the recruitment of Indian labour. The government of India was


5 Ibid.

so irked by these measures adopted in spite of their contrary persuasion that they imposed a ban on emigration of unskilled labour to Ceylon in 1939. This affected the Ceylonese economy so adversely that a delegation went to India in 1940 with a request that the ban be lifted. At the conference of Ceylonese and Indian delegations that was held in New Delhi in November 1940, D.S.Senanayake, then Minister of Agriculture and lands made the Ceylonese policy unambiguously explicit when he confirmed Sir Ramaswamy Mudaliar's summary of their policy and position: "Point No.1 really means, we shall throw them out and ask them to look after themselves when we do not want them." Several instances of discriminatory acts can be cited but what is more important in this context is the fact that as long as there were no loaves and fishes to be shared, Sinhalese and Tamils cooperated with each other in their struggle against the colonial government, so much so that Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, a Tamil, was the first President of Ceylon National Congress when it was formed in 1919. As soon as the principle of representation on the basis of community was replaced by the territorial basis the conflict arose with the Sinhalese campaigning to edge out Tamils as far as

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7 Ibid, pp.53, 54.
possible. In the elections of 1931 and 1936 two Indian members, designated 'Indian Tamils' in the census reports, were elected and again in the 1947 elections they won 7 out of 95 elected seats. But during the tenure of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who came to power in 1956, there was no representation of the 'Indian community' in parliament. What was a process of Ceylonisation in the pre-colonial era turned into a process of Sinhalisation in the post-colonial era. The issue of Indian immigrant Tamil labour in Sri Lanka had been the most contentious issue in bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka and the final settlement under Srimavo-Shastri pact-1964 was the culmination of a long process, and it was made possible by the Indian readiness to accommodate Sri Lanka. Even then, it took Sri Lanka 15 years to effect fully the Srimavo-Shastri pact.

Thus we find that there is a long history of differences between India and Sri Lanka over the ethnic ---

8 Goran Lindgren and Peter Wallensteen, eds., Towards Conflict Resolution in the Third World, Report from the 1988 Advanced International Programme: Conflict Resolution, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden, pp.7-8.

9 Sivalingam, n.4, p.57.

10 Ibid, p.60.

situation and the resultant imbroglio in the island. India has found itself placed in an unenviable position with few escape-routes at its disposal. The Sinhalese have at no stage shown any genuine change of heart in respect of their Tamil countrymen except under overwhelming compulsions generated by widespread and intense Tamil insurgency, otherwise propelled by a very deep rooted and powerful chauvinism they have always exhibited by abusing their majority strength. The course of their pursuit has been such that even an entirely peaceful and non-violent creed like Buddhism has been turned into an armour in the bloody "war" against Tamils. A little reflection would reveal that even Christianity, a gospel of peace and love, has a militant core.

THE COURSE OF ETHNIC CONFLICT

It is obvious that in a multi-ethnic society or state there is always lurking, in the depths, a potentiality for ethnic conflict. An integration achieved has to be guarded without any recourse to subterfuge. An integration which has been effected through the imposition of colonial rule is all the more fragile, and needs to be nurtured over a long period.

12 Lindgren and Wallenstean, n.3, pp.99-104.
13 St. Matthew 21.41; Revelation 1.7, 6.17. The Holy Bible (authorized version: 1616).
span of time by all the parties concerned, and specially the state which has to play the role of being the chief instrument of integration. Unfortunately in the case of Sri Lanka this is really what did not happen. The constitutional checks and balances in important areas as parliamentary representation, safeguarding the rights of minorities and similar other things are indispensable requisites which through a series of discriminatory legislations and constitutional amendments whittled away in a growingly brazen fashion.\(^\text{14}\) Thus was bound to provoke retaliation and lead to a Tamil backlash. A watershed in this process was a 1956 legislation which established Sinhala as the sole official language and the further step of disfranchisement of estate Tamils.\(^\text{15}\) There were riots over language in May 1958. It has been remarked that the language bill of 1956 was passed in spite of a constitutional check against this kind of a measure, which shows the Sinhala majority's determination to establish its


\(^{15}\) Edward E. Azar, n.14, p.68.
own hegemony, riding rough-shod over Tamils rights and sensibilities.\textsuperscript{16} Thus violence had made its entry into the conflict arena which only escalated and grew worse in the face of the majority's intransigence. The first republican constitution of 1972 was in more than one way a movement in the direction of consolidating its gains and legitimising them by the Sinhala majority. Several rounds of talks were held between the Federal Party (Tamil) and the government, but they led nowhere. It was only to be expected because the party in power was a hostage of sorts to the Buddhist leadership of Sinhala community. These developments saw the emergence of the 'Tamil United Front' (TUF) which rechristened itself as Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in May 1976.\textsuperscript{17} In the constitution of 1972, there were no provisions to protect minority rights as earlier provisions in this regard were made to disappear. For example, Clause 29(2)(b)\textsuperscript{18} was deleted in the new constitution. The Tamil protest movement's initial plank or demand for regional autonomy turned into the secessionist demand. The movement thus had moved to the extreme end of the political

\textsuperscript{17} Partha Ghosh, n.14, pp.165-7.
\textsuperscript{18} W.A.Wiswawarnapala, "The New Constitution of Sri Lanka", \textit{Asian Survey}, vol.13, no.12, December 1973, pp.1190-91; Clause 29(2)(b) pertained to the protection of minority rights.
One of the resolutions adopted at the May 1976 Conference read:

the republican Constitution of 1972 had made the Tamils a slave nation ruled by the new colonial masters, the Sinhalese, who are using the power they have wrongly usurped to deprive the Tamil nation of its territory, language, citizenship, economic life, opportunities for employment and education thereby destroying all the attributes of nationhood of the Tamil people... the restoration and reconstitution of the Free, Sovereign, Secular, Socialist State of Tamil Elam... has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil Nation in this country.20

The 1977 parliamentary election established the status of TULF as the authentic voice of the Tamil community. It won all the seats in the Northern Province and three out of four in the East. The UNP too won with a clear majority. The resultant profile of the political parties which had participated in the election was that UNP occupied the first position, the TULF was the main opposition and SLFP was relegated to the third position. The UNP election manifesto had included the Tamil grievances, but it went back on them. This was made possible by its absolute majority based on Sinhala support, and thus any support by the TULF had become irrelevant. However, to begin with, the UNP acted with good faith and replaced the 1972 constitution, which was authoritarian, by a new one under which Tamil was elevated

as a national language and discrimination between citizens was removed. Even the stateless Tamils were given equal civil rights. It is to be noted that the success of the TULF at the election had provoked anti-Tamil riots in which 300 Tamils were killed and several thousand became homeless. The UNP suppressed the riots and declared its intention to call an all-party conference. In August 1979, a ten-member presidential commission to look into the problems of Tamils was appointed but TULF did not joint it. In spite of these reconciliatory and ameliorative steps there was no substantial improvement in the condition of Tamils. The free economy policy of the new government had had an adverse impact on them and this was further aggravated by the subtle forms of discriminatory advantage given to the Sinhalese, such as horticultural subsidy being confined to areas inhabited by the Sinhalese and preferential treatment extended in the issuing of export import as well as industrial licence. Between 1971 and 1976 out of 9,965 persons recruited in government jobs, 9,326 were Sinhalese


and only 492 Tamils, i.e., 4.9 percent. The non-participation of the TULF, therefore, was a signal of Tamil mood and perception. This was a period marked by the rise of the youth militancy and insurgent activities, which had made their beginning around the mid-seventies. A measure, in particular, fueled insurgency. It was 'colonisation' of Tamil areas in central Sri Lanka, which was later even extended to the eastern province with a view to neutralising or counterbalancing Tamil predominance. The Tiger movement also emerged during 1977-78 when four policemen were murdered in Velvettiturai in April 1978. In May 1982 V.Prabhakaran and Uma Maheswaran, who were wanted for murder and robbery in Sri Lanka and were residing in Madras, were arrested and prosecuted by Tamil Nadu police for shooting at each other in Madras. They were defended in the court by Chandrahasans, a senior lawyer member of TULF. He and some Indian lawyers prevented the extradition of the two men. The government responded by taking harsh measures but without taking any political initiative. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) and other such groups were proscribed. An anti-terrorism bill was passed by national assembly in

23 Partha Ghosh, n.11, p.169.
July 1979. These measures did not succeed in putting an end to terrorism. There were as many as six Tamil groups engaged in guerrilla activities. They were LTTE, PLOT, TELO, TELA, EPRLF and ERUS. These groups grew in popularity very fast. It was their activities which culminated in the holocaust in 1983.25

1983-1987 Phase

Large scale violence began in 1983 and has continued unabated until recently, although there had been communal violence from 30 July to 29 August in 1982 between the Sinhalese and the Muslims in the southern town of Galle in which two people were killed and one hundred wounded. This had necessitated the imposition of a comprehensive national state of emergency.26 It was on 23 July that Tamil separatists had ambushed and killed thirteen soldiers in Jaffna district. Even prior to this, on May 18, on the polling day for parliamentary byelections a soldier was killed by machinegun attack on a polling booth27 and troops had resorted to retaliatory actions against the Tamil

26 Keesings, Contemporary Archives, vol.29, April 1983, p.32076
community such as shops and houses being set on fire, till such time as they were confined to barracks. The 23 July killing was, in fact, a retaliatory measure by Tamil Guerrillas. That incident can be said to mark the beginning of a regular and continuous pattern of violence and counter violence in Sri Lanka. On 24 July there was mob violence in Colombo, which deteriorated into large scale attacks on Tamil areas involving killings and large scale burning and looting. A curfew was imposed on the same day. 25 Tamil prisoners were massacred in the maximum security prison at Welikada by other prisoners on 25 July. Among the killed was also a TELF leader - Selva Rajah Yogchandra alias "Kuti Mani". The curfew imposed by the government in Colombo was extended to cover the entire country. The violence spread outwards to the central towns of Kandy and Gampola. There was a riot in Jaffna region too in which guards opened fire and killed three Tamil prisoners. Even in Colombo, in spite of curfew, the situation had not truly improved. Western tourists reported the burning of nine Tamils at the railway station there on 28 July. This had been done after the victims were identified as "Liberation Tigers" by a crowd. Prisons appeared to have emerged as sensitive points for the violence to erupt, perhaps because enclosed small

28 Ibid, p.32631.
space in which were gathered by now intensely hostile Tamils and Sinhalese, became naturally prone to the outbreak of violence. This gives a measure of alienation and antagonism between the two communities. On the same day seventeen Tamils were killed in a second massacre at Welikada jail. Among those killed was Dr. Somanaunderan Rajasundaran, Secretary-General of the Gandhian movement in Sri Lanka. It was also acknowledged by the government on 28 July itself that "Naval forces stationed in Trincomalee had 'gone on the rampage on July 26'." Mr. P.V. Narsimha Rao, the then Indian Minister of External Affairs, arrived in Colombo on 29 July 1983. The day of his arrival was also the day of great violence. Police shot dead ten people designating them as looters, and by 31 July tea plantations in the central highlands inhabited by "Indian Tamils" was engulfed by the advancing waves of communal violence. Three Tamils were killed in separate incidents in Paris, it was reported. Tamils in large numbers started migrating to the North and nearly 10,00,000 of them fled away to southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu across the narrow sea gap, where they found shelter as refugees. This was bound to

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Lindgren and Wallensteen, n.8.
involve India deeply in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, irrespective of its unwillingness or willingness.

Between 1984 and 1987 there was a full scale pattern of guerrilla war launched by the Tamil militants and countered by the Sri Lankan army, which soon grew into a no win situation. At times it appeared that the Sri Lankan army had made a major breakthrough and would soon be able to put an end to insurgency and guerrilla activities, but this hope was never realized, a pattern that was to be repeated in IPKF operation against the LTTE. There were continuous clashes between September 1984 and April 1985 between the two sides. A spill-over of the violent ethnic conflict was Tamil-Muslim intra-violence too in April 1985.32 This series of armed conflicts came to a temporary halt on 13 June 1985 when a ceasefire agreement between five major guerrilla groups and the government was reached to stop hostilities for 12 weeks,33 but sporadic single incidence of violence continued to happen. There was an attack on civilians at Anuradhapura on 14 May 1985, alleged assassination attempt against President Jayawardene on 11 July 1985, and murder of two former TULF M.Ps on 3 September

However the Sri Lankan government extended the ceasefire on 16 September 1985 and a broad agreement on interim ceasefire between the government and militants was reached. As a matter of fact the hostilities in one form or the other continued without abatement except for frontal confrontations, throughout 1985 and up to May 1986, with both the sides trading allegations and counter-allegations. The ceasefire monitoring committee came to its formal end on 10 January 1986, when the two representatives of separatist Tamil organisations resigned from its membership. The government's hold over Tamil areas both in the North and the East was getting eroded. It was reported that President Jayawardene had admitted that certain areas around the town of Trincomalee were in total rebel control and that there was a "big war" being waged in the area. What added to the human misery and even the violation of elementary human right was the fact that civilians on both sides were made to lose life, property and occupation. The Sri Lankan government had resorted to air attacks and had pressed helicopters into service for this purpose which had a temporary halt on 15 March 1986. The entire course of the conflict during this period culminated in the economic

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blockade of the Jaffna peninsula, which ultimately led to government of India's decision to provide relief supplies in June 1987. This section has been focused upon the extent, intensity, and pattern of violent hostilities in a complex intra-ethnic conflict situation with view to reflecting the magnitude of the tasks and responsibilities that a conflict management and peacekeeping operations may involve in such situations. The Tamil militant groups, especially the LTTE, had shown a skill, perseverance, determination, leadership with commitment to their ideology, which was not taken into consideration by the Indian management of the conflict as well as its peacekeeping operations. Even in the second phase when the role of IPKF had got transformed from peacekeeping to peace enforcement.

In Sri Lanka the escalation and deepening of the violent conflict process gave rise to the parallel process of negotiations for which the initiative came from the government side as the situation kept turning from bad to worse. Nothing showed this better than the changing and contradictory postures adopted by them from time to time, especially vis-a-vis India which had come to be a much more interested and involved party in the ethnic conflict, after the influx a large number of Tamil refugees. In fact, India's participation was a result of its own ideological orientations coupled with the international practice and the
existing strong and overt sympathy of the state government of Tamil Nadu.

On 26 July 1983 Sri Lankan government expressed its resentment over the rioting that had broken out in Sri Lanka and was still continuing, and again President Jayawardene spurned India's offer of its 'good offices' in very unambiguous terms: "but we have not decided about availing ourselves of this. At this moment I want India to keep quiet, rather Tamil Nadu to keep quiet and I have no idea of calling for any help from India".36 In view of Mrs. Gandhi's reiteration that India cannot remain a silent spectator to any injustice done to the Tamil minority and S.Thondaman's (a Sri Lankan minister) affirmation about the desirability of Indian mediation as well as the governments failure to bring about any abatement of the ethnic conflict spreading in larger and larger waves, President Jayawardene invited G.Parthasarthy to resume his mediation for finding a durable solution of the Tamil problem.37 This was a

36 Muni, n.33, p.186.

37 Rohan Gunaratna (n.24, p.96), writes: "In October, S.Thondaman visited India on the invitation of Parthasarthy and met leaders ranging from Indira Gandhi to Uma Maheshwaran. On his return to Colombo he urged the cabinet and Jayawardene to avail of India's offices to solve the Sri Lankan ethnic issue by inviting Parthasarthy. Thondaman said that Uma was willing to come to a compromise with the government instead of clamouring for a separate state."
reversal of his declared policy as well as the decision of his cabinet not to invite G.Parthasarthy, the special envoy of Mrs.Gandhi, who had earlier came on 25 August 1983 on his own. This could have been a potent reason together with other reasons for Jayawardene to reverse his earlier stand. Prior to his arrival in India for participation in the Commonwealth Summit during 23-30 November 1983 a broad framework for political settlement had emerged through India's good offices, a major achievement of Parthasarthy's silent diplomacy.38 Although the proposal of regional council was rejected by the Tamil groups as something: "too little and too late". The proposals were given a final shape in New Delhi and later became Annexure 'C' for the All Party Conference (APC). The establishment of a channel of communication between the two antagonist was the first positive indication in the direction of peace. But unfortunately, to their own cost both the Tamils and Colombo failed to turn it into any meaningful achievement beyond a course of negotiations running parallel to the ongoing course of conflict. The negotiations were made along two parallel lines - the course of diplomatic interaction between the two governments and the dialogue between the Tamils and government of Sri Lanka in the form of dialogue

38 S.D.Muni, n.33, p.187.
at APC and another set of talks held at Thimpu, Capital of Bhutan. An important concomitant of these communication processes was the interaction between the Government of India and Tamils who by then held a firm base in Tamil Nadu.

At the sessions of APC during May and June no progress was made. At this stage it was TULF which was proving intransigent. At the plenary session of the APC in July 1984 President Jayawardene placed a memorandum with the provision that a second chamber of members representing 25 districts be created. It is obvious that this provision was inspired by the desire to keep the unitary structure of Sri Lankan constitution intact and undiluted. The TULF rejected the proposals as falling short of its acceptable minimum for regional autonomy. The APC had reached a deadlock. In less than a month the working committee of the UNP accused India of invading the Island through Tamil guerrillas and other Tamils. Mercury had dipped very low but India continued with its policy, consistently sending its official envoys as part of the diplomatic initiative. The Indian diplomatic effort succeeded in two ways: a ceasefire agreement on 18 June 1985 and it was followed by the first Thimpu talks held directly between Tamils and Sri Lankan government through the Indian agency. Some of the gap between the two was covered but it was still far short of making a settlement possible. The second phase of talks abruptly ended with the
Tamil groups walking out in the wake of the killings of Tamils in Vavuniya and Trincomalee. This could have been a ruse as, shown earlier; and the violence, in spite of the ceasefire, had continued. This sea-saw between the two sides blowing hot and cold until the signing of the peace accord remained unabated in a total political space within Sri Lanka afflicted by violence.\textsuperscript{39}

It has been already stated that Sri Lankan government was pressured into negotiations, peace efforts and attempts to find some settlement by the pressure of circumstances. This was not evident so much by its interactions with the Tamils as was by its interactions with India. This is so because any negotiation between any two sides, which are parties to the conflict may proceed tortuously over a long period of time characterised by hard bargaining until the process terminates in success or failure. Cambodia provides a prime example of this, where the peace process culminated in success. Sri Lankan government and its leaders used India as a scapegoat and vented their spleen over it at each impasse obstructing their scheme of things. Ever since the conflict broke out they never showed any real change of

\textsuperscript{39} The course of events has been documented in several works with sufficient details. Here an outline has been presented through a selective presentation for the sake of establishing the respective patterns of conduct of the antagonists.
heart to any degree except for what they were ready to do under overwhelming compulsions. As early as 1956 it has been seen that they had little scruple in overriding the constitutional limits placed over them. Therefore the failure of the negotiations with their opponents could be a sign of lack of trustworthiness. Nothing shows the truth of this better than the developments in the post-Premdasa period. After all, if at all there was a chance for peace, it lay in unambiguous acceptance of a limited degree of federalism by clearly conceding the northern and eastern provinces to Tamils with essential provisions for protection of minority rights. The unitary form of government had evidently failed and therefore a settlement called for a fundamental restructuring of the constitution which itself was a third version of the original one. Jayanthi Seneviratne writes, "In the dynamics of the conflict of Sri Lanka this structural contradiction between the unitary form of the existing political structure and the demand for regional autonomy is the major issue (sic)".

It may be reasonably argued that in the case of any militant secessionist movement, the problem and challenge can be met either by political readjustment of the existing

41 Jayanthi Seneviratne, n.16, p.27.
system or by destroying insurgency completely and totally at an early stage itself if there are no genuine political economic and social grievances. If there are any, then suppression can only be a temporary means in the long run. In Sri Lanka the grievance were both genuine and serious and the majority determined to pile upon them further causes. Therefore a political readjustment at an early stage was warranted to escape a protracted and ruinous conflict. From July 1983 at each turn in the course of conflict, whenever a peace and resolution effort failed, the Tamil insurgency gained in both inner and outer strength even if it was made possible through external support in whatever form it received from India. This was amply shown by what LTTE was able to do and achieve in the post-accord period. Tamil intransigence acquired the same characteristics as that of Sri Lankan government.

From the perspective of conflict management, the responsibility for primary failure lay with Sri Lankan government and its leadership because it should be the duty and responsibility of the state to manage and resolve internal conflicts, which can be done through a judicious mixture of firm strength and justice. India as a mediator did not seem to have taken into consideration important aspects like the true minds of both the antagonists. It also underestimated LTTE in assuming that it would be able
to bring LTTE round to workable acceptance of the accord it had worked out with the Sri Lankan government.

**INDIAN PERCEPTION**

Perception of a nation is as much determined by its antecedents, i.e., historical experience, natural endowments, interests and concerns as that of a person by a similar set of factors. The crucial component in the wake of India’s historical experience in the context of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka was its centuries long experience of pluralistic living together of diverse cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious elements, the Indian nation being a much more complex build up than what Sri Lanka has ever been. This historical experience encompasses attendant stresses and conflicts as well as assimilation and adjustments that have worked with a fair degree of success and without which living together over such a long span of historical time would not have been possible. To a very great extent assimilation and adjustment were made possible by its ideological legacy of mutual tolerance and catholicity of perspective. These two elements in its historical experience are so closely interrelated that they can be said to be interdependent. But it would be a false claim to make that this state of affairs has reached perfection. The reality is so obviously far from any perfection that it gave Rohan Gunaratna a valid
conflicts within India in making his calendar of events and actions under the heading India and Sri Lanka. Yet, this side of India's contemporary history is likely to be misperceived unless care is taken to maintain objectivity of perspective, because the fact that in spite of all the attendant stresses of living together, the unity and integration achieved by India has been a working reality. In a genuinely democratic set up, the Indian state can be accused of having committed serious errors of judgement but it cannot be faulted of bad faith and departure from the letter and spirit of its constitution in so far as its minorities are concerned, first, in the North-East, then in Punjab and finally in Kashmir. It has acted with firmness and used force but without the aim of relegating peoples in those regions to a secondary position and exploiting them and their resources for the benefit of other segments and regions. If anything, India can be faulted for acting without enough firmness and despatch.

India is a large country with multiple and vast resources inclusive of human resource. In population it is the second largest country in the world. It has made a very fair progress in science, technology and economy, though its

42 Rohan Gunaratna, n.24, pp.ix-xvii.
progress and achievements in economy have been getting maimed because of excessive population growth. These endowments taken together have given India a certain status both in the region and worldwide. The status implies and entails responsibilities. Jordan refused entry to desperate evacuees during the Gulf crisis and they were stranded in the desert at the mercy of elements and relief while their own state had disappeared for a while. If India can be expected to accommodate and shelter a large number of refugees coming in a continuous flux, it thereby acquires certain claims as well.

Several studies have pointed out India's geo-political interests and security concern as a principal motivating force behind its Sri Lankan policy and its interventionist actions in Sri Lanka. It could be argued that both the reasons were legitimate by international practice and conventions. India has had unpleasant and difficult experiences with Pakistan and China which influenced her own threat perceptions and made her sensitive in the matter of security concerns especially because of the attitude of western powers towards her relations with Pakistan. India


has also had some problems in Tamil Nadu and it has been argued that Indian policy in Sri Lanka was also a fallout of its reckoning of the way the problems of Sri Lankan Tamils might affect the people of Tamil Nadu. Although it is not the place to go into details of it, it may be pointed out that a dispassionate and objective estimate of the problem in Tamil Nadu will reveal that any likelihood of it to grow or lead to a situation like the one in Sri Lanka does not arise for one simple reason that Tamil Nadu does not have the sort of grievances which the Tamils in Sri Lanka have. Nevertheless, the Tamil factor has had an impact on India's framing of her Sri Lankan policy.

The Indian policy and actions based upon it were shaped by its perceptions of the ethnic situation in Sri Lanka as determined by the following factors. The Indian perception had three constituents. Firstly, the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka had suffered from blatant grievances and was likely to suffer even more in future. India had specific and concrete acquaintance with its history right from the colonial days and even the British Indian government had to resort to retaliatory measures against its counterparts' maltreatment of Indian labour in Sri Lanka. This legacy was inherited by successive governments of free India, which had arrived at a prolonged course of negotiations starting with Nehru and ending with Mrs. Indira Gandhi running through the Shastri
period. The settlement reached or obtained by India was unfair and unsatisfactory from its own point of view, but India accepted it with a view to ending the stalemate in a spirit of accommodation. As such India has had extensive experience of Sri Lankan intransigence, i.e., Sinhalese intransigence.

Secondly, India believed that the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka must be preserved. The Indian reasons for this were two fold: (a) this was in line with the pattern of its own integrity and it was in consonance with its own ideological ethos; Throughout the entire course of its dealings with Sri Lankan problem India never made the slightest departure from this core political doctrine publicly stated and declared by it, and it was for this reason that it forfeited the faith of Lankan Tamil militants LTTE and also incurred their wrath. Ironically it never earned any gratitude or appreciation from the Sinhalese dominated Sri Lankan government.

Finally, a separate and independent homeland could be a destabilising factor through its affinity with Tamil Nadu for the region as a whole, because a small and independent nation was likely to attract superpower interests as well as others. This would mean trouble for India and India's security.

The concrete and specific Indian policy can be seen as
having evolved in three distinct phases. They were, the diplomatic phase, the interventionist phase and the mediatory phase.

**Diplomatic Phase:**

It can be seen that India's diplomatic initiatives that began on the day next to the outbreak of rioting in Sri Lanka were made in pursuit of policy goals as sketched above. It is also obvious that if India succeeded in securing its first two goals the third goal, that of keeping other powers away from Sri Lanka would be subserved of itself. India conveyed its distress over the rioting and sought assurances from Sri Lankan government that lives and properties of Indians would be protected. A major initiative was the sudden visit of P.V. Narasimha Rao to Colombo for an on-the-spot assessment of the situation and to discuss the measures for protection of Indians. The situation took a complex turn when the External Affairs Minister was reported to have warned all powers to keep out of what was happening in Sri Lanka. This happened as a response to a report that Sri Lank had requested U.S., U.K., Pakistan and Bangladesh for assistance.  

On 12 August 1983, Mrs. Gandhi assured the special emissary of Sri Lankan President about India's firm support for Sri Lanka's independence, unity and integrity, but also conveyed that India was bound to be affected by the events that were taking place there. This was followed by an announcement in the parliament that India would send G. Parthasarathy "to facilitate the process of negotiation between the Sri Lankan government and its Tamil minority", but Sri Lankan President in essence spurned the offer. However India did not give up its diplomatic efforts because what was happening in Sri Lanka was affecting it in more than one way, which has been sketched above and it too had been shown how Sri Lankan government had to let India into the problem, however willy-nilly. It was on 6 April 1984 that P. V. Narasimha Rao, external affairs minister made an ambiguous policy statement in the parliament. The core of India's diplomatic effort was to pursuade, on the one hand, Sri Lankan government to concede legitimate Tamil demands in a viable and durable frame, and on the other hand, to pursue and make Sri Lankan Tamils give up their extremist position of secession. All party conferences and Thimpu talks as

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Lok Sabha Debates 7th series (14th session nos.31-34, 6 April 1984).
well as ceasefire agreements were the main outcomes of India's diplomatic initiatives which were conducted at the highest levels through its external affairs ministers, its foreign secretaries and meetings between the Indian Prime Minister (Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi).

**Interventionist Phase**

In spite of negotiations that were going on through India's good offices there was no abatement in the violent course of conflict in Sri Lanka, and India was so exasperated that Rajiv Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister sent a tough message to Colombo making it clear that it would suspend its mediatory role, i.e., through diplomatic means unless Sri Lanka was consistent and abided by the proposals that had emerged as a result of three rounds of talks which the two Indian ministers, P.Chidambaram and K.Natwar Singh had with President Jayawardene. On 17-19 December 1986⁴⁹ there was a repetition of a threat given by India earlier on 22 May 1986.⁵⁰ India in fact withdrew its good offices withdrew its good offices on 24 February 1987, and K.Natwar Singh, State Minister for External Affairs,

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made accordingly a statement in the Rajya Sabha. 51 Meanwhile, the situation on the ground was worsening in Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan army had launched Operation Liberation 52 on 26 May 1987, which led to aerial bombing of Jaffna. Jaffna was besieged and suffered from economic blockade with all the entry and exit routes closed. Civilians turned out to be main victims. Rajiv Gandhi's stiff warning on 28 May 1987 53 was followed by the announcement of India's plan to send relief supplies by boats to Jaffna, 54 and the Indian High Commissioner accordingly conveyed this decision to Sri Lankan Foreign Minister. 55 The announcement was followed by the execution

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51 "...India's good offices for the purpose of finding a peaceful political settlement to the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka were offered in response to requests to this effect from both the Sri Lanka and Tamil groups.... The government of India is gravely concerned at the military operations launched by the Sri Lankan government in the northern and eastern provinces and the economic and communication blockade imposed on Jaffna. Unless government get a clear indication that the government of Sri Lanka's firm in its commitment... we are not in a position to resume our good offices. Sri Lankan actions on the ground in fifty recent weeks do not inspire confidence in this regard." Parliamentary Debates, Rajya Sabha, vol.141, no.2, 24 January 1987, pp.24-25.

52 Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 27 May 1982.
53 Times of India (New Delhi), 29 May 1987.
54 Hindustan Times, 2 June 1987.
of declared plan on 3 June 1987 in spite of Sri Lanka's stiff protests and even the sending of a message to the UN Secretary General.\textsuperscript{56} The boats returned on being stopped by Sri Lankan Navy even before it could enter their territorial waters. Then, India's direct and physical intervention in the conflict had begun to move towards a culmination which was reached on the very next day when the Indian Air Force flew over Jaffna and dropped relief supplies. This forced Sri Lanka to agree on the modalities for the relief supplies.\textsuperscript{57} Thus started a new phase of negotiations between the two governments which culminated in the signing of Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement on 29 July 1987.

\textbf{Mediation Phase}

India's mediatory role, as a matter of fact, ran parallel to its diplomatic role since its diplomatic exchanges with the Sri Lankan government necessarily involved the conducting of dialogue with the Sri Lankan Tamils. India's sincerity in finding solution to the protracted ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is evident from eleven delegations that visited Sri Lanka from July 1983 to

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\textsuperscript{56} S.D.Muni, n.48, p.201.
\textsuperscript{57} Proceedings of the Seminar on \textit{Indo-Sri Lankan Accord}, n.49, p.74.
\end{flushleft}
December 1986. In this mediatory role India's goal was to bring the Tamils round to giving up their secessionist demands and to subscribe to an undivided, unified Sri Lanka, without which no resolution of the conflict and any settlement between them and the Sri Lankan government was possible. Through its many ups and downs India's mediatory efforts reached or was intended to reach its final moment in the form of arms surrender by the militants. But this was not to be realized. Peacekeeping was only an important component of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement and an instrument of conflict management-cum-conflict resolution. The entire

58 The details of the delegation along with their leaders and important members are: (1) 28 to 30 July 1983 led by Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao, Foreign Minister, Shri K.S. Bajpai, Secretary (East) and Sri Ramu Damodaran; (2) 02 August to 01 September 1983, led by Shri G. Parthasarathy, Special Envoy of Prime Minister and Smt. Meera Shankar; (3) 06 to 09 Decembr 1983, Shri G.Parthasarathy, Special Envoy of Prime Minister and Smt. Meera Shankar; (4) 03 to 11 January 1984, Shri G.Parthasarathy, Special Envoy of Prime Minister and Smt. Meera Shankar; (5) 24 to 28 March 1984, Shri Romesh Bhandari, Foreign Secretary and Shri S.T. Davare; (6) 28 to 30 May 1985, Shri Ramesh Bhandari, Shri ST. Davare and Smt. Meera Shankar; (7) 07 to 11 August 1985, Shri Romesh Bhandari, Foreign Secretary; (8) 25 to 28 September 1985, Shri Romesh Bhandari, Foreign Secretary; (9) 29 April to 03 May 1986 Shri P.Chindambaram, Minister of State, Ministry of Home Affairs, Shri Romesh Bhandari, Special Representative for Sri Lanka; (10) 24 November 1986, Shri K.Natwar Singh, Minister of State, Ministry of External Affairs, Shri P.Chidambaran, Minister of State, Ministry of Home Affairs; (11) 16 to 19 December 1986, K.Natwar Singh and P.Chidambaram. Parliamentary Debates, Rajya Sabha, 24 February 1987, pp.25-27.
process from peacekeeping to the intended new political order based on regional autonomy of the Tamil regions was essentially the final product of India's mediatory role.