CHAPTER-III

INDIA’S RESPONSE TO THE ETHNIC CONFLICT
IN SRI LANKA

in the modern world, many states have disintegrated on ethnic basis, some more are in the process of disintegration and others are also facing the problem of ethnic conflict, whereas integration is also going on ethnic and economic basis in same cases. The states are facing serious crisis and their existence is in danger.\(^1\) It is the socio, economic, political deprivation and wrongheaded State policies i.e., denial of autonomy to ethnic communities which leads to a conflict among ethnic groups\(^4\) and the state.\(^2\) In multi-ethnic states, the ethnic “affiliations” are powerful, permeative, passionate and pervasive. Unification of Vietnam, Yemeni, Germany; disintegration of two major multi-ethnic communist states on ethnic lines (Soviet Union and Yugoslavia) and its threat the world over speaks of the quantum of autonomy the ethnic variables have gained.\(^3\) In the post cold war era, many new nations have been formed on the ethnic basis and acquired international recognition and membership of the International Organisation.\(^4\) Geographic location, level of economic development, form of government, degree of urbanisation, socio-political philosophy, and magnitude of population, literacy rate, average standard of living and length of time as an independent state have receded to the background.\(^5\)

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5 Ibid., p. 406.
Modernisation has not only made the people more aware regarding their well-being but also generated the competition for resources. Both awareness and competition are also responsible for the present state of affairs prevailing in the modern states. The modern means of audio-visual mass media and communications have created parochial political consciousness on ethnic lines, which is for ahead of forces of trade, commerce and industries. In some cases, the state has also played a central role in forging ethnic consciousness. State has failed to act as universal institution in multi-ethnic societies. The policies framed by the state from time to time have failed to ensure the betterment of all sections of societies especially in the developing nations.

In the third world countries, the minority community/communities remain at a permanent disadvantage. Their electoral competition arouses ethnic conflicts, because political mobilisation proceeds on ethnic lines. The deprivation of power, whether in a democratic or authoritarian political setup, leads to inter-group conflict within the state and even sometimes transcending the border. The ethnic aspirations and the consequent uprisings have not properly been managed by the post-colonial states. No serious effort has been made to accommodate or manage the ethnic aspirations. Instead, governments in the third world countries followed assimilationist policies and often resorted to military solutions of the ethnic conflicts, consequently, the festering irredentism of ethnic groups assumed the form of violent conflict and terrorism with demands ranging from autonomy to complete independence.

The problem of irrationality of political boundaries is at the root of many ethnic conflicts whereby ethnic groups divided between two or more states strive for either ethnic unity or independence from the parent state or both. Ethnic ties were completely ignored while dividing the ethnic states, for example, the division of Kurds amongst Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Armenia and Syria, and Baluchs between Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Pushtuns between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In some cases, colonial legacy of artificial

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6 Baljit Singh, op. cit., p. 32.
7 Gurnam Singh, op. cit., p. 407
8 Ibid., p. 418.
9 Gurnam Singh, op.cit., p. 408.
10 Ibid., p. 411.
boundaries, cutting across ethno-cultural or religious ties among people, complicated the problem for the new states. These communities felt that either they were denied their share in national wealth, education or employment etc., or they had been deprived of their earlier privileges. Such feelings are aggravated by the political parties and they exploited sentiments of the people, slowly, people lost their faith in the government and the state. They may start viewing other communities as their enemies.

To accomplish their objectives, these ethnic groups need politico-diplomatic support, economic and military assistance from the external states and such support can easily be provided by ethnic states. The response of the ethnic state may vary from complete indifference to intervention and military involvement. There are examples where numerical ethnic minority or majority has extended support to its co-ethnic minority in the kin-state as Pakhtoons in Afghanistan have supported the case of Pakhtoons in Pakistan. Russia is supporting the cause of Russians living in Ukraine and Moldova pursuing the cause of Serbs in Bosnia. Tamils of Tamil Nadu in India have supported the cause of Tamils in Sri Lanka.¹¹

Before going in detail about ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, here the basic question arises, what is ethnicity? Ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity. It is defined by George de Vos as consisting of the "subjective, symbolic or emblematic use" by "a group of people...... of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups."¹² “Ethnicity or ethnic identity also involves, in addition to the subjective self consciousness, a claim to status and recognition, either as a superior group or as a group at least equal to other groups. Ethnicity is to ethnic category, what class consciousness is to class.”¹³ Ethnicity is not primordial, in the sense that the emotive power of ethnic distinctions inevitably leads to political conflicts and demands. Many studies show that ethnicity is not simply a matter of manipulation. Economic, political and social development can disrupt traditional patterns and cause dislocation on which ethnic resentment can feed. Modernity is a potent cause of ethnicity. Ethnicity as a concept covers a variety of factors which distinguish

¹¹ Kulwant Kaur, op. cit., p. 185.
¹² O.N. Mehrotra, op.cit., p. 683.
¹³ Ibid.,
one group of people from the others. Important contemporary distinctions are language, race, religion and colour. When these markers cease to be mere means of social distinctions, and become the basis of political identity and claim to a specific role in the political process or power, ethnic distinctions are transformed into ethnicity.\footnote{Ibid., p. 4.} Studies of Sri Lanka show that ethnic consciousness and resentment is a frequent result of oppression by the state or by the majority community.\footnote{Yash Ghai (2000), \textit{Ethnicity and Autonomy: A Frame work for Analysis}, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 6.}

**ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA**

This study is related with ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and this ethnic conflict is over half-a-century old, of which the later half of the period (since 1983) has been marked by civil war between the government forces and the Sri Lankan Tamils. The conflict began in 1956 when the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism triumphed and, consequently, a sense of alienation among the Sri Lankan Tamil minority grew strong due to electoral interest-driven chauvinistic policies of the SLFP led government of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. Since then, the dynamics have changed to turn the conflict into one of the seemingly interminable violent events in South Asia.\footnote{P. Sahadevan (2009), “Understanding the State and Military Victory in Sri Lanka,” \textit{Indian Foreign Affairs Journal}, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, March, Vol. 4, No.1, p. 10.}

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is the result largely of continued discrimination against the Tamils by the successive Sri Lankan governments. In the post independence period, Sri Lankan governments due to their electoral imperatives adopted discriminatory policies against Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils by denying them, their legitimate, civil and political rights. In Sri Lanka only, the rights of the Sinhalese were accepted as a group, for example, Sinhalese as an official language and Buddhism as state religion. Every Tamil politician negotiated some sort of power sharing deal with a Sinhalese government. The party out of power always claimed that the party
THE MAP SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION OF TAMILS IN SRI LANKA

Source: www.mapsofworld.com
in power backed away from agreement. The ability of any Sinhalese government to implement any agreement is due to power rivalries between the UNP (United National Party) and SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party). To be popular among the majority Sinhalese, the party in the opposition always opposed any concession to the Tamil proposed by the ruling party. Lack of intra-party consensus and the inability to go beyond the positional dispute have been the major obstacles to the resolution of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan Tamil conflict had deep impact on bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka. This study would be incomplete without briefly reviewing the various aspects of this conflict. This conflict in Sri Lanka has historical roots, and is the result largely of continued discrimination against the Tamils by the successive Sri Lankan governments both before and after independence. This discrimination was indulged in for vested political interests. This conflict is also a consequence of the migration of people from India to Sri Lanka a long way back and also in 19th century.

The Sinhala-Tamil Problem in Sri Lanka is two dimensional and each posed a different set of problems. For better understanding, we have divided this problem in two parts, Indian Tamil Problem and Sri Lankan Tamil Conflict. When Sri Lanka attained independence, Indian or the Plantation Tamils enjoyed full voting rights as British Subjects and were in a position to win elections to 7 to 8 Kandyan Constituencies and influence another 14 results by strategic voting in the Kandy central highlands. This was an anathema to the Kandyans the Brahmins among the Sinhalese. To correct this insufferable position, the first thing that the Sinhalese did in the post-independence period was to restrict the citizenship rights and voting rights of Tamils of Indian origin. Despite ties of ethnicity, the Sri Lankan Tamils remained indifferent to the plight of their Tamil brethren. Similarly, the plantation Tamil by and large, remained desensitized of the ethnic conflict of Sri Lankan Tamils.

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18 Ibid., p. 203.
Sri Lankan Tamilian who constitute about 12 per cent (estimated as last census count in north was not done in 2001) of total population and are the single biggest minority group in Sri Lanka. They are 92 per cent of the population in the Northern Province and 68 per cent in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. The two Tamil provinces constitute one third of the Sri Lanka surface area and contain the world’s best and most strategic natural harbor Trincomalee. It is the Tamils concentration in the north and the east that is bane of Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict. These are the areas which were the battle grounds between the Sinhalese and Tamil Kings stretching over centuries and which changed hands many a time between the rivals.

There are many aspects to the Sri Lankan Tamil conflict. Firstly, both the Sinhalese and the Tamils claim to be the original settlers in Ceylon. Which of these two groups came first is a dispute between the two. The Tamils are of Dravidian origin and are predominantly Hindus. The racial antagonism in Sri Lanka goes back to the evolution of the Sinhalese and the Tamil communities. The historical relationship of these two communities has coloured their perception of the present problem. According to the Buddhist mythology, the Sinhalese are early migrants from North India, whereas the Tamil chronicles claim that some Sri Lankan Tamils were the first to inhabit Sri Lanka and the Sinhalese came much later. Therefore, both the communities have been putting forward rival claims in establishing their racial and cultural superiority and administrative hegemony over each other. Both groups have been suspicious of each other and feared that the other would dominate it. 19

So far as the origin of the Sinhalese is concerned, there are two main historical assumptions as to its source. Firstly, the arrival of Indian prince Vijay with 700 followers in 543 BC Secondly, the arrival and gradual settlement of merchant marines from north India. The first generally holds away both in India and in Ceylon but what is disputed is whether Vijay was a prince from Bengal or from Gujarat or from some other upper India area. 20 What is clear is that on settlement in Ceylon the present Sinhalese race intermingled with

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the old inhabitants of the island. In the basic dispute between the Sinhalese and Tamils, the main point involved is whether the Yakkas and Nagas were Dravidians or not. The Tamils claim so and assert that since they are Dravidian in origin, they have equal, if not more, claim as the original settlers in Ceylon. The Sinhalese, on the other hand, are not prepared to accept the Tamils as anything else but the direct outcome of the Tamil invasions which began sometimes in the second century B.C. initiated by a chieftain of the Cholas kingdom in south India and which led to the overthrow of Anuradhapura kingdom in Ceylon. But later, Elala, the Cholas chief is said to have been defeated and the Sinhala kingdom was restored. Thus, the problem as to which community is indigenous and superior to other, led to differences between the two communities from the dawn of history itself.

Secondly, during the British regime, Tamils had obtained influence in administrative jobs and other fields. After independence, the difference between the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils which had remained dormant during the British rule came to the forefront. Ethnic conflict was accentuated by the British policy which was designed to consolidate imperial power and authority through every means necessary and possible. As between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, from the British point of view and for their particular purpose, their choice fell on the Tamil, as they were “a hard working, steady and dependable people” The result was that the Sinhalese and the Tamils both in the higher and the lower strata of society got some kind of a parallel patronage without reference to their ratio (Sinhalese 74% and Tamils 12.6%) in the total population. It was here that the first seed of difference between the Sinhalese and the Tamils was sown. The differences further widened when a Tamil was elected to the British legislature in 1911. The series of

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21 Ibid. pp. 16-17.
22 Sadhan Mukherjee (1971), Ceylon-Island that Changed, People’s Publishing House, New Delhi, p. 42.
23 Ravi Kant Dubey, op. cit., p. 64.

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constitutional reforms which followed climaxed in the inclusion in 1911 of an elected ‘native’ member in the legislature which otherwise consisted of the British and a few Sri Lankan nominees. This individual was a former advocate who incidentally was a Tamil, Sir Poonnambalam Ramanathan. In 1917, the Ceylon National Congress was founded. The first president was again a Tamil, Sir Poonambielan Arunachalam who was the brother of the first native elected member of the legislature. There were eminent Sinhalese in the group—Sir James Peris, P. R. Senanayake and others but Arunachalam was chosen for the honour unanimously because of his record as a national figure. There were not any immediate reactions to this and there was no communal thinking in the minds of people.

But sometime later, cracks did begin to show up. Soon after Arunachalam’s election as Congress president, the number of elected native seats in the legislature was increased from one to two. As a leader of the major political organization, Arunachalam was expected to be nominated by the Congress for election. This did not happen. Sinhalese leaders preferred James Peiris of their own to take that seat. When this happened, the break started. When the Ceylon National Congress was founded in 1917, the president was again a Tamil. Dispute for political posts created the Tamil Mahajan Sabha and the Sinhalese Mahajan Sabha. The gulf between the two dominating groups in the island widened and in the 1930’s the Sinhala Mahajana Sabha began to engage with revolutionary fury in Sinhalese nationalism and Buddhism.

What aggravated matters was a new set of constitutional reforms proposed in 1930 by the British Dononghmoure Commission providing for total elected representation in the legislature for the Ceylonese. Tamils demanded communal electorate, but their demand was turned down, and the bulk of the Tamils boycotted the elections under the new constitution. After the election in 1931, an all Sinhalese Board of Ministers came into being with focus on new education policy to help Sinhalese language.

26 Thomas Abraham, op. cit., p. 19.
27 Ibid., p. 18.
28 P. Ramaswamy, op. cit., p. 224.
The government, at this time, planned to distribute certain land under the scheme known as Minneriya Scheme. But the area chosen, the Minneriya district, was bordering the intractable forest land which had been some sort of a barrier between the northern Tamil areas and the traditionally Sinhalese-occupied south. The Tamils regarded the scheme as an attempt to start invasion into the northern Tamil territory. Similarly, a new education policy to help Sinhalese Buddhist schools and discourage Christian missionary institutions added to the impression of the minorities that special stress was being laid on the Buddhist religion and the Sinhalese language. Thus began the era of what in later years came to be called the island’s “ethnic politics or great divide.”  

Thirdly, the issue of Tamils of Indian origin caused strain between India and Sri Lanka. These Tamils had migrated to Sri Lanka from South India particularly from Tamil Nadu and Kerala during the British period. These were taken to Ceylon to work as labourers, when coffee became the first plantation in 1837, and subsequently to tea plantations. This took place due to three main factors.

(i) The indigenous population (Sinhalese) of Ceylon was neither inclined nor habituated to work on the plantations established on the hills in the Kandyan province of Ceylon.

(ii) Slavery had already been abolished throughout the British plantations in Ceylon.

(iii) The South Indian Tamil labour was cheaply available, because of prevailing poverty and unemployment. Thus, the shortage of labour on these plantations caused by the apathy of the indigenous people to work was removed by the immigration and recruitment of cheaply available South Indian labour.

The Ceylonese constitutions of 1920 and 1923 had given the Indian Tamils political and legal rights in Ceylon equal to the indigenous population residing in Ceylon. Six months residence in Ceylon qualified them for

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29 Ibid., p. 225.
With the Sinhalese assuming power in 1948, they disenfranchised the Indian Tamils. The Sri Lankan government in the first parliament enacted discriminatory Citizenship Acts of 1948 and 1949. These Acts were designed to deny citizenship and voting rights to the Indian Tamils, in order to divide them in Sri Lanka. With the advent of mass politics, the status and rights of Indian Tamils acquired prominence. The United National Party (UNP) went for these Acts with great vigour, not only on account of the Sinhalese pressure, but for good reasons of its own. It was feared that the Indian Tamils, if allowed to continue as a political force, might someday join hands with the indigenous Tamils to create problem for the majority community. Ultimately, the Indian Tamils were politically excommunicated from the national community and they became stateless. The Sri Lankan governments’ policy of repatriation of all those persons who did not qualify for citizenship in accordance with 1948 Act to India further complicated the matter. Because of their strong ethnic linkages, the Tamil Nadu politicians reacted strongly. Several agreements, including Jawhar Lal Nehru-John Kotelawala pact of 1954, the Srimavo Bandaranaike-Lal Bahadur Shastri pact of 1964 and Srimavo Bandaranaike-Indira Gandhi Pact of 1974, did address the problem. But the problem of citizenship of a sizeable numbers of Tamils of the Indian origin could not be resolved satisfactorily.

**Fourth** aspect is the problem of religious harmony. Religion played (and still plays) a very important role in reinforcing the ethnic consciousness of the two groups i.e. Sinhalese and Tamils. The Sinhalese embraced the Buddhist faith in the third century B.C. Myth tells that the Sri Lanka belongs to Sinhalese and Sinhalese are the chosen guardians of the Buddhist faith. On the other hand, the Tamil retained their Hindu faith which prevailed in South India. For the Tamils in Sri Lanka, language and culture are the foremost elements of identity and not religion as it is for the Sinhalese. Therefore, the Sinhalese as a collectivity regard themselves as the rightful owners of the

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34 Ibid., p. 64.
Island. The Tamils, on the other hand, view themselves as equal partners with the Sinhalese, after their superiority in cultural matters, and regard the country as belonging to them too.

Fifth aspect is the question of official language. The victory of Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led by Bhandaranaike in the 1956 was based on its "Sinhala only" platform. Bandaranaike converted the Sri Lankan polity to a Sinhalese Buddhist state. On assuming office, the SLFP government passed an official language Act 1956, declaring Sinhala as the official language of Sri Lanka. The knowledge of it was made compulsory in higher education and for entry into government services.35 The Act tried to provide clauses on the use of Tamil but violent demonstrations by the Sinhala extremists prevented the government from doing so. This led to eventual polarization of politics on ethnic lines. The immediate (and intended) consequence of the Sinhala only Act 1956 was to force large number of Tamil who worked in the civil services, and who could not meet this language requirement, to resign. This discriminatory attitude adopted by Bandaranaike government against Tamil was challenged by federal party.36 The Federal Party of the Sri Lanka Tamils threatened a Satyagraha. In this scenario, Sward Bandaranaike, the then prime minister, met the leader of the Federal Party and made a compromise which led to the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakem Pact of 1957.37

The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakem Pact of 1957 recognised Tamil as the language of national minority and the language of administration in the northern and eastern provinces. It decided to set up Regional Councils, and Boards in Agriculture and Education. But this pact could not be enforced on account of violent agitations by militant Sinhala Buddhists backed by the UNP

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36 A. J. Wilson, *op. cit.* p. 60.
37 The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakem Pact of 1957 recognised Tamil as the language of national minority and the language of administration in the northern and eastern provinces. It decided to set up regional Councils, and Boards in Agriculture and Education. But this pact could not be enforced on account of violent agitations by militant Sinhala Buddhists backed by the UNP (then in opposition) in which Junius Jayawardene played an active role. The divergence of opinion between the government and the opposition and militant opposition to the implementation of the pact led to the assassination of Bandaranaike by a Sinhala militant in 1959.
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In 1965, a similar pact was sought to be concluded by UNP premier Senanayake and Chelvanayakam. The Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact recognized Tamil as the language of administration in the north and the east and decided to set up District Development Councils in those regions. But in the face of strong opposition from the Sinhala chauvinists, this pact was also unilaterally abrogated by the Sri Lankan government.

After the enactment of 1978 Constitution, Tamil attained the official status of National Language but it was far from reality. However, it was getting the official status as a language of administration in Tamil region. Geographical proximity of India and trans-border ethnic affinities of Tamils is also one of the aspects for continuance of the conflict. The Sinhalese have a suspicious attitude towards the Tamils. They think that the Tamils still have strong emotional links with the 65 million Tamils just across the Palk-Strait in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Ethnic linkage has contributed a fear complex in the minds of Sinhalese. As a result, the majority Sinhalese community has a curious feeling of minority complex. Sri Lanka's geographical proximity to India compelled India to perceive critical developments in the island as an issue that could affect India's own unity and territorial integrity, if it did not respect the sentiments of Tamil citizens. Another important aspect that gave rise to ethnic conflict was the Sri Lankan government's policy of colonization in the Tamil dominated areas. It was planned to reduce the Tamil to a minority in their 'homeland'. Discrimination against the Tamils in education, services and in economic activities was another factor which played a crucial role.

A critical aspect in the ethnic conflict are the Sri Lankan Muslims, most of whom are Tamil speaking, claiming a separate ethno-religious identity and asserting that any delegation of powers and new territorial arrangement within

39 J. N. Dixit, op. cit., p. 57.
Sri Lanka should ensure a separate self-governing region for the Tamil Muslims in the Eastern province of Amparai, Batticoloa, Mannar and portion of Trincomalee.\(^{41}\) Owing to political compulsion and fear of antagonizing the Tamils, the successive governments at Colombo have not been in favour of having Muslims in any major mechanism or conflict resolution process.\(^{42}\) The demerger of the Northern and Eastern provinces by the order of the Supreme Court in December 2006 has, in fact, lately gave the Muslims, cause for optimism for a possible autonomous area. The ruling SLFP’s proposal in May 2007, which spoke of concessions to minority communities, such as enhanced powers to village authorities and some devolution to district level, is a further reason for optimism.\(^{43}\)

The Tamils lost all hopes when the United National Party, led by Jaywardene, amended the Sri Lankan constitution converting the Government to a presidential form with president enjoying extensive executive powers.\(^{44}\) A new constitution of 1972 reaffirmed Sinhala as an official language and the Buddhism as a state religion was given a prominent place in the constitution. This led to deep sense of deprivation and discrimination among Tamils. They lost faith in SLFP and UNP and strengthened their Federal party that demanded a federal constitutional framework. The continuous discrimination and deprivation of the Tamils created more anger, resentment and frustration and the Tamil youth rejected the conventional method of agitation.\(^{45}\)

This precipitated their drift towards militancy and secession. The federal party joined the Tamil congress and other minor Tamil parties to form the Tamil United Front (TUF) to fight for the rights of Tamil Speaking people in Sri Lanka. TUF advanced a set of six demands that were: official status for the Tamil language, decentralisation of powers, a secular Sri Lanka, citizenship for the Indian Tamil, guarantee of fundamental rights, and banning of caste system. But the Sri Lanka government failed to respond to them.\(^{46}\)


\(^{42}\) M. Mayilvaganan, ibid., p. 844.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 845.

\(^{44}\) J. N. Dixit, op. cit., p. 52.

\(^{45}\) V.P. Vadik, op. cit., p. 70.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.
1976, TUF renamed itself as the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and demanded a "Tamil Eelam". However, it recommended the non-violent methods. TULF contested the 1977 elections on the basis of its demands for a separate state and emerged as the largest opposition. Meanwhile, the youth wing of TULF became impatient and rejected the non-violent methods for Tamil liberation and formed Guerrilla organization. The proliferation of factions has led to the formation of more than 35 guerrilla organisations, out of which five factions are dominant. These are Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), and People Liberation Organisation for Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Eelam People Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS). However, the LTTE has gained supremacy over the other organisations. Political violence by Tamil Tigers groups introduced a new dimension to ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.\(^{47}\) In 1978, a new constitution was passed retaining Sinhala as the official language along with Tamil as the language of administration in the predominantly Tamil areas. Also, assurances were given regarding restricting Sinhala colonisation of Tamil areas and providing employment to the Tamils. At a later stage, the District Development Council scheme was introduced for the Tamil areas. However, the assurances remained mainly on paper and the Tamil demands remained unfulfilled.\(^{48}\)

In this setting, several underground Tamil groups came on the scene and terrorism raised its head. Instead of taking any effective steps toward a political solution to the conflict, the Sri Lankan government enacted strict laws and endowed the security forces with extraordinary powers, whose indiscriminate use resulted in violation of human rights and alienation of the Tamil groups. The state’s discriminatory policies led to anti-Tamil riots in 1956, followed by deadlier riots in 1958, 1978, 1981 and 1983. The 1983 riots

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* Eelam mean in Tamil-Sri Lanka, Tamil Eelam means where Tamils are in majority; Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. In order to ensure their survival and progress, The Tamils in 1976 demanded a separate state-'Tamil Eelam'.


were especially gruesome and caused thousands of Tamils to flee to India and western countries as refugees.\textsuperscript{49}

In July 1983, the most violent and brutal anti Tamil rioting that Sri Lanka had ever seen swept through the city (Colombo). Dissanayake, who was also a senior official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Colombo, admits in his study,

"There was organised violence by gangs. Their targets were the economic basis of the Tamils in Colombo and their homes were systematically consigned to the flames, such homes were identified with pinpoint accuracy using electoral lists." \textsuperscript{50}

These riots began the flow of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees into India. Anti- Tamil riots and its aftermath marked a watershed in India-Sri Lanka relations.

**INDIA’S RESPONSE (1983-1990)**

Ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka has been primarily of its own creation and is, as such, an internal phenomenon. However, the imperatives and consequences of this conflict have spilled over beyond national boundaries of Sri Lanka and sucked into them the interest and involvement of external factors and forces, this constitutes a formidable external dimension to Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict.\textsuperscript{51} Of all the external forces and factors in the Sri Lanka ethnic conflict, India’s response has been pervasive, significant and even decisive.

The government of India has often faced a great policy dilemma in responding to the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. India had in the past been actively engaged in the process of negotiations for citizenship and other rights of Tamils of Indian origin. But its direct involvement in assisting Sri Lanka to work out a political solution to the ethnic problem, at Sri Lanka’s request,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{50} T. D. S. Dissenayke, op. cit., p. 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{51} S. D. Muni (1993), Pangs of Proximity, op. cit., p. 12.
\end{itemize}
began in the wake of July 1983 riots. From 1983 to 1987, the objective of India’s involvement in Sri Lanka was two fold. India wanted to help Sri Lanka government and the Tamils to evolve a workable solution to the ethnic conflict as it was wary of the emergence of a Tamil Eelam nation out of Sri Lanka. At the same time, India also wanted to prevent Sri Lanka turning into cockpit of American domination intruding in India’s sphere of influence. India considered the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka as an internal matter of Sri Lanka. India believed that solution to this conflict had to be found within the framework of sovereignty and integrity of Sri Lanka. India did not support the Tamil demand for a separate state, because it would have a negative impact in South India and North-Eastern states. However, the ethnic riots in 1983 and the subsequent civil war between the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE led to an emotional upsurge in Tamil Nadu in favour of Tamils of Sri Lanka. Therefore, the government of India could not remain a passive spectator to mass killing of the Tamils, as Tamils in India were watching government of India’s lack of action with anxiety. The people and political parties in Tamil Nadu exerted pressure to force India to save the lives of “their brethren” in Sri Lanka. The Indian government condemned the killing of Tamils in Sri Lanka and sent foreign minister Narashima Rao to Colombo to ascertain facts on the spot. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was forced to take some steps to placate

52 After LTTE attack against army soldiers in Jaffna on 23 July, 1983, anti-Tamil riots erupted in Colombo. The Sri Lankan government, under President J. R. Jayawardene, intervened only belatedly to stop the killing and looting, which left several hundred dead and thousands homeless. For more detail see, Shelton U. Kodikara (1993), Foreign policy of Sri Lanka: A Third World Perspective, Cinkara Publication, New Delhi, pp. 42-47.


54 For India after 30 years of involvement in the Tamil question, sacrifice of 1200 IPKF men and helping eliminate the LTTE, obtaining a just and fair devolution package for the Tamils is not an internal affairs of Sri Lanka. Ashok K. Mehta (2009), “Sri Lanka after the LTTE,” The Tribune, Chandigarh, 22 June.

55 The main opposition party, DMK called for all party conference in June 1983, to express solidarity with the Tamils of Sri Lanka, and pleading that asylum would be given to the militant groups. While, the ruling AIADMK, stayed away from the conference, the Tamil Nadu chief minister, M. G. Ramachandran, convened an all party meeting on 28th July 1983 in Madras. The meeting strongly condemned the killing of Tamils in Sri Lanka and further, decided to send a delegation to New Delhi to seek India’s intervention to end the ethnic violence in the island. Also, the Tamil Nadu Assembly moved a resolution on 24 October 1983, expressing the condolence for innocent Tamils who killed in Sri Lanka. See, M. Mayilvaganan (2008), “India’s Policy Towards Sri Lanka, 1947-2007: Continuity and Change,” World Focus, Series-2, New Delhi, p. 56.
the opinion of Tamil Nadu. Indira Gandhi stated that the Indian government was dealing with the Tamils question in Sri Lanka as a national issue. She further expressed that, “India could not be regarded as ‘Just another country’ as every development in Sri Lanka affected India also.”\(^{56}\) If Indian government failed to respond to the Tamil sentiments in India, this might lead to the demand for creation of an independent Dravidistan.\(^{57}\) So, realities of coalition politics at both the state and central level and the Tamil Nadu sensitivities have proved crucial in formulating India’s response to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Another aspect that determined India’s response to the ethnic conflict during this period is the geo-strategic importance of Sri Lanka and India’s external security concerns. With the rise of the Tamil militancy and escalation of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lanka government was seeking help from abroad to curb the Tamil insurgency. Jaywardene government, in Sri Lanka, sought military and political support from Israel, USA, UK and Pakistan.\(^{58}\) This was inimical to India’s security interests in the region.\(^{59}\) To win the US support, Sri Lanka government extended refueling and recreation facilities to visiting US naval ships. Jaywardene also tried to seek Britain’s direct involvement in the conflict by giving a fresh lease of life to the 1947 defence agreement. Having their anti-India postures in foreign policy, China and Pakistan had given military support to Sri Lanka. What upset India was Sri Lanka government’s decision to grant a contract for leasing of oil storage tanks in Trincomalee to a Singapore-based US company and its agreement with the USA in December 1983 to set up a powerful Voice of America (VOA)\(^{60}\) station in the East. India’s firm and categorical stand against Sri


\(^{57}\) Kulwant Kaur, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

\(^{58}\) Sri Lanka also tried to convince the world that Tamil terrorism posed a great threat to its unity and integrity. It said that the Tamils had the support and encouragement of the government and people in India and that were would be a direct military invasion by India for the creation of an independent sovereign Tamil state on the model of Bangladesh. For detail see, S. D. Muni, (1993), *Pangs of Proximity: India and Sri Lanka Ethnic Crisis*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, pp. 52-53.


\(^{60}\) It was the largest radio station with a powerful transmission facility established outside the USA. India’s apprehension was that it would be used for the US Navy’s intelligence purpose in the Indian Ocean.
Lanka’s move to build up strategic relationship with external powers, affected her relations with India. It was this strategic concern that guided India’s policy of intervention in Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990. Sri Lanka also recognised India’s concern, when it signed the India-Sri Lanka Agreement of 29th July 1987.61

Another pertinent aspect was that India’s unity was in danger. The Tamil Eleam movement was getting stronger day by day and India felt that it would lead to destabilisation in Tamil Nadu. Dissanayake, a close ally of President Jaywardene, confirmed this when he said that India was committed to oppose division of the island on ethnic grounds, because, “The (Indians) feel it might be the beginning of the destabilization process in Tamil Nadu also”.62

In view of the above developments in Sri Lanka, the compulsion for India was to abandon its earlier non-interventionist policy and get involved in order to pre-empt all possible or actual foreign involvement. To achieve its objective and to cope with the development in Sri Lanka, India declared its Indian doctrine of ‘regional security.’ The foreign countries, from which Sri Lanka had sought military help, became cautious in their response. Sri Lanka had no other option but to seek India’s assistance in dealing with its ethnic conflict.

Jaywardene came to Delhi in June 1985 and it was agreed that India would help to affect a ceasefire and arrange direct negotiations between the Sri Lankan Tamil groups and the Sri Lanka government. G. Parthasarthy was appointed as a mediator. He organized two conferences at Thimpu to maintain peace, but peace talks could not be successful due to difference of opinion. The Sri Lanka government, under mounting pressure from hardliner Sinhalese and fundamentalists, launched “Operation liberation,” and imposed economic blockade on the Jaffna peninsula in January 1987. Military operations of 26th July, 1987 surpassed all previous records. The Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi reacted very strongly against the military operations. This also created a tremendous backlash in Tamil Nadu and faced

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62 Times of India (1987), New Delhi, 16 November.
with intense pressure from the Tamil Nadu state government, the Indian government announced its intentions to send relief supplies to Jaffna. Consequently, the Indian government sent shipment of food supplies and petroleum products to Jaffna in June 1987. When these shipments were turned back by the Sri Lanka navy, India decided to airdrop relief supplies in and around Jaffna. This move by India, social and internal pressure and finally external realities made the Sri Lankan government come to an Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement (ISLA) on 29th July, 1987.63

Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement came out due to compulsion rather than rational perception of the ethnic conflict. The accord has been called a watershed in India Sri Lanka relations. The accord recognised the multilingual and multi-ethnic character of Sri Lankan society; it pledged to nurture the cultural and linguistic identity of each ethnic group within the frame work of the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. The accord provided for joining of the northern and eastern provinces in one administrative unit. A provincial council was to be set up. The agreement also provided for the Indian armed forces being involved if required by the Sri Lankan government to oversee these measures. Finally, the agreement stated that Tamil shall be recognised as an official language along with Sinhalese and English.64 This accord also addresses the security concerns of both the countries. The basic point to understand about the agreement is that it was the best deal that the Tamils were ever likely to get. But, the issue of statelessness of the Tamils of Indian origin was left out of the purview of the Accord.

Unfortunately, as the accord was signed hurriedly and under compulsions, the LTTE did not agree to it.65 Very few efforts were made to include the LTTE in the process. As per the provisions of the agreement, IPKF of about 8000 men was sent to Sri Lanka on 30th July 1987 to oversee the

63 For the text of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 29 July, 1987 see Appendix-III.  
65 The LTE almost rendered the accord meaningless by initially rejecting it on the ground that they, as the people whose fate was being decided, were not consulted at all on the terms of the agreement. But later on Vellupillai Prabhakaran, after a meeting with Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, grudgingly agreed to go along. For detail, see, Dilip Bobb, et al, (1987), "Accord Discord", India Today, New Delhi, Vol. XII, No. 15, 15 August, pp. 76-79.
implementation of the accord.\textsuperscript{66} Initially, things seemed to go well. Arrangements for fulfilling the terms of political and administrative provisions of the agreement were set in motion. However, the LTTE refused to surrender more than token number of weapons, contrary to the agreement that called for disarmament. With this difference between the LTTE and IPKF intensified. Not only did the LTTE refuse to disarm, it actively instigated violence against the other Tamil groups. The Indian government in its turn arrested some leaders of the LTTE.\textsuperscript{67} LTTE subsequently alleged that IPKF intended to cut the LTTE out, the outcome was breakout of hostilities between the LTTE and IPKF. India decided to forcibly disarm the LTTE. This made India’s relations with Sri Lanka troublesome and by and large conflictual.\textsuperscript{68}

Subsequently, president of Sri Lanka, R. Premadasa arranged the IPKF withdrawal by securing ceasefire arrangement with the LTTE in March 1990. The role of the IPKF did not end in success. It cost the lives of 1250 Indian armed personnel and 7000 LTTE men. The IPKF also put heavy burden on the national economy. The assassination of ex-prime minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, which followed the pullout of IPKF from their peace keeping role, was the worst fallout of India’s intervention. Smaller countries in South Asia, particularly Pakistan, denounced India’s intervention in Sri Lanka as hegemonistic. Peace keeping operations even under the United Nations flag have not achieved desired goals. India’s policy was based on a sincere and abiding commitment to Sri Lanka unity and territorial integrity on the one hand and genuine concern for the interests and rights of the Tamils. A number of difficulties in evolving and pursuing the policy arose because there existed, in Sri Lanka, a gap between these two objectives. The lessons that India has learnt from its intervention are very harsh and hard to forget. India has

\textsuperscript{66} Their number rose to around one lakh. The IPKF operation and accord reflected a major shift in Indian policy, from mediator to guarantor of a settlement. For detail see, M.Mayilvaganan (2008), “India’s Policy Towards Sri Lanka 1947-2007: Continuity and Change,” World Focus, New Delhi, Series-2, Delhi, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{67} Sri Lanka requested that the arrested LTTE members be transferred to its custody. India agreed. At the same time, it is reported to have offered to secure the release of the captured militants if the LTTE supported the peace accord. The LTTE refused, and the group collectively committed suicide, consuming cyanide capsules. The official Indian view was that Indian troops were in Sri Lanka at the invitation of the government and could not deny that government’s official request. The Tamil view was that the IPKF was supporting a repressive Sri Lankan regime.

restrictions on trade between the two are detrimental to their economic growth and prosperity. They also realised that relaxation of the restrictions, abolition of tariffs and lifting restrictions on free movement of manufactured goods and services minimize the illegal trade between the two countries.

After the IPKF withdrawal, successive governments in India have expressed their hurt feelings by deciding against any form of direct intervention in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka. At the same time, since mid 1990, successive governments in Sri Lanka led by UNP and SLFP have constantly sought India’s direct politico-military role. But Indian government declined to play any role in resolving the ethnic conflict. Such a policy response has culminated into the involvement of extra-regional countries in resolving the ethnic conflict. India’s new policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs has contributed to remove the cultivated fear complex of Sri Lanka. The leadership and the people in Sri Lanka have changed their mindset and thinking about India; for the first time, India is considered as an asset rather than a threat to the Sri Lanka’s security. A key reason for India-Sri Lanka relations to improve dramatically since the mid 1990’s was not only the change of government (as power moves form the hand of the UNP to the SLFP after 17 years) but also India’s policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka.

India’s non-interventionist policy should be seen not only in the context of the failure of its earlier policy but also the changing security perceptions of the Indian Leadership in the post cold war period. Unlike the 1980’s, when the Sri Lankan leaders tried to use its strategic advantage the post cold war period has signified the loss of the country strategic importance in regional politics. This effectively removed India’s apprehensions and security concern over, for instance, the status of Trincomalee harbour, resulting in convergence of security interests between the two countries.

India’s new Sri Lanka policy vis a vis the ethnic conflict combines its old stand with recognition of the new realities. At the core of, it is a reiteration

realised its limitations. Many felt that Indian policy was ill conceived, unrealistic and adventurous. However, it can be stated that India’s intervention had certainly saved the Sri Lanka from territorial disintegration and also it had undoubtedly served India’s geo-security interests by preventing the entry of outside powers in the region.69 The events that unfolded between 1983 to 1990 were the most troubled and by and large conflictual, worst years in India’s response to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. India’s intervention had embittered its relationship with both the government and people of Sri Lanka.

India’s involvement in Sri Lanka between 1983 to 1990 was unavoidable not only due to the ramifications of Sri Lanka’s oppressive and discriminatory policies against its Tamil citizens but also in terms of India’s national security concern due to the Sri Lankan government’s security connections with US, Pakistan and Israel.70 Not only this, but it is also India’s sincere desire to safeguard the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.71 Not withstanding that, the fact remains that the India–Sri Lanka Agreement of 29th July 1987 still provides the most appropriate and viable basis for resolving the Tamil problem amicably.

INDIA’S CHANGING RESPONSE (1990-2006)

India’s policy, during this phase, remained in the state of transition from overly political to one with greater emphasis on economic contents of the policy response towards Sri Lanka. Realising the constraints and cost of its direct intervention in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka, during this period India has adopted new policy of non-intervention with active interest in the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka. Post 1990 phase has witnessed a historic and qualitative change in India-Sri Lanka relations. The journey of relations from conflictual to normal and thereafter to co-operative is the manifestation of this qualitative change. The post 1990 period registered an all round improvement in India-Sri Lanka relations. In this new phase, both the nations realised that

69 S. D. Muni, op. cit. p. 10., For detail see also, Depinder Singh, op. cit. p.70.
70 J. N. Dixit., op. cit., p. 58.
71 Ibid., p. 81.
of the Indian government’s commitment to protect Sri Lanka’s unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.74 There is no compromise on the existing fundamentals of the Sri Lanka state whose break up, as sought by the LTTE, is unacceptable to India. At the same time, maintaining the political status quo at the structural and institutional level, as desired by the Sinhalese majoritarian ideology, is not viable. Permanent peace in Sri Lanka requires institutional restructuring aimed at creating ethnic equality; a power sharing arrangement to satisfy the ‘aspirations of all the Sri Lankan communities, especially those of Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sri Lankan Muslims’, is considered as the most desirable democratic option.75 This pro-minority position underlining the need for devolution of powers is to counter the majority community’s entrenched position on ethnic democratic centralism.

India’s insistence on a political process to achieve peace has clearly rejected war. India strongly prefers a home-grown solution to the conflict, reached through a serious negotiation process involving all the ethnic groups. India was also not opposed to international involvement in peacemaking. India’s approval of the Norwegian facilitation supported by United States, Japan and the European Union indicates some revision of its traditional policy of preventing external involvement in South Asia.

NEW TURN TO THE ETHNIC CONFLICT

In 1994, People’s Alliance (PA) led by Chandrika Kumaratunge came to power. It presented a ‘political package’ to solve this conflict. But, the final version of the package was completely rejected by Tamil moderate parties such as TULF, EPRLF and TELO. Other parties too expressed their reservations. As per schedule, election was held on 5th December, 2001 in Sri Lanka. During election campaign among other promises UNP promised to the people to end the protracted ethnic conflict by opening negotiation with LTTE. People voted UNP in Sinhala Buddhist south and the newly formed Tamil National Alliance (TNA) in the Tamil dominated North-East, so they sent a

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74 Every joint statement issued by the government of India and Sri Lanka since the mid-1990’s has made a reference and reassurance to protect Sri Lanka’s sovereignty. [http://www.meaindia.nic.in](http://www.meaindia.nic.in)

75 P. Sahadevan and Neil Devotta, op.cit. p. 370.
clear message that they expect the new Government for quick resolution of
the ethnic conflict. Ranil Wickremesinghe was made the Prime Minister of
UNP led United Front Government. In this election people voted out President
Chandrika Kumarantunga’s People’s Alliance. A grim constitutional crisis has
arisen in Sri Lanka, as for the first time the voter has opted for a different
alliance for a majority in parliament than they had chosen for President.76

In view of the intractable nature of the conflict and its escalation
potential, both the parties to the conflict have welcomed external mediation to
seek a way out of the crisis.77 Norway has played the role of third party
mediation, technically called “facilitation.” First time since 1987, Sri Lanka
government and LTTE have come close and three days talks from 16th
September, 2002 to 18th September, 2002 were held with the help of Norway
in Thailand. After the talks Anton Balasingham, chief negotiator for the LTTE
told the reporters that, “the LTTE does not operate in the concept of separate
state. We operate with the concept of homeland and self determination.” He
also said, “if demand for regional autonomy is rejected, then a fight for political
independence and statehood is the only last resort”. He also said India was
“fully backing” the peace process. India also expressed satisfaction over the
conclusion of first round of peace talks. Prime Minister Wickremensighe said
after the talks, that politically sensitive issues, including those of homeland;
self determination and political autonomy would be much down the agenda as
preference was given to humanitarian issues on both sides.78

Making a steady progress in Norway facilitated peace talks from 31st
October 2002 to 3rd November 2002 in Nakhon Pathon, Thailand, Sri Lanka
and the LTTE agreed on military de-escalation. The two sides reached an
agreement to set up key peace committee to improve security. LTTE also
dropped its demand for an interim administration as it wanted to take up core

76 Bidwai Praful (2001), “Towards a Thaw?.” Frontline, Channi, Vol. 18, No. 1,
19 January, p. 32.
Tribune, Chandigarh, 19 September.
issue i.e. autonomy. They also evaluated the ceasefire agreement. Inter ethnic co-operation and respect for human rights were also discussed.79

The Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE negotiating peace in Oslo, in third round from 2nd December 2002 to 5th December 2002, agreed on a ‘federal model’ that could form the basis for a final settlement to the ethnic conflict.80 The most important achievement of the fourth round of talks held in Nakhon-Pathon from 6th January 2003 to 9th January 2003 was the finalisation of detailed action plan for the re-settlement for the Tamil refugees in the war torn Jaffna and a package for the reconstruction and development of the peninsula, besides committing themselves for the protection of human rights.81 All rounds of talks were mainly concerned with procedural aspects of the talks and confidence building measures. No progress was made on question of devolution of powers to the Tamils, the core issue.82

A formidable block before the resumption of peace negotiations was the LTTE’s demand that there must be an Interim Self Government Authority (ISGA) through which the Tamils can run their own administration in the northern and eastern provinces without any interference by the Sri Lanka Government. The distrust between the Government and the LTTE was another hurdle.83

Norway brokered ceasefire agreement between the LTTE and government, which went into effect from 23rd February, 2002. First time since 1987, Sri Lanka government and LTTE had six rounds of talks and discussed the various issues including federal solution to solve the conflict with the help of Norway but failed to find out any solution.84 A notable feature of the talks was the commitment by the two sides to explore “a solution

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80 The Tribune, (2002), Chandigareh, 10 December.
82 In a surprising act of climb down, “Prabhakaran had given a hint in November 2002 Hero’s Day speech, we are prepared to consider favourably a political framework that offers substantial regional autonomy and self-government in our homeland on the basis of our right to internal self-determination.” For detail see, Ashok K Behuria, (2006), “Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Seeking A Transformative Way Out,” Strategic Analyses, New Delhi, Vol. 30, No.1, January-March, pp. 93-121.
founded on the principles of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking people, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka. It articulated a possible post conflict state (i.e., separation) and the minimalist position of the Sinhalese political class (i.e., devolution). The two sides could not sustain this common ground for long, however, negotiations were suspended in April 2003, after the LTTE withdrew from the talks on the grounds that the government was not committed to fully implement decisions made previously at the negotiation table.

Recognizing India's importance for permanent peace, the Sri Lanka government and the Norwegian facilitators have taken India into confidence while engaging the LTTE in negotiations. They periodically briefed the Indian leaders about the outcome of several rounds of talks and sought their advice on the conduct of the peace process. This was advantageous to both India and Sri Lanka. India was assured that nothing is done behind its back to undermine its interests and due recognition was given to its regional power status. For the Sri Lankan government, its constant touch with India was to indicate the Latter's continued interest in the conflict. By keeping the 'India factor' alive in the ethnic conflict, the Sri Lankan government wanted to moderate, as far as possible, the LTTE's ruthless behaviour and tough negotiating position.

India has never openly opposed the LTTE's demand for an interim civil administration in the North-east Province. Nor did it openly disapprove or criticize the LTTE recent proposal for a full fledged Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA). India has taken a stand that any, "Interim arrangement should be an integral part of the final settlement." India expected that both adversaries the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE adopted a reasonable stand on the issue of interim administration for northeast.

In August, 2005, the assassination of Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadigamar, reignited the conflict. For the next two years, both the government and the LTTE repeatedly violated the cease-fire agreement.

87 See the official document on India Sri Lanka Relations, http://www.meaindia.nic.in.
Ultimately peace talks broke down and the Sri Lankan government withdrew from the truce, prompting Norway to pull out of the country.

In November 2005, national elections, anti-LTTE hardliner Mahinda Rajapakse of SLFP was elected President with the support of two staunchly anti-LTTE political parties JVP and JHU (Jathika Hela Urmaya) who demanded a military solution to the ethnic conflict. Muslim parliamentarians also took stand with this alliance against the LTTE. In 2006, the government launched military campaign to root out the LTTE. The Sri Lankan army and paramilitary forces have driven the LTTE out of the East by exploiting the defection of Karuna. The governing coalition formed a partnership with the pro-government splinter group of the LTTE, Tamil Makkal Vidutnalai Pulikoel (TMVP), and installed the leader of that party as chief Minister of the newly created eastern provincial council after May 2008 elections.

After capturing the East, the government security forces and the LTTE both took on each other with renewed determination. The Sri Lankan Army has made deep inroads into LTTE strongholds in Mannar and Wanni in the North and captured Killinochi. The sea and Air Tigers too have suffered setbacks. Sri Lankan armed forces have ultimately defeated the LTTE and freed the nation from three decades of terror. The end of military conflict with the LTTE has brought Sri Lanka to a major turning point in its history with the death of LTTE Chief Velupillai Prabakaran, the militant campaign for a Tamil State in Sri Lanka seems to have come to an end. At this critical Juncture, the country can move forward from nearly three decades of civil war.

Indian government had quietly supported Mahinda Rajapaksa’s government war against the LTTE throughout the last three years. At the same time, Indian government was constrained by the widespread popular opposition to the Sri Lankan war, particularly in Tamil Nadu. However, that did not stop centre government from helping to train Sri Lankan military

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89 Army Chief lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka Said in an address over national television. 20 May, 2009.
personnel, suppling radar equipment with technicians to track the LTTE’s light aircraft and providing intelligence to assist in the sinking of the LTTE’s supply ships. The nearly three-decades ethnic conflict has come to an end in May 2009.

In the post-war period, the need for a national reconciliation through political settlement of ethnic issues has been reiterated by India at the highest political level. India expects a meaningful devolution building upon the 13th Amendment of the Sri Lankan Constitution to create the necessary condition for lasting political settlement, which is acceptable to all the communities within the framework of a united Sri Lanka and which is consistent with democracy, pluralism and respect for human rights.\footnote{High Commission of India (2010), Colombo, Brief on India-Sri Lanka Relations, March, accessed on 14 August, 2010.} India faces the major task of making special efforts to persuade the President Mahinda Rajapakasa of Sri Lanka to improve the lots of the Tamils and to persuade the Tamils to talk to and to cooperate with the President Mahinda Rajapaksa towards that end.\footnote{R. Swaminathan, “Refining India’s Policy in Post-war Sri Lanka,” http://www.southasiananalysis.org/5Cpaper3762.html, accessed on 17 September, 2010.}

India has welcomed, as an important step the decision of the Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakasa Government to constitute a Lesson Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) on 15th May 2010. The Commission which has eight reputed representatives from the Sinhala and Tamil communities is to go into the events of the period, 21st February, 2002 and 19th May, 2009. The commission is aimed at ensuring that the situation that existed till the virtual decimation of the LTTE should not be there again.\footnote{B. Muralidhar Reddy (2010), “A Year After,” Frontline, Chennai, Vol. 27, No. 12, 5-18 June, p. 118.} The commission has to submit its report with in six months. In the post-war period, India supported a Sri Lankan resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) that endorsed the Sri Lankan government war.\footnote{The resolution which was adopted was aimed at countering a move by European powers, backed by US, for an investigation into human rights violations and war crimes in Sri Lanka.}

In the post-LTTE era, with successful holding of both Presidential election in January 2010 and Parliamentary election in April 2010, with the
realisation that negotiated settlement in the sprit of understanding and mutual accommodation is the only path to durable peace and genuine political settlement to the ethnic problem. The time has come to address all outstanding issues in a spirit of understanding and mutual accommodation. The ‘Four Ds’ strategy-Demilitarisation, Development, Democratisation and Development in that order of priority has been reiterated by Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa. S. D. Muni opines that the crying need for Sri Lanka is to resolve the ethnic issue politically and constitutionally.

There is a consensus within and outside Sri Lanka that with the LTTE out of the way, a golden opportunity has presented itself before the government to work towards a just, honourable and durable political settlement of the ethnic conflict. The government has promised a political package to address the grievances of the Tamil community. President Mahinda Rajapakse also noted at the victory rally in Colombo on June 3, “The war is over. Now is the time to win the hearts and minds of Tamils”. India’s constant refrain, over the years has been that Sri Lanka should come up with a political solution, including devolution of powers to the minorities to solve the ethnic conflict. India can now play very positive and meaningful role in Sri Lanka and ensure that ethnic minorities have a say in the Sri Lanka’s political future.

To conclude, Indian response over ethnic conflict gained utmost importance in the relation between the two countries. India always supported the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka but its legitimate responses have often been construed as interference in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka. Internationalisation of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka which led to the involvement of the external powers was a reason of concern for India from its security point of view. Indian Government also could not overlook the killing of innocent Tamils which was a major concern from the sentimental viewpoint of

98 Bharti Chibber, op.cit. p. 27.
Tamil Nadu. The government of India had been, right from the beginning, interested in a negotiated political solution to this ethnic conflict, and it had been urging the Sri Lankan government to arrive at such a solution. India did not want a separate state to emerge in Sri Lanka, as it could have fuelled a separatist movement in Tamil Nadu. India also did not want the foreign personnel and equipment in and around Sri Lanka which would have jeopardized India’s geo-security. Indian government sent IPKF under the agreement which made sincere efforts to bring down the separatist forces but IPKF were withdrawn without fulfilling its mission. Since 1991, India has adopted a new pragmatic policy of non-intervention in ethnic conflict. At the core, it is a reiteration of the Indian government’s commitment to protect Sri Lanka’s unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity. While refusing to play any direct role in the conflict, India’s consistent position has been in favour of, “a politically negotiated settlement acceptable to all sections of Sri Lankan society within the framework of an undivided Sri-Lanka and consistent with democracy, pluralism and respect for human rights.” Indian government wants government of Sri Lanka, “to put forward a credible devolution package at the earliest.”