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My interest in the troubled ethnic politics of Sri Lanka is an outcome of my experiences in living through some of its volatile periods, crises and precarious moments. During the whole course of events, I was constantly faced with questions regarding the transition from a moderate movement to an armed struggle; and this prompted me to pursue my studies in understanding this complex scenario. My supervisor, Dr. P. Sahadevan, has been greatly supporting me both morally and academically ever since I decided to pursue this research. I wish to express my deep sense of gratitude to my supervisor, for his encouragement and fruitful discussions, which enabled me to undertake the work and give shape to this thesis. Without his critical comments and guidance, this work would have never taken the right shape. I thank him once again for all the help he has given me during the course of the work and for the insights I have gathered from him.

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Political Scientists have analysed the process of formation of political parties, their growth and decline. However the existing studies have rarely dealt with the causes for the emergence of ethnic parties in a conflict situation. The intensity of conflict poses a threat to the free functioning of moderate political parties, leading to their decline. In this context, the emergence, growth and decline of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in Sri Lanka assume importance.

TULF was formed by the merger of the Federal party (FP) and the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) in 1976. The TULF was emerged as the sole moderate political party to voice the aspirations of the Sri Lankan Tamils. With the formation of the TULF, the Sri Lankan Tamil politics reached a radical stage. Not only the party declared itself as a “Liberation Front” but also its policy focussed on establishing a ‘separate sovereign state’ - Tamil Eelam consisting of Northern and Eastern provinces. In this process, the entire Sri Lankan Tamil polity was successfully mobilised against the state. The significance of the party lies in the credibility it enjoyed, the responsibility it had been entrusted and the immense task it had to accomplish.

Despite the caste, class and regional differences, the growth of the TULF was smooth for various reasons. First, the ethnic issue was in the forefront and its momentum was increasing since the 1950s, as no other party effectively addressed the Sri Lankan Tamil issues. Further, the politics of the ‘national’ parties enhanced the Tamil unity. Secondly, the Sri Lankan Tamils had their full trust in the TULF, due to its policies and the commitment of its leaders. Thirdly, the TULF promised to achieve a separate state, which emotionally rallied the people and united them. This was manifested in the first election faced by the party faced in 1977. The TULF swept this election in the Tamil dominated areas by winning 18 seats and became the main opposition party in parliament. The election manifesto focused on a single agenda to establish a separate State for the Tamils.

However, after the elections, the TULF faced harsh criticism and resentment from the people especially from youth for disowning its own manifesto. This led
to the formation of militant organisations. Some of the important groups were:
Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), People Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Eelam Revolutionary Organisation (EROS), and Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF). These militant groups gradually gained the support of the Tamils and attracted youth into their fold including members of the Youth wing of the TULF. Of these militant organisations some were openly critical of the TULF while the others maintained a tacit relationship with it until 1983.

The UNP, which formed the government after the 1977 elections, ignored the mandate of the TULF by branding its leaders as secessionists. Moreover, it amended the constitution to prevent secessionism and ordered all the members of parliament to take an oath upholding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. This left the TULF in a political quandary. On the one hand, the people lost the trust on the TULF, as they doubted its conviction and commitment towards the cause. On the other, the government cornered the TULF to give up its separatist programme.

The politics of the TULF during 1976–1983 witnessed a growth of radicalism that brought both communities to open confrontation. Regular communal attacks against the Tamils by the security forces and the Sinhala chauvinistic elements pushed the Tamil youth to resort to violent means. During this period, the growing separatist campaign of the TULF and the militants gradually provoked the Sinhalese resulting in the July 1983 anti-Tamil riots.

The 1983 riots led to the direct involvement of India in the conflict after which, the TULF leadership shifted its operational headquarters to India, and functioned in exile. India, as a mediator, treated five major militant groups along with the TULF as the representatives of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Until then the TULF acted as the sole representative of the Sri Lankan Tamils. The TULF attended the All-Party Conference in 1984 and also the India mediated Thimpu Talks of 1985. Except the Thimpu talks, all other prior negotiations were attended solely by the TULF. In the post-Thimpu period the role of the TULF as the sole
representative of the Sri Lanka Tamils has gradually declined, as the militant
groups became a part of the negotiation process.

Consequently, the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement of 1987 sought to provide
autonomy to the Sri Lankan Tamils under the Provincial Council (PC) system. The
TULF, which was expected to play an active role in implementing the accord as a
moderate and legitimate political party, failed to get the endorsement of the Tamils
and did not even contest the PC election.

Later, the party contested three parliamentary elections and a local body
election since 1989. Politically, it faced opposition from the militant-turned-
political parties, which drastically downsized the TULF vote bank. Ever since then
the TULF's organisational structure and political programme are in disarray. At
present, the party's leadership is shrinking; political mobilisation has stopped, and
it has little popular support. At times, the TULF is even accused of acting at the
behest of the LTTE.

In the light of above discussion, the following issues are to be examined in
the context of the rise and decline of the TULF:

How did the TULF leadership build the party? In this context, its ideological,
social, political bases and the leadership qualities have been examined. Particularly,
it's policies; political Programmes and strategies for mass
mobilisation are be studied.

(i) Why did the party fail to implement its 1977 election manifesto
and what was the alternative programme that the party placed
before the people for their mobilisation till 1983?

(ii) What has been the attitude of successive governments towards the
TULF?

(iii) What have been the TULF's responses to militancy and how did it
relate with the militant groups?

(iv) What is the impact of Indian intervention in Sri Lanka's ethnic
conflict especially on the Tamil moderate politics?
(v) What have been the constraints of the TULF to restore its leadership role, especially since the withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in 1990?

This study focuses on the political history of the TULF during 1976 - 2000. The TULF was formed in 1976 and enjoyed the peak of its popular support in 1977. The decline of its popularity and support began from the early eighties. During 1983 to 1987 it functioned in exile. It faced the 1989 elections in which it could not win even a single seat. In both the elections conducted in 1994 and 2000, the TULF won five seats. Significant developments occurred during the period of study, which had a serious impact on the party organisation, its policy, mobilisation, leadership, Tamil politics and the island’s political climate as a whole.

Studies on the Sri Lankan politics and ethnic conflict are many. However, no full-length study on the TULF has been conducted. Urmila Phadnis in her *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia* brings out the variations and similarities of different ethnic problems and establishes the ethnic factor as a major challenge of these states to nation building. Chandra Richard de Silva, in his *Sri Lanka: A History of Sri Lanka from 4th century BC to 1986 AD* narrates the history of Sri Lanka in the social, political, economical and cultural perspectives, and gives the development of ethnic communities and the ethnic discourse in Sri Lanka. Satchi Ponnambalam in his study - *Sri Lanka: The National Question and the Tamil Liberation Struggle* analyses the debate of historians on the issue of early settlements of Sri Lanka and the evolution of the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamil communities. The author also examines the alienation of Tamils from the national mainstream by analysing discriminatory policies of successive governments. The nature of the state that intensified the ethnic conflict in the post independence era is also investigated.

S. J. Thambiah’s *Buddhism Betrayed: Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* gives an account of the role of Buddhist institutions and religious elites in the politics and in the present ethnic conflict. His other work - *Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* analyses the theory and practice of democracy
in a historical perspective from independence to 1983 anti-Tamil riot in Sri Lanka. Ignoring certain democratic practices such as regular elections, he claims that Sri Lanka’s democracy is a farce.

S. Ponnaiah’s *Satyagraha and the Freedom Movement of the Tamils in Ceylon* gives a detail account of the Satyagraha campaign of the Federal Party from 1956 to 1970. Though the work lacks systematic academic exercise, its utility lies in its valuable information; it provides the first hand insights, as the author himself was involved in the campaign.

A. Jeyaratnam Wilson’s *Politics of Sri Lanka, 1947-1973* is a comprehensive study on political development and political forces of post independent Sri Lanka. He analyses the political development and its problems from the dimensions of constitutional, and economic, programs of various political parties and the system of government. Wilson’s *S.J.V. Chelvanayagam and the Crisis of Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism, 1947- 1977* is a political biography of a prominent Tamil leader Chelvanayagam. He analyses achievements of the Federal Party; and the formation of the TULF under his leadership. Wilson maintains that Tamil nationalism and the Tamil unity were at its peak under Chelvanayagam’s leadership. His last work - *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origin and Development in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* brings out the genesis and development of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka by tracing the Tamil politics from 1796 to 1947 and analyses the role of Tamil political parties in post-independent development of Tamil nationalism up to 1997. The work however lacks a critical analysis of the role of the Tamil political parties.

K. M. de Silva, Sri Lanka’s renowned historian in his *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance* analyses the constitutional constrains in maintaining democracy in Sri Lanka. He discusses the multi ethnic character and the contentious issues that led to the conflict. Further, he examines the bureaucracy, civil liberties, political economy, welfare system, language, religion, and defence system of the state. His other work *Reaping the Whirl Wind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka* analyses the various dimensions of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. He explains the ramifications of the conflict such as the emergence of Muslim identity, the
internationalisation of the conflict, Indian involvement etc. He also narrates the approach of the governments towards the conflict. His other work, which he co-edited with G. H. Peiris, *Pursuit of Peace in Sri Lanka: Past Failure and prospects* is a compilation of articles written from the perspective of conflict resolution. Past failures of the attempts at resolution and impending rehabilitation and reconstruction problems are analysed by various prominent authors. This book identifies the Sinhalese Buddhist hard liners as stumbling block for any devolution of power, but fails to suggest the ways and means to cope with such forces.

J. N. Dixit who played a major role in the whole process of Indian involvement in Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict, in his *Assignment Colombo* presents first hand information on the events. He gives the perceptions and intentions of the different parties involved in the conflict. It refutes most of the existing polemical writings on this issue. S. D. Muni’s *Pangs of Proximity: India and Sri Lanka’s Ethnic Conflict* analyses India’s foreign policy considerations towards Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict and establishes that it consists of ensuring Tamils’ interest, the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and India’s security concerns. He also rationalises the involvement of India in Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict based on India’s security perspectives.

Ravi Kant Dubey’s *Indo-Sri Lanka Relations: With Special References to Tamil Problem* provides the genesis and development of ethnic conflict in the first half of this book. The second half analyses the changes in Indo-Sri Lanka relations before 1983. He examines the mediatory role of India and its impact on Indo-Sri Lanka relations. Alan J. Bullion’s *India, Sri Lanka and the Tamil Crisis 1976-1994: An International perspective* analyses the dynamic relationship between India and Sri Lanka and the role of Tamil crisis that in turn shaped and determined the foreign policy parameters. The author also analyses drawbacks in the exercise of the Indian intervention in this book.

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- To conceptualise the emergence, growth and decline of moderate ethnic parties in conflicting situations.
• To understand the role of the Sri Lankan state in the growth and decline of TULF.
• To investigate the impact of different political programs and mobilising strategies of the TULF that led to its growth and decline.
• To probe the impact of the emergence of Tamil militancy on the decline of the TULF.
• To examine the implications of the change of leadership on the position of the TULF.

The study seeks to test the following hypotheses:

- The majoritarian tendency of a state not only produces ethnic parties but also drives them to advocate separatism.
- The secessionist policy of a moderate ethnic party lacking adequate working programme shall threaten its very existence while enhancing the popular support base to militancy.
- Greater the success of militants in securing legitimacy, the greater the chances of the moderate party losing its pre-eminence.
- The contradictory strategies of the moderates and militants tend to create rift between them in which the latter works for the decline of the former.

The study adopts a historical-analytical case study design. Primary data includes original documents of the party and the interviews with its' leaders. The original documents include resolutions of annual and special conferences of the Federal Party and the TULF, election manifestos and leaflets, control committee reports on party dissidents, writings of the leaders and correspondence of the party leaders to the Governments of Sri Lanka and India. Party’s official publications, Parliament Hansards, published interviews and important speeches have also been utilised for this study. Interviews conducted by the author have also been used in this study. Secondary data includes books and research articles. Relevant theoretical works on the formation and decline of political parties have been consulted.
This study is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter seeks to evolve a theoretical framework. It analyses the intricacy of majority and minority politics in a multi-society. The focus is on the role of the history, state and the representation in relation to the ethnic minorities. Besides the organisational aspects such as party programme, mobilisation strategy and leadership are examined. Especially, the influence of the militants and external factors in an intensive conflict condition is investigated.

The second chapter analyses the ethnic politics in the colonial period. The competitive ethnic assertion between Sinhalese and Tamil leaderships, the causes for the inability to evolve a national party and the causes and factors that led to the formation of Tamil ethnic party are some of the issues covered in the chapter.

The third chapter discussed the evolution of the TULF in the context of Tamil ethnic politics. An overview of the discontent and mistrust between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority that led to the formation of this party is presented. The analysis focuses on the majoritarian character of successive governments, their discriminatory policies, the nature of the left parties in addressing the aspirations of the ethnic minority and the growth of the Tamil ethnic movements/parties in the post-colonial phase (till 1976). Especially, the CNC in addressing the Tamils aspirations that led to the formation of an ethnic party at the time of independence is illustrated. Focus is also on the federal movement under the leadership of the FP. The politics of two other Tamil ethnic parties - ACTC and Suyadchi Kazagam and their relationship with FP are also be highlighted.

The fourth chapter analyses strategies of the party for its consolidation including its ability in unifying the Tamil speaking people as a whole. In this connection, four major factors are analysed. They are: organisational approach - its policy, whether it has been formulated realistically; the working programme of the party; party's strategies to politicise/mobilise the Tamils; and the commitment and capability of the leadership in rallying the Tamils and the ability to provide the leadership. It also examines the role of the state and the limitations of the party for the emergence of Tamil militancy. In this context, the challenges posed to the
TULF leadership by the militants, state response against the separatism, and crisis-managing strategy of the TULF are examined.

The fifth chapter examines the nature and the activities of the party during 1983–87 by focusing the role of TULF in leading the movement in exile. Militant organisations that filled the space created by TULF and their relationship with the TULF till the Indo-Lanka accord are studied. Attempt is made to examine India’s approach towards the ethnic conflict that influenced the position of the TULF.

The sixth chapter makes a survey of the position of the TULF after the Indo-Sri Lanka accord. Change of its policy, impact of its absence on its organisation and support base, nature of the political climate in the north and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka for the functioning of moderate parties, change of mobilisation strategy and the relations with militant-turn-political parties are examined. The chapter also deals with its achievements in the electoral politics and the ability in influencing peace negotiations.

While summarising the study, the concluding chapter critically examines the causes for the decline of the TULF and tests the hypothesis with a view to bring about some theoretical insights.
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