CHAPTER II

ETHNIC VIOLENCE:

ORIGIN, FORMS AND PATTERNS
In recent decades, South Asia in general has witnessed violence as the main factor in not only State-society relations but also inter-group relations. Violence no longer constitutes a hidden dimension of State power in the countries of the region. Similarly, the way in which the subordinate ethnic groups and social classes relate to each other and negotiate with the State has come to be characterized by a recurrent propensity to use collective violence as a means of articulating their demands. They do not appear to see electoral and parliamentary tactics as an effective and viable means of political mobilization.¹

Sri Lanka is arguably one of the most violent modern States.² One can say that the State of violence in the island State has reached a crescendo after growing steadily since independence. Over the past few years, the process of violence has been normalized in individual as well as social relations in Sri Lanka. The militarization of social and individual relations has also been accompanied by militarization of political conflicts. Once a conflict is militarized, demilitarizing it is enormously difficult. The Sri Lankan society has also accepted political violence as a legitimate mode of political behaviour, whether by the State or anti-State forces.³

It is generally asked why a State, which did not have a violent political tradition, is resorting to violence resulting in gross violation of human rights? Is it not surprising why a society with a dominant religion—Buddhism—advocating non-violence and compassion as its cardinal principles is afflicted with protracted and intractable violence? Where do the roots of violence lie? What are its

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³ Christopher Mc Dowell, A Tamil Asylum Diaspora, Sri Lankan Migration Settlement and Politics in Switzerland (Oxford: Bergham Books, 1996), see Chapter-IV.
typologies? How far does ethnic violence differ from general violence prevalent in
the Sri Lankan society? What are its forms and patterns? Before attempting to
answer each question, it is necessary to provide a socio-economic and political
profile of the country.

PROFILE OF THE ISLAND

Sri Lanka (known as Ceylon till 1972) is a pear-shaped island spreading across 65,
610 sq k.ms (including territorial waters) in the Indian Ocean, just adjacent to
southern India separated by the Palk Straits with 29 kms of shallow waters at its
nearest point. Its 1,340 kms of coastline is irregular with many lagoons and
beautiful beaches; forty percent of its terrain is forested and its central part is
elevated and conducive for tea and coffee plantations. Sri Lanka, possessed with
some of the world’s finest harbours, lies at the maritime highways of the Indian
Ocean connecting the East with the West. Droughts, especially in the north, are
normal due to unstable weather conditions.

Sri Lanka is a multiethnic society with a population of 18,728,000.\(^4\) The
population of the island is broadly divided into six categories: Sinhalese are
account for 74 per cent of the total population; Sri Lankan Tamils 12 per cent,
Indian Plantation Tamils 5 per cent, Muslims 7 per cent, Burghers one per cent
and aboriginal tribes constitute insignificant numbers. The above categories are
not monolithic in nature and consist of many divisions. On the basis of religion,
the Sinhalese are either Buddhist or Christians, Tamils (both Sri Lankan and
Plantation) are Hindus or Christians and all Muslims follow Islamic faith but are
divided along sectarian lines. Burghers are mostly Christians; and aborigines
follow native faith. As far language is concerned, Sinhalese mostly speak Sinhala,

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\(^4\) As of 2001 census. See for details http://www.statistics.gov.lk
which belongs to the Indo-European group of languages with a mix of vocabulary and syntax of Dravidian languages. Tamils (both Sri Lankan and Plantation) speak Tamil, a Dravidian language. Muslims speak Sinhala and Tamil, and Burghers speak English. The aborigines converse in native tribal languages.\textsuperscript{5} Caste wise, Sinhalese distinguish themselves into Goyigama (agriculture), Karava (fishing), Durawa (toddy tapers) and Salagama (cinnamon peelers) in that order of dominance. Similar to the Sinhalese caste system, Sri Lankan Tamil community is divided into Vellala (land-owning), Karayar (fishing) and other "low" caste groups like Pallas and Pariars who do menial jobs. Caste distinctions are not visibly found in other ethnic categories. On the basis of geographical location of population, Sinhalese could be ‘Kandian’ or ‘Low Country’; Sri Lankan Tamils geographically identify themselves as Jaffna Tamils, East coast or Batticaloa Tamils, and Colombo Tamils; Plantations Tamils could be either upcountry or low-country. The Muslims are divided into eastern and mainland; Burghers are largely urban based, and aborigines confine themselves mostly to jungles of central and southeastern Sri Lanka.

\textbf{TABLE 2.1}

\textbf{ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF SRI LANKA}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Religious</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Geographical location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sinhalese (74%) (13.861 mn)</td>
<td>Buddhists, Christians</td>
<td>Sinhala</td>
<td>Goigama, Karava Durawa</td>
<td>Kandy, Low country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lankan Tamils (12%) (2.247 mn)</td>
<td>Hindus, Christians</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>Vellalars, Kariyars, Mukhuvars</td>
<td>Jaffna, Batticaloa, Colombo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims (7%) (1.311 mn)</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Tamil, Sinhala</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Eastern Muslims, Mainland Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantation Tamils (5%)</td>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Central upcountry, low country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Traditionally an agricultural economy, Sri Lanka is presently highly domestic-trade-dependent economy. Wholesale and retail trade is the largest single sector, accounting for 21 percent of the GDP. The combined services sector, which also includes utilities, financial services and tourism, generates nearly 53 percent of the GDP (in 2002). Tourism continues to be a significant contributor to this sector, although it has not reached full potential due to the ethnic conflict. Manufacturing is generally the leading growth area with an increasing share of GDP (16.5 percent). Agriculture has lost its relative importance, which accounts for about 16.9 percent of GDP and employs 35 percent of the working population. Rice, the staple cereal, is cultivated extensively. The plantation sector consists of tea, rubber, and coconut; it has made significant contributions to export earnings.

The United States, Japan and India are the largest trading partners. Sri Lanka is highly dependent on foreign assistance and receives about $500 million in annual grant aid and concessional assistance every year, with Japan being the largest donor. The unemployment rate has declined in recent years and hovers at 10 percent.

Sri Lanka is a unitary State with a multi-party democratic system governed under its second Republican Constitution adopted on 16 August 1978.

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7 Central Bank of Ceylon, Annual Report, 2002 (Colombo: CBC, 2002), See section under Economic Indicators.
The present form of government is a mixture of both Presidential and Parliamentary; earlier it had a Westminster model until 1978. The President, elected directly by the people for a term of six years, is both head of the State and head of the government. The legislature is unicameral with 225 members elected by a modified form of proportional representation system for a term of six years. The Prime Minister and other ministers of the Cabinet are appointed by the President from a party or coalition that commands majority in the Parliament. The Supreme Court is at the apex of the judiciary, which also includes the Court of Appeal, High Courts and lower courts. Along with the Parliament, the Supreme Court enjoys the power to impeach the President on certain grounds. A clear picture of the Sri Lankan polity is given in the following chart:

**STRUCTURE OF THE SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENT UNDER 1978 CONSTITUTION**

![Diagram of Sri Lankan Government Structure]


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Sri Lankan chronicles, *Mahavamsa* and *Culavamsa*, trace the island’s history with the arrival of banished half-leonine offspring Prince Vijaya from Vanga (modern day Orissa/Bengal) with his 700 followers. But it was Devanampiya Tissa (BC 268-231) who was responsible for converting the island into Buddhist faith. There was constant interaction with the Indian sub-continent in terms of inter-marriages, religion, migration and literature in the succeeding centuries. Various invasions from southern India and the resulting internecine strife led to the division of the island into three kingdoms which centered around Kotte in the far south, Kandy in the centre, and Jaffna in the north.9 None of these three kingdoms were powerful enough to overpower the other and unify the island; the status quo continued till the arrival of Portuguese in 1505 AD.

Without any territorial or political ambitions, and with the sole aim of mercantilism and missionary expansion, the Portuguese found Sri Lanka very significant strategically. The Dutch, who were expanding their spice trade from their Indonesian base subsequently, ousted the Portuguese from the island in 1658. Their noteworthy contribution to the island was in the judicial and administrative system of the island.10 Through the Treaty of Amiens, Sri Lanka became the ‘first crown colony’ of Great Britain in 1801; the Kandyan Convention of March 1815 brought the island under British sovereignty. The acceptance of most of the recommendations of Colebrooke-Cameron Report of 1833 led to wide ranging reforms of island’s administrative, educational, judicial and economic systems that continued for over 100 years. Plantation crops like tea and coffee were introduced successfully on the lines of the Jamaican plantation system which transformed the island’s economy from subsistence to profitable plantation

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system. At the social level, while there was social mobilization and modernization due to Western influences, Buddhist revivalism was taking place as a simultaneous reaction to Christian missionary activities.\textsuperscript{11} On the political front, reforms were slowly introduced and local elites were gradually accommodated in the administration. Universal adult franchise was introduced in 1931 under the Donoughmore Constitution, which ushered participatory democracy in the island. The post-colonial Constitution, which was drafted by the Second Royal Commission (or popularly known as the Soulbury Commission) came into effect on 4 February 1948, the day the island achieved independence. Sri Lanka opted not to become a republic and the Governor General represented the British monarch as the head of the State.\textsuperscript{12}

**SCOPE OF DEFINITION IN THE SRI LANKAN CONTEXT**

Violence in Sri Lanka has four facets at the macro level:

1. *Ethnic violence:* It is related to early autonomist and later separatist struggle by the Tamil minority. This has two dimensions: inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic. While inter-ethnic violence involves the conflict between the Sinhala majority aided by the State and the Tamil minority represented by the militants, the intra-ethnic violence here refers to the violence as a result of internal dissensions within the Tamil community.

2. *Political violence:* It normally refers to the two JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) uprisings in 1971 and 1987-89. Some scholars term the above category too as 'political violence'. However, the present study excludes ethnic violence from 'political violence'. Also included in this category is


‘electoral violence’, for which Sri Lanka is notable. It involves violence purely on electoral malpractices and manipulations for electoral gains, and post-election violence.

3. *Criminal violence*, which is of purely criminal nature.

4. *Domestic violence*, which is at the family level.

The scope of this study limits itself only with the first category. However, certain linkages with the second category is acknowledged and discussed wherever relevant.

**ROOTS OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE**

Some scholars trace the origin of the ethnic violence in Sri Lanka to ancient times when there were wars for control of the island. However, a majority of the scholars hold the view that the contemporary violent Sri Lankan State is a post-colonial reconstruction of polity that had exploited the utility of violence through all phases of its transformation. The fact of the matter is that history is being used to rekindle and perpetrate violence.13 The origin of ethnic violence in the island can be attributed to various factors that emerged from the Sri Lankan history. Identifying those factors under different heads is vital in understanding the various political and socio-economic pressures that work in sustaining ethnic violence in the island to this day.

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Political Factors

1. Ideology

In a society where ethnic relations are hierarchically ordered, ethnic violence is a structural mechanism of reestablishing domination and submission. If the critique of counter-State violence comes from the State, it will have no moral argument against violence in politics, because the State’s morality of non-violence is a mere re-affirmation of its monopolization of violence and terror as a means to achieve political goals.\(^\text{14}\)

The Sinhalese justify violence against the Tamils as a means of protecting “their” State and, in turn, themselves. The inherent ideological assumption is that the Sri Lankan State is primarily a Sinhalese State. Hence, those challenging the State and attempting to break it are, in fact, trying to break the Sinhalese community.\(^\text{15}\) It has been argued that all other communities in the island have some place to go; for the Sinhalese, however, Sri Lanka is the only place. According to them, the cause for the prevalence of violence in the north and the east is primarily due to instigation and perpetration of militant violence that has severely undermined the integrity of the State. The attack on the State is also seen as an attack on the principles of Buddhism, considered to be the basis of the Sri Lankan State. It is the duty of the government, considered essentially Sinhalese, to protect the Buddhist principles, the Sinhala race and the land. Seen in this perspective, democracy is representative of the majority. Violence is the means by which the Tamils, who had exceeded the behavioural limits of an ethnic minority,

\(^{14}\) Jayadeva Uyangoda, n. 1, pp. 122-23.
could be “put back in their proper subordinate place.”¹⁶ Thus, in the Sinhalese society, the task of defending the sanctity of the State is transferred from the traditional institutions of political bargaining and mediation to the agencies of war.

The electoral process accentuated the pressures on the State. The 1956 elections, whereby a government with a hegemonic Sinhala Buddhist ideology came to power, was a turning point in this process. Although this ideology emerged immediately after independence, when a section of the minority was disenfranchised, it was after 1956 that Sinhala Buddhist nationalism became the dominant ideology of the ruling class. The fall out was adoption of State-dominated populist development policies within a capitalist framework.

Another adverse result of the development of Sinhala Buddhist ideology was the systematic dismantling of the safeguards for minorities like Section 29 of the 1948 Constitution. This process shows the contradiction of a bourgeois-democratic system in a multi-ethnic society. Due to the importance of numerical strength within the bourgeois-democratic framework, the Sinhalese Buddhists came to occupy a dominant position. Further, the minorities began to feel that they did not have the numerical strength to exercise power within the system. Thus, ethnic issues began to dominate the electoral process and came to occupy an important position in mass consciousness. Even the bourgeois, whose objective interests within an internationally operative capitalist system were to overcome narrow ethnic nationalism, began to play politics in order to remain in power. Thus, in Sri Lanka, all major political parties identify with the Sinhala Buddhist ideology. This does not mean that ethnicised politics is a result of the

manipulation by the ruling classes; ethnic consciousness has become a part of the popular psyche. This is true of all ethnic groups. Thus, the rulers and the ruled form a part of society where ethnic consciousness dominates.

A parallel process unfolded in Tamil society. The central argument was that an unresponsive State had to be dismembered by means of war in order to satisfy minority ethnic aspirations. Failure of peace attempts only resulted in remilitarisation of the whole ethnic question. The Sinhalese society believed that only a military victory over the Tamil society would ultimately secure the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. The task of fulfilling this Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist belief was thus entrusted to the armed forces. The central message, readily accepted by the ethnically mobilized masses, was that the ethnic war had historical antecedents. It is this combination of State power, religion, mythology and popular ethnic prejudice that laid the ideological and popular foundation for the militarization of the State in the 1980s.

The pertinent point is that militarisation of the State began with the blessings of the Sinhalese masses. The militaristic capacity of the State supported by repressive legislation, and its will to conduct a prolonged war have provided the condition for human rights violations. The 'military option only' argument was sustained primarily due to widespread belief that the ethnic war was winnable and, therefore, it should be fought until a victory was attained.

On their part, the Tamil militants justified their violence on various counts. The LTTE, for instance, metaphors itself as a hydra, which, if cut, springs itself as ten others. The newly born will carry out where the demised had left. This

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18 Nissan, n. 15, pp. 175-76.
19 Uyangoda, n. 1, p. 124.
imagery is to counter the Sri Lankan military leaders' resolve to 'eradicate' or 'crush' the militants by force. In the follow-up to such vows, the Sri Lankan government's primary tactics was what is known as 'Guatemalan game plan' of inflicting terror on the ethnic population until the 'sea' in which the LTTE 'fish' swam would be poisoned.

The Tigers' ideology of violence is also derived from the Dravidian national movement in Tamil Nadu in the 1950s and 1960s, which was a revival of the martial culture of the long suppressed castes of South India such as Maravar (war castes). Such Tamil heritage was also used to craft a philosophy of violence that dovetailed well with the use of trained troops and professional military tactics.

Can the State and the militant groups be placed on the same ideological plane? Both believe that the 'end justify the means'. In one case, it is the "end" of preserving democracy, restoring law and order, and protecting national integrity; and in other case, it is the "end" of "national liberation" or "social liberation". In either case, the lives of individuals are considered to be a small price for the "cherished end". But such justifications are unacceptable not only because of humane considerations but also due to the fact that the means we use determine the end we reach.

21 Ibid.  
24 German socialist Lassale observed, "Show us not aim without the way. For ends and means on earth are so entangled that changing one, you change the other too. Each different path brings other ends in view."
2. Leadership

Reggie Siriwardena underlines the dimension of leadership as a cause for ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. He argues,

...transition from conflict to violence is dependent on decisions made by the choice and will of leaders – of those in control of the apparatus of the State as well as those contending against it. It is dependent on judgements made by the former about what is legitimate in maintaining the security of the State and by the latter about what is justified in opposing or in subverting it. Often the decisions in this respect by one of these forces evoke a countervailing reaction from the other.... His decisions are often motivated by considerations of immediate expediency. But it is all the more important, therefore, to bring into focus the wider and long term consequences of such decisions. For instance, the adoption of Sinhala Only Act was itself one of those momentous decisions that have changed the course of Sri Lanka's history. But most importantly another decision which had a more direct bearing on the question of violence was when the head of the government allowed to use violence to disperse those Tamil leaders who staged satyagraha against the Bill. That was set as a precedent for the use of violence against peaceful protest in the sixties.²⁵

The failure of the political leadership to objectively analyse and end the ethnic violence, which broke out in regular intervals, was one of the main reasons for its escalation. For instance, Prime Minister SWRD Bandaranaike did not act decisively during 1958 riots. The State of emergency was not declared on time; he addressed the nation only on the fourth day of the riots. But his address only inflamed the situation instead of pacifying the rioting mobs against Tamils. It was Governor-General, Sir Oliver Goonetilaka who intervened to bring the situation under control.²⁶

Similarly, during the 1983 riots, it took more than 24 hours for President Jeyewardenep to impose curfew in Colombo and other places. But, by then enough

²⁵ Siriwardena, n. 23.
damage had been done. It was after four days that he addressed the nation to “safeguard the interest of Sinhalese.” While Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa belittled the violence by attributing it to rumours, the Cabinet Spokesperson, de Alwis, called it a “naxalite plot”. This had a lasting impression of “glaring omission at the first opportunity” from the head of the State and government in the minds of the Tamils. Interestingly, even the Sinhalese opposition leaders always failed to condemn or pressurize the government to take firm steps to curb violence.

On its part, the moderate Tamil leadership not only failed to condemn violence by Tamil youth in the initial stages, but also condoned them as an “act of heroism.” Their pledge of an independent State “either by peaceful means or by direct action and struggle” was taken to mean “through any means.” Had the leaders condemned and regulated the energies and grievances of the youth at that point of time, their political culture would have become a different. However, on witnessing the gaining popularity of militancy among the restive people due to various discriminatory State actions and high-handedness of the security forces, they had no option but to keep silent.

The inaction of the moderate leadership by not acting decisively on the separate State declaration only made the youth more restive. As K. Sivathamby puts it,

...youth militancy arose as a reaction to what was seen as the all-too-conciliatory parliamentarism of the TULF, which in 1976 demanded a separate State but, when it came to political negotiations, was always

27 Ibid., p. 112.
discussing 'district councils'... youth militancy demanded of the Tamil politician to mean what he said.\footnote{Sivathamby, n. 22, pp. 249-50.}

Moreover, hopes were kept alive on the viability of seeking help from foreign power for the liberation. But nothing came about as the security forces were acting decisively in repressing the Tamil population. The Sri Lankan Tamils’ plea for India’s intervention infuriated the Sinhalese. Over 20 years of political frustration made “the youth to abandon the Gandhian doctrine of \textit{ahimsa}, which they realized was irreconcilable with revolutionary political practice.... Confronted with political vacuum and caught up in a revolutionary situation created by the concrete conditions of intolerable national oppression, the Tamil youth sought desperately to create a revolutionary political organization to advance the task of national liberation.”\footnote{Anton Balasingham, \textit{Liberation Tigers and Tamil Eelam Freedom Struggle} (Madras: Political Committee of LTTE, 1983), pp. 23-25.} Belief in militancy and sympathy for militants gradually rose uncritically among the common people.\footnote{Jonathan Spencer, “Popular Perceptions of the Violence: A Provincial View” in James Manor (ed.), \textit{Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis} (London: Croom Helm), pp. 191-92.}

Successful Sinhalese dominated governments also failed to give enough maneuverable space for the moderate leadership to handle the crisis, especially when the popularity of the militants in the Tamil society was growing. Their intermittent gestures for talks were to buy time to deal with the militants. On the other hand, the regimes at Colombo brought legislation like the Sixth Amendment\footnote{The Amendment, which was brought in by inserting a new Article 157-A and a new Seventh Schedule, States, “No person shall, directly or indirectly, in or outside Sri Lanka, support, espouse, promote, finance, encourage or advocate the establishment of a separate State within the territory of Sri Lanka.”} to deprive the Tamil MPs of their representation in the Parliament. They completely weakened the political activities of the TULF MPs who refused to take oath and preferred to lose seats.
Since 1956, Tamil representation in the central cabinet was meager or, nothing. This paved the way for the emergence of a new political leadership within the Sri Lankan Tamil community and a change in the form of political struggle (from non-violent to violent). The social background of the new Tamil leadership is more of a petty-bourgeois character. They are less westernized than the earlier leadership, and has had a regional base in the northern province. Armed struggle became its dominant method. In some ways, they were a mirror image of the Sinhalese nationalists who added a militant dimension to their movement in the south.

3. Security Forces

The experience of most societies shows that considerable violence is perpetrated by the agencies of the State, such as the police or the army. Veena Das observes that

...the manner in which the armed forces and the police have been engaged in South Asia in the management of internal conflicts leads one to seriously question the notion of legitimate force. Although there is a well developed repertoire that the State has at its disposal for the management of collective episodes of violence, including the use of curfews, the deployment of limited force, preventive arrests, etc.—the manner in which these measures are used by the police can be shown to be partisan.34

The security forces of Sri Lanka consist of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Police and the paramilitary forces. According to the 1978 Constitution, the President is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Ministry of Internal Security was created in March 1984 as a response to the rising Tamil militancy. A Joint Operations Command (JOC) was created in 1985 to coordinate anti-

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insurgency operations of all the forces at the field level. The Sri Lankan Army was created initially to assist the police in maintaining law and order. There was no need to have sophisticated weaponry for this purpose. However, the JVP uprising in 1971 created the requirement for advanced weaponry. The rise of Tamil militancy demanded more modern equipment. Since 1983, modernisation took place at a rapid rate. The tactical concept of the Army was tailor-made to fight an insurgency, but it has now developed its ability to fight a conventional war against the LTTE.\[35\] The formation of Sea Tigers has brought the Navy into counter-insurgency operations. The Sri Lankan Air Force has been used extensively for bombing missions as a part of counter-insurgency operations. It also helps in the movement of troops and supplies to the northeast.

The Sri Lankan police in the modern sense was established in 1833 by the British to manage the coastal areas.\[36\] With independence in 1948 the Police Department, until then under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, was brought directly under Ministry of Defence. The Police Special Task Force (STF) was formed in 1983 specially to handle insurgent activities in northern and eastern parts of the country.\[37\] It guards police stations and device ways and means to counter terrorism. The Force also provides the back-up security to police officers performing field duties in the northeast. The training for STF is entirely militaristic and its special “task” is first to repulse the enemy, hold back the

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\[36\] It was composed of principal and experienced men of each village and presided over by a minor royal official known as the "Vidane". This system of law enforcement dates back to approximately 150 BC, and went through little change until the collapse of Monarchy in 1815. However, it was only in 1832 a committee appointed by the governor was instructed to form a police force. It was decided by this committee that this new police force was to be funded by a tax to be paid by the public. Constituted of One Superintendent, One Chief Constable, Five Constables, Ten Sergeants and 150 Peons, the first police force of Sri Lanka formed in 1833 was responsible for maintaining the law and order in the capital city of Colombo.

crumbling frontier and thereafter to penetrate deep into Tamil territory held by the rebels.\textsuperscript{38} Its strategy includes arming of Sinhala frontier villagers, planting new Sinhala settlements along border and training them to fight.

Paramilitary consists of Home Guards, drawn from local communities, to provide security for Muslim and Sinhalese communities in the war zone. It also includes non-LTTE Tamil militant groups which operate along with the security forces. These Tamil militias are used not for political purposes but as hit squads by the security forces. But during the Indian peace-keeping operation (1987-90) the Sri Lankan government used the LTTE to attack pro-India Tamil groups.\textsuperscript{39}

The problems facing the security forces have been created by politicisation and ethnicisation of the recruitment and promotion policies, and the use of armed services for quelling civil disturbances.\textsuperscript{40} In the pre-1956 period, though the Sinhalese constituted two-thirds of the population, they formed just two-fifths of the officers; but the Christians, both Tamil and Sinhalese, with only 1/10 of the population, constituted three-fifths of the officers. But, things took a U-turn with the language policy of 1956. Politicisation started in the 1970s with the appointment of politically affiliated officers who supported the then centre-left government.

The gradual rise of Tamil militancy in the northeast transformed the security forces into a more professional, but biased force, due to their ethnic composition. More Sinhalese personnel were sent to the Tamil dominated areas as


\textsuperscript{39} UTHR ([J], The War of June 1990, Report No. 4, August 1990, Chapter 7.

the government felt that the Tamil security personnel were either unreliable or inefficient. The Tamil minority saw the security forces as "oppressive", whose sole aim was to implement the State's majoritarian agenda. A Fact Finding Mission of the International Peace Research Institute (OSLO) attributes the following reasons for the change in the character of the security forces in the Tamil dominated areas:

1. Postings to Tamil areas were mostly "punishment" transfers. Personnel were already discontented with their postings and morale was low.
2. Most of the personnel had been recruited under Emergency Regulations. During the previous decade, they had hardly known more than three years of service under normal law. For most of the time they had conducted their affairs under the protection of Emergency and therefore had no experience of responding to conflict under normal conditions.
3. They had no concept of their "mission" in the Tamil territories. They had no political education at all, no concept of the why and wherefore of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict, no concept of the role of the civilian administration or of the rule of law.
4. Service personnel brought with them the hubris of Sinhala hegemonism from the South. They had been fed, both in school and temple, through legend and myth, with the heroic images of Dutugemunu, Vijayabahu and Supumal Kumaraya. Officers saw themselves in atavistic roles, bringing the "Damil" hordes under subjugation.
5. They knew hardly a word of Tamil language. There was no communication between them and the local people. All Tamils were just the "enemy". The services had no concept of local customs, culture of local grievances.
6. They could not cope with the "cyanide pill" factor, the Kami Kaze morale of the militant groups, and consequently with their total ferocity.
7. Most importantly, partly due to failure of language and partly due to a conceptual failure at the level of the political leadership, the services lacked "intelligence" about the problems they were dealing with, intelligence about "enemy" dispositions, about their weaponry and about their tactics and strategies.
8. They were faced with a classic "army of occupation" situation. They were dealing with a totally hostile citizenry and consequently suffered from a siege mentality.

Much of the violence of State forces has a bureaucratic sense to it. Its defenders say that this is mainly due to the fact that the anti-State forces largely operate in secrecy. Moreover, the armed forces in Sri Lanka were trained in the

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41 Ibid.
western military and anti-terrorist technique, which is characterised by what 
Clausewitz calls “violence pushed to its utmost bounds” and its equation of war 
with politics. The instrument of violence was used in ‘disciplining’ population as 
the forces lacked the ability, or, perhaps were not trained in responding to 
vio-lence in commensurate with its nature and intensity. A common practice by 
the security forces, while facing unexpected violence from the militants, is to 
target at the ethnic community to which the militants belong as a kind of 
surrogate punishment.\textsuperscript{43} The security forces are seen as an important factor in the 
anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka. For instance, in July 1983, as soon as the news of the 
ambush by the Tigers broke out, the soldiers started retaliating against the Tamil 
civilians.\textsuperscript{44}

In the realm of use of ‘legitimate force’, the State includes even those who 
express their political discontent. Importantly, people who misuse the State power 
in such manner tend to go unpunished. In order to deal with collective violence, 
the State relies not only on the legal measures such as declaration of curfew and 
preventive arrests, but also brutal terror which its agencies employ. Even in the 
case of individual crime and violence, the police often use muted violence. In the 
case of collective violence, we can see the transmutation of such mute violence 
into applied terror.

The Emergency Regulations and Prevention of Terrorism Act have given 
the security forces a free hand to use of violence with maximum possible 
immunity. In the past, the number of incommunicado detentions had increased 
phenomenally, and there were many cases of maltreatment, torture, deaths and

\textsuperscript{43} Daya Somasundaram, \textit{Scarred Minds: The Psychological Impact of War on Sri Lankan Tamils} 
\textsuperscript{44} Sunil Bastian, “Development NGOs and Ethnic Conflicts,” in Mithran Tiruchelvam and 
Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1998), pp. 300-01.
disappearances of those who got detained under these draconian laws. Free hand
given to the security forces in “wiping out terrorism” resulted in the alienation of
the people of north and east and consequently, strengthening of Tamil militancy.
Moreover, the legislation enacted in 1981 deprived the judiciary of the its power
to review any law passed by parliament in the name of urgent national
importance.45

**Economic Factors**

The Economic dimension of the origin of ethnic violence is very significant.
Generally speaking, intervention of the State in the economy is seen as a phase in
which the ethnic cleavages get entrenched. The expanded role of the State in the
economy introduces three main elements that could go against the interests of
minority ethnic groups:

1. The State's expansion could mean taking over the areas of economic
   activity by the State in which the minorities have been involved.

2. It also means the introduction of systems of quotas, permits and
   licenses even in private sectors. The political patronage and the
   influence of the State bureaucracy plays a significant role in granting
   these licenses and permits along ethnic lines.

3. With the expansion of the State in the economy, the State becomes the
   major avenue of employment. Here too political patronage on ethnic
   lines becomes critical.46

Moving on to the Sri Lankan case, it is vital to focus on contradictions in
the post-independence development process with an emphasis on underlying

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45 S. J. Tambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and Dismantling of Democracy* (Chicago:
46 Bastian, n. 44, p. 293.
policy errors, which led to serious economic crisis and resultant discontent and violence. The social welfare programmes, which commenced during the final phase of British colonial rule, got entrenched with independence. Health and education facilities were either subsidized or provided free of cost. The economic policies were aimed at creating self-sufficiency in rice production and diversification of agriculture. But, it would not be an exaggeration to say that these subsidies were the price paid by the ruling elite to buy social peace and check the growing popularity of the communist parties. In the 1950s and 1960s, these policies evolved into comprehensive welfare programmes. Government expenditure on health, education, housing, and food subsidies rose from about five per cent of GDP in 1950s to 12.4 per cent in the 1960s. These core welfare programmes were supplemented by several poverty-alleviation schemes like village expansion and the colonization programmes that transferred population from the densely inhabited southwest and central regions of the country to sparsely populated north-central and eastern parts.

However, these welfare policies generated a new set of problems in the mid 1960s as increasing imbalance between human capital formation and physical capital formation led to phenomenal increase in the unemployment rate. In other words, while the population had grown at an annual rate of 2.5 per cent and the work force at 2.1 per cent, the economy was able to grow only at 1.1 per cent between 1958 and 1971.47 The growth of younger generation was faster – about half of the total population was below 20 years and more than one-fourth was in the age group below 10 years during the period between the 1950s and the 1970s. The youth were politically conscious and exposed to the repercussions of

developmental changes. With extensive welfare system spinning off high social aspirations and expectations, this younger generation confronted a situation in which there was little capacity to provide means for their upward social mobility.  

TABLE 2.2

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY AGE GROUP (IN PERCENTAGE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>1963</th>
<th>1973</th>
<th>1987</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14-18</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-25</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 55</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Report on the Consumer Finances and Socio-Economic Surveys (various issues).

As shown in the above table, in the 1970s, unemployment reached to an all-time high of 24 percent, while real wages of State employees declined by 37 percent. It became a critical problem when the modern economy was not expanding enough to absorb the massive flight of educated youth from the traditional economies in the non-metropolitan regions and rural sectors of the country.

Education has always been an important avenue for upward social mobility in Sri Lanka; the free education since independence has facilitated this process. Majority of the Sinhalese felt that the Sri Lankan Tamils were getting admitted into medical, engineering and other professional courses in far greater

48 For detailed discussion on the topic see S. Hettige (ed.), Unrest or Revolt: Some Aspects of Youth Unrest in Sri Lanka (Colombo: Goethe-Institute, 1992).
number, which was disproportionate to their population ratio. However, this perception was not based on facts.\textsuperscript{51}

### TABLE 2.3

**ADMISSION IN UNIVERSITIES BY ETHNIC GROUPS, 1975-1983**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/ Ethnic group</th>
<th>Arts</th>
<th>Physical Sciences</th>
<th>Biological Sciences</th>
<th>Engineering</th>
<th>Medicine</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1975</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sinhalese</td>
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<td>76.4</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamils\textsuperscript{52}</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others\textsuperscript{53}</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sinhalese</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamils</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>25.5</td>
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<td>Others</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
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<td>10.9</td>
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<td>Sinhalese</td>
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<td>79.5</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>81.9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Sinhalese</td>
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<td>57.8</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1980</strong></td>
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<td>23.1</td>
<td>16.2</td>
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<td>68.8</td>
<td>74.0</td>
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<td>28.5</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>24.0</td>
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<td>Others</td>
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<td>7.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
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<td>23.1</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>19.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>3.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\textsuperscript{51} For detailed statistical analyses see *Report of the Committee for Rational Development* (Colombo: CRD, November 1983).

\textsuperscript{52} Tamils include Sri Lankan Tamils who forms 12 per cent of the total population and Plantation Indian Tamils who constitute around five percent.

\textsuperscript{53} Include Muslims and Burghers, who together form roughly eight percent.
The table clearly indicates that while the Sinhalese were represented in higher education more than their population, the Tamils were not over represented to any significant extent.

Moreover, the free education system made an impact on different ethnic groups, especially for their upward social mobility. For the Sinhalese, free education increased their advancement while, in the case of the Sri Lankan Tamils, the benefits were severely curtailed by discriminatory policies that affected their entry into higher education (especially professional courses) and government services.

The fundamental political problem in Sri Lanka is related to the majoritarian nature of the State. The intervention of the State in the economic affairs carried with it the interests of the majority community. This is the dimension which was largely ignored in any discussion of policies that came to dominate Sri Lanka after 1956.

Policy prescriptions in this period looked at the State as the main engine of economic growth. Protected market and quotas in production were the hallmark of this period. All these amounted to greater dependence on State regulation on the one hand, and further State involvement for economic development on the other. State intervention was also legitimized with a social-justice argument of promoting ‘socialism’; however, there was an ethnic dimension to the interventionist role played by the State.54

In the aftermath of the 1971 JVP revolt, the United Front government embarked on a programme of radical social and economic reforms aimed at extending State control. This included the Land Reform Act under which large

54 Bastian in Das, n. 34, pp. 289-90.
proportion of estates owned by foreign and local private individuals were nationalized. Admissions in the educational institutions were “standardized”, so that the entry of minority students became difficult. In the 1970s, the public sector, which expanded largely, employed 1.25 million people (a quarter of the total employed population in the island). Notably, the Sinhalese were over-represented (87.1 percent of employment as against 74 percent of population) and Tamils remained under-represented (11.24 percent of employment as against 13 percent of population).55

Thus the inadequate expansion of economic capacity to meet the increasing social demand created important contradictions in the historical development process of Sri Lanka. The gradual exclusion of individuals, social groups as well as regions from the mainstream development process was an inevitable outcome of these contradictions. As P. Bardhan puts it, “Failed economic policies often provide the context of despair and desperation which encourage channeling of frustrations on ethnic lines.”56 The lack of opportunities in the modern society not only frustrated the ambitious educated youth but also challenged the privileged position of existing regions and the existing social groups.57 This does not mean that social exclusion itself paved the way for militancy, but it is appropriate to say that it created a conducive atmosphere for the outbreak of organized and collective violence.

After the capture of power by the UNP in 1977, the government introduced the policy of free market economy by liberalizing trade, deregularising the private sector, and dismantling many welfare measures and subsidies. Great faith was placed on the market mechanism as a panacea for economic ailments, and the government intervention in the economy was opposed in almost all forms. Consequently, it was assumed that a liberalized economy would give less chance to ethnic factors becoming influential, as the removal of controls that accompanies a closed economy will minimise the influences of forces dominanting the State apparatus. Thus, theoretically speaking, the opening up of economy should have done away the ethnic contradictions in Sri Lanka. However, this did not happen.

The impact of liberalization on ethnic violence can be seen in many ways. Firstly, to Dunham and Jayasuriya, the “liberalization process, midwifed by unprecedented levels of aid flows did not actually end ethnically-biased rent-seeking from the State sector, but expanded it to new groups that benefited from the climate of heightened tension and authoritarianism.” Secondly, scholars like Gunasinghe argue that “disproportionate impact of the reforms on Sinhalese versus Tamils may have formed the basis for heightened tensions” between the two ethnic groups. In particular, while the position of Sinhalese small-scale industrialists became worse under the reforms as they could not compete with cheap imports, the Tamil merchant class from Colombo appeared to have

benefited from this move. Thirdly, some scholars\textsuperscript{61} believe that the sudden and unequal impact of the liberalization caused abrupt and disoriented social repercussions like social upheavals, poverty, lumpenisation and socio-political decay. They were subsequently accompanied by institutionalization of political violence and authoritarian measures used by the government to maintain political stability conducive for open markets and to suppress opposition to reforms. Fourthly, some of the authors attribute the reasons to the differential impact of the agricultural trade liberalization which regionally differentiated distribution of trade from non-tradable crops. While liberal trade benefited the export of plantation crops like tea, rubber and coconut grown largely in Sinhalese dominated south, it resulted in a sharp decline of food crops like bananas, onions and chillies grown in Tamil majority region of north and east. High inflation buttressed with high cost of production relegated agriculture to a non-profitable occupation.\textsuperscript{62} The Tamil peasantry became frustrated due to neglect of their basic livelihood.

Liberalization, thus, resulted in the dissatisfaction of

a) all sections of the poor people;

b) the Sinhalese small entrepreneurs, and

c) the Tamil farming community.

Ethnic violence exacerbated to new proportions after the opening up of economy. The free market policies also carried with it the tag of political stability


as the *sine qua non*. Ethnic conflict, with violent overtones, was seen as the main destabilising factor. Therefore, the first step adopted by the government was a policy of accommodation. The Standardisation policy was replaced, however, by some other formula\(^63\) that still affected the Tamil students. The new constitution, enacted in 1978, gave Tamil the status of a national language. The District Development Council (DDC) Bill that was enacted subsequently offered certain amount of autonomy to the districts and, in turn, to the Tamils. At the same time, this policy of accommodation was not extended to the militants by engaging them in political dialogue. Instead, the government responded with repressive measures. The State repression, to which the Tamil population knowingly or unknowingly was subjected, created enough social base for Tamil militancy.\(^64\)

The new liberalised economy also dismantled some special benefits enjoyed by the Sinhalese. This evoked a strong reaction from the Sinhalese nationalists, who expressed their displeasure in the form of riots against the minorities.\(^65\) However, those who were in positions had a greater chance of perpetrating violence and yet escaping from it than those from outside the government.\(^66\) Large-scale ethnic chauvinism was displayed whenever the government tried to accommodate the moderate Tamil leadership. Such events became frequent after 1977 when the imperatives of development necessitated increased accommodation. As a result, ethnic riots broke-out regularly in 1977, 1979, 1981 and 1983.

\(^63\) District Quota System in which each district in the country had a number of reserved slots for its students; the Sinhalese community benefited because it dominated a majority of districts.


\(^66\) Bastian, n. 44, p. 299.
Mass legitimization of violence is symptomatic of the present incapacity of Sri Lankan society to produce indigenous arguments for non-violence, despite the professedly non-violence moral codes of its dominant religion, Buddhism. Contemporary Sinhalese Buddhism has moved towards openly advocating State violence along ethnic lines. In fact, the Sinhalese Buddhist historiographical tradition and ideology supports ethnic political violence. It also pre-supposes an authoritarian State and not democracy and pluralism. But the disturbing aspect of this social acceptance of political violence is that it prepares social space for long-term processes of militarisation at various levels.

The political and economic circumstances of colonialism enabled the revitalisation of Buddhist revivalist movements. British Christian evangelics castigated the indigenous religions and their followers while simultaneously seeking converts. Revitalisation spawned monks representing diversity of sectional interests in the island. Major reinterpretations of Buddhism in Sri Lanka occurred during this period. The theosophical movement in the late nineteenth century gave enough impetus to Sinhala-Buddhist revivalism. After a period of puzzled tolerance, the Buddhist monks began to arm themselves with the same tools as the Christian bigots; the printing machine and the pamphlet, intolerance and polemic. The diffusion of publications inspired Buddhist laymen to join the monks in their counterattack.

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69 Roberts in Das, n. 34, p. 261.
Christian assertiveness drew Buddhist fire. Some of these salvos were fired by of Anagarika Dharmapala and Piyadasa Sirisena. Dharmapala, a leading spokesman during the temperance campaign (1912-15) and an active member of the Lanka Maha Jana in the 1920s, was a journalist who could influence the thinking of his readership on an everyday basis. His novels were political documents saturated with didactic moralisms. Sirisena was not merely a defender of Buddhism, but also a Sinhala nationalist. He observed that his intention was to diffuse ‘modern knowledge’ so that the Sinhalese could rid themselves of their “unfound fears and their sense of inferiority”—his point being that “so long as such a sense of inferiority remained the Sinhalese nation would not be rich and powerful.”

Underlying the critiques presented by Dharmapala was a belief that the island was the land of the Sinhala people and was destined to preserve Buddhism in its pristine form. They adhered to the Dhammadipa and Sinhadipa concepts propounded by Mahavamsa. In these terms, ‘Ceylon’ and ‘Sinhala’ became synonymous and Dharmapala was able to shift, often unreflexively, from one to the other. This ideology gained its potency from Sinhalese ideologues flamed by ‘a strong sense of nativistic grievance’ that the Sinhalese, especially the Buddhists, were ‘under-privileged as against other ethnic and religious groups’.

The Sinhalese Buddhist activists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were in a position to combat further encroachments into their valued

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domains. Sometimes spontaneous, sometimes premeditated, these acts of resistance had become to acts of aggression. The action gained legitimacy through the Sinhalese activists' belief that they were defending their faith and the honour of the Sinhalese people.

According to Veena Das, violence is extolled through:

1. Use of metonymy and mimesis: Sinhalese employed metonymy and mimesis to link the killing of innocent Tamils to the killing of 13 soldiers.

2. Use of metaphor: This was done by drawing parallels in the history, like slaying of Elara by Dutugamunu. This had a "profound influence in shaping popular perceptions of the past, and of the role of the Tamils in Sri Lankan history as the single most powerful and persistent threat confronting the Sinhalese."74

Thus events are linked in temporal sequences through metaphor and metonymy. It is significant to note that the ethnic references ‘Sinhalese’ and ‘Tamil’ do not have the same significance today as they had in the ancient past. The emulations such as “Dutugemunu”, “Elara”, “Damila”, “Kotti”, etc are popular usages in the lyrics of the local folk songs and the popular bailas. This apart, political leaders emulated the roles of ancient and medieval Sinhalese kings when the ethnic violence broke out in the 1980s and the 1990s. For instance, President Jeyewardene presented himself as a descendent of the Sinhalese kings starting from legendary Vijaya, and his successor, Premadasa, reinstituted the abhisheka repotentiating rites of past Sinhalese kings.75

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73 Das, n. 34, pp. 3-6.
75 Kapferer, n. 2, p. 34.
Added to this is the discourse on cosmic centres, legendary kings and mythical heroes, which gathered their specific political point and potency in interpreting the meaning of symbolic actions and rituals. For instance, in the Sinhalese village rituals, demonic outsiders are sometimes metaphorized as ‘Tamils’ who bring suffering and death. In one such exorcism called *Sanni Yakuma*, which is regularly performed along the south coast, a masked representation of the disease-causing demons appear. One of these demons is the Tamil demon, *Demala Sanniya*. Battered and ridiculed, these demons are chased to the borders of village and society with the authority of the Buddha and the force of other deities and mythic heroes. Transforming these rites, which operate ontologically, into the service of practical violence is not difficult for political and religious elites.

In Sri Lanka, militant Buddhism played a major role in creating conditions that led to outbreak of communal violence. The newly constructed or renovated places of Buddhist worship provided the site for inter-religious struggle at least on four occasions: Kotehena, 1883, Ambagamuwa in Gampola, 1907-1916, Kandy, 1915, and Gampaha, 1927. The struggle between Buddhists and Catholics at Kotahena in March 1883 was the outcome of territorial competition and religious tension that went back a decade or so. The Gampola disturbance came into being as a result of a new mosque that appeared on the traditional route of *peraheras* conducted by the Buddhists at Wesak, during *Esala* and on other auspicious

76 Ibid., p. 35.
77 The term *perahera*, primarily meaning “procession”, signifies a popular Buddhist ceremony replete with many rituals.
78 When Buddha’s birthday and the day of enlightenment fall.
79 *Esala* is the fourth month in the Sinhalese calendar (roughly around July-August) which commemorates several auspicious events in the history of Buddhism when the annual festivals of Sri Lankan Buddhist *devalas* (holy places) are celebrated.
occasions of Buddhists. The other two riots also were caused by controversies related to religious processions.

On their part, the Buddhist clergy relates the occurrence of violence in the island with the undermining of traditional Buddhist values by colonialism and materialism;

By the time we regained our independence, there prevailed through the influence of western imperial force a situation whereby State Law and Legal Power overpowered People’s Law and Power of Righteousness and hence, as local Rule, these parties and their Leaders emerged to provide State, National and Religious Leadership, in place of the Value-based Leadership provided earlier by the Maha Sangha… the majority as well as the Christian and Islamic Communities, all degenerated in the stranglehold of divisive strife and disintegration… The number of Community Leaders capable of providing leadership to the People’s Power and the Power of Righteousness, gradually dwindled and almost disappeared during the more recent years.80

But A. T. Ariyaratne views it differently:

The socialization of the conscience, to be effective, must start in infancy and early childhood…. But what happens with a lumpen proletariat in a city like Colombo, where 50 percent of the people live in crowded slums and only 25 percent of its children go to school? The gap must surely be wide… the empty space in the Buddhist conscience is then filled with the predominant identity. Sinhalese equals Buddhist, reinforced by the hatreds and frustrations that slum dwelling breeds everywhere.81

The Sinhalese-Buddhist myth is incorporated in the ideology of the State. Given the fact that the Sinhalese see themselves in a struggle to achieve their rightful place in the society, those military units who fight against the Tamils carry the historical names such as Rajarate, Singha and Gajababu.

80 People’s Declaration for National Peace and Harmony, Bandaranaike Memorial Hall, Colombo, 20 October 1983.
Despite the militant nature of Buddhist movement, it has a positive side too. It must be noted that Buddhism reinforced the idea for social welfare programs and concern for poverty alleviation.\(^{82}\) However, it is altogether different matter that political leaders used political gains.

**International Factors**

The regional and global dynamics of international politics have impacted internal developments in Sri Lanka. This applies to the roots of ethnic violence as well. Much of what appears to be domestic is actually the complex synthesis of successive waves of interlocking political, economic and cultural engagements with the outside world.\(^{83}\) The focus here, however, is not to deal with the entire gamut of global influences on the internal developments of the island, but to see those factors which directly influenced the origin and exacerbation of ethnic violence.

1. **Influence of Liberation Movements**

Two liberation movements—Bangladesh and Palestine—have deeply influenced Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka.

The liberation of Bangladesh hardened Tamil militants' stand on their eelam demand. The Bengali-dominated East Pakistanis resorted to armed means for secession from the then united Punjabi-dominated Pakistan. The civil war ultimately led to the birth of a new State, Bangladesh, with the help of Indian military intervention. The creation of Bangladesh not only gave India


unquestioned regional preeminence, but also created a precedent in international politics as the world’s first successful post-colonial secessionist State.\textsuperscript{84} Despite ambiguous legitimacy of post-colonial secessionist States, Bangladesh’s quick international recognition provided impetus to many post-colonial secessionist movements.

It was exactly during this period, that the Sri Lankan government faced the JVP armed rebellion. In an attempt at addressing the root causes of such an insurrection, the government ended up in alienating the Tamil youth. The Tamil youth leadership drew parallels between Bangladesh and Eelam with India as a common denominator.\textsuperscript{85} Inspired by Bangladeshi leader Mujibur Rehman, they believed that the Sinhalese dominated State would respond to armed means as it responded to Sinhala youth insurrection. A Bangladesh-type operation in the creation of separate Tamil Eelam was pondered over.\textsuperscript{86} Their plan was to have a limited militant movement with economic self-sufficiency and once U.D.I (unilateral declaration of independence) was declared, India would come in and finish the job quickly.\textsuperscript{87} Such belief intensified immediately soon after the 1983 riots when thousands of refugees fled to India—similar to the Bengalis taking refuge following the March 1971 repression by the Pakistani forces.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} TULF leader Amirthalingam firmly believed that India would certainly intervene in Sri Lanka to “liberate” Tamils on the lines of Bangladesh. See A. J. Wilson, Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and Development in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (London: Hurst Co., 2000).
\textsuperscript{87} Rajan Hoole et al., The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka - An Inside Account (Claremont: The Sri Lanka Studies Institute, 1988), see Chapter 2. In fact, PLOTE brought out a small pamphlet called \textit{Vangam Thantha Kathai} (Lessons from Bangladesh) in the early eighties to emulate a corollary. This was stated by PLOTE leader Mr. Siddharthan in his interview, October 2001.
Even moderate Tamil leaders were impressed by Indian intervention and held a seven-party rally on 12 January 1972 in Kankesanthurai to celebrate India's victory. They even went to the extent of demanding a separate State like Bangladesh with foreign assistance. The then TULF General Secretary, Amirthalingam said,

Time had now come for the Tamils of this country to wage a clear-cut struggle for a totally separate assistance. Independence cannot be bought from shop. It has to be won through a hard struggle, if necessary, a bloody struggle. There are no short cuts. The Federal party in its satyagraha and civil disobedience campaigns had not called for foreign assistance. But the present struggle is for a separate State and, therefore, needed foreign assistance.89

Similarly, the Tamil militants also drew parallels with the Palestinian struggle. The militants firmly believed that "violence was the panacea of all ills that was afflicting the Tamil society" and the Sinhalese regime would certainly respond to armed struggle.90 Their belief got a big boost when the United Nations General Assembly granted the PLO an observer status91 in the international body by recognizing the Palestinians' right to self-determination.92 The policy of the PLO also suited the thinking of Tamil militants. Narayan Swamy quotes Abu Jihad of PLO, while training the Sri Lankan Tamils that "creating bubbles of anti-imperialism everywhere or wherever possible would indirectly help their own struggle."93 Starting from the mid-1970s till mid 1980s many Tamil militant groups including PLOTE, EROS, LTTE, EPRLF and TELO got training from Palestine liberation groups like Al Fatah (military wing of PLO) and PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) in various training centres in the Middle-east. The use of suicide terrorist tactics, networking with the Tamil

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90 Interview with PLOTE leader Mr. D. Siddharthan, October 2001.
91 UN General Assembly Resolution No. 3237(XXIX), 22 November 1974.
92 UN General Assembly Resolution No. 3236 (XXIX), 22 November 1974.
93 Swamy, n. 88, p. 98.
diaspora for funds, propaganda and other services, arms transfers, and method of motivating its cadres all these strategies have been borrowed by the LTTE from the Palestine terrorist organisations.94

2. External Intervention

After the July 1983 anti-Tamil riots and consequent exodus of refugees into Tamil Nadu, India could not “remain unaffected by the events.”95 New Delhi, keeping in mind its national security interests in the region, offered its good offices to resolve the conflict through peaceful negotiations. The failure of various peace efforts compelled India to take a step further by entering into an accord with Sri Lanka “to establish peace and normalcy” in the island.96 As per the provisions of the Accord, India was to “guarantee and cooperate in the implementation of the proposals,” with “military assistance as and when required.”97

The arrival of the IPKF, which was expected to break the cycle of violence, in fact, aggravated the condition in two ways. Firstly, the involvement of the IPKF triggered protests in southern Sri Lanka led by the JVP which successfully transformed the anti-India sentiments to their own advantage. The extent of

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95 Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, while rejecting Bangladesh type intervention in Sri Lanka on behalf of the Tamils, said in the Indian Parliament “India stands for the independence, unity and integrity of Sri Lanka.... However, because of the historical, cultural and other such close ties between the peoples of the two countries, especially between the Tamil community of Sri Lanka and us, India cannot remain unaffected by the events there.” See A.J. Wilson, The Break-up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict (London: Christopher Hurst, 1988), p. 203.
97 As per paras 2.15 & 2.16 of the Accord.
violence that resulted from armed attacks by the JVP and counter State repression is well known and requires no elaboration here.\textsuperscript{98} Secondly, the IPKF operations against the LTTE became one of the reasons for the exacerbation of violence in the Tamil society. The contribution of the IPKF to ethnic violence in Sri Lanka can be seen in the following ways:

1. It reinforced the LTTE's brand of Tamil nationalism and strengthened the hands of the LTTE as a formidable force that could "turn back the world's fourth largest army."\textsuperscript{99}

2. It encouraged, for the first time, the creation of 'death squads' within pro-India Tamil militant groups to carry out assassination of LTTE sympathizers. Similar 'death squads' were to be found later in Sri Lankan armed and paramilitary forces.

3. The IPKF period was also marked by large scale human rights violations marked by huge civilian casualties.

Many of the Tamil militant organizations were given military training by the Indian intelligence agencies, while at the same time New Delhi was using its good offices to bring about a peaceful settlement of the ethnic crisis. The training and supply of arms strengthened the hands of the militants as they "excelled in field craft, marksmanship, use of explosives and handling of telecommunications


\textsuperscript{99} Bose, n. 64, p. 134.
equipment...”100 They now took on the Sri Lankan forces with more confidence; this, in turn, gave justification for the Sri Lankan armed forces to use more terror in the north to bring back “law and order”. It also resulted in the militants taking the law into their hands and indulging in discriminate executions of “traitors”, extortion, robberies and assassinations in the Tamil dominated areas.

FORMS AND PATTERNS

For the sake of convenience, forms and patterns of ethnic violence in the island are classified as follows:

1. Intra-ethnic Violence

Intra-ethnic violence has received less scholarly attention. It is used here to mean violence within the Tamil community. This form of violence can be broadly categorised into three types:101

a. Violence used by Tamil militants against Tamil moderates who fail to subscribe to separatism. In the incipient stages, the militants targeted the Tamil politicians belonging to main Sinhalese majority parties like the UNP and the SLFP; the first such incident was the killing of Thiyagarajah, a UNP candidate, and Nadaraja, the party’s organizer, during the 1981 District Council elections in Jaffna.102 Later, however, they turned against moderate Tamil leaders who were considered as “traitors” and unable to win the rights of the Tamil community. TULF leaders Amirthalingam and Yogeswaran were

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101 Jagath P. Senaratne adds two more types with this viz., Tamil militants killing its own cadres which betray the cause, and “anti-social” elements within the territory under their control. But these two categories are ignored due to overlappings with the other types. See “Intra-Tamil Violence in Sri Lanka”, Nethra (Colombo), Vol. 2, No. 3, April-June 1998, p. 40.
102 Hoole, n. 26, pp. 34-35
assassinated by the LTTE in 1989 for their pro-IPKF stand and their interest in negotiated settlement. Three other TULF MPs were killed thereafter: Sam Thambimuttu in Colombo in June 1990; Arunachalam Thangadurai in July 1997 in Trincomalee; and Neelan Tiruchelvam in Colombo in July 1999. Jaffna Mayors Sarojini Yogeswaran and Ponnuthurai Sivapalan were killed successively in May and September 1998 by the Tigers.

b. Violence against Tamil civilians in the process of political, economic, intelligence, organizational and military activities.

c. Violence resulting from intra-militant rivalry. Though Tamil militancy took root in the early 1970s, mobilization under various organizational structures commenced only in the early eighties. The 1983 anti-Tamil riots gave a fresh impetus to the mobilization fund and international support, and a large number of politically radicalized youth joined various organisations. At one point of time in the mid-1980s, about 37 militant groups remained committed to the cause of separatism. Of these, five outfits—LTTE, TELO, PLOTE, EPRLF and EROS—were dominant as others went into oblivion. Race for supremacy between these five groups gave intra-ethnic violence a new dimension. As the State gradually lost control of the Tamil dominated north and east, existing guerilla organizations competed among themselves for the control of territory, resources and population. Indeed, there existed a brief period of unity among the above mentioned groups, barring PLOTE, under the banner of ENLF. This was due to Indian diplomatic efforts to bring all militant groups under one umbrella on the eve of the Thimpu talks in 1985. But, the LTTE soon broke from the alliance and started targeting two other groups, TELO and EPRLF, in 1986. TELO chief Sabaratnam was killed by the LTTE in May 1986 and EPRLF chief Padmanaba in 1990. With the signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord in
1987, the EROS accepted the hegemony of the LTTE, while other non-LTTE groups joined the democratic mainstream. Two other militant groups that emerged at a later period were ENDLF, formed with the help of Indian intelligence agencies in May 1987, and EPDP, a break away faction of the EPLRF. While the ENDLF no longer exists, the EPDP is a political party. The killings of leaders and prominent cadres of the rival militant groups by the LTTE continue to this day; a number of leaders are in its hit list.

Riots

Riots are the most frequent and dramatic expressions of ethnic conflict. It is a particular kind of collective violence, which once began takes an interpersonal and brutal form. It is observed that despite “an atmosphere of sadistic gaiety that frequently surrounds the killings, this is no lighthearted or ritualized test of strength—it is deadly serious.” Though riots connote spontaneity, in the Sri Lankan context, the whole operation is planned and implemented with virtually military precision. This method of organised violence has become an integral part of mass politics in Sri Lanka.

Even before independence there were many riots along religious lines. But, in the post-independence period, the riots are uniquely anti-Tamil. Table provides a profile of major post-independence riots.

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103 Tambiah, n. 13, p. 28.
TABLE 2.4
MAJOR POST-INDEPENDENCE RIOTS IN SRI LANKA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Immediate cause</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
<th>Affected community</th>
<th>Casualties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 1956</td>
<td>Protest by Tamils over the passage of 'Sinhala Only Act'</td>
<td>Colombo, Batticaloa</td>
<td>Sri Lankan Tamils</td>
<td>150 killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1958</td>
<td>Resistance by Tamils against the compulsory use of 'SRI' on the registration plates of motor vehicles</td>
<td>Colombo, Central and Eastern provinces</td>
<td>Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian origin Tamils</td>
<td>200 killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1977</td>
<td>Clash at a carnival in Jaffna and subsequent spread of rumours that &quot;Sinhalese in Jaffna are targeted&quot;</td>
<td>North, East, Central, North-central provinces</td>
<td>Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian origin Tamils, Sinhalese, Muslims</td>
<td>112 killed, 25,000 displaced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1979</td>
<td>Approval of PTA; conscription of the LTTE; declaration of emergency in the north</td>
<td>North, East, Central provinces</td>
<td>Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1981</td>
<td>Killing of two UNP candidates and the subsequent police rampage in Jaffna</td>
<td>North, East, Central, North-central provinces</td>
<td>Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian origin Tamils</td>
<td>148 killed, 3500 displaced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1983</td>
<td>Ambush of 13 soldiers by the LTTE in Jaffna</td>
<td>Colombo, Eastern and Central provinces</td>
<td>Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian origin Tamils</td>
<td>3000 killed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The year 1956 is significant in the history of Sri Lanka for developing a major wedge between the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils on the language issue. Riots broke in June 1956 as a result of violence against the Tamil satyagrahis who were protesting peacefully at Gale Face Green against the introduction of the 'Sinhala Only Act'. Violence spread to other parts of Colombo and Eastern province. In Colombo, the Pettah area, where most of the Tamil shops were
situated, was looted and destroyed. The rioting at the Gal Oya\textsuperscript{107} area in the eastern part of the island was organized by the Sinhalese to drive away the Tamil settlers from the Scheme area. As the police force was not so much politicized on ethnic lines at that point of time and also due to the adept handling of the situation by Governor General Oliver Gunatilleke, the situation was brought under control quickly. Nevertheless, 150 were dead and thousands injured, apart from huge loss of property and displacement of over 12,000.\textsuperscript{108} Thambiah points out certain themes of the 1956 riots which were to recur in riots of later years. Those running threads were:

- a) the central role of rumours in triggering the violence and also in generating anger and panic among the participants;
- b) lethargy on the part of the police (but later this characteristic transformed itself into active connivance with the rioters against the minorities);
- c) critical faces in the crowd like mobile and volatile labour force and construction workers who unleashed violence.\textsuperscript{109}

The 1958 riots also centred on language and colonization concerns. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact, signed in June 1957, which gave the reasonable use of Tamil and regional councils, was unilaterally abrogated. At the same time, colonization in the east was intensified; the Padaviya Scheme was one among them. The Federal Party responded by organizing agitations and anti “SRI” campaigns in the north. The response from the Sinhalese was in the form of riots firstly in the eastern parts of the island on 22 May 1958, when the Tamil villages were attacked. But a rumor that a “Tamil Army” was marching to destroy

\textsuperscript{107} Gal Oya, situated 150 miles east of Colombo, is Sri Lanka’s first and largest post-independence Multipurpose Scheme modeled on Tennessee Valley Authority and Damador Valley Corporation.
\textsuperscript{108} Sabaratnam, n. 29, pp. 71-72.
\textsuperscript{109} Tambiah, n. 13, pp. 86-87.
Polonnaruwa caused the riots to spread to the rest of the island. For the first time, pangs of violence reached the Plantation Tamils in the Central districts. Initially, the administration failed to take any action. In Colombo, the Tamil business establishments were prime targets of the rioters.\footnote{For detailed account of the riots see Tarzie Vittachi, \textit{Emergency '58: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots} (London: Andre Deutsch, 1958).} The situation was brought under control by the army. The 1958 riots clearly demonstrated the role of the leadership in controlling violence, which emerged as a major variable in the riots of later years.

The 1977 riots were held against the backdrop of post-poll violence following the victory of the UNP under Jayewardene. Tamil militancy had taken root and now the militants were in a position to retaliate police attacks, though in a limited manner. The dominant Tamil political party, TULF, in its Vaddukoddai resolution, resolved to fight for a separate State. The party also started internationalizing the ethnic issue in various world forums. All these enraged the Sinhalese. Trouble started in Jaffna with a small incident on 12 August 1977 at a carnival in St. Patrick's College when some police men in plain clothes were not allowed to enter without tickets. This led to massive assaults by the police in various parts of Jaffna and the violence gradually spread to other parts of the island, again, due to rumors. But this time it was spread by the Sinhalese students who were brought from Jaffna University for safety to Anuradhapura. The police forces, which were by now ethnicised, were either indifferent onlookers or active collaborators in the riots.

The government accused the SLFP for the violence as a reaction to the post-poll violent incidents; the SLFP in turn, pointed fingers at the UNP thugs. But, no attempt was made to find the truth. A Commission under Justice Sansoni
was appointed to find out the causes and recommend remedial measures to prevent such riots in the future. But the Commission was disappointingly biased in most of its findings. The Report, however, strictured the police for their inability to act promptly in bringing the riots under control. It also pointed out the lack of proper coordination among the senior police officers and too much of political interference in police forces. The Report also called upon the government to discuss major issues of education, employment and colonisation with the Tamil representatives. But the recommendations were not fully implemented by the government. As a result another riot broke out within two years in 1979. The notable features of the 1977 riots were:

a. For the first time since independence, the atmosphere for ethnic violence was created by electoral violence.

b. For the first time, the government acknowledged the intensity of the violence and appointed a commission to find its causes and consequences.

c. The riots displaced numerous Plantation Tamils from hill country towards eastern parts.

The 1979 riots took place in the backdrop of

1. Proscription of the LTTE on 22 May 1978.

2. Passage of PTA on 29 July 1979

3. Presidential order to the Army to "wipe out terrorism" by 31 December 1979.

4. Declaration of emergency in the north.

Thus, anti-insurgency operations in the north and east became intensified and the militants' attack on the army became a regular event. The riots were sporadic and

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111 Paul Sieghart, n. 28, p. 78.
intermittent spreading out in July and August of 1979. But unlike the previous riots, the 1979 riots were restricted only to north and east.

The 1981 riots have to be seen in the backdrop of violence-marred District Development Councils elections held in June 1981 and burning down of the Jaffna library resulting. The riots, which erupted in Amparai as a small clash between Tamil and Sinhalese students in August 1981, spread the entire island. It affected the Plantation Tamils the most and displaced them from the hill districts. The extent of arsoning, killing and destruction demonstrated the organized nature of the riots in various places. The then President Jayewardene himself admitted that many party members were involved in organizing violence against the Tamils.

The 1983 riots broke out in the charged atmosphere of ambush of 13 soldiers in Jaffna by the LTTE. Of all the previous riots, the 1983 riots were well organized and became widespread, both in terms of destruction and geographical reach. The connivance of the government and the security forces was remarkably high. Tamil homes and business establishments were attacked systematically. Pettah, one of the biggest bazaars in Colombo, came under attack. The riots in Colombo were organised by hired thugs supervised by government higher ups. The riots facilitated a large scale looting, stealing, vandalism and settling of old scores. On July 25, about 300-500 prisoners broke out of their cells and stabbed 35 Tamil detainees to death at the Welikade Prison high-security prison. On July 27, violence spread to other parts of the island. Panic heightened among the Sinhalese with the spread of rumours that the Tigers were in Colombo to exact revenge. This sparked further attacks on the Tamils.

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112 Ibid., p.21.
113 Ibid., p. 75.
The government was confused and indecisive. While, on the one hand, it appeased the majority by claiming that the riots were a legitimate expression of anger by the Sinhalese Buddhist majority and assured safeguard of their rights, on the other, it blamed the Left for the riots. Many other explanations have been put forward for the riots. One section represented by the former minister Cyril Mathew accused foreign agencies like Indian RAW and Russian KGB for the riots. The perspective from the Sri Lankan security forces was that the LTTE deliberately perpetrated the violence to demonstrate the Sinhalese of communal hatred against the Tamils. Some pointed fingers at the JVP, a militant nationalist group which was anti-Tamil in its character. The Tamil nationalist leaders pointed out that the racist elements in the government master mined the riots. Some said that a section of the business community wanted to eliminate its competitors. It was also said that the riots were an attempt to promote conflicts between different ethnic groups of the island. It is also maintained that a section of army was involved to assert its supremacy and gain political power by using the prevailing instability.

Whatever may be the reasons, the riots undoubtedly demonstrated the extent to which the Sri Lankan society was ethnically polarized. It clearly established that the security forces were no longer neutral and could not to be trusted by all. And, the government was representative of only the majority community.

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Vengeance Killings

Both the militant groups and the armed forces have evolved a strategy of attacking civilians belonging to each other to seek vengeance. The militants use this strategy to provoke communal disturbances in the south with the expectation that the Sinhalese Army would be pulled back from the north or the east to their advantage. 116 The militants also attack the Sinhalese settled by the government in the 'traditional homeland' of the Tamils so as to compel them to move out.

Attack on the villagers and Buddhist religious places have been conventional tactics of the LTTE. The anti-Tamil sentiments have been successfully transformed into pro-militant sentiment by the guerillas. The Tamil nationalists argue that such scheming attacks on unarmed civilians were unknown to Tamil militants until the Indian intelligence agencies apparently urged the LTTE into doing so in Anuradhapura in 1985, which claimed over 200 lives. 117

The security forces made use of night curfews to unleash hired hoodlums on Tamil homes and if the residents tried to flee, the security personnel shot them down as curfew violators. In retaliation, Tamil militants attacked families of the armed forces and in one such instance, 126 Sinhalese army personnel and their family members were killed at Kituluttawa in April 1987. 118 Attacks on the Sinhalese civilians were justified on the ground that the Tamils civilians have experienced such attacks for long at the hands of the security forces. 119

116 Chattopadyaya, n. 105, p. 76.
117 Trawick, n. 20, p.192.
118 Somasundaram, n. 43, pp. 69-70
If the above vengeance killings are unplanned and result from a fit of rage, it is termed as "My Lai Phenomenon". In Sri Lanka, this phenomena is seen with the security forces and the militants. However, as the stress involved is more in the case of the Army, it is found predominantly with them. Lack of discipline is also partly responsible for this. Being impromptu, the end result is killing of innocent civilians. This has been a characteristic feature of the Sri Lankan armed forces since their deployment in Tamil dominated areas in the late 1970s. The resulting cost has not only been human lives but also priceless property- for example, as the burning of the Jaffna Public Library in June 1981. The IPKF also cannot be absolved of this phenomenon. In what is known as "India's My Lai", the Indian soldiers killed nearly 50 unarmed civilians on 2 August 1989 in Velvettuthurai, Jaffna, in retaliation to the killing of five IPKF men in an ambush by the Tigers earlier the same day.

Another dimension of the revenge attacks is interrelated to the notion of 'justice'. Children who have grown up with hatred over the loss of their parents and their social ostracisation and financial difficulties also manifest in the intensity of violence.

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120 On March 16, 1968 the angry and frustrated men of Charlie Company, 11th Brigade, American Division entered the village of My Lai. As the "search and destroy" mission unfolded it soon degenerated into the massacre of over 300 apparently unarmed civilians including women, children, and the elderly. It was an attack out of frustration when numerous members of the same company were maimed or killed in the preceding weeks by the Vietcong.


Assassinations

Assassination is a form of killing somebody or important person for money or for political reasons. In Sri Lanka, this form violence is adopted by the LTTE. Though the Tigers adopt various means for assassinating their rivals, the most successful and often resorted method has been suicide attacks.

Suicide attacks have been a mode of violence adopted by the LTTE since July 1987. This method of attack is absent in other groups involved in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. Trained specially for this purpose, the Black Tigers, thus far, have conducted nearly 190 successful attacks killing hundreds of civilians and armed forces personnel. Suicide attacks are known for their high success rate and enormous terror impact they instill in the enemy. For the LTTE chief, Prabhakaran, “With perseverance and sacrifice, Tamil Eelam can be achieved in 100 years. But if we conduct Black Tiger operations, we can shorten the suffering of the people and achieve Tamil Eelam in a shorter period of time.”

The Black Tigers employ various equipments including body suits, boats, bi-cycles, cars, and trucks for suicide attacks. Through suicide attacks, the LTTE has been able to eliminate political leaders like Rajiv Gandhi, the former prime minister of India, R. Premadasa, the former President of Sri Lanka, Ranjan Wijeratne, Gamini Dissanayake, (both UNP leaders and ministers) and TULF leader, Neelan Tiruchelvam, C. V. Gunaratne (Industrial Development Minister). Its military targets have included Admiral Clancy Fernando, Brigadier Larry Wijeratne, and Brigadier Ananda Hamangoda. The Black Tigers were also successful in inflicting damages on Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Joint Operations command of the Sri Lankan security forces, World Trade Centre at Colombo,

CONCLUSION

The Sri Lankan security forces and the Tamil militants are convinced that violence is the panacea of all ills of the community. For this, the most modern techniques of violence are used. In the post-independence period, ethnic violence erupted in 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983. Thus, the intervals between the each riot are narrowed down and, at the same time, the intensity and area increased. Both the State forces and the militants are responsible for dehumanizing the society. It is clear that the use of violence by the State has enhanced the legitimacy of the militant groups like the LTTE, and their use of violence as tactics. At the same time, the legitimacy and the authority of the State has been eroded. It also clearly evident that the causes of ethnic violence in Sri Lanka are multi-dimensional that lay in a combination of political, economic, social and cultural spheres. The ideological underpinnings of violence are deep on both sides. The political leadership, as a factor in violence, failed time and again to root out violence in from the society. This is reflected in the characteristics of the security forces, which have ethnic bias in discharging their functions. Accumulated economic grievances have aggravated and provided strong justification for the violent means adopted by the Tamil militants. Thus, it is wrong to attribute the causes to one single factor. The forms and patterns of ethnic violence are not distinguishable, and one cannot surely say about the eruption of ethnic violence in the island. Perhaps, one exception could be the LTTE attack on a specific date like the Black July to mark the anniversary of July 1983 riots, and heroes week that falls in November every year to pay respect to the Tiger ‘martyrs’. But this pattern has been fading slowly.