Chapter – 2

India – Sri Lanka Relations During (1950-60)
India and Sri Lanka, two immediate neighbours on the Indian subcontinent, have been linked by traditional bonds of close and cordial friendship for more than two thousand years. They not only share historical, social, political and common cultural traditions but are also economically interlinked with each other. Therefore, India’s relation with Sri Lanka, unlike other neighbours such as Pakistan and China, has not been marked by conflict and confrontation; rather they are based on the principles of mutual cooperation and friendliness.¹

The common colonial experience, nature of freedom struggle and exchange of patriots during the colonial period has the bearing on the relations between India and Ceylon. Both the countries were under the British Empire for a pretty long time. From 1796 to 1802 Ceylon was governed from Madras. Afterwards it was declared a separate British colony.² In the course of national struggle for freedom, events in both countries influenced each other though “unlike its Indian prototype” Ceylon “used only constitutional means to attain its ends”.³ On the model of Indian National Congress, the Ceylon National Congress was established.

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³ Ibid.
Mahatma Gandhi (in 1927) and Jawaharlal Nehru (in 1931 and 1939) visited Ceylon and inspired the Ceylonese patriots to carry forward their struggle against British imperialism. After the Second World War, in course of granting independence to India, Pakistan and Burma, Britain also conceded independence to Ceylon and on February 4, 1948, Ceylon became free.

In strategic terms, Sri Lanka’s position in the Indian ocean and the existence of Trincomalee harbour are important in formulating and conducting both the countries, foreign policy. Since India is the nearest neighbour of Sri Lanka, the strategic importance of this harbour, brings Sri Lanka within the sphere of direct interest of India.

Religion also has played an important role in peoples’ private and public life and in national and international affairs of both the countries. India being the cradle of Buddhism naturally attracts the Ceylonese and hence they are interest in the welfare of their co-religionist here.

The majority of Sri Lanka people whether they are Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim, belong to the same ethnic stock as India’s population, and cultural affinities extend not only to religion but also to language.

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The Tamil language came to Sri Lanka from Tamilnadu. Similarly, the Sinhalese language belongs to the Indo-European group and is related to Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali and Hindi.

Despite such inherent ties in geographical, historical, cultural, ethnic and linguistic fields, India’s relation with Sri Lanka has not always been smooth, but periodically strained. The vast disparities in their size, population, natural resources and military power generated some sort of fear and anxieties in Sri Lanka against India. Sri Lanka as a smaller nation suffers from an illusion of threat perception from India. The people of Sri Lanka have “a sensation of living under mountain which might send down destructive avalanche”,7 at any moment.

The fear-psychosis of Sri Lanka constrains India’s efforts to create not only favourable conditions for closer ties with Sri Lanka but also to do more for mutual benefit. Therefore, India is conscious not only about her own security and stability but also cautions about Sri Lanka’s security and stability.

After the attainment of independence membership of various international bodies like the Commonwealth and later UNO gave India and Sri Lanka an opportunity for political and economic collaboration. Asian regional conferences like Bandung, and the 1954 Asian Prime Ministers Conference provided them forums for giving vent to similar political views in the context of cold war.\(^8\) Notwithstanding all these, apprehension of the design and extent of the pressure exerting capabilities of India did find an indirect and somewhat ambivalent expression in some of the statements of the United National Party leadership which was the legatee of political power after independence till it was defected by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party in the election of 1956.

In this context Sir Ivor Jennings, the vice-chancellor of Peradeneiya University and a close confidant of the UNP leadership observed.

"If India and Ceylon were linked, it would not be on a basis of equality. The link would involve the incorporation of Ceylon in the Indian federation, and some Indian leaders have gone so far as to speak to this development as manifest destiny. Such expression inevitably cause Cylonese nationalism to rebound.... India, thus, appears as a friendly but potentially dangerous neighbour to whom one must be polite but a little distant."\(^9\)

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For quite sometime since their independence India and Ceylon demonstrated full cooperation. Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination was taken with deep sorrow in Ceylon and the Ceylonese Premier D.S. Senanayake moved a vote of condolence in the Ceylon Parliament on the 31st January 1948. The Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru went to Ceylon (in 1950 and 1954) and Prime Minister of Ceylon D.S. Senanayake (in 1947) and Sir John Kotelwala (in 1954) also visited India. They participated actively in the regional groupings of “Colombo Powers” and sponsored the Afro-Asian conference held at Bandung in April 1955.

The very fact that Nehru was held in high esteem by the UNP leaders, could have helped in establishing a cordial relationship. But this was not possible owing to the divergent foreign policy orientations of the leadership of India and Sri Lanka. While the ruling leader of Sri Lanka were worry of the Communist ideology and some of them holding strong views about it, the Indian leadership tried to build friendship with the two leading members of the communist bloc, The Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. Sri Lanka also perceived India to have gone out of her way to cultivate friendship with the communists by signing ‘Panchsheel’ with China in 1954.

India was also developing an intimate relation with communist China. But Ceylonese government under the UNP was not willing to do so. Ceylon's recognition to the People's Republic of China in early 1950 as among one of the first nations to do it "was merely following Britain's lead on the question." Ceylon also terminated simultaneously its existing relations with the Chinese nationalist government. A proposal to enter into a trade pact with China was turned down at that time and during the UNP rule Ceylon showed no interest in establishing diplomatic relations with China. About Farmosa, too, they maintained a view different from that of India and did not accept Farmosa to be a part of China.

Security was the main urge of Sri Lanka's foreign policy during the initial years of Independence. The UNP Prime Ministers looked at the connections with Britain as an essential prerequisite of Sri Lanka's national security.

13. Ceylon : House of Representative, Parliamentary Debates Vol. 8 (1 August 1951) Cols. P-1713-14 op.cit. N0.10
D.S. Senanayake, the first Prime Minister and his UNP successors, worked on the principle that the friendship with Great Britain was Sri Lanka’s greatest security and which became the basis of Sri Lanka’s external relations. Therefore, Sri Lanka entered into a defence agreement with Britain. Britain was allowed to retain naval and air bases at Trincomalee and Katunayake respectively. One of the chief reasons for its was said to be fear of India.

As India was in the Commonwealth, it was useful for Ceylon to be its member. In the Commonwealth, it could contribute equally to the deliberations, and could get some moral pressure exerted on India in its own favour. From Britain, the most powerful partner in the commonwealth, it expected unqualified support. Although Nehru’s policy of peace was not challenged but who knew what happened after him. If India became aggressive, Ceylon was to bank upon a dependable ally for its defence, as said premier Kotelawala:

“That being so, I shall stand by the Commonwealth and by Britain as long as I can, until they do not want us or insult us”.

15. The successors of Mr. D.S. Senanayake include Dudley Senanayake (1952-53) and Sir John Kotelawala (1953-56)
17. Ibid.
John Kotelawala seemed to have suffered from an identity crisis vis-à-vis Nehru. The conflict of personalities and his dislike for Nehru led to his hostile attitude towards India. In this context R.M. Haney aptly remarks “...... the antagonism he (Kotelawala) felt towards Nehru’s assumed leadership of the neutral countries of Asia was a barrier to the adoption of any policy that recognized Indian leadership.”\(^{18}\) As a matter of fact, he took effort to reduce India’s stature by expanding links with India’s rivals and tried to erode India’s credibility among the Afro-Asian nations. D.S. Senanayake did not take sides with regard to Indo-Pak discord.\(^{19}\) He also accused India of being intransigent over Kashmir. For him U.S.-Pak military alliance’ was not against the peace of Ceylon.

In 1954, Kotelawala convened the South-East Asian Prime Ministers conference at Colombo to discuss international issues to which India was not invited.\(^{20}\) Moreover, at the Bandung conference of April 1955, Kotelawala raised the issue of “Soviet colonialism” in Eastern Europe. He tried to demonstrate that colonialism and communism went together and any compromise with either of them was out of question.

\(^{18}\) Ibid
\(^{19}\) Muni. S.D. – Understanding South Asia (South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1994) P.48
\(^{20}\) Ibid.
This view was at variance with the Indian diplomacy of keeping a neutral attitude between communist and non-communist powers.

After the general election of April 1956 Sri Lanka Freedom Party’s (SLFP) SWRD Bandarnaike was appointed as the new premier. He gave a definite turn to Ceylon’s foreign policy. Bandarnaike envisaged a greater role for Sri Lanka in the community of nations and declared that it was imperative on the party of Sri Lanka to recognize the principle of coexistence because of its smallness and lack of military strength.21

During the SLFP rule since 1956 tremendous improvement in the relations with India took place. The prevalence of identity of views on international affairs was undoubtedly a factor in the changed attitude to India. After its admission in to the UN in 1955, Ceylon got wider opportunities for participation with the members of Afro-Asian bloc on the global scene. Both the countries cooperated with each other on every major international question. Sri Lanka entered into consultation with India on the two major cold war disputes of Suez and Hungary and broadly, their stands were analogous.22

Ceylon Daily News, also noted that India and Ceylon have moved still closer together in their outlook on world politics as was evidenced by the stand both took on the Suez and Hungarian crisis. The threat potential of India also seemed to decline considerably at this juncture.

In 1956, Bandarnaike requested the British government to withdraw its bases in Ceylon and this was readily agreed upon. A phased withdrawal of naval base at Trincomalee, and the air base at Katunayake commenced in October and November 1956, respectively. This particular action was appreciated in India.

Bandarnaike regarded India as “a very friendly country” and when asked whether he was confident India would never attack Ceylon, he said:

“I have no duty cast upon me to meet the unreasonable fears of the people...and I do hope the present cordial and friendly relations between Ceylon and India will be preserved and maintained.”

Nehru also tried to remove this fear. Addressing the Indian community in Ceylon he said that “our relations are friendly, have always been friendly, and will continue to be friendly.”

25. Ibid
At a mass meeting at Independence square, Colombo he described as "fantastic nonsense" the notion that India had any designs of territorial expansion. He aptly remarked that "No body in his right sense would have imagined that country like India would at any date annex Ceylon."  

In 1956, Nehru was one of the special dignitaries invited to participate in Budha Jayanti, the 2500th anniversary of the "Mahaparinirvana' of Budha. Again, at a farewell dinner to B.N. Chakaravarthy, the then Indian High Commissioner in Ceylon, Premier Bandarnaike said that Nehru was "one of the greatest and foresighted statesmen of the world today" He also said:

"The new generation of India and Ceylon would be called upon to shape a new world, a new civilization. India was to Asia today what Greece had been to Europe."  

On the issue of Kashmir, the Bandarnaike Government wanted peaceful solution of the problem and took steps in that direction by appealing to the involved parties as well as mobilized international public opinion for a just and honourable solution.

27. Ibid.
India’s strategy of development through democratic planning’ was also accepted by Sri Lanka. Experts from India were sent to Sri Lanka to help her in preparing the draft of the Ten Year Plan (1959-68). When Ceylon faced difficulties due to shortage of essential items like drugs, petroleum and food stuffs, because of the blockade of Suez canal during the 1956 crisis, Indian government extended its help to tide over that crisis.

Regarding the citizenship issue Sri Lanka approach under Bandarnaike’s was least embarrassing. He treated the problem not from mere legal and political angle but from humane viewpoint.28 However, minor irritants continued over the ownership of Kachchativu island, over territorial water and contiguous areas and broadcast of cheap film songs from Radio Ceylon which were beamed in India.

INDO-SRI LANKA RELATIONS: Some contentious Issues

Besides some minor problems like illicit immigration and Tamil minorities in Sri Lanka settled earlier through mutual agreements, issues like peoples of Indian origin in Sri Lanka, language issue, Kachchativu problem, maritime boundary dispute and issues of trade deficit of Sri Lanka with India were the main unsolved problems between them, which need to be highlighted here.

THE CITIZENSHIP QUESTION

The question of persons of Indian origin in Sri Lanka was the main bone of contention that jeopardised the cooperation between the two neighbours. From the very beginning the position of UNP leadership was that, despite the “Indian Tamils” stay in Sri Lanka for generations, they had not assimilated themselves into the Sri Lanka society and culture.29 They were they “birds of passage”, keeping one foot in Sri Lanka and another in India. John Kotelawala remarked.

“In most countries a migrant population can be absorbed in to the indigenous population in one generation. In Ceylon it is still ‘Indian’ after three generations.”30

Being a small island, there was always a lurking fear in the mind of Sri Lanka about political domination of India. Politically, it was conceived that if franchise was given to all the resident Tamil population in the Kandyan area the Sinhalese might be swamped by them. Moreover, the fear was further aggravated due to the feeling of a number of Sri Lankas that about a million Tamil resident in Sri Lanka owed their allegiance to India.\textsuperscript{31}

In accordance with the Nehru’s statement that India was purely motivated by “sentimental” considerations in raising the citizenship issue with the government of Sri Lanka. The Government of India did not appear to acknowledge any political obligation towards people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka. At the same time, the government of Sri Lanka was vehement in its rejection of the title of these workers to Sri Lanka citizenship.\textsuperscript{32} Consequently nearly a million people became stateless’ by the citizenship Act no. 18 of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistani Residents’ (Citizenship) Act of 1949.


As was expected, these acts were strongly condemned in India. Bilateral discussions were held widely at official levels regarding political status of the persons of Indian origin in Sri Lanka. In June 1953, talks were held at London between Nehru and Dudley Senanayke. The discussion was carried on the basis of the under-mentioned proposals put forward by Premier Senanayake:

(a) 400,000 Indian residents in Sri Lanka were expected to be registered under the citizenship Act of 1949.

(b) An additional number of 250,000 persons would be granted permanent Residence Permit whose future would be reviewed after 10 years, and if during that period any of them desired to go back to India, the government of India would not raise any objection.

(c) The permissible number of persons to be granted citizenship by registration and permanent residence permit in no case was to exceed 650,000.

(d) The balance of the Indian residents about 300,000 were to be accepted by the government of India and to be compulsorily repatriated over a definite period.33

33. Phadnis, Urmila, P-36, op.cit., No. 32
Dudley Senanayake wanted all these steps to be part of an integral scheme of solving the Indo-Sri Lanka problem. Although Nehru was very much impressed by the scheme of Senanayake he was unable to accept the principle of “Compulsory repatriation” because it would set a precedent for other Afro-Asian countries.

Before any progress was made, Dudley Senanayake was succeeded by John Kotelawala as the Prime Minister. Kotelawala regarded the Acts of 1948 and 1949 as the utmost concession that the government of Sri Lanka was willing to make. That concession went far beyond the views of many supporters of the government especially in the Kandyan province. Nevertheless, the negotiations with Nehru continued which resulted in the signing of Nehru-Kotelawala pact on January 18, 1954.

According to this pact the government of two countries expressed their desire to check the traffic of illicit immigration between Sri Lanka and India and resolved to take all possible steps for it. To trace the illicit immigrants the Sri Lanka government decided to prepare an update register of those residents whose names were not in the electoral register.

34. Kotelawala, P-105, op.cit. No. 30
Regarding the citizenship question the agreement laid down that Indian persons registered as Sri Lanka citizen were to be placed in a separate electoral register for an initial period of 10 years. However, the government of Sri Lanka agreed that in certain constituencies where the number of registered voters were not likely to go beyond 250, they were to put on the national register. Indians not registered as Indian citizens were permitted if they wished, to register themselves as one under Article 8 of Indian constitution. Sri Lanka was willing to offer inducements to encourage the persons of Indian origin to prefer Indian citizenship. India on the other hand agreed to provide all administrative facilities for the purpose.

However, the Nehru-Kotelawala agreement was not sincerely implemented by either of the two governments.36 Even prior to the ratification of this agreement, it was being interpreted divergently.37 While Sri Lanka government envisaged the emergence of only the categories of Indian residents under the agreement i.e. Indian nationals and Sri Lanka nationals, the Indian government believed that there would be a third category of Stateless persons. Sri Lanka in its interpretation did not accept the theory of “statelessness”.

Sri Lanka government seemed to be interested that out of 984,327 Indian in Sri Lanka, majority should opt for Indian citizenship. But they did not realise that the provisions of Article 8 of the Indian constitution could not be turned to the disadvantage of India.

A historic break-through was made by the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact of October 1964. Both the leaders decided that out of 973,000 stateless persons of Indian origin, 300,000 be granted Sri Lanka citizenship and 525,000 to be repatriated to India with natural increase with in a period of 15 years. The agreement also included that the status of the remaining 1500,000 persons would be decided later. The Sri Lanka Government also expressed its willingness to extend facilities to the repatriates to take with them to India assets worth Rs. 4,000 per family.

Again the repatriate people were allowed to continue in employment until their repatriation i.e. up to a period of 15 years or until they attained the age of 55 years, whichever was earlier.

38. Article 8 of Indian constitution pertains to rights of citizenship of certain persons of Indian origin residing outside India. It reads: "Notwithstanding anything in Article 5, any person who or either of whose parents or any of whose grand parents was born in India as defined in the Government of India Act 1935 (as originally enacted) and who defined shall be deemed to be a citizen of India if he has been registered as a citizen of India by the diplomatic or consular representative of India in the country where he is for the time being residing on an application made by him therefore to such diplomatic or consular representative, whether before or after the commencement of this constitution in the form or manner prescribed by the Government of the Dominion of India or the government of India.

The 1964 agreement further established a ratio of 7:4 which meant that for every seven persons granted Indian citizenship and repatriated to India four would get Sri Lanka citizenship. But it is significant to note here that though India was ready to absorb a greater portion, the stateless persons rather opted for Sri Lanka citizenship, showing their unwillingness to come back to India.

Despite of domestic pressures and criticism both inside and outside India, Lal Bahadur Shastri, India’s then Prime Minister and the main architect of this pact, had taken bold steps on this matter to settle it amicably. It is again pertinent to note here that “unlike J.L. Nehru, who maintained that future of Indian Tamils was a domestic problem of Sri Lanka and wanted to settle this problem on the basis of political principles that meant granting of franchise rights to each people by the government of Sri Lanka, Shastri looked at this issue with a realistic approach and made efforts to arrive at mutually agreed solution.40

Accordingly from Indian point of view the 1964 agreement was a major step and the beginning of a process of settlement of this long standing problem in relation to Sri Lanka.

On the other hand Sri Lanka maintained that “this agreement was a great success for the political gains in the domestic context.” Sri Lanka had its own view that the speedy replacement of Indian Tamils would lessen the acute unemployment problem and strengthen its economic position as well. Besides this, Sri Lanka’s chief aim was to remove the fear and suspicious in the minds of the people that this immigration process would result in a war-like situation in future and Ceylon would in that case automatically became part of India.

Later, both the governments agreed that they would maintain separate registers containing the names of persons who would be granted Sri Lanka citizenship and that to be repatriated to India. But soon after the 1964 agreement Bandarnaike’s new idea of separate electorate register for Sri Lanka citizen and compulsory repatriation for Indian citizen led to criticism both in Indian as well as in Sri Lanka. The opposition in their respective countries strongly condemned this idea and held that repatriation should not be made compulsory but should be voluntary. The Indian Press reacted against it and described this idea as an act of “bad faith” and against the spirit of the agreement.

41. Muni, Anuradha, P. 72, op.cit., No.72
The Indian Prime ministers contention was that separate electoral register will not only make the process of assimilation of the people of Indian origin in the mainstream of Sri Lanka’s life slow but might even generate and intensify separatist tendencies giving rise to disunity and conflict.\textsuperscript{44} Indira Gandhi throughout her tenure (1966-77) endeavoured hard to speed up the pace of repatriation. During her visit to Sri Lanka in 1973 she agreed with Sri Lanka government to increase the repatriation by ten percent, over the annual rate of 35,000 fixed earlier, which required both of them to take 35,141 persons each. But this provision was not that much helpful in expediting the speedy repatriation of residual person of 1.5 lakhs to India. To accelerate the process of repatriation, there was a consensus between them to extend by two more years after 1979 which envisaged the end of statelessness to October 1981. This was the focus of their discussion during Bandarnaike’s visit to India.

About residual persons, both the leaders at that time, came to a final agreement after a ten years gap in 1974. under the Indo-Sri Lanka joint Communiqué, to share equally the future of the remaining 150,000 ‘stateless’ persons. They agreed to grant citizenship on 75,000 persons each. This agreement can be termed as a major break through in their bilateral relation settling the problem of Indian people in Sri Lanka in future.

\textsuperscript{44} Parliamentary, Debates, vol. 35, 1964, pp. 1216-92 and 1521-28
The table given below shows the full idea of slow progress of repatriation to India:

**REPATRIATION FROM SRI LANKA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of persons arrived</th>
<th>Cumulative Total</th>
<th>No. of persons expected to arrive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>4,565</td>
<td>4,565</td>
<td>1,40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>5,876</td>
<td>10,441</td>
<td>1,75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>10,156</td>
<td>20,597</td>
<td>2,10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>26,051</td>
<td>46,648</td>
<td>2,45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>32,713</td>
<td>79,361</td>
<td>2,80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>40,979</td>
<td>1,20,340</td>
<td>3,15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>44,940</td>
<td>1,65,280</td>
<td>3,50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>26,028</td>
<td>1,91,308</td>
<td>3,85,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>45,785</td>
<td>2,37,093</td>
<td>4,20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>39,800</td>
<td>2,76,893</td>
<td>4,55,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>29,400</td>
<td>3,06,293</td>
<td>4,90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>22,119</td>
<td>3,28,412</td>
<td>5,25,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The above table shows that throughout the period 1968-79, out of the total number of expected persons only a small fraction repatriated to India. Therefore while in 1968, the number of expected persons was 1,40,000 only
4,565 of them arrived in India and this figured to 5,25,000 and 22,119 respectively by 1979.

The above analysis leads to conclude that although various effective measures were taken by India as well as Sri Lanka to solve the citizenship issue, the practical progress was very slow, that strained the relationship. Moreover, the Sri Lanka government partially responded to India’s initiative and concentrated mainly on the process of repatriation, the Shastri-Srimavo pact-offered a suitable framework for both the countries to settle the issue peacefully.

LANGUAGE ISSUE

Along with the issue of stateless persons of Indian origin, the problems faced by Tamil minority in Sri Lanka proved to be an important factor for the continuance of strained relationship between the two countries. The status of Tamil minority and their demand for separate Tamil State (EELAM) and India’s attitude to these issues of domestic politics needs to be analysed here.

The Tamils constitute the largest minority in Sri Lanka (see Appendix-XV & XVI). But they were treated by the local Sinhalese as foreigners, in-furious and were denied many political rights by the Sri Lanka government. Their conditions deteriorated when Bandarnaike endorsed the
demand of the Sri Lanka parties, by declaring ‘Sinhala’ as the only official language. It resulted in a conflict between Sinhalese and Sri Lanka Tamils particularly over the demand of parity of the Tamil language with Sinhalese. Again, Sri Lanka Tamils of Indian origin living in Sri Lanka and their counterparts in the Indian state of Tamilnadu\textsuperscript{45} openly criticized the Sri Lanka Government’s action.

The subsequent communal violence in Sri Lanka compelled the Indian Government to take necessary steps in this regard. But India has consistently viewed the Tamil problem as the internal affairs of Sri Lanka and never shown any intention of interference in to the matter.\textsuperscript{46} India feared that her interference in the internal matter of Tamil-Sinhalese language controversy might arouse the latent it suspicious and annoyance of Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{47} However, the support as well as sympathy shown by South Indian Tamils for Tamil people of Sri Lanka has not only created adverse feelings in the minds of the people but has resulted in the exchange of hot words between both the governments.


\textsuperscript{47} Appadorai, A., and Rajan, M.S., India’s Foreign Policy and relations, (South Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi 1985) p. 194
Though South Indian Tamils requested the government of India to take initiative to settle the issue, Indian government declined their demands strongly and claimed that the issue was not under the purview of India’s interest. Moreover, the UNP’s intention of granting separate autonomy to them proved to be major step for a meaningful positive development of cordial relations between them.

**KACHCHATIVU AND MARITIME BOUNDARY ISSUE**

Another issue of discord, though on a minor scale related to the ownership of the Island of Kachchativu. Kachchativu is a cactus ridden, oval shaped, island with a circumference of three miles, lying in the Palk straits and Adam bridge, midway between India and Sri Lanka.\(^{48}\) It acquires particular prominence once a year when pilgrims from both countries converged on it on the feast of St. Anthony. The controversy arose when both India and Sri Lanka Government claimed their sovereignty over the island.\(^{49}\) Sri Lanka laid its claim on the basis of cold maps and had from time to time carried out naval air and gunnery exercises after prior notice to India.

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48. Prasad, D.M. P-111, op.cit., No. 22  
While India, not clearly contesting this claim, nevertheless had some reservations about it.\(^{50}\) In the absence of any settlement, this dispute continued to disturb the relationship between them.

It was in January 1974 that the basic understanding for the settlement of the issue was concluded between the two Prime Ministers. Both Indira Gandhi and Sirimavo Bandarnaike agreed to draw a boundary line falling one mile off the west coast of Kachchativu, while mutually satisfactory provisions were made regarding navigation, pilgrimage, fishing and mineral exploration in the area.\(^{51}\) Besides retaining safeguards to the earlier rights of the Indian pilgrims and fishermen, this agreement imply that each country would have exclusive jurisdiction, sovereignty and control over the water and vessels of both countries.\(^{52}\) Bandarnaike in the National State Assembly on 23\(^{rd}\) July 1974, on the agreement of Kachchativu said:

"this agreement defines once for all our Maritime boundary with our neighbouring country and also opens a new chapter in our dealing with India."\(^{53}\)

\(^{50}\) Appadorai and Rajan, P-203, op.cit., No. 47

\(^{51}\) Suryanarayana, V. Kachchativu: History of a Dispute, Frontline (Madras) 28 March 1992, P. 90-4


\(^{53}\) Ibid.
Indira Gandhi’s statesmanship displayed in resolving this vexed question of Kachchativu was appreciated by the Sri Lanka Government. But India’s recognition of Sri Lanka’s sovereignty over Kachchativu was mainly centered around India’s interest in maintaining cordial relationship with her neighbouring countries while keeping in mind its continued economic growth and trade, settling the Tamil dispute, and support regarding Indian ocean and nuclear policy options. Indira Gandhi earlier had made it clear that the island was of no significance to India. Similarly of course, neither was it of any real strategic significance to Sri Lanka. But there was the ‘emotive’ factor involved.

Again, the Kachchativu agreement of 1974 related to the international boundary between India and Sri Lanka in their historic waters in the Palk Straits and Palk Bay also resolved the question of overlap created by the extension by both countries of the limits of their territorial sea from six to twelve nautical miles in 1967.

The 1976 agreement regarding maritime boundaries can be termed as a major step towards the settlement of the issue. This agreement allowed both the countries to exercise full sovereignty and absolute jurisdiction on their side of the maritime boundary54 and for the establishment of firm economic and fishing zones. Again this agreement was followed by another

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54. Asthana, Vendra: India’s Foreign Policy and Sub continental Politics, P-97
agreement by which both the countries extended their maritime boundary in the Gulf of Mannar up to the trijunction of India, Sri Lanka and Maldieves.\textsuperscript{55}

Therefore the active encouragement of both the Prime Ministers on the settlement of the boundary between the two countries. Heralds an era of even closer and more fruitful cooperation for their mutual benefits.\textsuperscript{56} With settlement of Kachchativu dispute Indo-Sri Lanka relation attained a new height.

The above discussion reveals that Indo-Sri Lanka relations have seen ups and downs, but they have by and large, continued on a cordial and friendly manner. Though the problems of citizenship issue remained as an unsolved problem, the Kachchatives and boundary issues were solved by them by mutual agreements. Their strong faith in non-alignment and active initiative to eliminate the cold war to maintain a peaceful wealthy atmosphere, was also encouraging. Again, they developed a cooperative relationship in the late 1960's. Moreover, not withstanding Sri Lanka's illusion of threat perception from India both of them tried to promote friendly relationships.

\textsuperscript{55} Asthana, Vendra, P-97, op.cit., No.-54
\textsuperscript{56} Dubey – Indo – Sri Lanka relations (Deep & Deep Publishers, New Delhi 1989) p-101