PREFA CE

Elections are an important test to the concept of democracy. Elections confirm the right of the citizens and enable them to express their choice and views. Sri Lanka, to a large extent, is the first among developing countries to adhere to the principles of democracy. Ever since the independence, elections became a part and parcel of Sri Lanka's political system. Until 1977 elections were held periodically except for a two-year delay between 1970 and 1977. In these elections people's participation was high enough to compare it with developed countries. Significantly each of these elections witnessed a change in government between the two main political parties - the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). However, in 1978 the parliamentary form of government followed till then was replaced by a presidential system. The change in political system and the politics of victimisation practiced by the ruling UNP eroded the prospects of democratic institutions and a free and fair contest among the parties. This was evident from the 1988 presidential election held under an atmosphere of violence unleashed by both systemic and anti-systemic forces.

The thrust of the present study is to highlight the factors that led to the erosion of democratic institutions in Sri Lanka after 1977. This is carried out by analysing the 1988 Presidential election in detail. In the process an
the 1988 Presidential election in detail. In the process an attempt is made to answer several relevant questions like: to what extent violence affected the electoral process during the 1988 Presidential election? To what extent factors such as violence, socio-economic issues and the minorities determined the electoral outcome? And what are the factors that contributed to the UNP candidate R.Premadasa's victory and to the defeat of the SLFP candidate Sirimavo Bandaranaike.

The present study will attempt to test three hypotheses. First, Sri Lankans vote for a party and its programmes rather than personalities and issues. Second, the votes of the minorities, particularly the Tamils, played a decisive role in deciding the outcome of the election. Third, the violent political situation in the island largely benefited the ruling UNP candidate in the election.

W. Warnapala, 1983, M. Weiner, 1987). However, not much analysis has been done on the electoral politics between 1947 and 1988 as a whole. The proposed study would endeavour to fill such gaps.

The present study is divided into seven chapters. While discussing the general perspective on 'Democracy and Elections', the first chapter attempts to analyse the electoral experiences in South Asia as a whole. Electoral framework, growth of party system, people's participation, issues and, voting pattern during the elections that were held between 1947 and 1977 in Sri Lanka forms the second chapter. The third chapter provides insights into the electoral system introduced under the 1978 Constitution and also analyses the 1982 Presidential election. The third chapter gives the background under which the 1988 Presidential election was held, candidates who contested, political re-alignments that evolved, issues that were prominent and, the campaign strategies of the political parties. To what extent factors like socio-economic bases, role of violence and proportionate voting determined the electoral outcome forms the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter analyses the impact of violence on voter turn-out and the voting pattern at the district level as also the voting pattern among the majority and minority communities. The concluding chapter identifies the factors responsible for the erosion of democracy, impact of violence on the
electoral process and, the factors that determined the electoral outcome.

As a descriptive-analytical study it is based on both primary source materials, e.g., official texts of speeches of leaders, government reports, parliamentary debates, party publications and, secondary data like books, research articles, magazine and newspaper reports. Apart from these, first-hand information on the 1988 Presidential election was collected through several interviews with various political leaders and journalists in Sri Lanka during my field trip to Colombo in September - October 1995.