CHAPTER TWO

TAMIL NATIONALISM IN SRI LANKA:
EVOLUTION OF MILITANCY AND TERROR

The people of Sri Lanka¹ are mostly the descendants of migrants from India. The Sinhalese form 74 percent of the population. The Sri Lankan Tamils,² who inhabit the north and the east Sri Lanka, form 12.6 percent and the Indian Tamils, who are the descendants of 19th century migrant plantation workers from India, form 5.6 percent of the population. The third largest ethnic group is the Muslims, who constitute 7.4 percent of the population. The Burghers, who are people of mixed origin, and the Malays form the rest.

The geographic spread of the otherwise agreeable demographic mix is the single most important factor that had historically frozen the ethnic fault-lines. The majority Sinhalese live in the South and West of Sri Lanka. North Sri Lanka is populated almost exclusively by Sri Lankan Tamils while they share the land with the Muslims and the Sinhalese in the East. The Indian Tamils live in the hilly Central Province where Sinhalese form the majority.

¹ Sri Lanka got its present name in 1972. Ceylon, the model colony became independent in February 1948 but stayed a British Dominion till 1972 when the country severed all legal ties with Great Britain and adopted its Republican Constitution.

² The indigenous Tamils of Sri Lanka are referred to as “Sri Lankan Tamils” throughout. The Tamils of recent Indian origin who form the plantation labour in the Central Province are variously called as
The population mix of the East is of particular significance in the context of the festering ethnic divide. The Sri Lankan Tamils constitute 42 percent of its population. The Muslims, who are also Tamil-speaking, constitute 34 percent and the remaining 24 percent are the Sinhalese. The majority of Sinhalese in the eastern province are relatively new residents who migrated there as part of the officially sponsored irrigation and settlement schemes that started in the 1940s.

The littoral regions of the Eastern province are the home of over a third of Sri Lanka’s Muslims. While they were, and still are largely, a Tamil-speaking group, they maintain an identity distinct from the Tamils through their religion. Apart from the East, the Muslims live in isolated but well entrenched pockets all across the country. Although Tamil is their mother tongue, the Muslims outside east speak Sinhala also. They form a distinct group with its own economic and socio-political structure and cultural moorings. Their binding force is religion and not language. A sizable portion of the Muslims are the Moors, the descendants of Arab and Persian merchants who came to the island since 8th century. Their gradual acceptance of Tamil, a non-Arabic language as mother-tongue goes to indicate that a substantial number of Tamils also converted to Islam. While the Moors lost contact with the Arab world for sometime at some point in history, the Muslim community, as an

Plantation Tamils or Hilly Country Tamils but are referred to as “Indian Tamils” throughout. This terminology may not be accurate but followed here for the sake of convenience.


4 The word ‘Sinhala’ is used for the language and the term ‘Sinhalese’ is used to refer the people whose mother tongue is Sinhala. This distinction is actually not made in scholarly writings and the two terms are interchangeable.
ethnic group, seeks to identify themselves with the Islamic adherents of the Middle East. Because they are geographically dispersed all over the country and their main interest is in commerce, they want peace with all the communities.

II

Historically, the British planters established coffee plantations in the Central highlands during the early part of the nineteenth century. As they experienced acute shortage of labour, they started bringing in Tamil labourers from India, especially from the districts of Tirunelveli, Madurai and Tanjore for seasonal work. The migration started in 1818 and continued till 1839 when Government of India banned the emigration of labour to Ceylon considering the evils of indentured labour in other British colonies. Although not chronicled in such vivid detail, this transfer of labour across frontiers involving starvation, disease and death was the same saga of man's cruelty to man documented in the slave trade from Africa to America around the same period in history. In 1847, the prohibition on emigration was lifted on the express understanding that the labourers would be treated on par with the local population. By mid-nineteenth century, the coffee plantations were replanted with tea which meant round-the-year work for the labourers. The number of Tamil plantation workers in Central highlands soon swelled to over one million. They were confined to shanty line houses in the estates far removed from Kandyan Sinhalese villagers with whom they had no religious or cultural affinities to share. The educational attainment among Indian Tamils continues to be the lowest among the communities in Sri Lanka. About 80 percent of the Indian Tamils still live in the
plantations. A fraction of the estate workers had migrated to the agricultural areas in Mannar and Vavuniya in the wake of the racial riots of 1977, 1981 and 1983. But their relationship with the Sri Lankan Tamils in those areas was never congenial. Language and religion are common to the two communities, but differences of historical background, economic position, caste and intangible factors of identification have militated against a close unity.⁵

The Sinhalese dominated the country from fifth century B.C. “Mahavamsa”, believed to be the work of an A.D. sixth century Buddhist monk, traces their history from Vijaya, their founding father landing in the island with his followers in about fifth century B.C. from Simhapura in northern India. Their language, Sinhala, has distinct features of Indo-Aryan family of languages. The Sinhalese have come to believe that they are the descendants of Aryan migrants from Bengal. Their Buddhist identity, their own highly evolved language and the distance in time and space leave no trace of their migratory roots to the mainland. Since the ancestors of the Sinhalese inhabited the island before the Tamils from South India, the Sinhalese claim that they have the “prior right” to the country, which is contested by the Tamils. The safest and the more scientific conclusion may be that there were several strands of migrations from the regions of northern and southern India which contributed to the evolution of Sri Lanka society.⁶


The Sinhalese embraced Buddhism during the 3rd century B.C. Invasions of the island by Tamil kings of South India had been frequent all through recorded history. Some of the earlier invasions were successful in holding sway for brief periods. The Sinhalese kingdom which controlled the entire island most of the time had relations of affinity and hostility with the Chola, Pandiya and Chera kingdoms of south India. There were frequent invasions from these kingdoms, and also frequent alliances and inter-marriages of four royal families. Sri Lanka has been from early in its recorded history a multi-ethnic society in which a recognizable Dravidian component was present. Neither the Sinhalese nor the Tamils remained pure.7

Repeated invasions of the island by South Indian rulers and the resultant destruction and plunder, had left a residue of bitterness in historical literature.8 During the thirteenth century, the old Sinhalese civilization collapsed in the wake of repeated invasions from south India. The Sinhalese withdrew southwards and an independent Hindu Tamil Kingdom with its capital at Nellur came into existence in Jaffna peninsula. The political organization of the kingdom of Jaffna followed the pattern of the Dravidian states of southern India. The existence of the Jaffna Kingdom from the thirteenth century to the seventeenth century helped to form a distinct Tamil identity and geographical area for the Sri Lankan Tamils. As opposed to Sinhala-Buddhist identity of the majority community, the components of Tamil identity are Tamil-Hindu yet more linguistic than religious. The Sri Lankan Tamils

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hold the strong belief that they are Tamils of pure Dravidian origin and this myth perhaps explains their uneasy ties with the Indian Tamils. Unlike the Sinhalese, the Sri Lankan Tamils retain the religion and the language of their ancestors and share them with the Tamils of the mainland, thanks to the relatively short distance both in time and space. Yet there is little evidence to suggest that the Sri Lankan Tamils are in kinship terms with the mainland Tamils and the cultural distance palpably stands out like the distinct Eelam dialect and the Jaffna accent.

In Sri Lanka, both Sinhalese revivalism and Tamil revivalism emerged around the latter half of the 19th century primarily as protest movements against the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries. Of the two, the Sinhalese-Buddhist revivalism had strong anti-Christian, anti-Colonial overtones. Sinhalese-Buddhist revivalism had been able to arouse patriotism and a sense of identity among the people. In asserting a Sinhalese identity, the leaders reconstructed an image of Sinhalese past using many elements of "origins" mythology. The arrival of Prince Vijaya in Sri Lanka in the fifth century B.C. coincided with the death of Buddha. It was claimed that Buddha in his infinite wisdom saw that his doctrine would be preserved for 5,000 years in Sri Lanka by these immigrants and their descendants. Thus Sri Lanka became the land of Sinhala and the land of Dharma. The belief was that the survival of Buddhist religion was dependent on the survival of Sinhalese people. Thus the Buddhist revivalism had been able to weave together religion, people, land and language in a unique, mystical and mythical maze. Such a revivalist ideology sought to establish Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony of the island. It was this
Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness that resulted in modern times in the denial of multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of Sri Lankan society and the refusal to accept the community rights of other minorities.

The Hindu revivalism, like the Buddhist revivalist movement was directed against Christian missionary activities. Throughout the history of Sri Lanka, Buddhism and Hinduism coexisted side by side almost in an atmosphere of harmony and concord. The modern Tamil national consciousness, however, grew in response to the growing Sinhalese nationalism. Arumuga Navalar, a great exponent of Saivite Hinduism and a Tamil scholar, was instrumental for this cultural revival in the Northern Province. Navalar mixed culture, religion and community work in a manner that led to the awareness of Tamil national consciousness.

The commercialization of agriculture, the registration of the title deeds for land ownership, the registration of births and deaths, proselytization and the like were the major social and economic developments during the early colonial period. These developments contributed to the freezing of ethnic boundaries. The Sinhala community got consolidated in the South and West and the Tamils in the north and on the eastern seaboard. The import of Tamil labour from India and the economic development of Central and Western areas of the island during the British further complicated the ethnic picture of Sri Lanka. The citizenship of the naturalized Tamil plantation labour was to become a major issue after independence. The Sri Lankan Tamils feeling disadvantaged at the slow pace of economic growth in their traditional

9 Ibid., p. 59.
areas of habitation had to move out to the central and southern regions for the purpose of employment and trade.

III

In the early years of the twentieth century, the middle-class leaders of all communities joined hands in demanding greater powers for the Legislative Council so as to get greater share in the power to govern. The Ceylon National Association (CAN), Jaffna Association and the Ceylon Reform League (CRL) were associations formed for the purpose of demanding constitutional reforms. In 1917, CAN and CRL merged to form the Ceylon National Congress (CNC). The British Governor had nominated members to the legislature on the basis of ethnicity. The agitation initially rejected ethnicity as a basis of representation and presented a picture of ethnic harmony. CNC's first president was Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, a Sri Lankan Tamil. The façade of communal amity gave away in about a year. In 1920 the Sinhalese political leadership campaigned for territorial representation, while the Tamils demanded the continuation of communal representation. It was agreed to continue the principle of communal representation through a constitutional arrangement.

In 1931, on the basis of Donoughmore reforms, the British constituted a State Council with territorial representation based on universal suffrage. The minority ethnic groups were agitated, as they believed that the Constitution would ensure the dominance of Sinhalese majority. The minority fears turned out to be true
in 1936 when 36 Sinhalese, as against 7 Sri Lankan Tamils, were elected to the State Council and the State Council, in turn, elected a totally Sinhalese Board of Ministers.

This paved the way for the emergence of ethnic-based organizations. S. W. R. D. Bandaranayke formed the Sinhala Maha Sabha as a cultural society in 1936. Other ethnic groups also set up similar organizations All-Ceylon Tamil Conference (ACTC) took up the Tamil cause. At this time both Indian Tamils and Muslims chose to back ACTC. During this period G. G. Ponnambalam put forward a formula for "balanced representation" which, according to him, would be the best safeguard for ethnic and religious minorities against the Sinhalese domination. His constitutional formula meant that in any future reforms of the Constitution, the Sinhalese community would get half the total seats in the legislature and the remaining half would be assigned to the minorities. This came to the popularly called the 50:50 formula. The proposal was rejected outright by the Governor.

Ceylon Youth Congress (CYC) was the first major political movement in Jaffna. It was in 1926, the middle-class youth mostly graduates from Indian universities came together to form the CYC, which stood for secularism, non-sectarian Ceylonese nationalism and independence from the British. Indian National Movement and its leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were CYC's ideals. Gandhiji visited Jaffna in 1927 and Nehru in 1932. Sinhalese leaders from

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10 Jawahad Nehru, An Autobiography (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1939 edn), p. 271-72. Nehru spent a month in Ceylon with his family for rest and recuperation as advised by his doctors. They spent a fortnight in Nuwara Eliya in the central highlands and the remaining period travelling all over Ceylon. Nehru had interacted with people from all walks of life including Tamil plantation labour, Buddhist bhikkus and others and all of them held Nehru in high esteem. There is nothing to
South also addressed CYC sessions. In fact, it was in one of the CYC’s meetings that S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike canvassed a federal constitution for Ceylon. CYC was successful in organizing a boycott of the elections held in 1931 under the Donoughmore Constitution on the ground that the Constitution failed to provide for complete independence. CYC’s influence, however, did not last long and the movement was soon forgotten. But many CYC activists later became men of stature in various spheres. Other than providing a forum for Ceylon Tamils to get to know about India’s freedom struggle and its leadership, CYC left no lasting political legacy.

A Royal Commission headed by Lord Soulbury was appointed in 1944 to recommend constitutional changes. The commission rejected the 50:50 demand. The commission, however, recommended a Constitution which not only had safeguards for the minorities against the majority but also gave weightage in the representation to the minority groups.

The Sri Lankan Tamils, by and large, did not show much interest in the concept of a federal Ceylon before independence. A disproportionate share of Government jobs was with the Sri Lankan Tamils, who lived outside traditional Tamil areas. The Tamil middle-class was the product of the colonial history of the island. Under the British, English was made the language of the government. The churches and Christian missionaries started many English medium schools in the island. The Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic leaders resisted the expansion of missionary

indicate that Nehru’s Ceylon visit had anything to do with the freedom struggle in India or with Ceylonese nationalist movement.
activities in the South. Therefore, more English medium schools came to be established in the North, especially in Jaffna, noted for its poor resource base and arid land, than in the South. Unrewarding and scant economic opportunities in the North prompted English-educated Sri Lankan Tamils, who looked at education primarily as a means to social and economic advancement, to migrate to the southern and central regions for the Government jobs that awaited them. This penchant for Government jobs that rewarded them with a lot of self-esteem apart from financial security was the forbidding factor in their not evincing interest in federalism. This also explains essentially the difference in socio-economic status between the ethnically akin Sri Lankan Tamils of the North and of the East. The educational backwardness of the relatively more fertile Batticaloa and Trincomalee Districts kept the Sri Lankan Tamils of East out of cozy government jobs. The difference in tradition and custom between the Tamils of the North and the East did play a part but far less significant compared to the changes brought about by English education.

With federalism slipping out of them at their own self-interest and the unrealistic 50:50 demand made by their leadership floundering, Tamils were unknowingly and gradually getting marginalized in the national politics of the unitary state at the time of independence. Their inability to integrate with mainstream politics paved the way for unjust and discriminatory legislations that left a third of the Tamil-speaking people of the country without voting rights. The tactical errors

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by the Tamil leaders made the community ready for playing the unforgiving game of communal politics.

The United National Party (UNP) was formed in 1947 in preparation for the first post-independence elections and UNP had members from all ethnic groups. The Sinhala Maha Sabha (SMS) decided to join UNP, but S. W. R. D. Bandaranayke kept the separate identity of SMS within UNP. The Left parties also had members from all communities. However, the Sri Lankan nationalism based on multi-ethnic nation-state with a secular outlook, a concept fostered by an English-educated liberal elite prior to independence fell prey to chauvinistic tendencies that manifested after Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948. The scheme of representation introduced by the Soulbury Constitution with provision for area weightage to the minority communities worked well only up to the enactment of the citizenship acts of 1948 and 1949. The second wave of Sinhala-Buddhist resurgence worked not only against the minorities but also against the English-speaking members of the upper class who wielded economic and political power.

IV

The first Parliament of independent Sri Lanka had forty percent representation of minorities though they formed only thirty percent of the population. The Citizenship Act of December of 1948 and the Parliamentary Elections Amendment Act of 1949, however, ensured that the representation of minorities in future parliaments would not exceed twenty percent. The Acts disenfranchised the Indian Tamil plantation
labour that formed a third of the minority population. Significantly, this minority group had seven members in the Parliament and in at least twenty other parliamentary constituencies in the Central Province, the electoral verdict was dependent on Indian Tamil vote. The Indian Tamil had voting rights since 1931. In the parliamentary debates leading to these enactments, the politically shrewd S. W. R. D. Bandaranayke, then Minister for Home Affairs, distanced himself from UNP's position saying that he would have preferred the problem to have been approached from another angle yet supported the legislations in the interests of statesmanship and wisdom.

These legislations unfortunately got the backing of the Sri Lankan Tamil MPs from the United National Party (UNP) and the Tamil Congress. At that time it was more a class issue and less of a communal or ethnic issue. What had caused alarm to the Prime Minister, D. S. Senanayake, the “brown Englishman” and his elitist UNP was the presence of Left MPs representing the working-class in Parliament. The Indian Tamil plantation labour was rightly perceived as under the influence of Left parties. Therefore, the vociferous opposition to the unjust legislation in Parliament came from Left parties and their MPs were mostly Sinhalese. For them, these Acts represented the crude expression of class hatred. The representatives of the Left parties with their ambivalence towards Parliament were an ambiguous, divided lot and were largely thought of as an irresponsible opposition and enemies of democracy. For the Prime Minister and his UNP and the elitist Ceylon Tamils, the only way to perpetrate their political and class dominance was to take away the voting rights of a major slice of the working-class population. And as a result, in the
1952 elections, UNP improved its majority to the comfortable level of fifty-four in the ninety-five-seat Parliament.

In 1951, S. W. R. D. Bandaranayke resigned from the UNP, due to ideological and personal differences. He launched a new party in place of the Sinhala Maha Sabha and called it the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). The elitist leadership of UNP had to adjust to the Sinhalese nationalist current to stay in power. The Tamil Congress understandably headed for tumultuous times. S. J. V. Chelvanayakam walked out; so did a few other prominent leaders and they formed the all-new Federal Party which started looking at this legislative fiat from the racist point of view. “This bill is a piece of legislation not based on the highest principles on which differences and difficulties of inter-communal problems have been resolved,” Chelvanayakam criticized. After the 1952 elections that saw the fruits of the diabolical action by the Government to silence the political opinion of a section of population, the Federal Party set out to fight to out in legal forums.

The legislations that took away the citizenship rights of the Indian Tamils were strongly felt to be violative of Section 29 of the Soulbury Constitution of 1948, which, among other things, restrained Parliament from enacting any law that “makes persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions are not made liable”. Another piece of legislation that was thought to be unconstitutional was The Indian and Pakistani

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Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949. Only those Indian and Pakistani residents who satisfied some very stringent conditions could get citizenship under this enactment. It was argued that had the same stringent and demanding conditions been applied to others, not many including the Prime Minister would have retained their Ceylonese citizenship.

The Kegalle District Court decided that the legislation was invalid, as it ran counter to Section 29 of the Soulbury Constitution. However, the Supreme Court upturned this decision of the District Court on the ground that the legislation applied to all of communal groups uniformly and as such was not unjust and discriminatory. On appeal, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council upheld the Supreme Court's decision in the matter.¹⁴

The development of the competitive party system and the mobilization of the ordinary people on the basis of the race, religion and language unleashed the conflict of interests between the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils. Initially, SLFP stood for Sinhala and Tamil as state languages and changed its policy to 'Sinhala Only' in 1955. UNP also went back on its commitment to make both Sinhala and Tamil as official languages. Most of the Tamil members in these mainstream political parties resigned in protest. The communal segregation in national politics became near total. This shows that very often than not, ethnicity is not an assertion of primordial loyalties, but an attempt to consolidate political support. Ethnic nationalism is often a weapon which regional elites use in the competition for

¹³ Ibid., p. 3.
national political power. Appeals to ethnic loyalties to build and sustain political support may be a consequence of the struggle for power between ethnic elites, rather than a cause of mobilization on the part of minority groups.\textsuperscript{15}

A coalition led by S. W. R. D. Bandaranayke came to power in 1956 in a landslide victory. Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP – People’s United Front) comprised of, apart from SLFP, Viplavakari Lanka Sama Samaj Party (VLSSP), Sinhala Bhasha Peramuna (Sinhala Language Front) and a group of independents. While this coalition represented the rural Sinhalese, its dynamism came from Sinhalese intelligentsia consisting largely of Buddhist monks, teachers and ayurvedic physicians.\textsuperscript{16} The coalition was popular and radical in its policies and its support base was the lower middle-class Sinhalese. The Bhikkus, the Buddhist clergy who played an important role in the process of political mobilization of the Sinhalese, had overriding say in the policies of the coalition. The elections of 1956 saw the Sinhalese polity split down the middle: the SLFP and UNP camps became not only virtually matched in strength but also polarized and irreconcilable.\textsuperscript{17} One of the first decisions taken by the coalition Government that had absolute majority in Parliament was to make Sinhala language the only official language of Sri Lanka. As against 6 percent of the population that spoke and understood English, Sinhala was the language of the

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 3.


\textsuperscript{16} Practitioners of the ancient oriental system of medicine involving drugs made from medicinal herbs and plants, now popular as an alternative system of medicine in the West.

\textsuperscript{17} Mani Shankar Aiyar, “Sri Lanka at Fifty”, \textit{The Hindu} (Chennai), 7, 8, 9 and 10 April 1997.
overwhelming majority. As such, the change of official language from English to Sinhala was democratic.

V

The law to have Sinhala only as official language had, however, the unfortunate effect of alienating the Tamil-speaking people especially in the geographical area they traditionally habituated. The law that insisted the knowledge of Sinhala an essential requirement for employment in state services had the effect of rendering illiterate every Tamil irrespective of his educational attainment in his own country. Since 1956, the Federal Party (FP) became the chief repository of Tamil hopes and interests and this was reflected in the electoral performance of the party in the Northern and Eastern provinces. The Sinhala only policy, apart from provoking periodic racial riots and reducing the number of Tamils in state services, also ignited a slow chain reaction in the field of education. The free schooling scheme using mother tongue as the medium of instruction resulted in vastly increasing the number of school-going children. University seats, though increased, did not keep pace with the virtual explosion in the number of schools. Only a fifth of all those qualified for university admission could be accommodated and this situation created a virtual scramble for university positions. The Tamil students from the missionary schools in the North were better equipped to face the intense competition for securing admissions. By 1970s, Government brought in the system of ‘standardisation’ whereby the minimum entry requirements for a Tamil student for science and professional degree courses like Medicine and Engineering were higher than for a Sinhala medium student. With the introduction of the new system, there was a
sudden drop in the number of Tamil university students. The Tamils looked at this as another instance of discriminatory practice to keep them out of the professions.

The Sinhala Only Act of 1956, which was the outcome of the simple arithmetic of the electoral process of democracy thus marked a watershed representing the extreme hardening of the division of the polity on communal lines. "Thus the concept of a Ceylonese or Sri Lankan nationalism based on multi-ethnic nation-state with a secular outlook, a concept fostered by an English educated liberal elite during the pre-independence period and for some time after, could not survive against the ideology of Sinhalese nationalism especially in the late 1950s."\(^{18}\)

At a time when the Tamils were getting acutely aware of the reality that they were being discriminated against in the areas of language, employment and education, the matter regarding land colonization came up to aggravate their anxieties. The north central areas of the island started reverting back to jungle as its old traditional system of irrigation was put to long disuse. The British started the project in the 1930s to repair and restore the old reservoirs and tanks and settle farmers in the reclaimed lands with irrigation facilities. "When the work for the Gal Oya (Dry Zone) settlement scheme in the Eastern province had been completed (after independence), the first preference was given to people from the same province. It was only after about six months, when faced with the paucity of local applicants, that doors were opened to applicants from other provinces."\(^{19}\) Soon

\(^{18}\) Sivarsah, n. 11, p. 103.

\(^{19}\) Hoole and others, n. 12, p. 1.
settlements of migrants Sinhalese peasants from southwestern and central areas began to appear in the predominantly Tamil Eastern province resulting in gradual changes in the demographic pattern of the East. This process came to be perceived by Tamil leadership as state-aided Sinhalese colonization of the East and hence part of the diabolical master-plan to threaten the existence of the Tamils as a community with its own linguistic and cultural identity.

The phenomenon of urban terrorism is not confined to disappointment arising out of non-realization of rising expectations; a similar effect may also be observed where a relatively prosperous community, which naturally expects its standard of living to continue to rise, faces a sudden and psychologically inexplicable drop in its affluence. Middle-class consumers – or those who aspire to that status – mortgage their future in emotional as well as in financial terms. The disappointment of these expectations – which they have come to regard as the job of the Government to fulfil – produces in them a bewilderment and disorientation at least equal to that experienced by their poorer counterparts. The evolution of militancy and terror in Tamil nationalism merits to be viewed in this light.

The Federal Party attempted to whip up the ‘we-feeling’ among Tamils after the Sinhala only bill but met with limited success in their endeavour. The party leaders spearheaded the movement to flatten the caste differences among Tamils that historically kept them divided. Temples and eating-houses were thrown open to

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Tamils belonging to all castes. Regional disparities between Tamils of the North and the East were then addressed. FP, however, did not succeed in its attempt to integrate the Indian Tamils and Muslims with the Tamil nationalist consciousness. The Indian Tamils, living in isolated pockets in plantation areas with the lowest levels of educational attainment and income, were socially and geographically separated from the Sri Lankan Tamils. With their stateless status hanging fire, the Indian Tamils were united under the total political domination of the trade unionism of Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC). FP’s attempts with the Muslims also did not provoke a favourable response. The Tamil-speaking Muslims of the East were sympathetic to FP’s language policies. But Muslims, by and large, were skeptical of FP’s demand for federal structure and regional autonomy. They were suspicious of the Hindu-Tamil hegemonic ambitions. “Muslims rejected this concept... because of its implications of a subordinate role for them vis-à-vis the Tamils, and the assumption of a Tamil ward-ship over them.” Thus, even in the wake of the anti-Tamil Sinhala only language policy, FP’s attempt to mobilize the Tamil-speaking people of Sri Lanka met with only modest success.

Besides, mainstream political parties were not totally insensitive to minority aspirations. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the Prime Minister and leader of SLFP, after negotiations with S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, the leader of FP came to an agreement on the problems of Sri Lankan Tamils. Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact was signed on 26 July 1957. Regarding official language issue, the understanding reached was

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21 de Silva, n. 3, p. 42.
22 The text of Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact is Annexure II
that “without infringing on the position of the Official Language Act, the language of administration in the Northern and Eastern provinces should be Tamil....” The pact also recorded the agreement reached in the matter of autonomous Regional Council regarding institution, election, powers in the matter of colonization schemes and funding. In the question of Ceylon citizenship to people of Indian origin, it was indicated that it would receive early consideration. With the signing of the Pact, FP agreed to withdraw its proposed agitation.

The opposition to the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact from UNP and the Buddhist monks was considerable. Julius R. Jayewardene, who had lost the 1956 election and was trying to revive the electoral fortunes of UNP, led a mammoth rally to Colombo from Kandy. The “Kandy March”, as it came to be called, was able to mobilize strong Sinhalese and Buddhist opinion against the Pact. The Pact was never put into practice. After one Buddhist protest outside the Prime Minister’s residence in Colombo, Bandaranaike announced that he was scrapping the accord. “And as if to prove he meant what he said, he tore up a copy of the pact in front of the assembled monks who clapped in joy.” On 25 September 1959, Bandaranaike was shot dead, ironically, by a Buddhist monk.

VI

Sri Lanka and the world saw the first woman Prime Minister, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike taking charge after the 1960 elections. The slain Premier’s widow was

voted to power with the mandate to carry forward her husband's policies. FP started their Indian-style nonviolent civil disobedience movement in the Northeast. "Faced with the collapse of her Government's authority in the Tamil areas, Bandaranaike clamped a state of emergency in the northeast and dispatched the military to the region." SLFP lost the 1965 polls and UNP had no clear majority. Dudley Senanayake of the UNP formed a 'national Government' with the support of minor Sinhalese parties. FP and the Tamil Congress also supported from outside. "The election had been preceded by secret talks between Dudley Senanayake and Chelvanayakam." After Dudley Senanayake became Prime Minister he signed an agreement with Chelvanayakam on 24 March 1965 which came to be called Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact. As per this agreement, Tamil will be made the language of administration and of record in the Northern and Eastern provinces. The legal proceedings in these provinces would be conducted and recorded in Tamil. The Pact provided for establishing District Councils and for regulating the allotment of land in land colonization schemes in Northern and Eastern province. This Pact was also not put into practice in the face of strong opposition, ironically this time, from SLFP.

The demands by the Tamils, for the recognition of their language and for regional autonomy and their nonviolent protests in support of that, by this time, became a major factor in Sinhalese politics. Sinhalese political hegemony was

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24 Ibid., p. 15.
25 Ibid., p. 16
26 The text of Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact is Annexure III.
gradually getting institutionalized. The Republican constitution of 1972 while proclaiming Sinhala as the official language declared that Buddhism had the foremost place in Sri Lanka and was the only religion eligible for state patronage, thus almost affirming a Sinhalese-Buddhist state. Significantly, the Republican Constitution had no provision, analogous to section 29 of the Soulbury Constitution it replaced, for the protection of minority interest. This is the background that persuaded the Tamils to believe that co-existence with the Sinhalese in a single polity was no longer possible. The communal divide in Sri Lankan polity unfortunately reached a point of no return.

At the ideological level, both the majority and minority ethnic nationalisms started the games of nationalist myth-making in order to justify their extreme chauvinistic postures. The Sinhalese masses were disillusioned at the perceived unreasonable demands being made by the already privileged Tamils. The class solidarity among the workers gave way to trans-class ethnic solidarity of both the Sinhalese and Tamils that submerged class consciousness. The ideology and political attitude of the Left parties led by Western educated elites contributed to this. With no viable programme to put to practice, their empty rhetoric of class struggle was, in fact, propaganda for the Right. The natural yet neglected constituency of the Left was up for grabs and SFLP and the *Janatha Vimukti Peramuna* (JVP – People’s Liberation Front) seized the opportunity. Compromising ideology and principles, the Left leaders became obliging partners in coalition governments. As the established
Marxist parties got absorbed in the parliamentary process, their appeal to radical youth, as revolutionary parties, presumably waned.27

At this juncture, it would be appropriate to investigate the regional pulls and pressures exerted on the growth of two extreme nationalisms in the tiny island of immense strategic importance. The Sinhalese with their distinct language and religion have no clear migratory roots to trace to the mainland other than the myth they have crafted that they are the descendants of Aryans from northern India. This cultural isolation and their community memory of frequent invasions from South Indian Tamil rulers and the perceived privileged position of Tamils during the colonial period are factors that fan Sinhalese nationalist sentiments. Yet, above all these, the presence of a big reservoir of Tamil-speaking people in India's Tamil Nadu, just across the narrow Palk Strait from Sri Lanka's north is the single most important factor that renders Sri Lanka's majority Sinhalese in a crippling minority complex in the regional context. India's perceived hegemonic ambitions in the region and its covert support of Tamils in the ethnic conflict, which will be investigated in the coming chapters, have contributed to the paranoia and to the strident anti-Tamil, anti-India posture of the Sinhalese nationalism.

It is accepted without any debate that the growth of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka was influenced a great deal by the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu. “The Federal Party was aided by the developments in the Tamil Nadu state of India where

a Dravidian movement emerged, which not only attempted to purify the Tamil language from the clutches of Sanskrit but provided a revival of the splendour of their heritage." The Sri Lankan Tamils were also influenced by anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu led by Dravida Munnetra Kazhakam (DMK) under the leadership of C. N. Annadurai.

VII

A brief overview of the Dravidian movement and the language agitations led by the DMK in Tamil Nadu would be appropriate at this stage in order to appreciate the nature and probable extent of their influence on Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism. After his education in England, E.V. Ramaswamy Naikar (EVR), son of a wealthy landlord in Erode joined Indian National Congress to soon become one of its general secretaries in Madras. He was still in the Congress when, in 1914, Dr. C. Nadesan Mudaliar started the Dravida Association with the professed aim to foster the development of the Dravidian people of South India. Understandably, the special enemy of this movement was the small minority of Brahmins who came to dominate the affairs of the state due to the iniquitous caste system prevalent in the state then. The Dravida Association evolved into the South Indian Liberal Federation, which later became a political party called the Justice Party. After his clash of ideas with the Congress stalwart and Brahmin, C. Rajagopalachari, EVR left Congress to join the

28 Sivarajah, n. 11, p. 108.
Justice Party. EVR was strongly opposed to the caste system and became an atheist and a staunch anti-Brahmin and remained so all his life.

In 1935 EVR started the Self-Respect Movement. His interpretation was that the Hinduism of caste and Brahmins was the result of the colonization of the country by the Aryan North whose agents were the southern Brahmins. Inherent in his doctrine was the separation of the Aryan North and the Dravidian South. After the elections of 1937, the Congress led by C. Rajagopalachari formed the Government. In pursuance of the national Congress policy, Hindi was made compulsory in the schools. EVR seized it as a weapon to campaign that once again a Brahmin was becoming a tool for North Indian imperialism to destroy the Tamil language and culture. Hindi thus came to be perceived as the latest instrument of the northern Aryan imperialism.29

EVR became the President of the Justice Party in 1938 and soon articulated his call for a Dravida nation, a separate federation of the four southern lingual blocks—the Malayalis, the Kannadigas, the Telugus and the Tamils. If this was not possible, there should at least be a separate Tamil country, the 'Tamil Nadu'. Dravidian movement and the call for a Dravida nation were confined only to Tamil Nadu. At the Salem conference of the party, EVR's deputy, C. N. Annadurai, moved the resolution changing the name of the party to Dravida Kazhagam (DK), which did not feel confident enough to contest the 1946 elections. An added problem had

arisen by then. Annadurai began chafing at the eccentricities of Periyar, as EVR came
to be called with respect, and Annadurai's view was shared by the bulk of the party,
which went with him in the split of 17 September 1949 and called themselves the
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). From the elitist social reforms movement of
DK, DMK was geared to transform into a mass based political party. Such was
however, the respect that the estranged disciples had for their mentor EVR, the man
who had shaped their ideology and destiny, that DMK did not name a president;
there would only be general secretaries. The physical presence of EVR had been
rejected, not his ideas. The Presidential chair was kept vacant for the 'soul of
Periyar'.30

While Periyar, with his eccentricities and penchant for dramatics got
marginalized, the DMK under C. N. Annadurai, was hard at work. EVR's visits to
Malaya, Singapore and Sri Lanka did not evoke much enthusiasm among the Tamils
in these countries. But when DMK was formed by Annadurai, it captured the
imagination of the Tamil people living outside India, especially in Malaysia and Sri
Lanka.31 In April 1962, C N Annadurai spoke for the first time in the Rajya Sabha,
on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address and he utilized that opportunity
to plead for his people's need to be separate from 'northern imperialism' "not
because of any antagonism, but because, if it was separated, it will become a small

30 Ibid., p. 67.
31Ambalavanar Sivarajah, "Dravidian Sub-nationalism and its Regional Implications" in Jayasekera, P.
nation, compact, homogeneous and united.... Then we can make economic regeneration more effective and social regeneration more fruitful." This was for the first time in India's parliamentary history a demand was voiced for secession.

The Chinese aggression of India in October 1962, however, rejuvenated patriotism in the country and thereby halted the spread of secessionist sentiments. The first thing that Annadurai did on being released from jail after a minor spell of political imprisonment was to place a moratorium on all DMK activities, agitational or otherwise, and direct all its energy and place its entire apparatus at the disposal of the Government of India to thwart the ambitions of the aggressor. Annadurai told Parliament: "I enter the name of the DMK in the roll-call of honour that is being now formulated for the safety, for the dignity and future of this country, this nation." Soon the DMK formally gave up its call for secession, and began preparations to become instead the ruling party of its state. Annadurai later confirmed: "We have since withdrawn the demand for Dravida Nadu. We first realized its dangerous potentialities at the time of the Chinese aggression." Annadurai denied having had any connection with any party abroad and the DMK leaders during their visits abroad had insisted that the Tamils' loyalty should be one hundred percent to the countries where they live.

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33 Ibid., p. 98.
34 The Illustrated Weekly of India, 26 September 1965.
35 Sivajah, n 11, p.108.
The Constitutional provisions regarding official language were drawn up by the Constituent Assembly after considerable thought and deliberation because language is an item that would test the Constitution of the country from day to day, from hour to hour, almost from minute to minute in actual practice. A misstep in this direction could betray the country in the wrong direction. As per the Constitutional provisions the official language of the Union shall be Hindi in the Devanagari script and the form of numerals to be used for the official purposes of the Union shall be the international form of Indian numerals. English would stay for another 15 years from the moment the Constitution of India was accepted, and then Hindi would takeover as the national language. Article 343 has, among other things, the following proviso: notwithstanding anything contained in this article, Parliament may by law provide for the use of the English language after the second period of 15 years for such purposes as may be specified in such law. With less than two years for the change over from English to Hindi, the government of India under Jawaharlal Nehru introduced the Official Languages Bill of 1963 in Parliament invoking the constitutional proviso for continuing English for non-Hindi speaking states. Taking part in the parliamentary debate, Annadurai reportedly said, "... democracy does not mean merely majority rule. It means, fundamentally, also recognizing, sanctifying and safeguarding minority rights and even minority sentiments." He continued, "In future times a proper solution may be arrived at... if this imposition of Hindi were to become a fact... the entire South well revolt against this."

36 Ramachandran, n 28, p. 107

37 Ibid., p. 121.
On 26 January 1965, the 15-year grace period for the use of English was to get over. The 1963 Act had removed the worry that the English language would actually be sent packing, but the South had its doubts and Nehru was no more. The DMK in Madras decided to spend the 15th Republic Day of free India as a 'day of mourning'. Apprehending trouble, the Congress Chief Minister, Bhaktavatsalam, got Annadurai and the top leadership of the DMK arrested. But this did not prevent 20,000 students from taking out a procession with a 'Hindi demon' at the head, garlanded with shoes and slippers. The demonstrations turned violent and the Chief Minister decided to treat this as just another law-and-order problem and sent in the police. Demonstrators began dying in police firing, and the anger began to touch the rest of the country. By 10 February, the violence reached a new peak and there were two dozen deaths in one day, with the police opening fire at six places. The Tamils never wanted Hindi to be abolished as the national language; all what they wanted was to give legal shape to what came to be termed the 'Nehru assurance'. The philosophy of the 'Nehru assurance' was that an authoritarian approach to have Hindi as the official language of the country was not only a fundamentally wrong approach but was a dangerous approach. It should be a democratic approach to win the goodwill of those groups of Indians whose mother tongue is not Hindi. The direct consequence of the language agitation was that in the 1967 elections DMK swept the polls in Madras. Decades after 1965, the controversy over language that threatened the country's unity and integrity is as good as forgotten. Tamil Nadu, as the name of Madras State was changed, has ever since been ruled either by the DMK or by its breakaway faction All Indian Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) of matinee idol M. G. Ramachandran (MGR). From 1944 when DK was
formed to 23 October 1963, the day the leader of the DMK announced the abandonment of the principle of Dravida Nadu and separatism, the Dravida movement was perceived as a potential threat to the unity and territorial integrity of the Indian Union.  

The foregoing narration, though a digression from the subject of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism, was unavoidable. The core issue of EVR’s Self-Respect Movement was the iniquitous caste system in mainland Tamil society. And the movement was directed against the minority Brahmin domination of the polity. By linking the Tamil Brahminiacal order with the North Indian Aryan imperialism and with Hindi in an unreal, yet appealing symbolism, EVR had been able to take the cause of the underprivileged castes to the central stage. For the Sri Lankan Tamil nationalist movement, the caste system was never a major issue, neither was so the class. There, of course, were caste and class differences but no oppressing caste hierarchy. These iniquities were set right even at the earliest phase of trans-class ethnic solidarity. From a privileged minority position, the Sri Lankan Tamils had to mobilize themselves to prevent their privileges slipping by, the core issue being the official language policy of the majority Sinhalese.

Another point of divergence is the transformation of the social activism of EVR and DK to the mass-based politics of Annadurai and DMK at the time when India became a republic and the federal concept of linguistic states was put to practice. Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism had to fight for restoring the lost status of the

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38 Sivarajah, n. 27, p 131.
language as well as for a federal structure, which they failed to demand when it was their due. Therefore, the pre-emptive demand of Indian Tamil nationalism was from a position of advantage of increasing political support. The secessionist demand of DMK and its withdrawal during the Chinese aggression would appear childish and half-hearted, but were clever political moves to mobilize the people behind the DMK. The language agitation could be a law and order situation that went out of control but went on to ring the death knell of the Congress Party rule in the state. The major events in the language issue, both political action and agitation, in Tamil Nadu and in Sri Lanka were post-1956. There is nothing to suggest that there was convergence of interest or meaningful interactions between the Tamil leaders across the Palk Strait. The most conspicuous difference between Indian and Sri Lankan situation was the political maturity shown by the leaders in India across the wide political spectrum to respect and accommodate minority sentiments. In Sri Lanka, unfortunately, this was conspicuous by its absence on the part of all the parties involved and the majority Sinhalese saw democracy only as a game of numbers. The explanation perhaps is what journalist Roland Edrisinge told Mani Shanker Aiyar: "Independence was given to us on a platter. We did not ask for it; you triggered it. The Brits decided that if they had to leave India, they might as well leave Sri Lanka too." Thus the core issues involved in these nationalisms have very little in common on a close analysis though both could be broadly classified as linguistic nationalism involving the same language.

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39 Aiyar, n. 15.
In early 70s, South Asia witnessed two apparently unconnected events that had its influence on the growing Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka. The uprising of the Sinhalese youth of the JVP and the emergence of Bangladesh were both violent and bloody which occurred in 1971. By a quirk of coincidence, India played its part in both. India intervened in favour of the Bengalis to liberate themselves from the yoke of Pakistan.\(^{40}\) In Sri Lanka, India promptly responded sending five frigates to seal off approaches to Colombo. In addition, Indian assistance also included military equipment for 5,000 troops, six helicopters with pilots for non-combat duties and 150 Indian troops to guard Kautanayake airport.\(^{41}\) Stridently opposed to what it perceived as \textquote{Indian expansionism}' even in 1971, the JVP was the first significant political movement to emerge in Sri Lanka independently of the leadership of members of the English speaking elite and it shared with SLFP the same social base: rural Sinhalese Buddhist.\(^{42}\) Professor Urmila Phadnis described the ideology of JVP as \textquote{eclectic, incorporating the world outlook of Marxism-Leninism, a Maoist itch for violent action, a Che Guevarist obsession with instant revolution,}
the ethnocentrism of chauvinist Sinhalese Buddhism and last, but not the least, the universal frustration of the educated unemployed and under-employed”. 43

These events and India’s involvement in them impacted the impressionable minds of the Tamil youth in Sri Lanka. For the first time, the Tamils, especially the younger generation started seriously considering violence as a viable option. Significantly the 1972 Republican Constitution effectively curtailed the space for political maneuverability for minorities. The political situation in which the Sri Lankan Tamils were placed, was ripe for demanding separation and for terror and violence to substitute the normal political process. “A new romanticism developed where political activists thought in terms of military structure, secret societies and undercover work.”44 As a consequence of the new Republican Constitution of 1972, the main Tamil political parties, FP and Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), representing the plantation Tamils, put up the common Tamil United Front (TUF). The political demand of the Tamils changed from autonomy to that of separation and the concept of Tamil linguistic region in geographical terms also emerged.

There was, however, no evidence even in the aftermath of the 1972 Constitution to indicate that the Tamils of the mainland in general or the Tamil elites in particular were greatly concerned about the discrimination Sri Lankan Tamils were being subjected to. This became evident in 1973, Sri Lankan navy seized a boat


44 Hoole et al, n. 12, p. 19.
belonging to Kuttimani loaded with dynamite in the Palk Strait. Kuttimani alias Selvaraja Yogachandran was a smuggler in Velvettithurai and a member of the informal group that called themselves Tamil Liberation Organisation (TLO). Kuttimani fled to Tamil Nadu where the DMK Government headed by M. Karunanidhi was in power. Kuttimani was arrested and later extradited at the request of Sri Lankan authorities to Sri Lanka. Obviously, the DMK government and the Tamil intelligentsia in Tamil Nadu were indifferent to the happenings in Sri Lanka.

In the meanwhile, the Tamil nationalist feelings were greatly hurt by the brutal police action on the last day of the 6th International Tamil Research Conference in Jaffna in January 1974. In the unprovoked police attack, nine persons died in electrocution. Bandaranaike refused to even order an enquiry. The unfortunate incident and the arrogant handling by the authorities had the effect of inciting the linguistic minority to resort to violence. Within a few months, Jaffna had its first suicide by cyanide poisoning, to avoid arrest by police. Sivakumaran, a seventeen year old youth, involved in cases of failed attempts to assassinate a Minister and the Mayor of Jaffna, was trapped by the police while attempting a bank robbery. He chose to swallow the cyanide pill to avoid getting caught. The cyanide cult thus arrived.

In July 1975, the first shots of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism were fired to kill Alfred Duraiappah, the Tamil Mayor of Jaffna and the chief organiser of SLFP in the

45 The other members of TLO that was opposed to the non-violent methods of FP included Thangadurai, Sri Sabaratnam and Vellupillai Prabhakaran.
region. A popular Mayor, he was noted for his proximity to Bandaranaike and for the deaths at the 1974 Tamil meet. Four men were involved in the plot and three of them were caught by the police. The fourth man, who fired at the Mayor at point blank range, was never caught. He was Vellupillai Prabhakaran who came to establish the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The very next year Prabhakaran had another first to his credit, a successful bank robbery that netted more than half a million rupees. Prabhakaran founded the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) which later became the LTTE. A number of Tamil militant outfits with every shade of creed and ideology sprang up like mushrooms.

By 1976, all the Tamil political parties had combined to form the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). The same year TULF adopted, what came to be called, the Vaddukkodai Resolution, which put forward “an independent state of Tamil Eelam, a nation distinct and apart from the Sinhalese, as being the only solution to the problems of Tamils in Sri Lanka.” This state was to be won by nonviolent means. The TULF had their reasoned arguments to back up their claim. The demand for a separate state, Tamil Eelam, was based on two factors: (i) the Tamil claim to nationhood and (ii) the right to self-determination. The Tamils, they claimed, are a nation by every test of nationhood; first, the fact of a separate historical past, secondly the fact of being a separate linguistic entity and finally by reason of their territorial habituation of definite areas. The British united the island under a unitary form of Government in 1833 without the consent of the people. The Tamils had never surrendered their sovereignty and the Sinhala nation had not obtained sovereignty over them by conquest or consent. Therefore, they claimed that
the sovereignty of the Tamil nation, which existed in 1621 at the time of Portuguese conquest should be reverted to the Tamils when last of the legal ties with Great Britain were severed in 1972 by adopting the new Constitution.

Although TULF adopted such a resolution in favour of separation, there is no evidence to indicate that TULF was ready with any viable plan and strategy to achieve this objective. The later events go to prove that the resolution for separation was adopted under pressure from the youth and the TULF leadership never nurtured the thought that Eelam was non-negotiable. Secession by negotiation and using parliamentary democratic processes is an impossible dream, a fantasy and has never worked if history is evidence. The Tamil youth, disquiet over the nonviolent policies of TULF, drifted towards violence and terror. The Tamil militancy was headed for popular, prosperous times.

IX

TULF regarded the general elections in 1977 as a means of proclaiming to the Sinhalese Government the resolve of the Tamil Nation. "Every vote you cast for the front would go to show that the Tamil Nation is determined to liberate itself from the Sinhalese domination." TULF manifesto further stated: "...the TULF seeks the mandate of the Tamil nation to establish an independent, sovereign, secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam that includes all the geographically contiguous areas that have been the traditional homeland of the Tamil-speaking people in the country.” TULF

46 As quoted in Sivarejaiah, n. 11, p. 124.
won 17 out of the 24 seats the party contested in the North and East. TULF claimed
to have got 57 percent of the votes in North and East but the UNP, which was
voted to power with an absolute majority having trounced SLFP, challenged the
claim saying that TULF got only 48 percent of the vote. The strategy of TULF as the
opposition party with the maximum number of MPs was to use Parliament to
mobilize public opinion in favour of Tamil Eelam. The restive Tamil youth further
distanced from the nonviolent policy of TULF. The 1977 anti-Tamil riots fanned the
embers.

By 1978, Tamil Tigers had earned enough notoriety as a militant group with
many successful bank robberies and killings of police officers. An act of Parliament
the same year proscribed the Tigers. The very next year Parliament came out with
the Prevention of Terrorism Act, a draconian legislation which many of its critics
compared with the Terrorism Act of South Africa under the white minority
apartheid regime. The police crackdown that followed the passing of PTA, saw
militant leaders, Thangadurai, Kuttimani, Prabhakaran and others escaping to India.
By 1980, Tamil militancy had nearly died down. Uma Maheswaran walked out of
LTTE to form People's Liberation Organisation for Tamil Eelam (PLOTE).
Thangadurai and Kuttimani were arrested by the Sri Lankan police near Point Pedro
while trying to sail back to India after one of their trysts there.47

Activities of the militant outfits overshadowed the TULF, which was almost
at a political dead-end. UNP as the party in power had neither the political will nor

47 Narayanswamy, n. 23, p. 42.
any concrete programme to find a solution for the Tamil problem. UNP seemed to follow a blow-hot, blow-cold policy of conciliation and coercion to meet the challenge of secession. After negotiations between TULF and UNP, which presumably included continued electoral support to UNP by TULF, a Presidential Commission was appointed in 1979 to examine the existing structure of local Government and suggest changes for organizing developmental activities at the district level. On the basis of the recommendations of the Commission, the parliament in 1980 passed the District Development Council Act that provided for decentralization of power at the centre. The elections to DDCs held in July 1981 resulted in violence and unhappy incidents for which the police and Government agencies were blamed. The Jaffna Public Library was burnt down and the blame for this much publicized act of 'cultural vandalism' was laid at the door of Government forces. Despite those untoward incidents, TULF candidates were elected in all Tamil districts. DDCs, however, did not work as the Government was not genuinely committed to devolving real power. The Tamil youth in general were opposed to TULF because they felt that TULF had betrayed the Tamils by accepting DDCs which were not equipped with even the powers of village councils which functioned under the earlier system. A split occurred within the TULF, a group of youth left TULF to form Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO).

After the DDC fiasco, and when Tamil opinion was strongly against UNP, the TULF leadership decided to back UNP in the presidential elections in October 1982 and the referendum soon thereafter. This curious stand of TULF, much against the prevailing sentiment of the opinion leaders of their constituency, ensured another
term for President Jayewardene. An extended term for Parliament where UNP had absolute majority meant maintaining the capacity of the UNP leadership to use its control of 80 per cent of Parliamentary seats to amend the Constitution at will. "The ruling UNP used all the resources at its command to obtain a majority at the referendum. It succeeded, but only through wide-spread intimidation and, perhaps, electoral fraud." The referendum came to be perceived as an undemocratic act to deprive the people of their democratic right to elect their representatives. The reason for this morally dubious referendum was the alleged discovery of a Naxalite plot, the details of which were never made public. TULF was totally alienated from its constituency and from its professed objective and the initiative passed on to the militants.

Understandably the militant activities in Jaffna had been on the rise and became a lot bloodier. Until 1983, it was slow but natural growth. Also on the increase were the repressive measures by the Government to contain the growing terror and violence. The enforcement of PTA was in full force; so were the host of minor regulations to check the transport and movement of refugees of 1977 riots. The Government machinery was all geared to put down violence at any cost. The changed composition of Sri Lanka's armed forces was of serious concern for the Sri Lankan Tamils. During the early years of independence, there was over

48 Moore, n. 37, p. 610.

49 Leftist revolutionary movement that takes its name from a small village called Naxalbari in Bengal, which is not far away from Nepal and Bangladesh. The rural agrarian movement led by some of the finest brains and the cream of India's youth erupted violently in 1967 and spread across the subcontinent. The flame was doused but the embers remain. See Prakash Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India* (New Delhi: Rupa, 1995)
representation of Sri Lankan Tamils and Burghers and Christians of all groups in the official corps. The Sinhalese-Buddhists formed only two fifth of the officers in the pre-1956 period. As the Government started pursuing a pro-Sinhala policy, the Sinhalese began to dominate the services at all levels thereby destroying the professional and secular logic of the armed forces. The gradual metamorphosis of multi-ethnic forces into a Sinhala Army ultimately contributed to the parting of ways of the two major ethnic groups. The deteriorating human rights situation came up for adverse comment in the Amnesty International report on Sri Lanka published in July 1983. India had also been diplomatically voicing its concerns. These responses had only hardened the anti-Tamil, anti-India posture of the Sinhalese-Buddhist chauvinism, President Jayewardene and his Government came to embody.

X

On 23 July 1983, thirteen Sri Lankan soldiers travelling on a truck on Palaly Road were killed in a land mine explosion. Also killed at the site, apparently by accident, was Sellakkili, a known senior LTTE operative. The next day the army went on a rampage in Jaffna and killed scores of Tamils. Violence against Tamils caught up in Colombo like wildfire. Hundreds were butchered. The most macabre and absurd of all killings in Colombo were that of fifty-three Tamil detainees in the high security Welikade prison in two spells on 25 and 27 July by armed Sinhalese fellow prisoners. Among those who were lynched on 25 July were Thangadurai and Kuttimani. The latter had his eyes gorged out. The two were sentenced to death the previous year.

50 Suryanarayan, n. 36, p. 63.
Kuttimani had triumphantly declared just before the court verdict: "Kuttimani will be sentenced to death today, but tomorrow there will appear thousands of Kuttimanis. They will not be innocent like me, but more vigorous." He also expressed a desire to donate his eyes so that they "may see the birth of Eelam". Tamil militancy or "Tamil Terrorism", as President Jayewardene always felt comfort in referring it as, ceased to be an internal problem of Sri Lanka. In his first major interview after the 1983 riots A. Amirtalingam, the undisputed leader of TULF compared the Tamil militants with Bhagat Singh, declining to label them "terrorist" and calling them "misguided". Prabhakaran, in this first major interview, branded the TULF leaders as "betrayers" and accused them of practicing "opportunistic politics".

In the wake of the 1983 riots, the Sri Lankan Parliament passed the 6th Amendment of the Constitution. In a marathon 13-hour session, Parliament passed the amendment that required all legislators and public officials to take an oath of allegiance to the unitary Sri Lankan state and to disavow all the notions of secession and separatism. The new amendment had the effect of having outlawed the TULF, which had 17 members in Parliament and was the minority group's largest political party, unless the organization renounced its separatist aims. TULF, whose raison d'etre is to fight for an independent Tamil Eelam through parliamentary means, found

51 Narayanswamy, n. 23, p. 94.

52 Ibid., p. 118.

53 Ibid., p. 128.

54 Newsweek, (Pacific edn., Tokyo), 15 August 1983.
it difficult to agree. As a political party, TULF became virtually banned from the parliament. By eliminating the only moderate buffer between the guerrillas and the government, President Jayewardene had, indirectly though, helped the militants to get their moorings right.55

Banished from Parliament by the brute majority of UNP, despised by Tamil Youth as “betrayers of the Tamil cause”, TULF was left without any cause to serve or brief to pursue and was reduced to an anachronism in Sri Lankan politics at least as long as the Tamil militants called the shots. With moderate Tamil opinion thus fading out, it did not take long for Northeast Sri Lanka to slide into a civil war and its urban centres elsewhere, especially Colombo to become targets of Tamil terrorism.

The evolution of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka and its potent militant outgrowth were matters of serious concern to India despite the fact that its links with Tamil Nadu were tenuous. Even in the wake of the worst communal carnage in Sri Lanka in 1983, India made its commitment clear to the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Yet Indian diplomatic initiatives failed to provoke the intended response from Sri Lanka for a political settlement of the problem. The Tamil militancy had gone well past the stage of being a mere police or military problem. Yet, having shut the doors for any meaningful dialogue with the moderate factions

55 Ibid., 8 August 1983.
with a view to reach a political solution, Colombo was steadfast on vengeful fighting mode. Being strategically placed in the region, Sri Lanka's obduracy and lack of realism in its handling its domestic ethnic problem that has strong portends to spill over to the mainland cannot be wished away as far as India is concerned. India had to do some strategic rethink on its policy on Sri Lanka. At this juncture, an investigation of the entire ambit of India-Sri Lanka relations would be well in order, which is attempted in the next chapter.