While a combination of idealism and realism in varying degrees has been the hallmark of India's foreign policy since independence, the conduct of foreign policy during the Nehru era was, however, projected more in idealistic terms than in realist.\(^1\) Since then policy shifts have been with a view to counterbalance the heady idealism with adequate dose of geo-political realism. It was Napoleon who once said that the foreign policy of a country is determined by its geography.\(^2\) This aphorism could be the most appropriate to describe India's relationship with its neighbours, especially with Sri Lanka.

South Asia, a region of considerable size and significance in global terms, has an essentially Indo-centric thrust. India's dominance remains implicit in its geo-political structure, be it in terms of its location and shared borders or the vastness of its size and power potential.\(^3\) India comprises 72 per cent of the Indian sub-continent in area and 77 per cent of the population. Apart from the physical size, India's military and economic capabilities far outweigh its South Asian neighbours with

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\(^2\) As cited in D. C. Jha, "The Making of Foreign Policy" in ibid., p. 16.

\(^3\) Nacy Jetly, "India in South Asia: Constraints and Possibilities" in Nancy Jetly, ed., *India's Foreign Policy: Challenges and Opportunities* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1999), p. 189.
whom India has either land borders or close maritime borders. India has also close historical, religious, economic, ethnic and linguistic relationship with all the other states. These critical factors largely determine the nature and extent of India's relations with its smaller neighbours. These factors also get linked to problems of national identity and diplomatic sensitivities of smaller states in the region.

II

Sri Lanka, the teardrop island south of Indian Peninsula, is one of the close neighbours of India. In the India-centric region of South Asia, having no neighbour other than India, places Sri Lanka geographically at a position of disadvantage. A thrust towards greater and visible autonomy vis-à-vis India is therefore built-in Sri Lanka's India policy. As far as India is concerned, the geography of Sri Lanka is of strategic significance. Sri Lanka is virtually in the centre of Asia and on the maritime routes between the Far East and the African and Arab worlds. The British realised the strategic importance of the island nation and the concept of strategic unity of India and Sri Lanka emerged and the control of Sri Lanka came to be considered essential to the defence and security of India. Fears were not about a threat emanating from Sri Lanka, but that if anybody with inimical interests towards India gained a foothold in the island nation, India's security interests could be adversely

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affected. India's neighbourhood policy, which came to be labeled "India Doctrine", that in the event of internal instabilities of a neighbour that require military and other forms of assistance, India should be consulted and used as a first resort, applies more persuasively to Sri Lanka than to any other neighbour due to this unique geographical imperative. As a necessary corollary, the geography of Sri Lanka ordains India to articulate its policy towards the stability of the island nation. "India should be conscious of the geo-strategic importance of the island nation and therefore, the stability of the island nation becomes very important."

In addition to physical geography, the human geography and historical memories also influence India-Sri Lanka relations thereby adding to the paranoia of the smaller state. Three out of four Sri Lankans are Sinhalese who speak Sinhala, the Indo-European language and practice Theravada Buddhism and they are largely confined to the south and west of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Tamils, who form the major group among the minorities, speak Tamil, a Dravidian language and are predominantly Hindus and inhabit the north and east of Sri Lanka where they form the majority. North Sri Lanka is separated from India's Tamil Nadu by a strip of 23-mile wide shallow sea and Tami Nadu is home to 50 million Tamils, who are mostly Hindu. Added to this is the presence of Indian Tamil estate labour force in the Central province, "entrenched as a 'fifth column' in the hills in what appears on the


map as the strategic ‘centre’ of the island.”

The historical memory of ancient invasions by the kingdoms in south India also clouds the Sinhalese-Tamil ties. In the Sinhalese mindset, the Sri Lankan Tamils are the descendants of the invaders, who have the backing of the great reservoir of Tamils in the mainland. This feeling is accentuated by the realization that the Sinhalese, though they trace their lineage to India, had independently developed their own unique cultural traditions involving their version of Buddhism and their language, which are not shared by any ethnic group extant in India. Therefore, even at the time of independence, the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka were the victims of the syndrome, which Professor Urmila Phadnis chose to describe as the “minority complex” of the majority community.

India and Sri Lanka, like other countries in South Asia, share a long colonial past. India was the ‘jewel’ in the British crown while Ceylon was Britain’s ‘model colony’. As pointed out earlier, the British realised the strategic importance of the island nation and thus the concept of strategic unity of India and Sri Lanka emerged, whereby the possession of Sri Lanka came to be regarded as a prerequisite to the defence and security of India. While it be so, the British kept the administration of their model colony scrupulously separate from that of India. India gained freedom from British rule after a historic struggle for independence that lasted nearly a hundred years. The transformation of the model colony into a Third World country


around the same time was peaceful. India fought and won freedom; Sri Lanka got it on a platter. Independent India had the benefit of a western educated leadership that had been sanctified by the fire of the freedom struggle. The leadership of independent Sri Lanka was the responsibility of the "brown" Englishmen, "the pro-western and anti-communist elites" to whom the British transferred power. Differences apart, both India and Sri Lanka represent colonial successor states superimposed on a pre-capitalist, semi-feudal and multi-ethnic social order. After independence, in order to be politically viable, these states felt the need to transform the ethnic, religious and cultural diversities of its peoples into an overreaching identity of a new nation, though what has been done to realize the felt need could be debated.

After the Second World War and prior to India and Sri Lanka becoming free, Indian leaders, scholars and diplomats had voiced their views that the realistic policy of Indian defence would be the continuation of the concept of strategic unity of India, Burma and Sri Lanka. Such a strategic thinking foresaw Sri Lanka becoming an organic part of Indian body politic. Nehru himself, in 1945, had pointed to the ethnic, linguistic and cultural unity of India and Sri Lanka to support the view that the latter would inevitably be drawn into a closer union with India, "presumably as


an autonomous unit of the Indian Federation".\(^\text{12}\) Although after independence, Nehru had publicly and repeatedly repudiated any suggestion that India had designs to interfere with the island's sovereignty, the perception of a threat from India became a very real element in the foreign policy decision making in Sri Lanka since independence and continues to be so.

### III

With such in-built structural incongruities and power asymmetries, India-Sri Lanka relationship has to have its highs and lows. The bilateral relationship has to be both conflict-ridden and cooperative. On independence, India chose to stay in the Commonwealth and so did Sri Lanka, which on independence did not snap all legal ties with Britain to continue as a British dominion until 1972 when a new Republican Constitution was adopted. India and Sri Lanka had, however, varied perceptions about their strategic interests. India's strategic thinking was almost akin to that of South Asia as a region, but Sri Lanka's had to be narrow and India-centric. In November 1947, a few months before Sri Lanka became independent, it negotiated and settled the Ceylon-UK Defence Agreement, "apparently as a counterpoise to India"\(^\text{13}\) that became free in August. The agreement was to take effect from the day Sri Lanka became independent, which happened on 4 February 1948. By virtue of this agreement, Britain retained the use of Trincomalee naval base and the airbase at

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Katunayake. The pro-western ruling elites to whom the British transferred power were eager to enter into the defence agreement.14 D. S. Senanayake, the first Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, was the architect of the defence pact and he could carry it through without naming India as the source of threat and the cause for security arrangement. The political expediency and imperative for the defence agreement was not adequately explained and justified to the satisfaction of Sri Lankan public opinion.15

India under Nehru did not take offence to the defence pact Sri Lanka signed with Britain. Along with independence, India did not sever all strategic ties with Britain. Indian armed forces continued to be led by British officers. In the matter of development of Indian navy, India was banking on Royal navy's expertise. Time and again Nehru attempted to reassure Sri Lanka that India had no hegemonic designs on her. The perceived threat from the communists is touted as a reason for concluding the pact. By so doing, Sri Lanka wanted to consolidate its position as a bastion of anti-communism in Asia and provide the necessary military security in case of an overt communist threat.16 As earlier indicated, the presence of Indian Tamil plantation labour force in the Central province, at the strategic centre of the island, at the time of independence had been a matter of profound concern for the


14 Suryanarayan, n. 10, p. 59.


16 Murthy, n. 5, p. 348.
Kandyan Sinhalese. At the time when the tea plantations were set up by the British planters using indentured Indian Tamil labour in the mid-nineteenth century, some lands belonging to Kandyan peasantry were taken over. The process of demographic transformation of recent historical origin converted parts of the core area of the old Kandyan Kingdom into a poly-ethnic community. In some areas, for example in Nuwara Eliya district, the Indian Tamils far outnumber the local Sinhalese population.17

In the nature of things, Kandyan anger tended to be turned against the Indian labour rather than against the Scottish planters and the low country Sinhalese businessmen who made money in the commerce of the hill country.18 The Indian plantation labour formed a very deprived class without means of social advancement, kept in isolated line rooms and alienated from the Kandyan peasantry. They knew no country other than Sri Lanka and had voting rights from 1931. In the first Parliament, Indian Tamils had seven representatives and Indian Tamil vote went against the interest of UNP in at least twenty constituencies. The drastic measure of disenfranchising the Indian Tamils was taken partly to weaken the Left movement which was gaining ground among these workers. Secondly, the Acts were intended to


satisfy the Kandyan Sinhalese leaders who feared that the extension of the franchise to Indian Tamil plantation workers would dilute their electoral strength.\textsuperscript{19}

IV

After disenfranchising the Indian Tamils through legislations enacted by the first Parliament, which had the representatives of this unfortunate group, Sri Lanka did manage to bring in a lot of pressure on the Indian leadership especially on Prime Minister Nehru to accept the stateless Indian Tamils “to be thrown out into India as a squeezed lemon.”\textsuperscript{20} New Delhi’s policy was to discourage Indians overseas from applying for Indian citizenship. In the long winding negotiations between New Delhi and Colombo, Jawaharlal Nehru initially maintained that the Indian Tamils were no longer Indian nationals, but the residents of Sri Lanka who ought to be Sri Lankan citizens owing to their long stay in the island and contribution to its economic buoyancy. Replying to a suggestion by a member that a show of strength by India might have resolved the problem of citizenship of Indian Tamils, Nehru spoke in Parliament in March 1953 thus: “The difficulty in a place like Ceylon is the fear that Ceylon has of India. The exercise of strength means more fear on the other side, not less. Here is a great big continent lying astride the north of Ceylon, and they are, I’m sorry, unreasonably just afraid of being swallowed up by India or the Indian


\textsuperscript{20} Sir G. S. Bajpai as quoted in V. Suryanarayan, “The ‘Other Tamils’ of Sri Lanka”, \textit{The Hindu} (Chennai), 18 February 1997.
people." At a later stage and anxious to arrive at a settlement, Nehru agreed to grant citizenship to those who voluntarily opted for Indian citizenship and such a decision was consistent with the interest of those affected and with the Indian Constitutional provisions governing citizenship. Any decision like large-scale repatriation to India would have adverse consequences for Indian communities in other parts of the world.

After Nehru, there was a change in New Delhi's attitude to the citizenship issue of the stateless Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. Eager to come out of the diplomatic isolation India was placed following the reverses in the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962, Lal Bahadur Shastri was determined to remove the irritants in bilateral relations. Sirimavo Bandaranaike seized the opportunity and the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact was hastily concluded in 1964. As per this agreement India agreed to confer citizenship on 5.25 lakh people and to repatriate them and "their natural increase". This Pact was opposed by the DMK in Tamil Nadu as well as by the Federal Party, the Ceylon Workers Congress and the Democratic Workers Congress of Sri Lanka. This agreement was followed by another in 1974 between Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Indira Gandhi as a result of which India was to absorb 75,000 more in two years. These agreements, which had a bearing on thousands of people of Indian origin

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21 Prime Minister Nehru was replying to a suggestion made by Dr Shyama Prasad Mukerjee, a member from the National Democratic Party as reported in The Mail (Madras), 19 March 1953. This remark is also found quoted in Shelton U. Kodikara, "Prospects for Indo-Sri Lanka Relations in the Nineties" in Shelton U. Kodikara, ed., External Compulsions of South Asian Politics (New Delhi/Newbury Park/London: Sage Publication, 1993), p. 242.


23 Bhattacharya, n. 16, p. 74.
were finalized without ascertaining their feelings and anxieties. S. Thondaman, the redoubtable voice of the Indian Tamils and the leader of Ceylon Workers Congress felt that these agreements had reduced Indian Tamils to the status of "merchandise" to be divided between two countries in the name of "good neighbourly relations". India's willingness to accept such terms despite the considerable problems that repatriation posed particularly in Tamil Nadu reflected New Delhi's strategic assessment of the greater value that would accrue to India by keeping good Government-to-Government relations with Sri Lanka. These agreements and the resultant repatriations did not settle the issue of citizenship once and for all. In 1981, New Delhi finally decided that the agreements have elapsed and stopped entertaining fresh applications for Indian citizenship. The Nehruvian policy was thus restored and the remaining stateless people became the responsibility of Sri Lanka. The problem of statelessness was finally resolved by the enactment of the Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act, 1986 and the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons (Special Provisions) Act, 1988 by the Sri Lankan Parliament. From the Indian side a residue of the problem still lingers. About 85,000 Indian passport holders are yet to be repatriated with their "natural increase". Prudence demands that Sri Lanka accord permanent resident status to them and accept their "natural increase" as Sri Lankan citizens.

24 As quoted in Suryanarayan, n. 22.
When S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and his SFLP came to power in 1956, he decided to terminate the British military bases at Katunayake and Trincomalee. Unlike his UNP predecessors, Bandaranaike was more at ease with India and decided not to bank on the UK and Commonwealth to counterbalance India. Bandaranaike’s India policy was the classical pilot-fish policy: keeping close to the shark to avoid being eaten. The policy aimed at redressing the imbalance of power without provoking India. The policy contained elements of accommodation without being conformist. Sirimavo Bandaranaike on becoming Prime Minister in the wake of her husband’s assassination by a Buddhist monk in 1959, declared to follow the slain Prime Minister’s foreign and security policies. As regards Sri Lanka’s relationship with India, Sirimavo attempted to maximize the island’s leverage with India by progressively cultivating China and Pakistan. This Sirimavo could achieve, while maintaining close personal friendship with Nehru and Indira Gandhi, should be seen as a brilliant stroke of diplomacy. In the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962, Sri Lanka kept a neutral posture and did not condemn the Chinese aggression. Not long after the Sino-Indian war, Sri Lanka entered into a maritime agreement with China in 1963. India expressed serious concern on the Sino-Sri Lanka maritime agreement as it suspected strategic underpinnings, at least from the Chinese side. Sri Lanka, however, denied that there was any security dimension to it.

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26 Murthy, n. 5, p. 351.

27 Ibid., p. 352.
Sri Lanka's neutral stand was equally pronounced in the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971. Maintenance of friendly ties with Pakistan had always been a basic element in Sri Lanka's foreign policy. So was the preservation of Pakistan's integrity and maintenance of the existing balance of power in South Asia. Sri Lanka's extension of air transit facilities to Pakistan in 1971 and its delay in recognizing the newly formed Bangladesh were irritants to India. In February 1971, when New Delhi withdrew landing and over flying rights to Pakistani airplanes, Sri Lanka extended these rights to Pakistan so that Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) could fly to East Pakistan skirting peninsular India and availing re-fuelling facilities in Katunayake airport. It is nobody's guess that these flights ferried Pakistani soldiers and war materials and it was an illustration of the extent to which Sri Lanka was prepared to accommodate Pakistan at the cost of provoking India and of facilitating the slaughter of innocents in Pakistan's eastern flank. Even after the crisis got over and Bangladesh was born, in order not to offend Pakistani susceptibilities, Sri Lanka did not accord diplomatic recognition to Bangladesh until March 1972. It may be recalled here that as against its policy during the Bangladesh crisis, Ceylon followed the Indian example and denied transit facilities to Dutch aircraft transporting troops and war materials to Indonesia when Holland had unleashed military action against Indonesians during the Indonesian revolution.

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29 Ibid., p. 139.

Behind a facade of friendship with India, Sri Lanka's diplomatic efforts during Sirimavo Bandaranaike's tenure were thus directed at counter-balancing India's pre-eminence in the region. This alone explains Sri Lanka's calculated attempts to cultivate both China and Pakistan at the same time. India's investment in goodwill in the form of Sirimavo-Shastri Pact of 1964, an unprecedented act of diplomacy of accommodation on the part of India, was not reciprocated in equal measure. Indian leadership and the foreign policy establishment apparently failed to see through the game. Indira Gandhi completely let her personal friendship and warmth with Sirimavo Bandaranaike influence and direct Indo-Lanka relations during 1970-77. As a result, the Congress regime in India was seen as pro-SLFP and the UNP leaders found themselves alienated from New Delhi.  

Mrs. Gandhi's sympathy for the Bandaranaike regime again came to light, when Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a youth led organization, launched an insurrection in 1971 in a bid to capture power. JVP originated in the background of the socio-economic crisis of the sixties. As the established Left parties in Sri Lanka got absorbed in the parliamentary process, their appeal to radical youth waned. Strongly opposed to the parliamentarism of the established Left parties, JVP embodied the disenchantment and frustration of the Sinhalese educated and underprivileged. The Sri Lankan army could not cope with the security threat; Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike approached India, UK, USA, Yugoslavia, USSR and

51 Sahadevan, n. 15, p. 167.
52 Ajay Darshan Behera, "The Social Background of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna in Sri Lanka", in S.D. Muni, ed., Understanding South Asia: Essays in the Memory of Late Professor (Mrs) Urmila Phadnis (South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1994) p. 128.
Pakistan for immediate help. India responded immediately and rushed adequate men and materials for non-combat duties. India’s action was prompted by the desire to protect the democratic system and domestic stability of Sri Lanka.

In addition, New Delhi extended support to the Sri Lankan initiative in the UN General Assembly in 1971 for declaring the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace (IOZP). It is apparent that the espousal of IOZP was not only directed against the super-power rivalry, but also against regional powers. When the initiative came from Sri Lanka, the allusion unmistakably was to India as a pre-eminent power in the region. The declaration, however, was adopted by India and 20 other nations in 1972. Indira Gandhi’s intentions to maintain friendly relations with Sri Lanka was also evident from her attempt to subject her policy towards neighbours, known as “Indira Doctrine” to ally the apprehensions of Sri Lanka.

India agreed to confer citizenship on an additional 75,000 and the agreement to this effect was drawn up during 1974. Another tangible case of accommodation was the resolving the long-standing dispute regarding the maritime boundaries of the two countries. The ownership of Kachchthivu, the small barren island in the Palk Strait, which Indira Gandhi referred to as “a sheer rock with no strategic

33 Suryanarayan, n. 10, p. 60.

34 India Doctrine came to mean India’s Monroe Doctrine or simply as ‘Indira Doctrine’, because it was during Indira Gandhi’s stewardship such expression of hegemonic ambitions was increasingly perceived. Indira Doctrine is interpreted thus: “India will neither intervene in the domestic affairs of any states in the region, unless requested to do so, nor tolerate such intervention by an outside power, if external assistance is needed to meet an internal crisis, states should first look within the region for help.” See Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, “Security in South Asia: An Approach” in Shelton U. Kodikara, ed.,
significance"\textsuperscript{35} was the bone of contention. India conceded Sri Lanka’s claim of this islet, in the maritime agreement signed on 26 June 1974 despite the fact that the historical evidence indicated that it was part of the Ramanathapuram Samasthanam and hence part of India. Conceding territory over which a country has rightful claim for the sake of "befriending neighbourly regimes"\textsuperscript{36} is indeed rare in international politics.

While Indira Gandhi’s decision to conclude the maritime agreement in 1974 without taking into consideration the future needs of the expanding Indian seafood industry and fishing activities in the area created tensions in India-Sri Lanka relations,\textsuperscript{37} both the countries were able to manage the differences. The foreign policy of Sri Lanka, like that of India, during these years was one of non-alignment, with a tilt to the socialist bloc in terms of assistance for public sector industry. Sri Lanka was a strong member of the non-aligned, anti-imperialist Third World. During this period, Sri Lanka’s foreign policy was congruent with that of India. India’s magnanimity to amicably settle the bilateral issues with the smaller neighbour during this period has to be appreciated in this light.


\textsuperscript{35} As quoted in V. Suryanarayan, \textit{Kachchh\textquotesingle u and the Problems of Indian Fishermen in the Palk Bay Region} (Madras: T. R. Publications, 1994)

\textsuperscript{36} S. D. Muni, "Kachchh\textquotesingle u Settlement: Befriending Neighbouring Regimes", \textit{Economic and Political Weekly} (Bombay), pp. 1119-22.

\textsuperscript{37} The cross-border smuggling industry spawned by the ethnic strife and civil war in Sri Lanka’s Jaffna peninsula has added to the confusion. Frequent arrests and shooting of Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan navy continue to attract mainland Tamil attention and often become a point of friction in bilateral relations.
In the wake of the dramatic electoral victory of the Janata Party under Morarjee Desai in India in 1977, J. R. Jayewardene and his UNP came to power on a massive electoral triumph in Sri Lanka in July the same year. The two elderly statesmen found common cause to concert bilateral diplomatic relations at the highest personal level as it had been during the Sirimavo-Indira Gandhi days. In February the following year, Jayewardene assumed the office of the first Executive President of Sri Lanka.

However, with the fall of the Morarjee Desai Government and the spectacular comeback of Indira Gandhi to power in 1980, the personal relationship between the Indian and Sri Lankan heads of State cooled noticeably, particularly after the withdrawal of Sirimavo Bandaranaike’s civic rights on the ground mainly of misuse and prolongation of emergency powers under her regime.38 Though India and Sri Lanka continued to be bound together by their firm commitment to Non-Alignment for the rest of the 70s and up to early 80s, the personal and other incompatibilities between the leaders in two countries started showing the strains in bilateral dealings which grew unnecessarily hard and unmanageable.

One of the factors that generated divergence in India-Sri Lanka ties was changes in Sri Lanka’s economic policies. From 1956 onwards, Sri Lanka had followed an economic policy that was characterized by state regulation of both local and foreign investment, emphasis on the public sector, import-substitution in

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38 Kodikara, n. 28, p. 153.
industry, fiscal policies directed towards an egalitarian distribution of wealth, welfare policies that sought to ensure to all citizens basic needs of food, health and education. These economic and social policies could naturally generate very slow economic growth rates. By 1977, unemployment and scarcities mounted and so did the people's dissatisfaction with the present order of things. Jayewardene Government therefore put in place a new economic policy, geared to a system of public and private sector competition. The changes were drastic. Subsidies were scaled down and Governmental efforts were directed towards attracting foreign investment for an export oriented manufacturing industry. Stringent foreign exchange controls and import restrictions were liberalized. The momentum of Government's economic policies tended to create the free-market economy in Sri Lanka, in place of the state welfarist approaches which marked the policies of previous Governments. Although the earlier welfare measures were retained, the new emphasis was on growth, not distribution. This swing away from an inward-looking regulated economy to an open, export-oriented economy had a determining influence on the country's foreign policy.

In the foreign policy front, the new Jayewardene Government followed the traditional UNP foreign policy of veering towards the West. Sri Lanka though chaired the Non-aligned Movement from 1976 to 1978 and continued to follow a policy of non-aligned, yet at the same time, the imperatives of the new economic strategies including the sources of funding often pushed Sri Lanka in the direction of the Western camp. Sri Lanka, for instance, was one of the very few Third World countries to vote with the UK on the Falklands issue, influenced no doubt by the
The adoption of free-market economy and the westward slant in foreign policy thinking by Sri Lanka brought further strains on Indo-Sri Lanka relations. By then, the Tamil separatist movement in North and East Sri Lanka was gaining strength and growing increasingly militant. The perceived threat from India and the real and growing threat from Tamil militants prompted Sri Lankan leadership by 1983 to search for security globally. The year 1983 marked a watershed in India-Sri Lanka relations.

VI

At this juncture and before proceeding further, it would be appropriate to investigate the ‘people’ factor or the Tamil Nadu factor that has strained the bilateral ties. According to the neorealist paradigm of international relations, there is an ‘automaticity’ of behaviour which impels the actors of the international system, irrespective of structures and processes within the national or regional systems. Human behaviour forms the first dimension and the most important. The second dimension is the internal structure and processes of state that affect foreign policy. The third dimension is the state system or international system where ‘everybody’s strategy depends on everybody else’s’. Kenneth N. Waltz sums up the concept thus:

Each state arrives at policies and decides on actions according to its own internal processes, but its decisions are shaped by the very presence of other states as well as by interactions with them. When and how internal forces find expression, if they do, cannot be explained in terms of the interacting
parties if the situation in which they act and interact constraints them from some actions, disposes them towards others, and affects the outcomes of their interactions.\textsuperscript{39}

International relations, including international conflict may therefore be understood in terms of the spill over of domestic politics into the international system. Again, international conflicts in the post-1945 international system have occurred because of Governments being 'sucked in' to conflicts which originated in the boundaries of other states.

The 'Tamil Nadu factor' has always played a significant role in Sri Lanka's India policy as well as in Sri Lankan State's attitude towards its Tamil population. The manner of treatment meted out to the Indian Tamil plantation labour force that had sweated out for generations in order to nurture and sustain Sri Lankan economy's mainstay, has already been discussed. We now propose to discuss Sri Lankan State's change in attitude towards its indigenous Tamil population and the inducement and reaction to it from the mainland Tamils. As already indicated, the person-to-person contact between Sri Lankan Tamils and mainland Tamils used to be largely limited to between Tamil intellectuals and scholars, those who had university education in India and fisher folk on both sides of the Palk Strait. In numerical and emotional terms, these social interactions were negligibly small as long as kinship and family ties never existed. The legal ferry, frequently disrupted in the past and now completely stopped, was between Rameswaram and Mannar where the respective Governments had their customs and immigration formalities.

The popular ‘smuggling route’ is between the mangrove-forests and lagoons of Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu and Velvettithurai in Jaffna peninsula. The smuggler route is open even when the surveillance by Indian Coast Guard and Navy on one side and Sri Lankan Navy on the other is at peak levels as is the case at present. Greater alertness on the part of the security infrastructure would reduce the frequency and volume of trade, but will not stop it altogether because the economy in the coastal belt is dependent on it for long years. When the risk of getting caught or shot is more, so are the gains. This illegal business and its network have always had a serious security dimension for Sri Lanka. On independence, the Army was deployed on the Sri Lankan side to check this illegal transborder trade. “From the 1950s, units of the Sinhalese-dominated armed forces are posted in Tamil areas of the North to counter smuggling between Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu…; by behaving rather like an army of occupation they contributed to the alienation of the Tamil minority.”40 It is already seen that from 1950s, the ethnic composition of the army and police as well as other public services underwent drastic changes and they became ‘sinhalized’. Such ‘sinhalization’ and the consequent brutalization affected the common man and not the smugglers. The smugglers are the least affected as long as the balance of advantage lies with them. On the Indian side, the smuggling activity was not countenanced as a serious customs problem, as the revenue loss assessed was not found adequate to justify investment in infrastructure to prevent the economic offence. For India, there was no serious security dimension to this fiscal violation until early 1980s.

40 Moore, n. 7, p. 605.
From the official language legislation of 1956 to the Republican Constitution of 1972, which conferred special status to Buddhism, is the period when Sri Lankan Tamil minority was subjected to various kinds of discrimination. These discriminations led to racial riots in Sri Lanka in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983. There is nothing to indicate that the blatantly discriminatory policies of Sri Lankan government against the minority Tamils and the resultant racial riots in 1956 and 1958 evoked any response in mainland. Tamil Nadu did react to the racial riots in Sri Lanka during 1977 and after. As seen in the last chapter, it was in 1973 Sri Lankan Navy seized the boat owned by Kuttimoni and found to carry dynamite across Palk Strait. Kuttimoni, a smuggler by profession and one of the earliest Tamil militants, escaped to Tamil Nadu where he was apprehended and extradited to Sri Lanka at their request. The DMK government headed by M. Karunanidhi was in power in Tamil Nadu and the mainland Tamils were unconcerned about the arrest and extradition of a ‘Tamil militant’ to Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu was quite indifferent to the plight of the Tamils across the sea.41

The response of the Sri Lankan Tamils to the mainland Tamil nationalism espoused by EVR in his Self-respect Movement and the subsequent language agitation spearheaded by C. N. Annadurai and the DMK was equally unenthusiastic. Moreover, C. N. Annadurai had denied any connection with any party abroad and the DMK leaders during their visits abroad had insisted that the Tamils’ loyalty

41 Narayanswamy, n. 8, p. 28. Whenever the DMK came out strongly in favour of the Tamil militants, especially the LTTE, the rival AIADMK and other parties made it a point to cite the extradition of Kuttimani to discredit the DMK and challenge their sincerity.
should be one hundred percent to the countries where they live. The unmistakable conclusion from this is that the Tamil nationalist movements in Tamil Nadu and in Sri Lanka were essentially differentiated by their intent and objectives and there had been no convergence of interests.

The unprovoked police brutality at the International Tamil Research Conference in Jaffna in January 1974, where a few people were killed in electrocution, also did not provoke any worthwhile reaction among mainland Tamils. A lot of symbolism came to be attached to this incident in the growth of Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka. This tragedy was in fact the rallying point for the various Sri Lankan Tamil political parties to forget their differences and to come together for the first time. The first act of Tamil terror, the killing of Jaffna Mayor, was in revenge of this act of police cruelty. The aftermath of the incident also demonstrated the antipathy and arrogance of Sinhalese chauvinism in as much as the Government not only ignored the demand by the Tamils of Jaffna to have an enquiry into the tragedy, but also promoted the police officer who was in charge of the Jaffna Police station during the incident to the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police. Not surprisingly, “Tamil youth felt that this was an onslaught on their culture and a challenge to their pride.”

In the previous chapter, the growth of Dravidian nationalism and the resultant political developments in Tamil Nadu up to 1967 were examined. In 1967,

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42 Sivarajah, n 19, p. 108. Also see the interview of C. N. Annadurai in The Illustrated Weekly of India, 26 September 1965.
the DMK swept the polls in Tamil Nadu and C. N. Annadurai became the Chief Minister. After his death, M. Karunanidhi, the popular poet and movie script-writer became the Chief Minister in 1968. In the subsequent split in the Congress Party, DMK was found backing Indira Gandhi's faction that won the elections. It did not, however, take long for the DMK-Congress (Indira) alliance to run into rough weather. The matinee idol and crowd puller, M. G. Ramachandran (MGR), walked out of the DMK camp to form his own All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) with the support and blessings of the Congress Party. MGR was a caste Hindu from Kerala, brought up in the plantations in Sri Lanka and a naturalized Tamil and had been a die-hard DMK loyalist since its inception. Karunanidhi, who prided himself to be a blue-blooded Tamil, made it a habit since then to ridicule MGR's Malayali\textsuperscript{44} origin.

VII

In 1977 MGR's AIADMK was voted to power in Tamil Nadu and MGR became the Chief Minister. Dismissed from power, slandered by corruption charges and hounded by enquiry commissions, "Kalinget"\textsuperscript{45} Karunanidhi and DMK went into political hibernation waiting for a blue-blooded Dravidian cause to take to the streets once again to rally the Tamils of Tamil Nadu under the DMK banner against the ruling AIADMK, the "hybrid" Dravidian party. The 1977 racial riots in Sri Lanka

\textsuperscript{44} One whose mother-tongue is Malayalam, the language of Kerala. Malayalam, though evolved from Tamil and belongs to the family of Dravidian languages, has a highly 'sanskritised' vocabulary.

\textsuperscript{45} The Tamil word for poet. Karunanidhi is referred to simply as Kalinget with awe by his admirers.
was the god-sent opportunity for Kalinger and the DMK, the political untouchables to recapture street power.

The racial riots of 1977 provoked indignation in Tamil Nadu, which until then had remained largely indifferent to the plight of the island Tamils. The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly expressed rude shock over the violence, in which some Indians had also been hit. It urged Prime Minister, Morarjee Desai, to depute a Cabinet Minister to Sri Lanka for an investigation. The Indian Government expressed its concern to Sri Lankan High Commissioner A. T. Jayakody. “In Madras, the DMK, which only four years ago had handed over Kuttimoni to the Sri Lankan authorities, organized a general strike and a mammoth procession that wound its way through the city to the office of the Deputy High Commissioner of Sri Lanka.”

Since then, the competitive Dravidian parties and their charismatic leaders ensured central place for the Tamil question in Sri Lanka in the political affairs of Tamil Nadu and in the foreign affairs of India. The Sri Lankan Tamil problem remained the glycerin for the filmy politics of Tamil Nadu to emote whenever and wherever needed.

The return of Indira Gandhi and the Congress (I) Party to power in 1980 made it all the more imperative for New Delhi to cultivate MGR and his AIADMK notwithstanding the fact that the Congress (I) and the DMK had fought the elections together. Tamil Nadu had become an increasingly important factor to New Delhi, for out of the four South Indian states only in Tamil Nadu the Congress (I) had a

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46 Narayanswamy, n. 8, p. 35.
powerful regional party as its coalition partner and through this coalition, the ruling Congress (I) intended to regain its lost political prestige and support. As an inevitable consequence, the domestic political situation in Tamil Nadu, especially relating to the Sri Lankan Tamil question, started colouring the perception of New Delhi and its foreign policy priorities on Sri Lanka. The racial riots in Sri Lanka in 1981 also evoked large-scale protests in Tamil Nadu. The DMK was at the forefront of organizing protest rally and meetings.

With this spillover of the Sri Lankan Tamil problem to Tamil Nadu, things started moving fast. For the first time, Prabhakaran and the LTTE claimed credit for many terrorist activities, including the killing of the Mayor of Jaffna. Sri Lanka enacted The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) which came into force in 1979. The subsequent crack down found the militant leaders escaping to Tamil Nadu. Almost every Sri Lankan militant with a police record reached Tamil Nadu at a time when both the ruling AIADMK and the opposition DMK in competition with each other whipped up the sentiments of the people of the state to the discrimination to which their Tamil brethren were subjected to in Sri Lanka. The public opinion in the state irrespective of the political spectrum was deeply sympathetic to the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils. A competitive concern for the "Tamil brethren" outside India, especially those in neighbouring Sri Lanka was integral to this manifestation of ethnic politics.

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47 Sivarajah, n. 19, p. 173.

Two of the most wanted Tamil terrorists of Sri Lanka, V. Prabhakaran and Uma Maheswaran, announced their presence in Tamil Nadu literally with a bang. The comrades-in-arms had parted company even while in Jaffna and Uma Maheswaran organized his own outfit PLOTE (People’s Liberation Organization for Tamil Eelam), which in numerical strength exceeded that of the LTTE. The two, together with their respective ‘gangs’, were involved in a Western-style shoot-out in the busy Pondy Bazaar area in Chennai on 19 May 1982 and police promptly arrested them. This was quite embarrassing for India as it happened at a time when India was, though unconvincingly, trying to deny the presence of Tamil militants on Indian soil. The incident also represented the bitter internecine violence that was brewing amongst the Tamil militant groups.

The Tamil Nadu Police quickly framed a variety of charges against all of them, including attempt to murder and violations of the Indian Explosives Act and Arms Act. But the times have changed. It was not 1973 when Sri Lankan officials could fly to Madras and take back Kuttimani in handcuffs. The arrests of Uma Maheswaran and Prabhakaran, both of whom had by then established contacts with sections of Tamil Nadu politicians, were different. Sri Lanka requested for the extradition of Prabhakaran, who was sought for 18 murders and two bank robberies, and Uma Maheswaran, who had nine murders and a bank robbery to his credit.
Baby Subramaniam, the LTTE’s unassuming public relations man in Tamil Nadu, went about the task methodically. He involved Nedumaran, who had split from the Congress (I) and formed the Tamil Nadu Kamaraj Congress (TNKC). Nedumaran organised an all-party meeting in Chennai on 1 June 1982, which urged the Tamil Nadu government and New Delhi not to extradite Uma Maheswaran and Prabhakaran. The DMK did not take part in the meeting but Chief Minister M. G. Ramachandran sent a representative. Kalainger was not silent and he campaigned against the extradition, alleging that Prabhakaran and Uma Maheswaran would be executed if they were sent to Colombo. New Delhi also took the stand against extraditing these two wanted men to Colombo. Once politics crept in, it was natural that two militants would get away. Sri Lankan Inspector General of Police, Rudra Rajasingham, a Tamil, had to fly back a disappointed man after arriving in Madras with a fiat to bring home the wanted men. On 6 August, a Chennai court released the accused on conditional bail and ordered them to stay in different cities in Tamil Nadu and keep the police informed of their whereabouts. Prabhakaran was assigned to Madurai and Uma Maheswaran to Chennai. The Pondy Bazaar shoot-out and the futile attempts by Sri Lanka to extradite these wanted men to stand trial in Sri Lanka were extensively covered in the Sri Lankan media. The naïve belief that the Union Government in India was bowing to Tamil Nadu pressure seemed a satisfactory explanation to both sides in Ceylon.49

Prabhakaran was earlier in Madurai in 1981 when he had helped train a group of 25 men while he was still associated with the TELO. Most of them had sided with

49 Hoole, n. 18, p. 21.
him after he revived the LTTE. He decided to stay with Nedumaran to make new friends, renew old contacts of even travel out of Madurai. Madurai provided Prabhakaran ample time to go through all that he had achieved and what he had failed to since taking to militancy almost a decade earlier. It was time for introspection and for reading and preparing for the years to come. It also gave him a good insight into the Indian polity; how it functioned and how it could be subverted, if one had the right links.

The Pondy Bazaar shooting incident announced to the world the presence of Tamil militants in Tamil Nadu. The consequent political developments in the state and the decision not to extradite the wanted criminals to Sri Lanka made the point clear regarding India’s stand in the matter, prompted largely by the politically provoked sentiments of the people of Tamil Nadu. It is not clear whether at this stage the militant outfits living in exile in Tamil Nadu had organized themselves for recruitment and training. It is quite unlikely that the Governments both federal and provincial were involved. But it is a fact that the Tamil militants were getting trained by the Palestine Liberation Organisation in Lebanon since 1975 as arranged by Eliyathambi Ratnasabapathy, Secretary General of the Eelam Revolutionary Organisers (EROS), an organization of Sri Lankan Tamils based in London. Both LTTE and TELO had earlier set up their training camps in Sri Lanka. After the militants came to India, they got some of their cadres trained in Tamil Nadu during

50 Narayanswamy, n. 8, p. 78-79.
1981-82 with the help of retired army personnel. At this stage, though India did not directly train the Eelam militants, “the extremists were allowed to perfect their ambushing techniques on Indian soil by themselves, through their own hired mercenaries.” There were media reports confirming the fact that from 1981 onwards India had provided training, weaponry and logistical support to Tamil militant groups. However, there is nothing to suggest that both the state as well as central Governments were aware of it at that point of time.

VIII

It is clear that the Tamils of Tamil Nadu were conditioned to react as emotionally as they could when the 1983 riots broke out in Sri Lanka. The circumstances under which the unfortunate riots broke out and how it turned out to become a pogrom of Tamils in Sri Lanka have already been discussed in the last chapter. Only the reaction of the Tamils in Tamil Nadu to these incidents in the neighbouring country and what bearing it had on India’s policy on Sri Lanka are the matters in focus here.

The reaction to the riots in Tamil Nadu was predictable. MGR asked Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to raise the issue of pogrom at the United Nations. Both the ruling AIADMK and opposition DMK parties organised mass demonstrations and

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51 Narayanswamy, n. 8, p. 97. For the running of clandestine training camps, the militants got the whole-hearted support of the DK by way of accommodation, food etc. The retired army personnel were also engaged by them. According to DK sources, the state intelligence personnel were aware of the training camps at this stage though they did nothing to close down these camps. Later, when the state itself got involved, the intelligence personnel sought help and assistance from those very same DK activists to organize training camps.

52 Sivarajah, n. 19, p. 139.
thousands of Tamils in Tamil Nadu took to the streets and marched to the Sri Lankan Deputy High Commission in Chennai. Noisy protest marches were also organised all over Tamil Nadu. A handful of protesters immolated themselves. An all-party delegation from Tamil Nadu urged Indira Gandhi to press for U.N. intervention and rushing troops for Sri Lanka. The DMK conducted a signature campaign and collected ten million signatures to send the UN requesting it to call upon the Government of Sri Lanka to grant the right of self-determination to the Tamils in Sri Lanka. In the Tamil Nadu Assembly, the DMK along with Gandhi Kamaraj Congress under Nedumaran and Kumari Ananthan advocated the theory of intervention and argued in favour of a Bangladesh-type of action against Sri Lanka. A Member of Parliament from DMK wanted New Delhi to sever diplomatic links with Sri Lanka. The political leaders and the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu attempted to exploit the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka to their advantage. This shows that the manipulation of ethnic identity by ruling elites in the absence of other effective forms of political participation is not rare in Third World politics.

"India does not hold any threat to Sri Lanka or wish to interfere in its internal affairs. We want the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka to be preserved," Indira Gandhi informed the Indian Parliament in the wake of the racial riots in 1983.

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53 Ibid., p. 173.

54 Narayanswamy, n. 8, p. 95.

55 Sivarajah, n. 19, p. 176.


57 Newsweek, 8 August 1983
While India was always perceived as a source of threat and the India-Sri Lanka relations were at an all-time low, President Jayewardene did not accuse India as the cause for the racial riots of 1983. On the other hand, Jeyawardene and other Government officials argued that the rioting was instigated by Communist Governments out to destabilise the country. The fact of the matter, however, was that longstanding hatred and mistrust between the two ethnic groups simply boiled over and the government was to be blamed for letting the rioting get out of hand by not intervening until it was too late.\textsuperscript{58}

The rioting triggered the migration of the Tamils from the north Sri Lanka to India. At the same time, the Tamils living outside the traditional Tamil areas of Sri Lanka started moving towards north and east. The massive refugee flow to India and the internal displacement and migration of people across the country further escalated the conflict situation and increased the ethnic tensions. Indira Gandhi wanted to put pressure on Jayewardene for an amicable settlement of the problem that had portends to become an international issue. She rushed her External Affairs Minister, Narasimha Rao, to Colombo within three days of the outbreak of the Colombo riots that shook the world. True to his arrogant self, Jayewardene kept Indian Minister for External Affairs waiting in the Presidential ante-room for twenty minutes before receiving him.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
The riots came in handy for the President to carry through Parliament the Constitutional Sixth Amendment, stipulating that all members of Parliament should unequivocally commit themselves to the unity of Sri Lanka and the provisions ensuring the domination by the Sinhalese of the Sri Lankan state. As TULF members could not comply with this stipulation that goes against their professed goal of a separate Tamil Eelam, a party which at that time was the largest party in opposition was as good as banished from Parliament. Such an action silenced the moderates and with the Government dead against any talks with the terrorists for fear that they gain legitimacy in that process, a negotiated settlement of the intractable Tamil ethnic issue was nowhere in sight, notwithstanding the constant diplomatic efforts and pressure by India and the firm assertion by Indian Prime Minister that India stood for the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

IX

After the 1983 riots, the strategic divergence in Indo-Sri Lanka relations became sharp and deeply manifested in bilateral dealings. Sri Lankan leadership started looking to the West for security and military assistance. China and Pakistan readily accepted Sri Lanka’s request for military supplies. Jayewardene tried to revive the 1947 defence treaty with UK for getting Britain’s direct military presence in the island, which did not materialise. UK’s indirect support was in the nature of arranging former British Special Air Services (SAS) officers to train the Sri Lankan

59 J. N. Dixit, Assignment Colombo (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1998), p. 16. Dixit, a career diplomat with excellent credentials, was India’s High Commissioner in Colombo from 1985 to 1989 and later rose to become India’s Foreign Secretary, after his tenure in Islamabad.
commando units. The USA also abstained from directly getting involved in the Sri Lankan affairs. The services of Israeli intelligence agencies, Mossad and Shin Bet to assist the Sri Lankan forces were arranged presumably at the initiative of the USA. Later Washington even permitted the Israelis to open their ‘interest section’ in the US Embassy in Colombo. Jayewardene extended the refueling facilities to the visiting naval ships and recreation for its personnel. India, long distrustful of Jayewardene and the UNP and their pro-West proclivities, perceived a serious threat to its security, finding interests inimical to its own gaining ground in the island neighbour.

Sri Lankan overtures to the West had to be seen in the context of the Cold War politics and the volatile strategic environment in the region in the 80s. Indian Ocean was no longer a zone of peace but a playfield of superpower rivalry. Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 had ensured this. Under such a situation, India could not afford to sit idle and watch intelligence agencies of extra-regional actors in its backyard and posing a threat to otherwise calm and peaceful peninsular India. The Sri Lankan leadership was insensitive to India’s legitimate security concerns.

As far as Sri Lanka’s ethnic problem was concerned, no country other than India, should feel more concerned, even after discounting the volatile Tamil Nadu factor. With more than 150,000 refugees coming to India in a short span of time, India had a massive humanitarian problem that had grave security underpinnings. India was, therefore, the most critical external element in the resolution of the internal conflict in Sri Lanka, which was later acknowledged by the international
community. Despite this and despite Sri Lanka’s frantic attempt to build up a strategic design aimed at countervailing India, New Delhi’s policy towards Sri Lanka continued to be tempered by caution, concern and continuity.

India’s cautious approach was reflected on two counts: first, by refusing military intervention and secondly, by trying not to hurt the sentiments of India’s Tamil population. India would have to weigh the long-term implications of a multilateral external intervention of the future crisis situation in the South Asian region as a whole and specifically, on India’s efforts to grapple with its own separatist elements. India’s concern has always been that India’s security is closely linked with its immediate neighbours, especially the geo-strategically located island nation, and India can ignore ominous developments only at its own peril. India’s concern is also due to the fact that ethnic loyalties straddle India’s boundaries with its neighbours and especially so with Sri Lanka. India, therefore, was keen to continue its Sri Lanka policy of insulating the island from adverse external forces, which could have a destabilizing impact on India’s security and strategic environment.

With Sri Lanka’s strident posture against India’s security sensitivities, it became incumbent upon India to pursue “a two-pronged strategy, which was, on many occasions, mutually contradictory – mediatory and militant supportive.”\(^\text{60}\) This is an instance of “linkage politics”, the process by which compulsions of domestic policies enter into and often become integral with the formation and conduct of

The option of even military intervention was open to Indira Gandhi. But her concerns about potential separatism in Tamil Nadu and her critical evaluation of Jayewardene’s developing equations with the United States and Israel made her adopt “a deliberately ambiguous and slightly dangerous stand on the evolving situation in Sri Lanka.”

India’s two-pronged strategy on Sri Lanka was mainly prompted by Tamil Nadu politics. MGR had to indicate the case of India supporting the Sri Lankan Tamils despite its future adverse implications for fear that otherwise the DMK leader M. Karunanidhi and other Tamil opposition parties would have accused him of betraying fellow Tamils in Sri Lanka in their hour of trauma and crises. Tamil Nadu politicians had by then started contrasting Indira Gandhi’s activist postures during the East Pakistan crisis, which led to the creation of Bangladesh, with her temporizing approach in relation to Sri Lanka. These politicians, however, failed to realise differences between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. In Bangladesh, virtually the entire population was for the country’s liberation but in Sri Lanka, the demand for liberation was from a section of the minority Tamil population in the North-Eastern region. A major chunk of the Tamils in the North-East, the whole lot of Muslims and Sinhalese in Eastern Province were not for secession. Again unlike Dhaka, Jaffna is not a thousand miles away from the mother country and therefore, unlike the

61 For a theoretical overview of linkages between domestic politics and foreign policy see Nalini Kanth Jha, Domestic Imperatives of India’s Foreign Policy (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 2002), Chapter I; and his Internal Crisis and Indira Gandhi’s Foreign Policy (Patna: Jaike Prakashan, 1985) Chapter I.


Pakistani army, the Sri Lankan army is not likely to give up the fight to prevent the country breaking up. Moreover, in 1971, there was hardly any separatist movement in India like the Khalistan movement of the '80s that would have prevented India from taking an interventionist role in Bangladesh.64

India’s policy towards the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka had, therefore, been conceived within an operating framework that was delicately poised between denying absolute victory to the Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan Government while, simultaneously, obstructing the establishment of a Tamil Eelam. India’s dual purpose was to stop or reverse the ingress of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees into Tamil Nadu, but also to establish a cordon sanitaire around India’s southern security perimeter. Preserving Sri Lanka’s unity and integrity was believed to be imperative; otherwise, the emergence of two economically weak, vulnerable states would create the objective conditions wherein external powers that could be inimical to India might establish a presence in Sri Lanka.65

Indian Government was thus willing to use the Tamil Nadu based militant groups for interceding in Sri Lankan affairs as part of its coercive diplomatic effort to channel Jayewardene Government into seeking a modus vivendi with the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. This effort was presumably assessed in Colombo as blending New Delhi’s mediatory effort with the dissuasive power of support to the militants

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in order to force Colombo to accept a solution for its ethnic problem that met India's strategic objectives. The Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India's external intelligence agency, was apparently given the task to "penetrate these groups to limit their militancy, erode their external linkages, and bring them under Indian influence. In the task RAW secured the go-ahead signal to even provide military training, money and arms to the Sri Lankan Tamil militants." 66 This effort was intended to limit the perceived influence of foreign intelligence agencies in Sri Lanka representing Israeli, Pakistani and mercenary interests, that were seeking to penetrate the Tamil militant groups in pursuit of their own objectives. 67 An unintended consequence of these efforts by RAW was to widen latent differences between the Tamil militant groups. 68

Tamil groups, like EROS, PLOTE and EPRLF (Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front) had earlier received training in Syria and Lebanon in the mid-70s. EROS was trained by the PLO and PLOTE and EPRLF were trained by the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine). The training that the Indians imparted was more extensive and involved almost all the major groups including the LTTE and TELO, which had hitherto had a few training camps of

65 Chari, n. 48, p. 5.
67 The officers of Cabinet Secretariat who were posted in Madras at various levels as RAW operatives talked privately and in confidence about their involvement in the training and arming of the Tamil militants. Some of them even admitted that they were skeptical of the strategic gains of such an exercise. A few local DK activists were personally familiar with the Government of India officials who were involved in these delicate operations.
68 Chari, n. 48, p. 4.
their own in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. The dependence on West Asia for training ceased after Indians started training the Tamil militants. These militants were trained in camps run at various places in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, New Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh. The PLOTE and TELO trained the largest number; perhaps some five thousand persons in about fifteen well run camps. The LTTE had camps in Salem and Madurai. MGR established links with these groups to ensure that he was not personally outflanked on the Tamil issue by rivals such as M Karunanidhi of the DMK. First the PLOTE and then the LTTE came for his personal patronage and funding. This, in turn, encouraged a competitive chauvinism between the two political rivals.

India was an affected country in the ethnic conflict. The bilateral issues stemmed from the ethnic conflict to which India was sucked into. India’s stakes and interests in the conflict arose out of Sri Lanka’s strategic choice and from the spillover effect of the violence from 1983. Being an affected party, India had a justifiable role as a peacemaker. Sri Lanka was skeptical of India’s intentions and the strained personal relations between the heads of Government in the two countries added to the piquant situation. The anti-India feeling was so widespread in Sinhala-Buddhist constituency that they failed to appreciate India’s unwavering commitment


70 The Salem camp for training LTTE cadres was set up in the property owned by DK activist Kolathur Mani who oversaw the activities there. Mani, who was a witness in Rajiv Gandhi assassination case knows all senior LTTE leaders and remembers the officers of state and central Governments involved in the training programme and shared all what he knew in an informal interview. After the ban on LTTE in India, Mani had been to jail several times for indulging in pro-LTTE activities.
to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. After being militant-supportive, India had an uphill task to become acceptable as a mediator. When India began the peace process in 1983, the intention was to play a limited role of facilitator of communication between the adversaries. “The role and strategies of a mediator cannot be uniform throughout the period of its involvement in the conflict, and role expansion is often necessitated by the ineffectivity of its earliest strategies to break the intransigent position of adversaries and the imperative of widely felt by all sections of the strife-torn society as well as the mediator.”71 In the meanwhile, in March 1984, India Today, the news magazine published from New Delhi, highlighted the presence and activities of the Sri Lankan militants in Tamil Nadu. South, the journal published from London in its May 1984 issue let out the full details of the location of training camps, period of training and the numbers trained in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere in India.

Being a covert operation carried out by intelligence agencies at various places at the same time almost two decades ago, one can only depend on published reports based on eye-witness accounts and the like of that operation. These would indicate that the Government-sponsored training of Tamil militants started some time in September 1983. An estimated 1,200 militants were trained by RAW alone in the use of automatic and semi-automatic weapons, self-loading rifles, rocket launchers and heavy weapons and in laying mines, map-reading, guerrilla war, mountaineering, demolitions and anti-tank warfare.72

71 Sahadevan, n. 15, p. 175.
The various groups were trained separately but each group knew that the other groups were also being trained. Some of them who got trained, on examination by journalists spoke out their impression that India was not serious about Eelam and gave them training and arms “only to teach Colombo a lesson” for its pro-West foreign policy. And as the militant leaders realized, there was enough dichotomy in the Indian polity which could be used to one’s benefit with some diligence and understanding - the rivalry between the central intelligence agencies and the Tamil Nadu police; unending feuds among Tamil Nadu politicians and the close links between the Tamil Nadu and Union Governments. The supply of arms to various groups started in 1984. The training camps, especially in Tamil Nadu, were not only visible to the local population but also run with local participation. The members of DK were enthusiastic in extending help to those organizing the training camps.

Sri Lanka stayed in the centre-stage in the political affairs of Tamil Nadu. Karunanidhi and DMK General Secretary K. Ambazagan resigned their seats in the state Legislative Assembly to express solidarity with the Sri Lankan Tamils. With the

72 A Sri Lankan who calls himself ‘Gundappa’ and lives in Chennai since 1987 was among the first to get training in Uttar Pradesh. Back in Jaffna as a LTTE fighter, he was injured in an explosion and was evacuated to India for medical treatment in 1987. He was involved in the ‘political’ activities of the LTTE in Madras when all LTTE bigwigs like Anton Balasingam and Baby Subramaniam were in Madras. Gundappa is known to all journalists and intelligence officers who consider him a renegade having snapped his ties with the LTTE. Gundappa narrated the training he got in India. Also see Narayanaswamy, n. 8, p. 110.


74 The intelligence personnel sought the help of local people for accommodation, messing arrangements etc. for organizing such training camps. This could be out of lack of experience and professionalism in handling covert operation of such magnitude. Wherever training camps were set up in Tamil Nadu, various factions of DK got actively involved. The response from mainstream political parties was lukewarm as it was apparent that such a secret exercise would not win them votes.
Sri Lankan Tamil issue on the political chessboard, MGR had to score points over his blue-blooded Dravidian opponents in order to stay on in power. Karunanidhi unveiled portraits of Tamil militants killed in Sri Lanka including that of Kuttimoni, whom his Government had extradited to Sri Lanka a few years back. MGR went a step ahead and declared the allotment of a Government-built house costing Rs 200,000 to Kuttimoni’s family. New Delhi could not turn a deaf ear to the domestic political hysteria, though instigated and provoked for narrow selfish and sectarian interests, in articulating their policy on Sri Lanka. The Indian government made no effort to apprise the moderate Tamil leadership about the militant training programme. At the same time, following its two-pronged approach, New Delhi prodded the moderates to start talking to Colombo. India also continued with its diplomatic parleys with an increasingly intransigent Colombo for an amicable political settlement.

It was in this complex and adversarial context, Indira Gandhi assigned the special diplomatic mission to G. Parthasarathy, the career diplomat who was then Special Adviser on foreign affairs. Parthasarathy’s brief was to bring the Sinhalese Government around to a position where they would meet legitimate Tamil aspirations. Indira Gandhi’s choice of Parthasarathy, a Tamil for this delicate endeavour was also to convince the people of Tamil Nadu that the interests of Sri Lankan Tamils would be safeguarded. Parthasarathy went about the task assigned to him professionally; he discussed the issues involved with all parties in the dispute including the militants and prepared a set of proposals which came to be known as
the Annexure C Proposals.\textsuperscript{75} Essentially, the proposals were for empowering the existing provision of District Development Councils by clustering them into one or more Regional Councils with legislative and executive powers without prejudice to the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka. Under diplomatic pressure from India and to appease the growing international criticism about widespread human rights violations in Sri Lanka, President Jayewardene convened an All Party Conference (APC) in January 1984 to find a political solution to the ethnic conflict. The proposals drawn up by G. Parthasarathy came up for consideration by APC. Initially the general response was quite favourable. However, intransigence on the ruling formation sabotaged a consensus of the issue. SLFP and other minor parties withdrew from the APC whereby APC lost its all party character.

With the positive encouragement by India, the Tamil militancy which had a normal growth till then was poised for exponential growth. The number of militant groups suddenly expanded. The strength of the trained cadres in some of the major groups ran into thousands. Such sudden growth in the number and strength of militant groups had to force dramatic changes in the ground situation and further fuel friction and inter-group rivalries. The increasing primacy given to gun-totting politics by the guerrilla groups also produced in the new warriors an undisguised contempt for mainstream Tamil leaders who were seen enjoying Indian hospitality while the "boys" fought and perished.\textsuperscript{76} The militants also had a similar, although not comparable disdain for the Sri Lankan Tamil society back home, which

\textsuperscript{75} The full text of "Annexure C Proposals" is Annexure VI.

\textsuperscript{76} Narayanswamy, n. 8, p. 175.
continued to place importance on education and career advancement and did not allow its children to take to militancy.

By 1986, there were nearly 38 Tamil militant organizations in existence. Tamil militancy aimed at the creation of Eelam became violent in character primarily because of the Sri Lankan Government's repeated failure to fulfil their assurances and commitments given to the moderate Tamil parties about granting autonomy and devolving power to Tamil areas in Sri Lanka. Practically all the Tamil groups that had received some form of assistance and training in India had left-of-the-Centre ideological orientation and all of them subscribed to almost the same set of political demands.

Indira Gandhi's sudden and unexpected end had its adverse fallout on the ongoing diplomatic parleys with Sri Lanka. She was well informed about the complexities of Sri Lanka; she was conscious of New Delhi's limitations and, what is more, she knew about the Machiavellian qualities of President Jayewardene. Her statements were deliberately vague and they kept Colombo guessing about New Delhi's intentions. The change in guard in New Delhi also changed personalities and personal equations. The chemistry between Rajiv Gandhi and Parthasarathy was not positive.

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77 Dixit, n. 59, p. 77.
78 Suryanarayan, n. 60, p. 394.
Parthasarathy’s deliberate, cautious and patient style of diplomacy could not mesh in with Rajiv Gandhi’s approach which aimed at quick and decisive results.79

By February-March 1985, the new foreign secretary, Romesh Bhandari, became the key representative of the Indian Government dealing with the Sri Lankan crisis. In striking contrast to his predecessor, the ascetic, aloof and Brahminical G. Parthasarathy, Bhandari arrived in Colombo bursting with bonhomie and succeeded in winning official approval in Colombo. He has earned his nickname “no problem” Bhandari and the hurriedly convened Rajiv-Jayewardene summit was partly the result of his efforts. But many in Tamil Nadu believed that in making the change Rajiv Gandhi was handing responsibility to someone with neither the personal knowledge nor the temperament to argue the subtleties of either the Sri Lankan Tamil or the Indian Tamil positions.80 It was the first time that Sri Lankan Government agreed to talk to the representatives of the Tamil separatist movement, giving up the stand adopted till then that such discussions about a political solution would provide legitimacy to Tamil separatists. Instead of engaging a full-time foreign policy bureaucrat, who had myriad official functions to perform, the Indian Government should have chosen a highly respectable public figure to conduct the mediation process.

Jayewardene came to Delhi and had a day-long meeting with Rajiv Gandhi in June 1985, when he expressed his Government’s willingness to talk to the militants

79 Dixit, n. 59, p. 25.
80 Bradrock, n. 25, p. 72-73.
with two pre-conditions. India should stop supporting the militants and should not endorse the demand for a separate Tamil state. Jayewardene joined Rajiv Gandhi on his goodwill visit to Dacca to sympathize with the Bangladeshis in the death and destruction brought about by the worst cyclonic storm. Rajiv Gandhi felt that he had persuaded Jayewardene to accept the provinces of Sri Lanka as primary units of devolution rather than the districts. The talks were under the auspices of India and hosted by Bhutan at Thimpu, their capital. The procedure and agenda for the talks were drawn up by Romesh Bhandari in consultation with the parties. The Sri Lankan Government decided to send a delegation headed by H. W. Jayewardene, the President's younger brother and a lawyer by profession with no Government position. The Tamil side had representatives from TULF, PLOTE, LTTE, EPRLF, TELO and EROS.

In the first round of talks held in July, after the plenary session, the dialogue degenerated into an acrimonious bedlam on procedure and legal grounds. There were wordy duels between Romesh Bhandari and a Tamil militant leader followed by a walkout by the Tamils in protest. The Tamil representatives articulated their basic demands for agreeing to a settlement of the issue and these came to be referred to as the "Thimpu Principles":

1. Recognition of the Tamils as a separate nation
2. Recognition of the areas occupied by the Tamils as the homeland of Tamils
3. Recognition of the right of self-determination of the Tamils
4. Granting citizenship

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to all those Tamils who wish to make Sri Lanka their home.\textsuperscript{82} The Sri Lankan Government delegation found conceding the demands as tantamount to granting a separate state for which they had no mandate to agree. They held the view that their brief was restricted to negotiating a deal within the framework of the Sri Lankan Constitution.

The first round of talks ended in abject failure though the parties grudgingly agreed for the scheduled second round the next month. Within the Sri Lankan government, there was a powerful lobby lead by Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa that was opposed to the role of India as mediator. In the meanwhile, New Delhi tried to impress upon Colombo that India's policy towards Sri Lanka's ethnic problem was an "Indian policy" and not a policy dominated by any narrower Indian ethnic considerations. The second round was also a disaster. The PLOTE, EPRLF and TELO withdrew one of their representatives each from Thimpu in protest, leaving one man each still behind. But the LTTE, in a sign of defiance, ordered both its members to fly back to Chennai. The TULF chief stayed on patiently. The Thimpu negotiations roused widespread anger and revulsion in Sri Lanka's northeast. Jaffna thought it was humiliating that Tamil leaders had been literally frog-marched to the Bhutanese Capital with threats that they would be banished from India if they did not cooperate. India had trained the militants to fight for Eelam; so this was seen as betrayal. All these months the militants had been

\textsuperscript{82} The Thimpu Principles, which the LTTE considers as the cardinal principles that guide their destiny, are so cleverly and cunningly conceived and articulated that the Tigers can fight for a separate Tamil Eelam upholding the Principles and whenever they want a time-out in war, then they can settle down for negotiations, again upholding the Principles. To this day, the Tigers' readiness to finally
decrying the TULF for its willingness to agree to a negotiated settlement; now they themselves were forced to talk. India appeared now to be badly letting down the Tamils and bailing out the Sri Lankan Government at a critical juncture.

It was clear by now that India’s delicate two-pronged policy of mediation and being militant supportive at the same time was not working well. The Sri Lankan Government, with the exception of the President, was highly suspicious of India’s role as an honest broker after having trained and supported the militants so long. The militants were also at an ideological quandary. Having been trained and armed to fight for an independent Eelam, India, on its own geo-political interest, was coercing them to lower their goals and settle for something much less. While those militant outfits which were small and militarily weak showed an inclination to go by India’s bidding, the LTTE and its charismatic leader, V. Prabhakaran, were determined to pursue their fight for Tamil Eelam. Even at the beginning, Prabhakaran had read India’s mind and was aware of the limits to India’s largess. As a natural corollary to the present developments, the LTTE started perceiving all other Tamil groups that obey India’s command as their enemy.

Prabhakaran was candid in a later interview: “In my opinion there must be only one dominant militant group to lead the struggle…. Ours is the only single liberation movement”. 83 This explains the ruthless internecine fights Northeast Sri Lanka witnessed in the next few months when the Tigers annihilated rival Tamil

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83 Saturday Review (Colombo), 4 October 1986.
leadership and disbanded their cadres. The specialists on guerrilla warfare insist that no guerrilla movement should develop a dependency on an external factor. The Tigers snapped their umbilical chord with India yet continued to play politics in Tamil Nadu. Henceforth Prabhakaran would be considered the deciding factor in any settlement of the ethnic conflict, a position the TULF and its leader Amrithalingam had been holding for long. In any civil war situation, it is military superiority and not majority that counts. The significance of the new scenario was not lost on any of the Tamil groups or the Indian Government.

XII

It was in this background Rajiv Gandhi decided to send Indian Ministers of State, Chidambaram and Natwar Singh, to Colombo in May, as his special emissaries to hold talks with President Jayewardene and other Sri Lankan leaders. Chidambaram with his Tamil identity and Natwar Singh with long experience in Indian Foreign Service, were chosen as a balanced team for the sensitive mission, which was primarily to start fine-tuning proposals for resolving the ethnic crisis, contained in the document, which was finalized in Delhi in August 1985 between Romesh Bhandari and H W Jayewardene and referred to as the “The Delhi Accord”. As their first round of discussions with Lalith Athuluthmudali, Sri Lankan National Security Minister, got underway in Colombo, news came about the blast in an Air Lanka Tri-Star jet that was being readied for a flight to Male. The bombing, later attributed to the Tigers, killed 16 persons and injured about 50 and the timing of the terrorist attack could have been deliberate to confuse the negotiators.
After several rounds of discussions, President Jayewardene agreed to expand the devolution package but did not concede the linkages between Northern and Eastern provinces. The arrangement was that the revised package would be discussed in an All Party Conference and if any consensus emerged, that would be announced at the SAARC Conference in Bangalore scheduled for 17 and 18 November 1986. Tamil militants were not invited for the Political Parties Conference. TULF joined the conference. The Political Parties did not accept the Tamil demand for the creation of a united North-Eastern Province and declaring it a Tamil homeland. In the second SAARC summit, held at Bangalore after discussions with the Rajiv Gandhi, Jayewardene declared that he was prepared to divide the Eastern Province into three and make Batticalova a Tamil Province leaving Trincomalee and Amparai to the Sinhalese and the Muslims respectively. This announcement was because the unit of devolution and the future of the East appeared to be the major hurdles which divided the Governments and the Tamil groups. The Indian Air Force (IAF) had flown Prabhakaran and Anton Balasingham from Chennai to Bangalore for a probable meeting with President Jayewardene. To the President’s announcement, Prabhakaran reacted that the proposed division of the East amounted to dismemberment of the Tamil homeland and handing over a portion to the Sinhalese most of whom were immigrants to Trincomalee. The meeting of the titans did not take place and the SAARC summit did not witness the breakthrough which both Jayewardene and Rajiv Gandhi desired. But Prabhakaran got what he wanted: the recognition that the LTTE alone mattered now if Colombo was to seek a settlement.
Early in the morning of 18 November 1986, Tamil Nadu police commandos, in a meticulously planned operation codenamed “Operation Disarm”, raided some 30 rebel camps all over Tamil Nadu and seized a huge cache of arms and ammunition. The arms seizure completely exposed Indian claims that it was not harbouring Tamil militants. The Tiger leader launched a flash hunger-strike in Chennai demanding the return of his powerful communications sets. MGR buckled, and in a complete turnaround returned to the LTTE not only the communication equipment but also all the arms seized in Chennai. The most significant political consequence of the post-SAARC developments was Prabhakaran’s realization that he could not expect unqualified support from Tamil Nadu authorities or the Government of India. He commenced shifting his operational base from Chennai to Jaffna by the middle of December 1986 and eventually he faded out of India. The LTTE came to display not only absolute mastery in waging guerrilla war in the Jaffna peninsula, but also a rare sense of diplomacy to slowly assume the mantle of the dominant Sri Lankan Tamil voice. It sought recognition from India as the sole representative of the Sri Lankan Tamil People, a stature like that of PLO or the African National Congress.

The efforts for a negotiated settlement thus disrupted, Sri Lanka that had built up its military strength substantially planned to take on the Tigers in a large-scale military operation. Rajiv Gandhi wanted to avoid this and deputed

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84 The Hindu, 19 November 1986. The police operation was master-minded by K. Mohandas, then Director General of Police (Intelligence), Tamil Nadu. For a first hand account, see K. Mohandas, MGR: The Man and the Myth (Bangalore, Panther Books, 1992)
Chidambaram and Natwar Singh again to Colombo on 17 December 1986. The two ministers held several rounds of discussions for two days with all the concerned parties and drew up, what came to be called the “December 19 Proposals”. The proposals in brief are as follows: (1) Sri Lanka agreed to examine the creation of the post of Vice-President of the country, a post which would go to a Tamil. (2) The present territory comprising the Eastern Province minus the Ampari Electoral District may constitute the new Eastern Province. (3) A Provincial Council will be established for the new Eastern Province. (4) The institutional linkages between the Northern Province and the Eastern Province agreed upon earlier will be further refined in order to make it more acceptable to the parties concerned. (5) Sri Lankan Government will be willing to consider a proposal for a second stage of constitutional development and providing for the Northern Province and the new Eastern Province coming together subject to modalities being agreed upon for ascertaining the wishes of the people comprised in the Northern Province and the Eastern Provinces separately. (6) The five Muslim Members of Parliament of the Eastern Provinces may be invited to visit India to discuss matters of mutual concern with the Tamil side under the auspices of the Government of India. The decision taken by Jayewardene and the Indian Ministers was that “December 19 Proposals” would be conveyed by the Government of India to the Tamil Nadu Government, TULF and other militant groups, with the suggestion that if there could be a suspension of military activities and militant operations, these proposals could be the basis of putting in place arrangements for autonomy for Tamil areas of Sri Lanka and devolution of powers to them.85

85 Dixit, n. 59, p. 64.
With the Tiger and the Lion poised for a fight to finish, India found itself at a diplomatic dead-end by the end of 1986; India-Sri Lanka relations hit a low trough. India had never failed to articulate her policy priorities clear: (1) India stands for the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and (2) India wants the legitimate democratic aspirations of minority Sri Lankan Tamils met. The myopia of the Sinhalese-Buddhist chauvinists and the hysteria of the mainland Tamil politics clouded India's foreign policy imperatives and diplomatic efforts. From the geo-strategic perspective, India shuddered even to consider a situation when the strategically poised island neighbour breaks up into two countries in the bipolar world order. Keeping good relations with two such countries would be an impossible diplomatic tight-rope for India. And the ethnic fault-lines of one of the two countries would run across peninsular India to include Tamil Nadu adding to the confusion and limiting India's policy alternatives to the bare minimum. The Sri Lankan paranoia about India and the lack of realism in her foreign policy and in her sense of democracy vis-à-vis minorities had taken things to such a diplomatic impasse. India had no option but to persevere with her diplomatic efforts and to use diplomacy-with-muscle, if needed. The year 1986 closed with no promises for future in India-Sri Lanka relations. What the year 1987 held out is examined in the next chapter.