Preface

History is witness to every successful invasion of India coming by sea. While the land geography is generally hostile to the invaders, the long coastline, especially of peninsular India, has always remained vulnerable. By a strange combination of history and geography, Sri Lanka, the teardrop island, separated from India by a narrow strip of shallow sea is so strategically poised that India can seldom afford to treat her as just another neighbour. Added to this is the anthropology of the island, which is peopled by two diverse ethnic groups both of Indian origin and look up to India as the birthplace of their faiths and forefathers. Politics and diplomacy can, therefore, ill-afford to sideline the ethnic and geo-strategic sensitivities of the region.

India's foreign policy on Sri Lanka during the Rajiv Gandhi years (1984-89) is uniformly commented upon as being seriously flawed. From the euphemistic 'qualified success' to the blunt 'unmitigated disaster', the wide spectrum of expert views essentially celebrated this failure. First, it was the covert Indian intervention on the Tamil ethnic question in Sri Lanka, quietly commenced during Indira Gandhi's time, but allowed to continue without any let up after Rajiv Gandhi took over power. The covert intervention gave way to the overt expression of regional hegemonic aggressiveness culminating eventually in the India-Sri Lanka Accord in July 1987. Consistent with the provisions of the Accord, India had to commit an Indian Peace-keeping Force (IPKF) at the request of the President of Sri Lanka. Within months of its induction, the IPKF had to take on a peace enforcement role to disarm the
recalcitrant LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) in a situation of armed conflict, neither foreseen nor rightly assessed. Not long thereafter, the demand for withdrawal of IPKF arose not only from the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka where the IPKF operated but also, more vociferously, from every section of the majority Sinhalese. India’s policy towards the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka during those difficult years had been articulated within a framework that was delicately positioned between denying absolute victory to the Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan Government while, at the same time, blocking the emergence of an independent Tamil Eelam. Preserving the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka was India’s imperative; otherwise, two unviable, strategically vulnerable states would create the objective conditions wherein foreign powers inimical to India’s interests would establish a foothold on that island.

The concern in India that the policies of President Junius Jayewardene were leaning towards the United States is to be seen in contrast with the indifferent state of Indo-US relations, but warm Indo-Soviet ties during the Indira Gandhi years. Indeed, Indo-US relations improved during the Rajiv Gandhi era, and the United States encouraged India to assert its regional primacy and supported the India-Sri Lanka Accord. The Rajiv Gandhi Government gave way to the V. P. Singh Government in New Delhi in December 1989. After some initial exchanges, it was unambiguously decided that India would withdraw the IPKF completely before March 31, 1990. Bruised by the hit-and-run tactics and land-mine blasts of the Tigers and despised as an occupying force and a threat to the country’s sovereignty by the Sinhala chauvinists and with no obvious success to claim, IPKF’s withdrawal eased
the immediate financial and military burden without offering any improvement in India's long term strategic interest.

India's hands-on Sri Lanka policy during Rajiv Gandhi's reign was mainly prompted by the aggressive campaigning for it by the politics of the two rival mainstream Dravidian parties of Tamil Nadu seeming to represent the concerns of the mainland Tamils for their Tamil brethren of Sri Lanka. The hidden "Tamil Nadu factor" held the key to India's policy on Sri Lanka during the Rajiv Gandhi years as pointed out by many a foreign scholar then and there. The competitive politics of competing Dravidian parties, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), revolving around charismatic leaders, drew sustenance from their strident emphasis on the Tamil language as a means to combat the perceived Hindi dominance of the north Indian political parties. Therefore, a competitive concern for the "Tamil brethren" outside India, especially those in neighbouring Sri Lanka, was integral to this manifestation of ethnic politics. This explains the "Tamil Nadu Factor" in New Delhi's policy on Sri Lanka that is articulated nowhere but understood everywhere. The Dravidian linguistic chauvinism in Tamil Nadu that provoked secessionist demands and language riots in the sixties is the historical premise, which the New Delhi policy planners had to cope.

For the 1991 general elections in India, only the Congress Party had raised the foreign policy issues relating to the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka in its manifesto. Rajiv Gandhi, as Congress President, in his published interviews, made his stand clear regarding the revival of India-Sri Lanka Accord, if voted back to power. The
political polarisation in the country prior to elections indicated a clear slant in favour of the Congress Party that was predicted to emerge as the single largest party though not the clear winner. To the Tamil Tigers the return of Rajiv Gandhi as India's Prime Minister appeared a distinct possibility. This would mean the revival of support to various Sri Lankan Tamil groups opposed to the LTTE, if not the actual return of the IPKF. Lording over the Northeast Sri Lanka after the exit of the IPKF, the LTTE sensed a sure and serious threat to their strategic objective of securing legitimacy for Tamil Eelam, where the writ of the democratically elected Premadasa Government had, by then, ceased to run. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991 in Sriperumbudur was thus the Tigers' pre-emptive strike.

Inder Kumar Gujral, during his visit to Sri Lanka as India's External Affairs Minister in 1997, was categorical that the ethnic conflict was Sri Lanka's internal problem. This formal announcement of the "hands-off policy" of India in Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis since 1989 raised many an expert eye-brow mainly because from the security perspective, peninsular India cannot totally and for long insulate itself from the bloody engagement between Sri Lankan forces and the Tamil Tigers across the narrow Palk Strait. While the hands-off policy continues even after several changes of Governments both in New Delhi and Colombo since then, one cannot rule out the day when the "Tamil Nadu Factor" starts playing its traditionally significant role in India's policy towards Sri Lanka. It is, therefore, relevant to examine the factors and forces that guide and mould India's Sri Lanka policy to provide a policy frame that can enable India to play a meaningful role to advance its national interest as well as the cause of peace and security in Sri Lanka.
The survey of literature, however, indicates that there has hardly been any in-depth analysis of the core issues posed here. The general trend in majority of works, which are descriptive in nature, is to find out ways to 'fix' the problem without labouring to understand the various facets and the dynamics of the problem. This study, therefore, intends to be an in-depth, multi-disciplinary inquiry into those relatively unexplored areas identified, which would be of immediate relevance and concern to India. As the study related to the domestic imperatives that should guide India's foreign policy on the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka, it involved problem formulation, analysis and actionable recommendation.

The study has been conducted with the help of historical analytical method. Primary sources such as Government documents, legislative debates, court documents, documents filed before various Commissions of Inquiry etc. and secondary sources such as books and articles from journals, periodicals and newspapers available at various libraries of Pondicherry, Chennai and New Delhi have been critically used. Policy makers and experts in the field apart from a host of others directly concerned with Sri Lankan affairs during the period of IPKF operations were interviewed. The study attempts to test the following hypotheses:

1. The Tamils of Sri Lanka have a genuine grievance of relative deprivation against the Sri Lankan state that failed to redress. The growth of militancy and terrorism was the natural outgrowth of the flawed policies of the Sri Lankan state to suppress the Tamils' just political dissent.
(ii) India's domestic imperatives demand that while it cannot remain a mute spectator to the atrocities against the Tamils in Sri Lanka, it cannot at the same time, encourage the disintegration of the Island Republic either. India must, therefore, try to encourage a solution of Sri Lanka's vexed ethnic problem within the framework of a united Sri Lanka.

(iii) The dawn of the coalition era in Indian politics, when the federal Government has to depend for its survival on those parties, some of which have openly displayed their sympathy for the Tamil terrorists, has obviously influenced India's Sri Lanka policy. Foreign policy making is, therefore, guided not only by considerations of national interest as naively believed, but also by the ruling regime's concerns for sustenance and survival.

(iv) The imperatives of the competitive Dravidian politics in Chennai and the coalition politics in New Delhi are likely to facilitate the return of the activities of Tamil Tigers in Tamil Nadu.

(v) The LTTE is not the sole and authentic representative of the Tamil speaking people in Sri Lanka as they claim to be.

(vi) The LTTE's proven military and terrorist capability has been able to put the legitimate aspirations of the minority Sri Lankan Tamils in focus at home and abroad.

(vii) The LTTE's military and terrorist prowess and their skill in manipulative politics make them an important element in the security environment in this region.
There will be no peaceful and negotiated settlement of the ethnic issue in Sri Lanka as long as the present leadership of the LTTE continues unchallenged from within.

Divided into seven chapters, the introductory chapter is devoted to evolving of a conceptual framework for understanding transnational terrorism and ethnic nationalism. The second chapter deals with the origin and evolution of militancy and terror in the growing Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka. Chapter III focuses on India’s policy towards Sri Lanka and its response to the Tamil militancy until the signing of the India-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987. Chapter IV explores the Indian peacekeeping mission after the Accord and how it went sour. Chapter V critically analyses the peace-enforcement experience of the IPKF and its pull-out from Sri Lanka. Chapter VI concentrates on India’s Sri Lanka policy in the post-Rajiv Gandhi assassination years. Finally, India’s approach to Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka has been summed up and a road map drawn for the future. This work, I hope, will stimulate fresh thinking concerning India’s policy towards ethnic nationalism and transnational terrorism in Sri Lanka.

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S. Balaji.