CHAPTER-V
INDIA-SRI LANKA’S CHANGING POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP:
INFLUENCE OF TAMIL NADU POLITICS

India-Sri Lanka enjoys excellent bilateral relations, sustained by geographical proximity, historical and cultural affinities and frequent high level political interactions. From 1987 to 1990, Indian Government and Indian Peace Keeping Force involvement in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka proved disastrous. It was only in 1990 after the withdrawal of IPKF from Sri Lanka, which paved the way for normalisation of relations between India and Sri Lanka.\(^1\) In the post 1990 phase, the sharply improving economic co-operation between the two countries has its roots in the maturing political relationship. India’s clear, sincere and abiding commitment to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and its supports for a peaceful, negotiated settlement for the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis that put animosity behind and sowed the seeds for the process of eliminating all differences in the political relations between the two countries.\(^2\) India’s pragmatic policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka’s commitment towards India’s security concern created a credible atmosphere and consequently brought a new era of relations between the two countries. The relationship can best be described as having matured over to a deep and abiding friendship.

In the post 1990 period, significant and definite changes have taken place in India-Sri Lanka relations. The nature and pattern of relations were completely different. The comprehensive improvement in relations can be assessed both in qualitative and quantitative terms. The ending of mutual misperception between governments of both the countries and the increase in

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mutual understanding has brought about this desired change. High level meetings between leaders and senior officials are taking place signifying the importance and seriousness attributed to bilateral relations. 3 The two governments were in regular interaction so that actions of others could not be misunderstood. 4 The main task of the government of both the countries was to maintain the same pattern of relations by providing a continuity in cooperation and strengthening their mutual understanding in order to take their relations to the level of excellence.

India-Sri Lanka relations in the post 1990 period have undergone a contextual change in tandem with changes in India’s foreign policy perceptions. After the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the US as the sole super power, India’s foreign policy perceptions have also changed. In keeping with the changing global economic and trade scenario, India’s strategic priorities in Indian Ocean region had also undergone a change during the last two decades. India’s national security perceptions have now been enlarged to include economic security, free trade and commerce, energy security, and social security of the population in addition to territorial integrity. Relations with the U.S. have become an important component of India’s strategic linkages to globally safeguard its interests. The Indo-US civil nuclear agreement and the growing strategic convergence between the two countries are part of the changes taking place that would have a direct consequence in the region. 5

There is an increasing Chinese presence in South Asia. China has also become a valuable partner of Sri Lanka in the pursuit of its military option. China has partly filled the vacuum created by India’s reluctance to actively participate in Sri Lanka’s war effort. While India had been constrained due to political compulsions from supplying the weapons, Sri Lanka needed, China filled in the gap with liberal supply of a wide variety of armaments. 6 Timely

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3 Padma Murthy, op. cit., p.1414.
4 Ibid., p. 1423.
help rendered during the war has enabled China to gain a lot of strategic space and credibility in Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{7}

The US has also been an active player in Sri Lanka, both in promoting the peace process in 2002 and later in supporting Sri Lanka’s war effort. However, on issues relating to Sri Lanka, the US has been maintaining close contact with India. It was evident that the US realises that India has a unique geographic and strategic advantage in Sri Lanka; and the Indo-US relationship is likely to be strengthened to counter-balance the increasing Chinese influence in the South Asian region.\textsuperscript{8}

The end of ‘Eelam’ war has opened a new chapter in India-Sri Lanka relations. India need not to worry about the presence of the third navy (Sea Tigers), Air Force (Air Tigers) and suicide cadres in the Indian Ocean. But the close relationship of Sri Lanka with China and Pakistan has increased strategic concern in India.\textsuperscript{9} India will have to safeguard its interests particularly in the Indian Ocean region. The sea-lanes of Indian Ocean have become vital for India’s expanding global trade. They carry fossil fuels so vital for India’s ever increasing energy needs.

The changes in global fiscal, economic and trading relationships and the emergence of Islamic terrorism as a major international threat have also brought about a number of changes in international relations. India-Sri Lanka relations also developed in keeping with these changes at the forefront.\textsuperscript{10}

India’s shift in relationship with Sri Lanka has to be understood in this broad strategic context, rather than in the background of its historical baggage. India’s Sri Lanka relations are now broad based with economic agenda as a priority followed by strategic considerations. India’s strategic interest in Sri Lanka has been enlarged to protect and project India’s strategic and economic interests by building strong bonds with Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka

\textsuperscript{7} The Chinese are constructing a commercial port complex in Hambantota in the south and thus their presence in Sri Lanka is likely to be firmed in. In the coming years, Chinese influence in Sri Lanka can be expected not only to increase but become more assertive. Col. R. Hariharn (2009), “Revisiting India’s Sri Lanka Policy Options,” \textit{Dialogue}, Vol.10, No. 5, July-September, \url{www.asthabharti.org}

\textsuperscript{8} Col. R. Hariharn, \textit{op. cit.}


was the first country with which India signed a Free Trade Agreement; the trade between the two countries is expected to grow up to $4 billion by the year 2010.\textsuperscript{11} There is greater appreciation between the two countries of each other's problems and perceptions.

Inevitably, the changes in India's strategic perception were reflected in its approach to Sri Lanka's war against the LTTE, particular after the failure of the peace process 2002.\textsuperscript{12} Its role had been limited as an advisor and counsellor not only to Sri Lanka but to the four Co-chairs—the European Union, Japan, Norway and the US who promoted the peace process. India scrupulously kept out of Sri Lanka's war with the LTTE despite strong internal political pressure from coalition partners in Tamil Nadu. India's agenda for Sri Lanka had mainly focused on strategic security cooperation and building of trade linkages.\textsuperscript{13}

India's changing foreign policy perceptions and India's earlier experience from 1983-1990 has changed its policy towards Sri Lanka. India's new pragmatic policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs has contributed to remove the cultivated fear complex of Sri Lanka. The leadership and the people of 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 Sri Lanka's security.\textsuperscript{14} 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 from J. R. Jayawardene of the United National Party to Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratuna of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party after 17 years) but also India's policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka. Politically, both the countries have a common interest in keeping the South Asian region free from conflict.\textsuperscript{15}

India's insistence on a political process to achieve peace has clearly rejected war. India strongly prefers a home-grown solution to the conflict,

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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.  

The above mentioned policy has been pursued by different governments in India in the post 1990 period. Following the General Elections in India, the Congress party led by Rajiv Gandhi was replaced in New Delhi by the National Front Government headed by Vishwanath Pratap Singh. V.P. Singh declared his Sri Lankan policy by saying,

"In the first place, it was a mistake to have sent our troops there. The whole affair had started on a wrong note. Our position was clear: we favour a phased withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka."  

V. P. Singh Government’s policy towards Sri Lanka became clear when the External Affairs Minister I.K. Gujral gave the statement that, India no longer wanted to intervene in Sri Lanka militarily. The Sri Lankan government should deal with its Tamil problem as an internal affair of Sri Lanka in which India would not take any interest. India would withdraw IPKF before 24th March 1990. He also said that the Indian Territory would not be allowed for subversive activities against Sri Lanka under any circumstances. I. K. Gujral also said,

"India had always favoured a negotiated political solution to Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict. An adequate package of devolution had to be vigorously implemented and the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 provided a good basis."
The V. P. Singh government was succeeded by the Chandrashekhar government. Its tenure was short and by February-March 1991 it was clear that India would be going in for another general election. During the rule of V.P. Singh and later that of Chandrashekhar, India-Sri Lanka relations had been of low key nature. After the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi on 21st May 1991, the entire Indian perspective on the LTTE changed. On 14th May 1992, the LTTE was formally banned in India.

In the General elections of 1991, the Congress Party came back to power, and P. V. Narasimha Rao became the Prime Minister of India. After assuming power Rao declared his Sri Lankan policy. He said that, India would not desire to take any active part in resolving the problems of Sri Lanka. These problems would have to be solved by Sri Lankans themselves, regardless of whether they are Sinhalese or Tamils. At the bilateral level, India showed more interest in developing of framework for a working relationship with Sri Lanka, rather than identifying itself with Sri Lankan Tamil cause.

The government of India and the government of Tamil Nadu would ensure to the extent possible, that the LTTE did not have base or sanctuaries in India. India remained opposed to any secessionist or terrorist group operating from its territory against any of its neighbours. An agreement was signed between India and Sri Lanka in July 1991 to establish an Indo-Sri Lanka Joint Commission. Its sub commissions included those on trade, investment and finance, science and technology. President Premadasa visited India in October 1992 and discussed the bilateral relations.

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga with the support of other political parties formed a coalition government and became the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. She attempted to resolve the ethnic conflict through peaceful

20 The ban was imposed on 14 May 1992 u/s 3(1), Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (37 of 1967), on the ground that the LTTE was engaged in activities in Tamil Nadu that threatened the territorial integrity of India. See Ministry of Home Affairs notification date May 14, 1992 (F. No. 1-11034/57/92-IS Di (B), http://www.india-today.com/jain/tvol 5/chap 28.html, accessed on 19 April, 2009.
21 Farzana Begum, op. cit., p. 65.
22 J. N. Dixit, op. cit., p. 298.
23 Avtar Singh Bhasin, op. cit., p. 263.
24 President Premadasa was assassinated, by LTTE in May 1, 1993. ‘Rajiv Gandhi had paid with his life for distrusting the LTTE’ Premadasa paid with his life for trusting it too much.
means and involved in direct talks with LTTE. After being elected, President Chandrika Kumaratunga paid a significant visit to India in March 1995 and laid the foundation for close relations with India. President Chandrika Kumaratunga again visited India in May 1995 for the SAARC Summit.25

The Narsimha Rao government lost power in 1996 and H.D. Deve Gowda became the new Prime Minister of India. I. K. Gujral once again assumed the office of External Affairs Minister. President Kumaratunga sent her Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar to India on a goodwill visit in 1996. India and Sri Lanka focused their attention on economic cooperation. Later on, I. K. Gujral became the Prime Minister in late 1997. He clearly understood the importance of maintaining friendly relations with the neighbours. He introduced ‘Gujral Doctrine’.26

After the midterm elections in 1998, Bhartiya Janta Party along with its alliance (National Democratic Alliance) came into power at the Centre. Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the new Prime Minister of India, the Sri Lankan representative was among the first to reach India. India reassured that it would respect the sovereignty and integrity of Sri Lanka and it had no intention to intervene in its internal affairs.27

The fourth session of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Commission took place in New Delhi on 18th December, 1998. The Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Sri Lanka to attend the 10th SAARC Summit. He said that India would be willing to conclude bilateral South Asian Free Trade Agreements with the member countries. By the end of December 1998, President Kumaratunga’s visit to India resulted in the conclusion of the historic Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement. The Sri Lankan President said,

26 The Gujral Doctrine is a set of five principles to guide the conduct of foreign relations with India’s immediate neighbours. These principles are: 1. With neighbours like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, India does not ask for reciprocity, but give and accommodates what it can in good faith and trust. 2. No South Asian country should allow its territory to be used against the interest of another country of the region. 3. No country should interfere in the internal affairs of another. 4. All South Asian Country must respect each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. 5. They should settle all their disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiations.
The agreement would not only cement close relations between India and Sri Lanka but also serve as a pacemaker for regional cooperation in South Asia.”

In May 2000, when the conflict intensified between the LTTE and the security forces over Elephant Pass and refugees started streaming into India, the Indian government approached the issue cautiously. When Sri Lanka requested for troops or arms after the Elephant Pass fell to the LTTE on April 2000 and the security forces were trapped in Jaffna, India declined to oblige.

In 2001 Parliamentary election, Sri Lanka’s main opposition party UNP won the majority and Ranil Wickremesinghe became the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. He visited India in 24th December 2001. He not only obtained New Delhi’s blessings to any peace initiative launched through the good offices of Norway but also asked Norway to make sure that New Delhi be kept in the picture. The warm relations between the two countries have continued ever since, and Sri Lanka is determined to forge closer ties with India. Ranil Wickremesinghe’s concept of ties between the two countries extended to the extent to partner each other in building a bridge, across, the Palk-Strait. In February 2002, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran signed a Ceasefire Agreement and a MoU to take the peace process forward, India welcomed this Agreement.

Norway brokered ceasefire agreement between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, which went into effect from 23rd February, 2002. After six rounds of talks, negotiations were suspended in April 2003. India has supported the Norwegian facilitation of the peace process in Sri Lanka since 2002, departing from its traditional and antagonistic policy against the involvement of external powers in South Asia. The assassination of Sri

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29 Though in line with India’s new policy which is characterised by its non-involvement in the conflict but supportive of the peace settlement of the ethnic question, Indian government does not want a situation to arise in Sri Lanka that could perceptible political situation in Tamil Nadu. For detail See John Cherian, “India’s policy dilemma,” [http://www.frontlineonnet.com/f11710/17100140.htm](http://www.frontlineonnet.com/f11710/17100140.htm), accessed on 25 December, 2009.


31 S. Mutthiah (2003), *The Indo-Lankans: Their 200 Years Saga*, Indian Heritage Foundation, Colombo, p. 304.
Lankan Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadigamar, reignited the conflict. Ultimately, peace talks broke down and the Sri Lankan government withdrew from the truce, prompting Norway to pull out from the country as a monitor.

In November 2005 national elections, Mahinda Rajapakse of SLFP was elected president. Like the previous governments, the administration of President Mahinda Rajapaksa devoted the highest priority to India-Sri Lanka relationship and the President visited India on four occasions, since assuming office in November 2005. The President was of the view that the India-Sri Lanka Agreement of 29th July 1987 provided the best prospects for a solution.

When the war was started in January 2006 and the Sri Lankan government began to resort to savage bombing of the Tamil areas in the northern part of Sri Lanka, the political parties in Tamil Nadu expressed deep concern. In August 2006 when news about the air attack on Sencholai orphanage and also a school meant for the internally displaced children reached Tamil Nadu, there was righteous indignation. Almost all political parties came together and the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly passed a unanimous resolution. The resolution characterized the air attack as “barbaric, uncivilized and inhuman” The resolution also requested New Delhi to step up pressure on Colombo to cease fire immediately and try to arrive at a negotiated settlement.

In 2006, Sri Lankan government launched a military campaign to root out LTTE. The Sri Lankan army and paramilitary forces had driven the LTTE out of the East by exploiting the defection of Karuna. The governing coalition formed a partnership with the pro-government splinter of the LTTE, Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikoel (TMVP), and installed the leader of that party as a Chief Minister of the newly created Eastern Provincial Council after May 2008 elections.

33 Mahinda Rajapakse anti LTTE hardliner elected President with the support of two staunch anti-LTTE Political parties JVP and JHU who demanded a military solution to the ethnic conflict.
35 Ashok Mehta, op. cit., p.19.
After capturing the East, security forces and the LTTE take on each other with renewed determination. The Sri Lankan Army has made deep in roads into LTTE strongholds in Mannar and Wanni in the North and captured Kilinochi. The Sea and Air Tigers too have suffered setbacks. After a 30 month long military campaign, Sri Lankan armed forces defeated the LTTE and freed the nation from three decades of terror in May 2009. 80,000 people were officially listed as killed during the war. 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.

In the post-war period, it was time for India and Sri Lanka to start a new chapter with renewed vigor and vitality in rigorous co-operation in various fields. In this period, both countries agreed that with the end of military operation in the island country, the time was opportune to focus attention on issues of relief, rehabilitation, resettlement and reconciliation, including a permanent political solution.

It was imperative that India adopts a pro-active policy towards Sri Lanka, in order to not only save the Tamils but also for its own enlarged security reasons. Economy aid could be a big trump card in India’s foreign policy. India’s Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has congratulated the President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa on his re-election as President on 26th January, 2010. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh reiterated,

“We have time tested ties of friendship and co-operation. I look forward to working closely with you to further strength our close and multidimensional bilateral relations in the coming years.”

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh noted on 9th June, 2010 in his reply to the debate on the motion of thanks to the President’s address to the joint session of Parliament, that the Tamils’ problem was much larger than the

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36 Army Chief lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka Said in an address over national television.
37 Ashok Mehta, op. cit., p. 22.
38 Bharti Chibber, op. cit. p. 27.
LTTE and hoped the Sri Lanka Government would show imagination and courage in meeting the legitimate concerns and aspirations of the Tamil people. Prime Minister told parliament that India has made it known that it has no intention of instructing Colombo on the political front.\(^\text{40}\)

Affirming a strong relationship with India, Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa stated during interview to *The Hindu* N. Ram, editor in chief at ‘Temple Tree’ in Colombo on June 30, 2009,

“All countries are friends of Sri Lanka but India is Sri Lanka’s relation (relative).”\(^\text{41}\)

C. Romesh Jayasinghe, Sri Lanka’s High Commissioner to India speaking at a seminar on “Post Conflict Sri Lanka and India’s Role,” organized by the Observer Research Foundation on 7th July, 2009 at Chennai, said, “India’s bilateral relationship with Sri Lanka could be strengthened even further with the end to the military conflict.”\(^\text{42}\)

Indian Foreign Secretary, Nirupama Rao after inaugurating the Sri Lanka-India Centre for English Language Training in Peradeniya on 7th March, 2010 stated, India and Sri Lanka are “sister countries,” which shared a model, unique, and time-tested relationship.\(^\text{43}\) In the post LTTE-era, India wants close relations with Sri Lanka to counter the growing influence of China and open up opportunities for Indian business.\(^\text{44}\)

To conclude this part, in the post 1990 phase leadership in both the countries gave a new life and showed interest in India-Sri Lanka relations. V. P. Singh and I. K. Gujral decided on the withdrawls of the IPKF. P. V. Narasimha Rao reoriented India’s Sri Lanka policy from an active involvement to non-intervention in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka with a deep sense of

\(^\text{40}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{44}\) China was a major supplier of arms, ammunition and other military equipment during the war. In return, China obtained economic and strategic concessions, including an exclusive special economic zone and the contracts to build a large port at Hambantota.
practicality, tacking into account the ground realities of the political situation in Sri Lanka. Chaarika Kumaratunge perceived India as an ally rather than an enemy. Leadership in both the countries concentrated on reviving areas of common interest, which has been ignored so far due to ethnic conflict. ‘Gujral Doctrine of India Foreign Policy’, which aimed at strengthening relations with neighbouring countries played a significant role in improving the relations between two countries. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Chandrika Kumaratunge signed the historic ISLFTA. Ranil Wickremesinghe which was known for its west-oriented policy, supported close relations with India was an example of mature relations between India and Sri Lanka. The relations have become stronger during the tenure of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Mahinda Rajapakse. The maturity of relations between both the countries is evident from Sri Lanka’s strong support to India for permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council.

INFLUENCE OF TAMIL NADU POLITICS ON INDIA-SRI LANKA RELATIONS

Social and cultural intermeshing has played a critical and persistent role in India's relations with its neighbors. The frequent reference to the Tamil Nadu influence in India-Sri Lanka relations was in fact a reference to the strong ethnic, socio-cultural, linguistic and religious constituency of the Sri Lankan Tamils in India. Ethnic affinity between the Tamils of Tamil Nadu and the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka was an important factor which influenced the bilateral relation between India and Sri Lanka. However, the activation of such social constituencies was perceived in India as different and far less threatening in comparison to that perceived in the neighboring country, precisely because of India's size and dimensions.

The ethnic and political consciousness of the Sri Lankan Tamils had always been influenced by developments across the Palk Strait. This applied to politics as well as to culture. The main events or conflicts in India, both in the north and the south, had their impact on the Tamil community. The

46 S. D. Muni, op. cit., p. 22.
Source: S. Muthiah (2003), The Indo-Lankan: Their 200 Year Saga, Indian Heritage Foundation, Colombo, p. 35.
THE MAP SHOWING TAMIL POPULATION IN INDIA AND SRI LANKA

Source: www.mapsofworld.com
founding of the Arya Samaj, the changes within the Hindu community brought out by the Ramakrishna Mission; the emergence of the Indian National Congress; the teachings of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Mahadev Govind Ranade, and Aurobindo; the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi; the Non-Cooperation and Satyagraha movements, all of them had their impact on the Tamil community. Equally relevant, the social and political movements in Madras Presidency- the emergence of Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker and his teachings, the self respect movement, the formation of the Dravida Kazhagam and later the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam also contributed to the rise of the political consciousness of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka.47

In India, the demand for a separate state for the Tamilians died a natural death; today the Dravidian parties not only rule in Tamil Nadu, they also share power in the union government. In Sri Lanka, on the other hand, the consensual politics has given way to conflictual politics. The dynamic changes in the Indian political system illustrate the success of the nation building experiment. On the other hand, a close study of the developments in Sri Lanka illustrates the perils of majoritarian democracy. A political system which does not take into consideration the aspirations and sensitivities of minority groups is bound to face serious challenges.48

Most of the Tamils in Sri Lanka were of South Indian origin especially from Tamil Nadu. Hence a special emotional attachment was always there between the Tamil residents of Tamil Nadu and the Tamils of Northern-Eastern province and Indian Tamils of central hills. This was the reason why any incident against Tamils in Sri Lanka provoked a sharp reaction in Tamil Nadu.49 Tamil Nadu’s political reactions demonstrate the close relevance to India-Sri Lanka relations of the internal politics in Sri Lanka.50 Whenever the Sri Lankan Tamils or LTTE has been militarily cornered, the Tamil politicians of India, prompted by the Sri Lankan Tamils, have raised the issue of the security of Tamil people and pressured Indian government to prevail over

48 Ibid.
49 Fargana Begum, op. cit., pp.158-159.
50 Shelton U. Kodikara (1992), Foreign Policy of Sri Lanka: A Third World Perspective Delhi, Chankaya Publication, p. 68.
When the Sri Lankan Tamil leaders demanded a separate state, they started to internationalise their cause and this attempt sought the support of political parties in Tamil Nadu. Supporting Sri Lankan Tamils had become an important factor in Tamil Nadu’s internal politics in order to woo voters.\(^5^2\)

It was beyond doubt that the ethnic political parties of Tamil Nadu specifically use Sri Lanka ethnic crisis for mobilising support to exert pressure on the centre Government to make them evolve a suitable policy in support of the cause of the Tamils. In the process of mobilising the people to help the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the ethnic parties gained support for their ethnic activities in Indian polity. Moreover, the other political parties, national and regional, were also extending their support to the cause of Tamils in Sri Lanka. Generally the support extended by the political parties to the cause of Tamils, has not been consistent over time. It has varied from time to time depending upon the nature and intensity of the conflict.

The influence of Tamil Nadu politics can be understood only if we keep in mind the competitive politics particularly among the two Dravidian parties, namely the DMK and the AIADMK. Equally relevant were the Congress party’s attempts to rebuild itself in Tamil Nadu by lending support to the Sri Lankan Tamil cause. In the game of one upmanship and competitive mudslinging, rhetoric was more important than reality.

Historically, despite their internal differences and mutual hatred for each other, the Dravidan parties DMK\(^5^3\) and AIADMK had taken a nearly common stand on the Sri Lanka Tamilian issue. Tamil Nadu political Parties keep making subtle shifts in their stand according to the changing condition in Sri Lanka. The attitude of the AIADMK and DMK was determined and still being determined by the imperatives of the democratic politics here. The other factors that had played a decisive role was the distance or otherwise of a particular party from the position of power at Tamil Nadu and in the centre.

S. D. Muni was of the view that the Sinhalese have a suspicious attitude towards the Tamils. They think that the Tamils still have strong

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53 AIADMK was formed in 1972 by a split from DMK.
emotional links with the 65 million Tamils just across the Palk-Strait in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.\textsuperscript{54} This ethnic linkage has caused a fear complex in the minds of the Sinhalese. As a result, the majority Sinhalese community has a feeling of minority complex. The Sinhalese have always maintained that Tamil Nadu was invariably the villain in the deterioration of India-Sri Lanka relations in the post independence period. K M De Silva, the well known Sri Lankan historian, has written:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The increasingly turbulent politics in Jaffna peninsula began to be treated as an integral part of the internal politics of Tamil Nadu. The DMK, effectively checked from pursuing its separatist goal in India, took vicarious pleasure in giving encouragement and support to separatist tendencies among the Tamils of Sri Lanka}. De Silva added, \textit{``Once a separatist movement emerged among the Tamils in Sri Lanka, it was fostered, nurtured a protected by Tamil Nadu''}.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

J. N. Dixit, former Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka while speaking in the United Services Institute, New Delhi on 10th March 1989, also endorsed the view, and highlighted the problems associated with the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnicity and its repercussions on Tamil Nadu as important determinants in India’s Sri Lankan policy. To quote Dixit:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The first voice of secessionism in the Indian Republic was raised in Tamil Nadu in the mid-sixties. This was exactly the same principle of Tamil ethnicity, Tamil language. So in a manner, interest in Sri Lanka, Tamil aspirations in Sri Lanka was based on maintaining our own unity, our own integrity, our own identity, in the manner in which we have been trying to build our society”}.
\end{quote}


The Congress party has ruled Tamil Nadu from 1952 to 1967. During this period the Indian Tamils problem passed through various stages and in every stage the political parties as well as the government of Tamil Nadu expressed their concern towards the welfare of the Indian Tamils to the centre government and to the outside World. When Citizenship Act of 1948\(^5\) was passed by the Sri Lankan Government, the feeling of Tamil Nadu over the Act was conveyed to the centre through a motion passed by the representatives of various political parties in the State Assembly. The motion stated that:

*The Legislative Assembly recommends to the Government to convey to the Honourable Prime Minister of India its apprehension at the recent enactment of the Ceylon citizenship and Immigrants and Emigrants Act before the question of citizenship rights for Indian in Ceylon had been settled.*\(^5\)

During the visit of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to Sri Lanka in 1949, once again a resolution was passed in the Madras Legislative Assembly. It urged the Prime Minister of India “to arrange to discuss with the Ceylon Government, the outstanding Indo-Ceylon issues, and if possible to arrange for a deputation of the representatives of the Madras government to be present in the discussions to assist the Honourable Prime Minister.”\(^5\)

These resolutions indicated the anxiety of the state government in finding a solution to the citizenship problem of Indian Tamils. At the same time, the Tamil Nadu state government indirectly reflected its desire to participate or at least assist the centre in its dealings with the Indian Tamils problem. During the negotiations with the Sri Lankan Premier, Jawahar Lal

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\(^5\) The Citizenship Act of 1948 was very much restrictive in nature and limited the chances of Indian Tamils to secure citizenship. A person could not by this Act, acquire Sri Lankan citizenship by virtue of his birth in Sri Lanka. Instead, he had to prove his family’s connection with the island for at least two generations. For detail see appendix-I.


\(^5\) G. Palanithurai and K. Mohinasundaram. op. cit., p. 28.
Nehru maintained a stand which, considerably coincided with the suggestions of the state assembly. 59

During the language riots in Sri Lanka, Tamils were attacked by the Sinhalese and its repercussions were felt in the Tamil Nadu. The working Committee of the DMK in Tamil Nadu, issued statements to extend its sympathy to Ceylon Tamils and appealed to the political leaders of Ceylon to restore order and peace in the Island. The committee also condemned the indifference of the government of India in this issue and its failure to protect the Indian Tamil minorities in Ceylon. It called upon the government to shed its inaction and to take necessary interest and action in this matter.60

They also condemned the Tamil Nadu and the Central governments for their disregard towards the problems affecting the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Language riots and the Tamil refugee issues were raised in the Indian Parliament and Jawaharlal Nehru clarified that he did not essentially consider the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka as Indian nationals.61

The problem of the Indian Tamils was raised, by and large in the Madras Legislative Assembly as well as outside it by the opposition parties of Tamil Nadu. The DMK which was emerging as the vociferous opposition in Tamil Nadu in the late 1950 strongly expressed its views on the Tamils problem in Sri Lanka. This party projected itself as the custodian of the entire Tamil race living in other parts of the world.62

During this period the Congress party regarded the Indian Tamil Problem as a foreign policy matter under the purview of the centre and conveyed its concern to the centre because of opposition pressure. The interests of Tamil Nadu used to be ignored by the central government; the role of Tamil Nadu was peripheral in influencing India Sri Lanka relations. In fact on crucial issues, the interests of Tamil Nadu were sacrificed by central government in the name of good neighbourly relations. For example the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact, 1964 converted the people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka into merchandise and they were divided.

59 Ibid., p. 28.
60 Ibid., p. 32.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., p. 34.
In the 1967 General Elections, the DMK defeated the ruling Congress party and formed the government in Tamil Nadu. The victory of the DMK party created apprehensions in Sri Lanka since it projected its image as the champion of the Tamils cause all over the world. From its inception, the DMK party and later its breakaway group ‘Nam Tamizhar’ (we Tamils) strongly advocated secession from the Union government. The separate ‘Dravidanad’ demand of the DMK and the demand of Nam Tamizhar organisation to create a ‘Greater Tamil Nadu’ comprising not only the Tamil speaking part of South India, but also the Tamil speaking parts of Sri Lanka caused greater alarm and concern in Sri Lanka.

The emergence of DMK in South India adversely affected relations between India and Sri Lanka. M. Karunanidhi became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu in 1969 after the demise of C.N. Annadurai, the first DMK Chief Minister of the state. The DMK which evinced keen interest in the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka-as an opposition party-continued to show its interest on the issue after it became the ruling party.

When the supplementary agreement to the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact was signed in 1974 by Mrs Indira Gandhi and Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, it evoked criticism from the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister. His grievance was that the centre had not consulted the Tamil Nadu government before arriving at the settlement. Karunanidhi felt that the 75,000 persons agreed to be taken back by India with this agreement in addition to the 5,25,000 persons covered earlier in the 1964 Pact, would impose, a formidable burden on the state.

The second major issue where the interests of Tamil Nadu were not kept in mind by New Delhi was in the delimitation of the maritime boundary between India and Sri Lanka. The 1974 and the 1976 Agreements not only ceded the island of Kachchhativu, which was a part of the Zamindari of Raja of Ramnad to Sri Lanka, they also failed to uphold the traditional fishing rights of the Indian fishermen in those waters. The Tamil Nadu fishermen still...
continue to suffer because of the failure of New Delhi to uphold their interests. Hence, the main grievance of Chief Minister might have been the failure of the centre to consult the state government before concluding the supplementary pact. The DMK government was dismissed on 31st January 1976 and Tamil Nadu came under the President’s rule.67

The DMK during its tenure of office as the ruling party of Tamil Nadu, advocated the cause of the Indian Tamils as it did earlier while it was in opposition. The DMK demanded a share in the policy formulations regarding the Indian Tamils issue. Since the party projected its image as the champion of the Tamils cause, it even charged the opposition with not co-operating with the State Government in protecting the interests of the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Thus, the domestic politics in the state had its influence in the bilateral relations. The ethnic affinity among the Tamils had its bearing on the domestic politics of India. The State’s participation in the issues involving the Tamils of Sri Lanka was intensified whenever the Tamils were affected in the island. The various internal developments in Sri Lanka had spillover effect on Tamil Nadu’s attitude towards the Tamils problem and this in turn automatically affected the bilateral relations. 68

III

In the general elections of 1977, AIADMK, which is also an ethnic political party won a majority of seats in the Assembly and formed the government in Tamil Nadu. M.G. Ramachandran, became the Chief Minister. The DMK became the major opposition party in the Assembly. The era of coalition governments, which began in 1979 at the centre, brought about salutary changes. The regional partners began to make inputs into the making of foreign policy. What is more, the Central Government also began to influence the regional partners and brought about changes in their way of thinking.69

In August 1977, major communal violence broke out against the Tamils in Sri Lanka. The repercussions of the riots were felt in Tamil Nadu. The opposition party, DMK organised a one day strike on 24th August 1977 to

67 Ibid., p. 47.
68 Ibid., p. 48.
69 The Hindu (1977), Chennai, 23 July.
"condemn the attacks on the Tamils in Sri Lanka." In the Tamil Nadu Assembly, a resolution was unanimously adopted on 24th August 1977 to express the "rude shock" at the happenings in Sri Lanka.71

Morarji Desai, the Indian Prime Minister, initiated action, even before the resolution was passed in the Tamil Nadu Assembly. The Janata government at the centre did not allow the issue to affect the relations between India and Sri Lanka. Possibly its adherence to non-interference in the affairs of its neighbors and the state's mild response to the 1977 riots might have contributed to this type of response by the centre.72

In Sri Lanka, major communal violence broke out again in August 1981. M. G. Ramachandran, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, met the Indian Prime Minister on 18th August, 1981 to urge her to protect the Tamils by using her influence on the Sri Lankan Government. Indira Gandhi fully shared the concern of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.73

The centre's response to the demands of Tamil Nadu amply illustrates its delicate position. When the issue was discussed in the Parliament, the External Affairs Minister agreed that the happenings in Sri Lanka temporarily upset the bilateral relations but cautioned that it should not be allowed to permanently impair the relations between India and Sri Lanka.74

The pressure exerted by Tamil Nadu varied in accordance with the domestic situations in Sri Lanka and India. It should be noted that whenever there was a problem or crisis in Sri Lanka affecting the welfare of the Tamils, the political parties of Tamil Nadu generally raised their voice in support of them. At the same time, some of the political parties of Tamil Nadu tried to project their own image as the custodians of the affected Tamils in Sri Lanka. While voicing their concern in the Legislative Assembly along with other parties, the leaders of the various political parties, particularly of the DMK and the AIADMK tried their best to protect the interests of the Tamils.75

Following the July 1983 riots, Karunanidhi and Anbazhagan resigned the Legislative Assembly to protest against New Delhi's lukewarm response to

72. Ibid.
75. G. Palanithurai and K. Mohinasundaram. op. cit., p. 60.
the sufferings of the Sri Lankan Tamils. On 27th August 1983, the DMK passed a resolution, which stated that a “separate Tamil Eelam” shall be the only remedy and paramount solution”. The response of the DMK/AIADMK was motivated mainly by their desire to score debating points and one-upmanship. During 1983-1987, the debate centered round the question as to who was the greater champion of the Sri Lankan Tamil interests. Both began to view the Eelam campaign with an eye on the elections. The TULF was close to the central government, Amirtalingam tried to maintain good equations with both DMK and the AIADMK; the LTTE and its leader Prabhakaran became very close to MG Ramachandran; the TELO had the patronage of Karunanidhi; the PLOTE under Uma Maheshwaran had the blessings of Somasundram of the AIADMK; the EPRLF under Padmanabha, because of its leftist ideology, came close to the CPI and later the UCPI; only the miniscule EROS under Balakumar, kept a safe distance from all political forces. With the blessings of Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, the LTTE began to register an astounding growth; Prabhakaran adopted ruthless methods to annihilate political opponents and eventually emerged as the single most important factor in the Tamil areas.

The LTTE built its vast network in different parts of Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu was not only the sanctuary; it also became a safe haven from which the Eelam struggle derived its vocal and material support. Prabhakaran exploited to the fullest the contradictions in the Indian political scene-between the AIADMK and the DMK, between central and state government and between RAW and the IPKF. What is more, the efficient network which the LTTE painstakingly built in Tamil Nadu-comprising smugglers, fishermen, political activists, transport operators, business men and corrupt officials-provided support and backing to their war machine. The long coastline in Tamil Nadu, with innumerable fishing harbours, provided safe haven to the LTTE’s fast moving boats. An efficient communication system linking Jaffna with the outside world through Tamil Nadu was built up.

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
When the DMK came to power in Tamil Nadu in 1989, the party began to adopt a pro-Tiger stance. The decision taken by the government of Tamil Nadu to boycott the functions in connection with the return of the IPKF has to be seen as an attempt by the DMK to get closer to the Tigers. However, the LTTE continued to remain intransigent. The LTTE’s policy of flouting all canons of civilized behaviour became evident when in June 1990; the LTTE guerrillas murdered the EPRLF leader Padmanabha and his comrades in cold blood at Kodambakkam in Chennai. The contempt that the LTTE had for the DMK can be understood from the fact that on the day of Padmanabha’s assassination, Karunanidhi was pleading with his allies in the National Front in New Delhi to accord permission to the LTTE to bring the sick and the wounded to Tamil Nadu for medical treatment. Even after Padmanabha’s assassination, security in the State was not tightened and streamlined. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in the prime of his life was the culmination of the overt and covert Indian involvement of Sri Lanka and the equally despicable activities of the LTTE in Tamil Nadu. Among the accused in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, six of them had been registered as refugees in the state.

Jayalalitha’s attitude to the LTTE has undergone three phases. During MGR’s time, she was probably ambivalent, though on occasion she did speak well of them LTTE. After the IPKF began fighting the LTTE in Sri Lanka, for instance, she referred to the Tiger as “Young and idealistic”. After Karunanidhi came to power in 1989, however, her attitude began to change. Jayalalitha started charging him of being in league with the LTTE and allowing the organisation the run of the state. When Chander Shekhar became the Prime Minister, she was unwilling to outrightly condemn the Tigers during that period. And on occasion she even went as far as praising them. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi changed all that. It confirmed Jayalalitha’s fears that she herself was high up on the LTTE’s hit list. There could be no other way; she had to get the Tigers before they got her.

79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
Before the signing of Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 29 July 1987, both congress (I) and AIADMK had identical attitudes towards the Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka. But as the situations deteriorated in the face of Jayewardene government’s operation to fight and blockade in Jaffna, the AIADMK started drifting away from the Congress (I).

However, after the airdrop of relief supplies in Jaffna on 4 June 1987, the differences between Tamil Nadu and New Delhi seemed to disappear. Once the Accord was signed, both the Congress (I) and the AIADMK supported this action. Both of them perceived that it would strengthen their parties and simultaneously sideline the DMK, led by Karunanidhi, which was posing as the sole champion of the Sri Lankan Tamils. But when there was confrontation between the IPKF and the LTTE, the AIADMK was on the horns of a dilemma. While it was trying to defeat Karunanidhi’s designs to emerge as the saviour of the Sri Lanka Tamils, it did not want to irritate the centre by opposing the IPKF action. But ultimately this development led to drifting away of the AIADMK from the Congress (I).

The hardline group in the AIADMK, taking advantage of the absence of the Chief minister, M. G. Ramachandran, who was hospitalised in US, started issuing statements deploring the alleged killings of Tamils by the IPKF. Former agriculture minister and a deputy general secretary of the AIADMK, K. Kalimutha, came out with a scathing attack on the Indian government on 12 October 1987. Addressing a function at Kanahipulam, he said that it was rather cruel on the part of the Indian army to do a dirty job for Lankan president Jaywardene who was notorious for his hatred for Tamils. Kalimuthu also said that his party and its leaders had welcomed the accord in good faith and had hoped that it would bring peace and harmony. But the subsequent developments in Sri Lanka belied these hopes. What was now sought to be achieved was not peace and harmony, but only the silence of the graveyard.

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82 The Hindu, (1987), Madras, 5 August.
85 Ibid.,
However, at the national level, the AIADMK did not join the walkout on the Sri Lanka issue in Lok Sabha on 10th November 1987. But it did not lag behind the other opposition parties in condemning the government on the Sri Lankan Issue. The AIADMK leader Aladi Aruna charged the government with using the army to commit atrocities on the Tamil people of the Indian origin. He said that his party, an ally of the Congress (I), favoured the implementation of the accord but not at the gun-point. It was colonial to force the accord at a gun-point, he added.  

In the Rajya Sabha, Aladi Aruna went a step further and described the IPKF action against LTTE as “another Blue Star operation against our brothers.” He further added that the IPKF had turned almost to be a peace killing force and a subordinate of Sri Lankan government. 

The Congress (I) was perhaps assessing that Indo-Sri Lanka accord would strengthen the ties between the Congress and the AIADMK and would bring good results in ensuing assembly elections. But after the death of MGR both the Congress (I) and the AIADMK contested elections separately and lost the election. Thus although the main reason for the defeat of the Congress (I) and the AIADMK seems to have been the death of M. G. Ramachandran and the resultant factionalism, the accord did not have the desired positive impact on the fortunes of the two parties.

The assessment of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord by the Dravida Munetra Kazhagam (DMK) was entirely different form that of the Congress (I) and the AIADMK. From the very beginning, the DMK opposed the Accord tooth and nail. DMK evaluated the Accord as a betrayal of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Karunanidhi, the party president, said that the accord should be only that of a mediator. In his view, the results of the implementation of accord were disastrous, because in its implementation, the government of India acted in accordance with the wishes of the Sri Lankan government. When, the IPKF launched operations against the LTTE in order to disarm it, the DMK, assumed the role of LTTE’s defender. It may be recalled that the DMK had

86 Times of India (1987), New Delhi, 11 November.
87 India, Rajya Sabha Debates (1987), Vol. 143, No. 15, 17 August, Col. 279.
89 The Hindu, (1987), New Delhi, 14 October.
gone into a shell of silence on the Sri Lanka issue ever since it was humiliated by the LTTE. The LTTE had not only slaughtered the activists of TELO, a rival group known to be closer to the DMK, but it had even refused to collect its share of funds offered to it by the DMK, thus pouring salt at the injury. At the same time, the LTTE had accepted the funds that came from the AIADMK government. At that time the DMK had branded the LTTE as fascist.

When the Accord was signed, the DMK had completed its “U” turn by throwing its weight on the side of the LTTE. It has taken a stand against the government of India and the IPKF. When M. G. Ramachandran was in US for medical treatment, Karunanidhi calculated that in his absence, the AIADMK men would largely remain silent and he could then emerge as the champion of the Tamil cause. Here he was found to have had success.

The DMK strongly supported the LTTE demand for a separate state, but Karunanidhi felt that there could be an interim arrangement for establishing a government of Tamils through the merger of the northern and eastern provinces. He declared on 14 October 1987, that he was protesting because Tamil blood flowed in his veins and IPKF was destroying the blood ties with the LTTE. That is why DMK launched a massive protest campaign against the IPKF offensive. It also organised a mass twelve-hour token fast all over Tamil Nadu to decry the offensive by the IPKF against the LTTE.

The DMK president, M. Karunanidhi felt that Jaywardene was putting down the Tamil resistance movement with the help of the IPKF. He said the Sri Lanka problem would not be solved unless the Tamils were treated basically on humanitarian considerations. In the Rajya Sabha, the DMK member, Maran, spearheaded the assault on the government describing the “butchering” of people by IPKF as shocking and shameful. Accusing the government of trying to kill the LTTE leader, Prabhakaran, he alleged that even civilians were being killed. He urged the Prime Minster to order an immediate ceasefire.

The DMK wanted to sentimentalise the Sri Lanka issue and sought to make political capital out of the changed equations in Tamil Nadu. As we said earlier, before the accord, the DMK had a critical attitude towards the LTTE. After the accord, it changed its strategy from being the critic to defender of the LTTE. The rallies it organised to criticise the accord, were used by DMK to
arouse anti-centre feelings. When the election came, the DMK remained firm on its stand and was able to win election with thumping majority after a gap of 13 years.

The Dravid Kazhgam (DK), the parental body of the Dravidian parties, did not lag behind the DMK in condemning the Accord and the IPKF action. The Dravid Kazhgam vociferously took up the LTTE's cause to use it as a cover to hide its ideological and political weakness. The Dravid Kazhgam and its ally, the Tamil Nadu Kamraj Congress, spoke against the central government for retaliating against the LTTE. The two parties which have secret relationship with the LTTE held the IPKF responsible for the tragic developments. Veeramani, the general secretary of the Dravid Kazhgam, said that the IPKF which was deployed in Sri Lanka to safeguard lives of Tamils was acting against the Tamil interests. He alleged that the IPKF had accepted Jayewardene as its commander.

Their bias is reflected in their reaction to the death of 12 LTTE cadres who consumed cyanide. These parties glorified them while they were being brought from Palay in Jaffna peninsula to Colombo. But they did not utter a word of sympathy for Indian armymen who sacrificed their lives to bring peace to the neighbouring Sri Lanka. They spoke not a word on the atrocities committed by the LTTE against the fellow Tamils, Sinhala civilians, and the Muslim population.

The DMK, in the long years when it was in opposition, used to be severely critical of the politics and programs of the central government; more relevant from the regional perspective, the Party used to accuse the AIADMK government of sacrificing the interests of the Tamil brethren across the Palk Strait. After coming to power, in 1989, Karunanidhi wanted to prove his pro-Tamil credentials. When the IPKF returned from Sri Lanka, Karunanidhi did not have even the courtesy to receive them, but accused the Indian Army of committing “atrocities” against the Tamils.

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FADING INFLUENCE OF TAMIL NADU AFTER RAJIV GANDHI’S ASSASSINATION

After the IPKF withdrawal and assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE on 21st May 1991, alienated the popular support for Sri Lankan Tamils and militants in India, India declared LTTE to be an unlawful organisation and took serve action against its supporters.92 The sympathy and support that the Sri Lankan militants, refugees and ordinary civilians enjoyed evaporated immediately. The two Dravidian parties began to delink themselves from the LTTE. Chief Minisier Jayalalitha distanced herself from the LTTE and stepped up pressure on the central government and the LTTE was banned as a political organization. She also demanded that the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees should be sent back to the island and the process of repatriation of refugees commenced in January 1992.93 The media reported high handed methods adopted by the government of Tamil Nadu to send back the refugees. The Tiger network in Tamil Nadu was destroyed and many who extended their support to the LTTE were detained. Following the publication of the Jain Commission Report, the dislike of the Tamil cause further increased. The DMK and the AIADMK claimed innocence and began to accuse each other for extending support to the LTTE. The cumulative result was, except for the fringe elements of ardent LTTE supporters, the politicians in Tamil Nadu did not get actively involved in the political developments in Sri Lanka. As a result, the influence of Tamil Nadu in India’s Sri Lanka policy decreased.94

Equally, the policy of economic liberalisation and emergence of economic interests contributed to changing India’s perception of Sri Lanka. 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-

92 The ban was imposed on 14 May 1992 u/s 3(1), Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967(37 of 1967), on the ground that the LTTE was engaged in activities in Tamil Nadu that Threatened the territorial integrity of India. See Ministry of Home Affairs notification dated 14 May 1992 (F. No. 1-11034/57/92-IS DI (B), http://www.indiatoday.com/jain/4005/chap28.html, accessed on 19 April, 2009.
94 Ibid.
military role. Many Sri Lankans belonging to both the ruling coalition and the opposition want India to give up its hands off policy and play a more proactive role in order to ensure that the island’s national territorial integrity is maintained.95

RESURRENCE OF TAMIL NADU INFLUENCE

The signing of the ceasefire agreement in Sri Lanka on 22nd February 2002, led to the de-escalation of the conflict, which brought a welcome relief to the people in Tamil Nadu, Consequently, in line with the decline in the influx of refugees to India following the peace process, the influence of Sri Lanka in Tamil Nadu politics declined.96 However, renewed violence after the breakdown of the peace process in late 2003 changed the situation in north and east Sri Lanka and also in Tamil Nadu. The sympathy for the Tamil cause continued to rise and peaked in 2006. Since the beginning of 2006, the Sri Lankan security forces have attacked LTTE controlled areas in response to explosions at Trincomalee, allegedly by the LTTE, and there has been a steady trickle of refugees into Tamil Nadu, Popular outrage in Tamil Nadu to the Sri Lankan government’s air attack at Sencholai orphanage, in Vallipunam in Mullaithivu district, on 14th August 2006, and a subsequent attack on the school for internally displaced people at Vaharal in Batticaloa on 8 November 2006, led to the resurgence of the Sri Lankan Tamil issue as an important factor in India Sri Lanka relations.97

Almost all the political parties came together in support of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Describing the Sri Lankan Air Force raid on an orphanage as 'barbaric, uncivilised and inhuman', the Tamil Nadu State Assembly observed two minutes' silence for the victims, and strongly condemned the raid through a unanimous resolution on 17th August 2006. When Colombo criticised the action of the Tamil Nadu Assembly, Chief Minister Karunanidhi defended the right of the Tamils in Tamil Nadu to stand by their brethren in Sri Lanka and

97 Ibid., p. 949.
said, ‘if Tamils condemning the killing of their Tamil brethren was dubbed a mistake, then they would continue to commit it’. Karunanidhi also remarked that there was a need for ‘rethinking’ India’s policy towards Sri Lanka. In fact, the assembly resolution was important because it was probably for the first time, since the killing of Rajiv Gandhi, that the Tamil Nadu State Assembly criticised the action of Sri Lankan government unanimously. Even political parties like Janta Party, headed by Subramanian Swamy, known for their strong anti-LTTE position, were subtle in their response in view of the growing sympathy for Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Similarly, the Tamil Nadu branches of the CPI, CPI (M) and the Congress, which are quite vociferous against the LTTE and Pro-LTTE groups, condemned the attack on children in the strongest terms. Even anti-LTTE leaders like Jayalalitha showed surprising restraint towards pro-Eelam groups like MDMK. All this suggests that there was a definite change in the approach of these political parties towards the Sri Lankan Tamil cause. Given the tremendous upsurge in sympathy towards Sri Lankan Tamils, political parties in Tamil Nadu might have considered it safe to join the popular wave. Pro-Eelam groups like MDMK, PMK, Dalit Panthers of India (DPI), Dravida Kazagham and TNM became more active in highlighting the atrocities of the Sri Lankan government and the sufferings of Tamils through regular protests and demonstrations in the state. PMK leader Ramados argued that the state government should send a high powered parliamentary delegation to impress upon the centre to caution the Sri Lankan government to stop the massacre of innocent Tamils. MDMK leader Vaiko strongly condemned the Sencholai attack on Tamils by the Sri Lankan army as ‘genocide’ and organised a number of protest rallies against the Sri Lankan government. DK President K. Veeramani flayed the Sri Lankan government decision on the continuing military strikes. The DPI walked out of the legislature and observed a one-day fast, protesting against the Indian government’s silence over Sencholai bombing. TNM leader Pazha Nedumaran demanded that the United

98 Ibid., See also, “Karunanidhi defends resolution on Sri Lanka,” (2006), The Hindu, New Delhi, 20 August.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
Progressive Alliance government led by the Congress party should change its approach towards Sri Lanka and come to the rescue of the Tamils of the island nation. The newly formed Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam, led by Vijaykanth, went one step further and said that he supported the LTTE’s demand for Tamil Eelam and decided against celebrating his birthday till a solution was found to the Sri Lankan Tamil problem.

It is necessary, however, to stress that even though the Sri Lankan Tamil issue continues to cast its shadow over the state’s politics, the support for LTTE and the emotive issue of ‘Eelam’ is confined to fringe political groups. Similarly, people of Tamil Nadu were not so much concerned about the problems faced by LTTE because of the split following Karuna’s revolt.\textsuperscript{102}

As the conflict got intensified and the war against the Tigers degenerated into war against Tamil civilians, the political parties in Tamil Nadu began to step up their agitation. The Sri Lankan issue became enmeshed in the electoral politics. Even Jayalalitha, the leader of the AIADMK, who used to scrupulously avoid any mention of Sri Lanka in her statements, began to speak about the atrocities against the Sri Lankan Tamils. Obviously, she did not want her party to get alienated from the public opinion. The competitive politics got further sharpened as the polling day began to approach. The politician that Karunanidhi is, he resolved to express concern for the sufferings of the Sri Lankan Tamils, while at the same time extending solid support to the central government’s policies on Sri Lanka. The end result was the DMK completely toeing the central line on Sri Lanka issue. Perceptive observers of the Tamil Nadu politics cannot escape the conclusion that from the point of view of Karunanidhi, power was the greatest aphrodisiac and, as stated in the beginning of the essay, he was willing to radically revise the party’s policy towards Sri Lanka. The ultimate losers were the Sri Lankan Tamils, who virtually became pawns in the opportunist politics of Tamil Nadu.

As the Sri Lankan military offensive gathered momentum, the war against the Tigers degenerated into a war against Tamil civilians. The hapless Tamils were caught virtually between the Sinhalese Lions and the Tamil

\textsuperscript{102} In fact, while a majority of people in Tamil Nadu display their solidarity with the Tamils in Sri Lankan, this does not translate into overwhelming sympathy for LTTE. In fact, most of them are critical of LTTE and support the Indian government’s efforts to stop LTTE from establishing its bases in Tamil Nadu again.
Tigers. Hundreds of them lost their lives as a result of savage bombing and many were fatally injured.103

The government of India should have tried to evolve an international mechanism, acceptable to the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers, to rescue the trapped Tamil civilians from the war zone and escort them to refugee camps manned by the UN organisations. The response of the government of India, backed solidly by the Tamil Nadu government, was only to express “concern” at the plight of the Tamil civilians. The maximum that Karunanidhi could accomplish, after his famous hunger strike, was the assurance from President Mahinda Rajapakse that there will be no military offensive for three days.

POST LTTE-ERA INFLUENCE

Speaking in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, who is also the President of the DMK, pointed out that in the post LTTE-era, attaining the goal of Tamil Eelam was not a realistic goal. He advocated the pursuance of a “flexible policy”, where the Tamils should avoid critical comments about the Sinhalese “out of anger and hatred”, because it may have “adverse effect” on their well being. The need of the hour, Karunanidhi underlined, is for the Tamils to carry on their struggle “for equal rights, equal status for their language and devolution of power at the regional level”. This statement showed that transformation has taken place in the DMK perception on Sri Lanka. It may be recalled that in July 1983, on 27 August 1983, the DMK had passed a resolution, which stated that a separate Tamil Eelam shall be the only remedy and permanent solution.104

In the post LTTE-era without devolution of power, the internal situation in Sri Lanka would continue to be restive. This could have a fall out on the Tamil Nadu situation.105 In the Post civil war period if the relationship between the Tamils of Tamil Nadu and the Tamils of Sri Lanka channel into a positive

and vibrant force, previously constraining force on India-Sri Lanka relations could transform into a promising connection that could draw India and Sri Lanka close together.\textsuperscript{106}

To conclude, Tamil Nadu politics has always played a major role in India-Sri Lanka relations. Ethnic affinity between the Tamil of Tamil Nadu and the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka was an important factor which influences the bilateral relation between India and Sri Lanka. A special emotional attachment was always there between the resident Tamils of Tamil Nadu and the Tamil of Northern-Eastern province and Indian Tamil of central hills. And this was the reason why any incident against Tamils in Sri Lanka provoked a sharp reaction in Tamil Nadu. Supporting Sri Lankan Tamils had become an important factor in Tamil Nadu internal politics in order to woo voters. Despite their internal differences and mutual hatred for each other, the Dravidan parties DMK and AIADMK had taken a nearly common stand on the Sri Lankan Tamilian issue. Tamil Nadu Parties keep making subtle shifts in their stand according to the changing condition in Sri Lanka. The attitude of the AIADMK and DMK was determined and is still being determined by the imperatives of the democratic politics here. The other factor that has played a decisive role is the distance or otherwise of a particular party from the position of power at Tamil Nadu and in the centre. The era of coalition governments, which began in 1979 in the centre, brought about salutary changes. The regional partners began to make inputs into the making of foreign policy.