IX

Conclusion and Findings

Resurrection of ethnic, religious and nationalist passions, mark the world of the day. The hope of intellectuals and statesmen at the turn of 1950s that a rising tide of rationality and modernization, would sweep away these ascriptive identities did not work, rather these passions have persisted and have gone beyond all expectations. Ethnic antagonisms have severely disrupted politics of many African and Asian states. Most of the countries in these two regions are multi-ethnic societies, many of which do not even have one numerically dominant ethnic group.

A nationality refers to a group of people who are united by identity of origin, race, language, or by common traditions or history. Nationality, therefore, emphasises its root meaning of common birth, real or fictitious. It also thus, indicates a common spiritual or psychological sentiment among people having some common affinities. It is essentially a sentiment of unity which may be the result of many factors like common race and language, common religion, common history and traditions and common political aspirations.
Tamils have definitely, their own culture, language, race, historical traditions, and geographical compactness along with common economic interest. They possess all the characteristics, which are fundamental for being a nationality. But with the emergence of 'nation-state' concept, the geographical location has played an important role in nationality question. Since, India and Sri Lanka are two sovereign states, we cannot talk about the nationality question of a community in both countries in common. Hence, the nationality question of Tamils in these two countries has its own dimensions.

Originally, Tamils maintained their separate culture, but slowly came to identify themselves with the Hindus of the rest of India. It is the issue of Hindi as an official language after independence that has become important. That constituted the potential of a linguistic regional identity to become a language and culture based nationalism. However, language alone is not the only criterion for determining nationality, though it is always an important factor. The Tamil national question in India has manifested itself into a sub-nationalist awareness of linguistic minority.
To accommodate linguistic minority persuasion of Tamils and other non-Hindi speaking people, the Constitution of India provided English as an alternative language to Hindi, the national language, for fifteen years. And later in 1963 an official language Act was passed, making possible the continuous use of English in administration and courts both at the Centre and in the States.

The Tamil political parties used language as a tool for demanding more autonomy for the States. It is pertinent to point out here that the first secessionist movement was launched in Tamil Nadu after independence on the issue of racial difference between the people of South who called themselves Dravidians against the people of North who were called by them Aryans. Nevertheless the language issue and also anti-Brahminism were two important components of this struggle. But after the Chinese aggression in 1962 the Tamil secessionist groups and parties modified their demand from secessionism to greater state autonomy and resisted the imposition of Hindi.

This was in tune with the intolerance Mrs. Gandhi had for non-Congress governments in states. Rather than working towards a genuinely decentralised federal polity where pluralism and autonomy would be respected, she moved towards centralising her
authority. But in case of Tamil Nadu even Mrs. Gandhi had come to a conclusion that it is better to accommodate the interests of the regional Tamil parties than to risk an agitation for autonomy or secession. Since 1967 only the regional Tamil parties are ruling Tamil Nadu and there have been no major struggle against the Centre except for greater state autonomy, a demand which has been articulated by the Communist parties of West Bengal and Kerala. In the political discourse the Tamils were already recognised as a nationality long back.

In Sri Lanka, Tamils have their distinct culture, religion, language and historical traditions since the beginning. Sinhalese leaders such as Bandaranaike, keeping in view the communal divide in 1920s, suggested a federal system. The Donoughmore Commission of 1928 also recommended an examination of a federal system.

After independence, Sri Lanka instead of accommodating sentiments of Tamils acted in a negative manner. The hegemonic interests of the Sinhalese were obvious immediately after independence, if their attitude towards the Tamil plantation workers of Indian origin is examined. They had enjoyed limited franchise and had voted in elections. By two Acts, the Citizenship Acts of 1949 and 1951, all these workers
were de-citizenized and disenfranchised and rendered stateless persons. This electoral engineering in this climate of communal hostility, preponderantly projected the Sinhalese into State power, and over the decades, the Sri Lankan rulers, whoever, formed the government, were abetted by the hard-core hoodlums and Buddhist monks to crush the Tamil ethnic group.

With a permanent Sinhala majority in Parliament given to the most elementary form of democracy, namely, majoritarian democracy. Sri Lanka's legislature could only be expected to function with an 'ethnic' bias. Practically every piece of post independence legislation regarding language, education, recruitment in the armed forces and public service and also land settlement was designed to tilt the scales in favour of the Sinhalese as a group. These measures involved a reallocation of the country's resources as well. Since the Buddhist religion was intimately connected with Sinhala culture, it was also decided to give it state and financial support. Such disillusion arising out of electoral politics had been mainly responsible for the birth of movements like that of LTTE and other organisations, which believe in politics of violence and terrorism for a separate homeland for the Tamils called Eelam.
In Sri Lankan politics, two major political parties, the UNP and SLFP compete for the allegiance of the Sinhalese. Any concession of the party in power to the Sinhalese was seized upon by the party out of power as sign of weakness. Although, there were Tamil cabinet ministers in every government since independence, yet none of them had enough bargaining power to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the Tamils of the North-East. Every time when such issues were raised, the Tamil ministers resigned in protest because of government's failure to accept their demands. Moreover, since 1972, the Tamil cabinet ministers in the respective governments have not come from any Tamil political party that espouses Tamil nationalism.

All these events have crystallised the Tamil nationality in Sri Lanka. The factor, which has taken this question to a point of no return is the strategy adopted by the Sri Lankan government towards the problem of Tamils. The government has adopted militaristic Strategy.

The adoption of militaristic solution to the problem has meant the increased presence of militant behaviour on both sides, with conflict
escalation and a vicious circle of violence and terrorism leading to the militarisation of the entire society. The recruitment to the armed forces has been on ethnic criteria, and this army has been rightly called ethnic army of the Sinhalese. The deployment of this army to crush Tamil minority rebellion has served to escalate conflict and has reproduced a cycle of violence, where civilians on both sides to the dispute have been the major casualty.

Thus in Sri Lanka, Tamils have characteristics, both primary and secondary, which I consider necessary for a nationality. In the primary factors, the Tamils have their distinct language, culture, historical traditions, religion and have common descent and a sense of homogeniety and common institutions and customs. The nationality sentiments arose due to these primary factors. And these sentiments were strengthened and crystalised due to the secondary factors, like industrialisation in favour of Sinhalese, uneven economic development and the role of the government.

The nationality problem of Tamils in Sri Lanka is today at the crossroads. Tamil have two options before them to tread the path of isolation or to identify those features that are also common to the majority community and work out a democratic way of
life. The choice would appear to be obvious. But to do that would also mean a national struggle by both communities obfuscating the veil of narrow ethnic interests and marching towards a social order in which there will be no exploitation of man by man. To do this, the Sinhalese must understand the concept of federalism in true spirit. Federalism would not be treated as secessionism. The Tamils should be given some sort of autonomy in north-east region, where they number more. Secondly, the Tamil language should be treated at par with the Sinhala, as in case of Canada where English and French are official languages though the French population is hardly one forth mostly concentrated in Quebec province.

The development in Sri Lanka, particularly the ethnic conflict between Tamil and Sinhalese has affected Indo-Sri Lankan relations. India cannot afford to be a silent spectator of either the atrocities committed on the Tamils by the Sinhalese majority government or of any foreign power intervening in the situation.

In brief, it can be stated that the Tamil nationality question in India i.e. in Tamil Nadu is well settled, where as the Tamil nationality ques-
tion in Sri Lanka is still unresolved. By this, I do not mean to say that Srilankan Tamils are not a nationality. They are a nationality in the real sense of the term and they have acquired the status of a nationality basically through their struggles, and they are engaged in a bitter struggle even today.