THE CAUSES

1. Political Alienation

Ethnic politics has caused immeasurable havoc and enormous damage to the political system in Sri Lanka. Ethnic violence against the Tamils in Sri Lanka attributed to a number of causes. Some regard it as due to pure racial prejudice, which in its very nature irrational. Others view it as calculated revenge against the Tamils, a form of terror politics. A third group attributes it to the religious fanaticism and madness of the Sinhalese majority, which is jealous of the Tamils. Many more apparent causes could perhaps be listed whatever the explicable causes be, the fact remains that the two major ethnic groups of Sri Lanka are alienated from each other. Broadly speaking, there are three important aspects to the Sinhalese-Tamil problem in Sri Lanka: (a) education and employment, (b) religion and colonisation of the Tamil areas by the Sinhalese, and (c) language. All these three factors are interlinked and inter-dependent.¹

2. Economic Impoverishment:

In comparative studies of race relations it is very common to find economic issues and considerations as chiefly responsible for conflicts. Economic disparities and impoverishment are both visible and measurable. For that reason, they appear to provide a convenient explanation for conflict particularly when other explanations are not readily available. But convenience is no substitute for causation. Economic grievances and impoverishment do play a predominant and significant role in ethnic politics, but they are operative in some connections and at some levels far more than at others. Therefore, they cannot be regarded as solely responsible. To do so would be to disregard other factors equally potent, if not more. A precise concept of ethnic politics must begin by differentiating the various stands of antagonism.

Actually, the economic argument takes two different forms. The first form is that the masses by themselves have no special reasons for ethnic hostility, but they are misled by opportunistic leaders who have economic axes to grind and who wish to do the grinding at the expense of the ethnic strangers. The second variant of it is that mass economic jealousy and revalries are the primary sources of ethnic antagonism.

Social Injustice:

Behind the hauntingly disharbing waves of ethnic politics...
In Sri Lanka lies a tragic tale of social injustice and intolerance which has confounded her history since her independence in 1948. During the days of British rule, the Tamils occupied high positions in the administration and business. This fact must naturally roused the ire of others in the country. The Tamils have complained of systematic and unscrupulous discrimination against them by the Sinhala-majority government since Sri Lanka attained independence. In this respect all successive Sri Lankan Governments have been alike. In addition to this, acts of arson and looting of the Tamils have been reported at regular intervals since the late fifties in 1956, 1958, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1981, 1982, and 1983. In 1981, the huge Jaffna public library containing several lakhs of books and precious manuscripts, was set fire to and burnt to ashes.

In 1948, Sri Lanka framed its own laws in regard to citizenship and franchise. However, the Ceylon citizenship act of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistan Residents (citizenship) Act No 3 of 1949, in effect put into legal form the rigorous conditions that conservative Sinhalese political leaders had been envisaging from the 1930s and even prior to them.

Sinhala Chauvinism:

Even in the earlier decades of colonial rule, in Sri Lanka there had been systematic efforts in some circles to foster the idea that the island rightfully belonged to the Sinhalese,
the so-called Bhumiputras, and since the island became independent this idea gathered further strength. These attempts have been successful to such a extent that this narrow Sinhala patriotism has growing into an influential ideology. The ideology has also been successfully institutionalised, so that political parties, religious organisations, educational institutions, the army, the police, in fact, all institutions in Srilanka over which the majority Sinhala community has a hold, have grown convinced of this idea that their people are inherently superior to the other communities in the island, and that the discrimination against them is justified.

This ethnic consciousness thus has seeped into the thinking of all classes of the Sinhala people. Small merchants, middle-level businessmen, the educated middle class and students. The anti-colonial movement or the nationalist movement in Srilanka was firmly circumscribed by its exclusive devotion to the majority community. In time this degenerated into communalism directed against the minorities, the Tamils in particular.

AN INSIGHT INTO THE HISTORY OF ETHNIC RIGHTS

Long before Srilanka attained independence, the rivalry between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils had become manifest in their respective political activities. In

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fact, even from the beginning the nationalist movement was split along communal lines. Strictly speaking, racial hostility as such was not a problem in the first decades of this century. The Sinhalese and the Tamils lived amicably enough to fight together and press for constitutional reforms in their country. Enthusiasm was not a problem when in 1919 the Ceylon National Congress was founded on the model of the Indian National Congress, and Sir Poomabalam Ramanathan, a Tamil, was made its first President. It was only later that racial hostility assumed frightening dimensions. The first ethnic riot in Sri Lanka occurred in 1915 when shops belonging to the Moslem were burnt down by Sinhala mobs which went on a rampage. Small Sinhala merchants were behind the arson. Two of Dharmapala’s brothers were arrested by the British in connection with the incident on the charge that they had plotted against the government. But neither Dharmapala, nor his brothers really intended causing the slightest inconvenience to the British. All that they aimed at was the pulling up by the roots and destruction of the Muslim and Tamil merchants in that country.

Before independence, representatives of the Tamil community had sought but failed to obtain equal parliamentary representation under the new constitution. In the process it engendered considerable bitterness. But the real ethnic problem at the national level in Sri Lankan politics began when at inde-

3. Dharmapala Anagarika (1864–1933) was one of the earliest proponents of a rabid and over Sinhala Chauvinism.
pendence in 1948, the British handed over power to the Sinhalese. Since then ethnic riots have been prevalent in Sri Lanka.

During the last four decades and more, the chasm dividing the Sinhalese and the Tamils have widened. In the ensuing ethnic holocaust unimaginable worth millions, atrocities have been committed on the victims, looting of property, murder, massacre of innocent people, defiling dishonouring and humiliating women. As a result tens of thousands of Tamils have been rendered homeless. In the history of independent Sri Lanka, more than a dozen times major ethnic riots have taken place.

The very year of independence—1948—saw the enactment of the citizenship Act No 18, which in effect converted the resident Tamils of Indian origin into a stateless minority. These Tamils, prior to independence, enjoyed rights similar to those of the Sri Lankans. The next year the Indian and Pakistani Residents (citizenship) Act was enacted to register the resident Tamils of Indian origin as citizens. When this Act was implemented actually, over ninety per cent of the Tamils of Indian origin were deprived of their citizenship rights. This Act was followed by the Ceylon (Parliamentary) Election Amendment Acts. This also deprived resident Tamils of Indian origin of this right to vote although they had hitherto to enjoy voting rights had returned eight members of Parliament and influenced the decision in nearly twenty other electorates.

In 1956 the Mahajans Ekasath Perumuna (People's United Front) Government headed by the late S W R D Bandaranaike enacted the Sinhala only Act which relegated to a secondary place the Tamil language which had enjoyed equal status with Sinhala and English under a law passed by the pre-independence State Council in 1944.

The Tamils, under the leadership of S J V Chelvanayagan organised a satyagraha in Galle pace, opposite the Parliament House, to protest against the law. The Police and Sinhalese fanatics assaulted the satyagrahas this was the signal for the first anti-Tamil riots in the island. Several Tamils were killed in the riots in the Sinhalese majority area at Caloya.

The Tamil Leaders who met at Trincomalee on August 19, 1956, launched the Federal Party to press the demand for a new construction based on the Federation principles and establishment of one or more Tamil states incorporating 4 contiguous areas in which Tamil-speaking people were in a majority. The party proposed that the Tamil states should enjoy the widest autonomy and residuary powers consistent with Srilankas' unity and external security. On July 26, 1957, Bandaranaike concluded an agreement with Mr Chelvanayagam, which met many of the Tamils' demands. Short of a federal set-up, it provided for recognition of Tamil as the language of a national minority, formation of regional councils for the Tamil areas, and the revision of the Citizenship Act to grant citizenship to the Tamils of Indian origin in the island.
However, the agreement could not be implemented as the Buddhist clergy rose against it J R Jayawardane who later as became President, who was then the Opposition leader orga-
nised a march to Kandy to mobilise public opinion against the agreement Island-wide anti-Tamil riots broke out and hundreds were killed There were several instances of arson, looting and rape The Government of S W R D Bandaranaike not only delayed declaration of a state of emergency in Srilankas which could have stemmed the tide of violence, but adopted an anti-
Tamil posture which only escalated the riots Bowing to the pressure from the clergy and the Sinhalese majority, Mr. Banda-
ranaike scrapped the agreement with Chelranayagam

Almost a year later Island-wide anti-Tamil riots broke out in May/June, and hundreds were killed Instances of arson, looting and rape became rampant again 5

In 1959, Bandaranaike the Prime Minister was assassinated by a Sinhalese fanatic in a monk's garb The Tamils started painting 'Sri' in Tamil on the number plates of their cars when motor-vehicle owners were required by law in 1958 to paint 'Sri' in the Sinhala language only. This too led to another round of riots

The police and military personnel unleashed violence on peaceful satyagrahis (Civil disobedience campaigners) who

5 Tarzie Vittachi, The Story of the Ceylone Race Riots, Emer-
gency, 1958.
were protesting against the imposition of Sinhala as the official language in the Tamil-speaking areas. Several brutalities and grievous injuries were perpetrated against the Tamils, and the Tamil-speaking areas were placed under military occupation for several months thereafter. There by the early phase of state terrorism was initiated which was to become a regular fact of life in those areas during the following years.

In 1965, the then Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake and the leader of the Tamils C. N. R. Amarakoon signed an agreement which permitted limited official use of Tamil. A bill to give effect to it was also passed in January 1966. But the law remained a dead letter. It was abrogated by the Sirimavo-Bandaranaike government, which came to power soon after. What was worse, anti-Tamil violence was stirred up and organised by the opposition parties against the Tamil regulations adopted by the Dudley Senanayake Government.

When the constitution which was proclaimed on May 22, 1972 made Sri Lanka a Republic and made Buddhism the state religion and Sinhala the sole official language, naturally the Tamils in the country felt that they were being reduced to second-class citizens. Therefore, eight days before the constitution came into force, various Tamil parties in Sri Lanka joined together and formed the Tamil United Front to protect the rights of Tamils.
In January 1974, the Sri Lankan police attacked and broke up the Fourth International Tamil Conference which was being held at Jaffna. The Tamil leaders then began rethinking on the issue of co-existence with the Sinhalese majority. An extremist organisation under the banner of 'Liberation Tigers' became active around this time.

On May 22, 1975, Mr. Chelvanayagan proclaimed the objective of a separate Tamil Eelam state comprising six northern and northeastern districts. He declared that it was the inalienable right of the Tamil people to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil, and 'if any other government deprives the people of their rights, they have a further right to alter or abolish it.' He added: 'We believe that the Tamil people are left with no other means of survival but the restoration of the Tamil State.'

The Tamil United Front which had been formed in 1972, rechristened as TULF, contested the 1977 general elections on the Eelam slogan and won 18 out of 19 seats. It contested and emerged as the main opposition in Parliament. The UNP Government of Jayawardene came to power on July 21, 1977 and within two weeks of it, it witnessed a major anti-Tamil riot which left more than three hundred dead.

A state of emergency was declared on July 1, 1979, in the northern Jaffna district and at Kattunayaka and Ratmalana
Airport (near Colombo) the measure was directed against the Tamil separatist 'Liberation Tigers' who had murdered fourteen policemen in the previous year and had destroyed Air Ceylon's only airliner at Katamayake Airport on September 6, 1979. Under the emergency regulations arson and attempting to overthrow the government by illegal means were made punishable with death.

The year 1981 witnessed one of the worst instances of public arson. A band of reserve policemen were brought all the way from the South to the city of Jaffna, and in the unusual presence of two Cabinet Ministers, the wing of the public library housing 95,000 volumes, some of them rare manuscripts, was set on fire. The house of the Jaffna MP, and the only regional newspaper office and its printing machinery were also burnt down. Acts of arson and destruction continued for a whole week despite the fact that a state of emergency had been declared in Jaffna together with a dusk to dawn curfew. Among the objects destroyed were several status along the hospital road. These included those of the famous Tamil poets Thiruvalluvar, and Avvaiyar, and Mahatma Gandhi.

In May 1983, the Tamil students at Peradeniya were mercilessly attacked by Sinhalese students, their belongings including books and notes were burnt down and they were driven out.

This was repeated at several other places too in order to compel the Tamil students not to complete their courses in June, 1983, the wrath of the members of the armed forces and the police was directed against the office of the Gandhiyan society which was burnt and destroyed. The orphanage managed by the same society was also burnt down. The Gandhiyan society became their target because it was the main organisation helping the plantation Tamil refugees of the August 1977 and 1981 pogroms. There was inevitably mutual retaliatory action, as a consequence.

On July 1983, thirteen Sri Lankan soldiers were killed by members of the Tamil 'terrorist' underground. The next day the capital city of Colombo was ablaze. Fourteen Tamil industrial houses and scores of Tamil homes were reduced to ashes by the mobs of Sinhalese rendering several thousands homeless. Nearly 10,000 refugees sought shelter in make-shift camps throughout the island. Though the official figure of the dead was put at three hundred the actual number was much lesser. Their anonymous bodies testifying the pervasive atmosphere of violence and hatred.

The refusal to distinguish between terrorist and civilian, hooligan and nationalist, resulted in what the President himself called 'a crisis of civilization.' It is now accepted that the widespread destruction was deliberately planned. But by whom and for what purpose remains unclear.
When the riots were at their height, the Srilankan Government introduced in great haste the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, which outlawed the demand for a separate state (Eelam), proscribed the parties which had as one of their objectives the creation of a separate state and punished those individuals who belonged to these parties by depriving them of their 'civic rights'. Several causes have been adduced for these ethnic rights. Merciless killing of thirteen army men by the Tamil Tigers, the chauvinism of the Buddhist monks, misreporting by the Sri Lanka press, exploitation of the susceptibilities of the people by the political leaders are among the causes for the July-August 1983 ethnic riots.

Prior to the 1970s, Sinhalese rule and the Buddhist hegemony in Sri Lanka had been asserted and successfully established. It remained now to entrench them in a constitution. The state machinery and national finances had been used to benefit the Sinhalese but not the Tamils. The Sinhalese and Buddhist domination was symbolically affirmed by the use of the lion and the pipal leaves in the national flag, by the Sinhalese national anthem, and national emblem, by the declaration of Anuradhapura as a sacred city, and by the Conversion of the ancient Hindu Kathirkammam Temple in the South into a Buddhist Shrine, significantly the Hindu request that the Koneswaran Temple precincts be made a protected area was turned down.

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7 Full text of the Sixth Amendment, which is also known as Anti-session law is given in Appendix VIII.
The Tamils in Sri Lanka had been reduced to a subject people. Their future was tied to Sinhalese power politics. Ever since the Tamils were deprived of citizenship in 1948, they suffered reversal after reversal. At the time of granting independence and transfer of power in 1948 to Sri Lanka no independent constitution had been framed for her by the British parliament. The Soulbury Constitution, which had been in operation from 1946, was intended for an interim constitutional stage prior to independence. As such, it was not enacted by an act of parliament. That constitution gave power to the Sri Lankan legislature 'to make laws for the peace, order and good government in the island.' The Ceylon Independence Act, 1947 was passed by the British Parliament providing that as from 4th February 1948 (1) His Majesty's Government should have no responsibility for the Government of Ceylon and (2) the Parliament territorial operation. The Soulbury constitution was to continue to operate as the independence constitution. As noted already the Tamils, under the leadership of S.J.V Chelvanayagam, organised a satyagraha in Galle Face, opposite parliament house, to protest against the 'Simhala only Act' of 1956. The Satyagrahis were attacked by the police and the Sinhalese fanatics injuring a few hundred persons, including Chelvanayagam. This was followed by other anti-Tamil riots in the island in which several Tamils were killed, particularly in the Sinhalese majority area as Gal Oya.
Under these circumstances the Tamil leaders, in their meeting at Trincomalee on August 19, 1956, launched the Tamil Federal Party demanding a new constitution based on the principles of Federation and establishment of one or more Tamil states incorporating contiguous areas in which the Tamil-speaking people were in a majority. The new party wanted the proposed Tamil States to enjoy the widest autonomy and residuary powers consistent with the islands unity and external security.

The agreement concluded on July 26, 1957, by Bandaranaike, the Prime Minister with Chelvayagam met many of the Tamils' demands, except a federal set-up. It provided for the recognition of Tamil as the language of a national minority, the formation of regional councils for the Tamil areas, and the revision of the Citizenship Act to grant citizenship to the Tamils of Indian Origin. The agreement proved to be a non-starter as the Buddhist clergy were totally opposed to it. J.R. Jayawardene, then on opposition leader, organised a march to Kandy to mobilise public opinion against the agreement. As riots broke out, the March, was cut short. Unable to resist the pressure from the clergy and the Sinhalese majority, Bandaranaike scrapped the agreement. Within a couple of years after this, on September 25, 1959, Bandaranaike was assassinated by Sinhalese fanatic disguised as a monk. The principal engineer of this was Colvin R De Silva, who was the Minister for Constitutional Affairs.
The Constitutional Assembly meeting of 22nd May 1972 which was summoned to pass the Constitution of the Republic of Srilanka was boycotted by 15 out of 19 elected Tamil representaatives. The Constitutional Assembly was purported to enact the draft Constitution. The earlier constitution was not expressly repealed, but Article 12 and Schedule 1, were essentially abrogated. Mrs Bandaranaike, who had become the Prime Minister sought to give the Constitution a religious sanctity, since it possessed no legal validity. Between the 1970 election and the purported enactment of this Constitution, the constitution-makers had done nothing to consult the people of the country, or take into account their views on the constitution.

The 1972 constitution cannot be called a genuine constitution for it did not give the people what they wanted. The makers of the Constitution had two objectives:

1) to remove all that stood in the way of their unbridled exercise of political power which they enjoyed under the earlier constitution,

2) to write into the new constitution all the gains that had been made and that needed to be made by turning Srilanka into a Sinhala-Buddhist state.

Article 6 stated that the religion of Srilanka should give Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it should be the duty of the state to protect and foster it.
On the official language, Article 7 of the Constitution reaffirmed that 'the official language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala as provided by the official language Act No 33 of 1956.'

Article 11 stated that the 'the language of the courts and Tribunals shall be Sinhala throughout Sri Lanka and according to their records, including pleading, proceedings judgments, orders and records of all judicial ministerial acts shall be in Sinhala.'

Thus the status of the Tamil language was reduced to nothing. The Tamils in Sri Lanka in general have felt that successive Sri Lankan governments have discriminated against the Indian Tamils.

FORMATION OF THE TAMIL UNITED FRONT (T.U.L.F)

Since the Constituent Assembly had rejected outright all the proposals of the Federal Party and the Tamil Congress, and proceeded to adopt a Buddhist theocentric state structure, the hitherto divided Tamil political parties and pressure groups had to come together even before the Constitution was enacted by the Constituent Assembly. The Tamil Federal Party (FP), Tamil Congress (TC), Ceylon workers congress (CWC), the Eelam Thamilar Otrumal Munninani, and several Tamil Youth and student organisations met at Trincomalee on 14th May 1972 and formed the Tamil United Front (TUF)
The TUF was born of the realisation of the danger facing the Tamil people in Sri Lanka and because of the uncompromising manner in which the proposals made by the Tamil parties had been rejected by the Constituent Assembly. The three elitist Tamil leaders—S I V Chelvanayakam (FP), G C Ponnambalam (TC), and S Thondaman (CWC), had not vision of the future of the Tamils in Sri Lanka except the need for the unity of their parties and a new front to project it. The TUF adopted a vague six point programme:

i) a defined place for the Tamil language
ii) Sri Lanka to be a secular state
iii) fundamental rights of ethnic minorities to be guaranteed
iv) citizenship for all who applied for it
v) decentralisation of the administration, and
vi) the caste system to be abolished.

Protesting over the proclamation of the New Constitution, Chelvanayakam resigned his seat and challenged Mrs. Bandaranaike's Government to hold a by-election to test the acceptability of the new constitution by the Tamil people. No by-election was held until December 1974. Mrs. Bandaranaike ordered the by-election to be held in January 1975, more than two years after the seat had been made vacant. Chelvanayakam sought the Tamil People's mandate for separation and won by a majority of 16,000 votes—his best result since 1947 winning the by-election. He declared unequivocally: Through out the ages the Simha-
lese and lamils in the country lived as distinct sovereign people till they were brought under foreign domination. It should be remembered that the lamils were in the vanguard of the struggle for independence in the full confidence that they also will regain their freedom. We have for the last twenty five years made every effort to secure our political rights on the basis of equality with the Sinhalese in a United Ceylon. It is regrettable fact that from early times, successive Sinhalese governments have used the power that flows from independence to deny us fundamental rights and reduce us to the position a subject people. These governments have been able to do so only by using against the lamils the sovereignty common to the Sinhalese and the lamils. I wish to announce to my people and to the country that I consider the verdict at this election as a mandate that the lamil Eelam nation should exercise the sovereignty already vested in the lamil people and become free. On behalf of the IUF, I give you my solemn assurance that we will carry out this mandate.

With such open advocacy of separation as the political goal of the TUF and the Tamil people, Tamil politics came to be radicalised by the intervention of the young Tamils who had suffered incarceration and torture and had been released from police detention without any charge. Under the state of emergency and with Censorship of news, the police resorted
to increased repression in the North the government refused to hold an inquiry into the riots and police atrocities.

**Formation of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF):**

In this situation of insecurity for the Srilankan Tamils, the Indian Tamils and the Tamil-speaking Muslims, the TUF leaders met at Panakam in the Vaddukkodai constituency in the north of Srilanka, and reconstituted themselves as the TULF. At its first convention presided over by Chelvanayakam, they resolved to restore and reconstitute the state of Tamil Eelam. Their resolution was as follows:

'The first National Convention of the TULF, meeting at Panakam (Vedukkodai constituency) on the 14th day of May 1976, hereby declares that the Tamils of Ceylon, by virtue of the great language, their religions, their culture, and heritage, their history of independent existence as a separate state over a distinct territory for several centuries till they were conquered by the armed might of the European invader, and above all by their will be exist as a separate entity ruling themselves in their own territory, are a nation distinct and apart from the Sinhalese and their constitution announces to the world that the Republican Constitution of 1972, has made the Tamil a slave nation ruled by the new colonial master, the Sinhalese, who are using the power they have wrongly usurped to deprive
the Tamil nation of its territory, language, citizenship, economic life, opportunities of employment and education and thereby destroying all the attributes of nationhood of the Tamil people. And therefore, while taking note of a reservation policy in relation to its commitment to the setting up of a separate state of Tamil expressed by the Ceylon Workers Congress, Trade Union of Plantation workers, the majority of whom live and work outside the northern and eastern areas.

This convention resolves that the restoration and reconstitution of the Free, Sovereign, Secular and Socialist State of Tamil Eelam based on the right of Self-determination Inherent in every nation has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil nation in the country.

Meanwhile more radical ideas were being propounded by the left-oriented Tamil Students Federation (TSF), the members of which felt that the political structure of the TUF, founded on a conservative bourgeois ideology could not provide them with an outlet for the articulation of their sense of living in a vacuum and of being caught up in a revolutionary situation created by oppression. The Tamil revolutionary youth therefore sought desperately to create a revolutionary political organisation to quicken the task of national liberation.

Velupillai Prabhakaran, whose name has become notorious since the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, was one such revolutionary
youth in search of direction formed an organisation called 'Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam' with the suggestive acronym of LITE this was the precursor of the Tiger movement and, by and large, of all other insurgent organisations which came up later.

After four year of ideological and political metampraphosis both the TNi and TULF decided on a major change of strategy in May 1976. The TNT was renamed 'Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam' (LTTE), which was now backed with a certain amount of armed strength. Similarly, at a national convention at Vaddukoddai on the Tamil region, the TULF openly demanded creation of an independent sovereign Tamil Eelam. In fact, in the 1977 general election the TULF manifesto sought popular mandate to 'establish an independent Sovereign, secular, Socialist, state of Tamil Eelam that includes all the geographically contiguous areas that have been the traditional homelands of the Tamil-speaking people in this country'.

The election led to a clear ethnic pluralisation between the rightwing UNP of President Jayawardene which had won eighty five per cent of the seats in parliament and the TULF which won only a handful of seats from the Tamil areas and which formed the only opposition. This was reflected in the racial riots which took place immediately afterwards, resulting in the death of a large number of Tamils, destruction of property
and in driving more Tamil youth to insurgency. The 'Tigers' had by now established training camps both in Sri Lanka and in Tamil Nadu.

On April 7, 1978 a police party led by an inspector organised an ambush on a Tiger training Camp at Betiampilla but was caught in a counter-ambush organised by the Tigers who killed four policemen including the inspector and captured their weapons. This marked the beginning of armed ethnic insurgency in Sri Lanka. Exactly five months later, as President Jayawardene introduced a new constitution which gave him enormous powers, the Tigers delivered their second blow on the government by burning Air Ceylon's Avro Airliner at the Jaffna Airport.

This was followed by frequent hit-and-run attacks forcing the government to promulgate the widely criticised Prevention of Terrorism Act under which the armed forces were given additional powers. In the following months, the strength of the rebels increased despite strong counter-measures by the government. They were aided in no small measure by the frequent racial riots, which increasingly drove the Tamil population to the wall. In the process however the Tigers organisation too underwent several changes. Many factions broke away from it and organised themselves into nine separate militant groups though they had the same objective of achieving Eelam'. But often they were working at cross-purposes. Some of the promi-
1 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This is the oldest largest and militarily the most highly organised group. It is led by Velupillai Prabhakaran, has widespread foreign links its most ignominous role in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi is too well-known for any special mention.

2 People Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOI) is led by Uma Maheswaran, a former associate of Prabhakaran. Fairly large in terms of manpower, the group has a central core trained by the PLO.

3 Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) came into prominence in July 1983 when its Chief, Thangathurai, and its military commander, Kuttimani, were killed in prison massacre. Now, led by Sri Sebaratham, known better by his nickname (Tamil Sri), TELO is a small but well-knit outfit.

4 Tamil Eelam Army (TEA) is led by Tambipillai Maheswaran, a final year engineering dropout, who was educated in the United Kingdom. The relatively new and small organisation made a sensation in February 1984, with a fifty million rupee bank robbery at Kattankudy near Batticalo.

5 Eelam Research Organisation (EROS), is a London-based body of Trotskyite expatriates who originally provided ideological content and international contracts to the Tamil insurgency under the leadership of E. Ratnasabhapati.
Certain internal contradictions on the question of organisational structure and programme resulted in the splitting up of EROS and the formation of EPRLF which took the General Union of Eelam students (GUES) under its umbrella. Several other bodies were created for practical and tactical reasons. The general Union of Eelam students (GUES), Rural Workers Peasants Front (RWPF), Eelam Youth Front (EYF), Plantation Proletariat Front (PPF), Eelam Women's Liberation Front (EWLF), and the Fishermen Workers Front (FWF). These organisations jointly or independently were engaged in propaganda, cadre training, rehabilitation, political education and struggles of various kinds. To consolidate further and advance the struggle in the military sphere the people's Liberation Army (PLA) was formed from within the cadres of the various other organisations of EPRLF.

The Tamil movement itself has evolved in various phases, initially, there were the first generation leaders of the TULF such as Amirthalingam and Sivasithamparam. Then came the second generation-Tamil Eelam Liberation Front leaders such as Eelaventhan, and finally, the third generation, comprising radical groups such as the Tigers, Koddiya, GUES and the EROS. In between them there are the moderates such as
Sivanayagam, along with the first two groups, who did not let the movement get out of hand.

To the Srilankan government and the Sinhalese, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are the chief source of trouble and the main cause of political violence in Jaffna. The Liberation Tigers are a group of young people who, impatient and disenchanted with the unproductive peaceful methods, preferred by the TULF, resorted to armed resistance. They are urban guerillas who fight with arms against the police and army excesses, and they are but a historical product of systematic oppression, police victimisation and harassment.

The Liberation Tigers have links with the naxalites in India, while there is little sympathy for their naxalite links, no government of Tamil Nadu can afford to hand them over to Sri Lanka, as they still carry the aura of Tamil freedom fighters.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE COMMUNAL CONFLICT

The Sinhalese constitute 70 per cent of the population of Srilanka while the Tamils are about 20 per cent The Muslims, who speak Tamil but consider themselves a group apart, are 7 per cent. The overwhelming majority of the Sinhalese population speak Sinhala which is an Indo-European language, while the Tamils speak a dravidian one. However, underlying the language and religious differences Buddhist versus Hindu-
strong cultural and racial similarities. Physically the two groups cannot be differentiated. Though the initial Sinhala migrants who arrived in the island over 2,500 years ago, were probably speakers of Indo-European languages, practically all later arrivals were South Indians (mostly Tamil speakers) who were assimilated into the Sinhalese Buddhist community. The South Indian influence is omnipresent among the Buddhists. On a level of popular religiousness, the Buddhists of Sri Lanka propitiate Hindu gods like Vishnu, and Skanda, the son of Shiva. However, the Buddhists view these gods as totally subservient to the Buddha while the Tamils view the Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu. Kinship and marriage patterns among the Sinhalese are also part of a larger Dravidian pattern. It is these cultural and subdoctrinal similarities that permitted the assimilation of South Indians through long periods of historical time, into the Sinhalese Buddhist social structure.

The core of the Sinhala identity was Buddhist; the destiny of the ethnic group and that of the religion were inseparable. Myths and historical events confirmed the twin facets of this identity. Historically, almost all the invasions of Sri Lanka came from the South Indian Kingdoms. Thus opposing the Sinhala Buddhist identity was that of the Tamil Hindu identity. In times of historical stress these identities were reaffirmed to mobilize popular support.

When the Portuguese arrived in Srilanka in 1505 there were several contending kingdoms in the country among which was a Tamil Hindu Kingdom in the Jaffna peninsula of the island. Each of these kingdoms claimed sovereignty over the whole island. No king was content to see himself as ruler of a part, since the island was always considered as a totality. The call for a separate state of the Tamil-speaking peoples is thus a contemporary historical phenomenon. How it has come about needs to be inquired into.

The Tamil kingdom of Jaffna had ceased to be an independent unit in the sixteenth century when it was captured by the Portuguese and then by the Dutch. The Sinhala-Buddhist Kingdom in the interior of the island remained independent till 1915 when it was taken over by the British. The Tamils of the east coast and part of the north-central province traditionally owed suzerainty to the Sinhalese kings of Kandy and trade routes connected the east coast with the kingdom of Kandy. Sinhalese Tamil inter-marriage which was exceptional in the north, was accepted and practiced in the east coast until recent times. As seen already, when the British took over Srilanka they introduced yet another complexity, by bringing in large numbers of tribal and often low status groups as labourers from South India to work on the tea plantations of the central high-lands. Thus there were three Tamil-Hindu zones well established by the end of the nineteenth century:
in the north, the east and the central high-lands. Though outsiders (as well as some Sinhalese) see to Tamil problem as one, the internal reality is very different. The northern Tamils are much more orthodox Hindu than the Tamils elsewhere and are strongly patrilineal, the East Coast Tamils who came from Kerala are divided into matrilineal clans, and the Tamils of the Central provinces are the recently introduced groups from South India, alienated from both the other groups. Besides they were thrust into the midst of the surrounding Sinhalese population from whom too they were inevitably alienated from the very start.

During the early twentieth century when the constitutional agitation against British rule gathered momentum, the Sinhalese and the Tamils however presented a united position. In 1919 the Ceylon National Congress was founded by both Tamils and Sinhalese. But political parties soon began to gravitate along communal lines. The Sinhalese increasingly felt that the Tamils who controlled business and the professions threatened their intensity while the Tamils became increasingly self-conscious of the fact they were a minority. The political democratization of the state exacerated these tendencies. When universal adult suffrage was introduced in the 1931 elections, it mobilized communal issues into public voting patterns. When independence was declared in 1948, there were several Tamil political parties with an exclusively ethnic base, while the Sinhalese parties
though formally non-ethnic, were in reality committed to Sinhalese nationalism. The problems of the Sinhalese and Tamils were further escalated in the post-1956 period which saw the massive electoral success of S.W.R.D Bandaranaike of the Srilanka Freedom Party (SLFP) over the United National Party (UNP). Much of Bandaranaike's success depended on the slogan "Sinhala only", there was to be one language for the nation—the language of the majority—Sinhala. This polarized the Sinhala and Tamil forces and led to the Tamil demands, some for equality of status for both languages and others for a federal type of constitution.

The Tamil Federal Party, founded in 1956 accelerated the Tamil demand for autonomy. The Sinhalese on their part feared that a Tamil separatist movement would involve support from the Tamils of South India and undermine the integrity of the state. In the Seventies, economic hardship and unemployment and the rise of discontented youth groups among the Sinhelas as well as Tamils added fuel to the fire. There was an attempt at insurrection in 1971 by the Sinhala youth, but it was drastically quelled by the government of Mrs Bandaranaike (SLFP). In the north, similar bands of Tamil youth militants demanded an independent Tamil State. As result of their pressure, the constitutional Tamil Federal Party and other Tamil organisation formed the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) committed to an independent Tamil state comprising large areas of
the north, east and central parts of the island. This in turn fanned the Sinhala fears, which increased further when the Tamil youth groups, in the late seventies, supported by expatriate financial backing, adopted terrorism to achieve their goal. Terrorism in turn forced the government to send an ill-disciplined and poorly trained army into Jaffna, further exacerbating the patterns of violence and reprisals on both sides.

THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF THE ETHNIC CONFLICT

It is against the backdrop of this complicated situation that one must understand the importance of the religions of Sri Lanka and their impact on Tamil and Sinhala identities. Briefly stated, the trauma of imperial conquest and disestablishment of Buddhism and Hinduism, the two major religions produced a Tamil-Hindu revival movement in the north headed by Armugam Navalar and a Sinhala-Buddhist revival movement in the south headed by Anagarika Dharmapala. Both reformers were educated in Protestant Mission Schools. With a missionary zeal both rationalized their respective religions, scorned old beliefs and rituals, affirmed their respective great traditions. Navalar affirmed contemporary Hinduism with its philosophical base in Saiva Siddantha, while Dharmapala affirmed the ascetic and abstract values of doctrinal Buddhism largely influenced by Western commentators on Buddhism. Both provided a philosophy and an ethnic for a bourgeoisie and a proletariat that emerged in the colonial and postcolonial periods. Dharmapala
not only affirmed the traditional identity but opposed other identities—Moslem, Hindu, Christian.

The victory of Bandaranaike in 1956 was spearheaded by those who were directly or indirectly influenced by Dharma-mpala. Thus the Post-1956 era saw the introduction of new fundamentalist and militant Buddhism advocating the take-over of denominational schools to reduce the power of the Christian missions, the compulsory teaching of religion in schools, the propagation of the intellectualist view of Buddhism as not a religion but a philosophy consonant with the spirit of science; and above all using Buddhism for political purposes. As a result, Buddhism was made the effective political and civil religion of the state.

**THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE**

An interesting aspect of population growth in Sri Lanka is the relative absence of huge cities on the scale of several Asian nations. People prefer to migrate to villages, and up to the 'forties this was the dominant pattern. Through time, however, this has had the unfortunate effect of destroying the homogeneous kin-based nature of village society, and producing a variety of social groups in village life competing for resources. There are a number of little market towns scattered all over Sri Lanka. The trade in these market towns is controlled by Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim merchants. Racial violence
has often been sparked off in them by business competition. Dispossessed proletarians of these towns have often been employed to eliminate business rivals during periods of post election political violence. In addition to these anomic market towns, colonization schemes where surplus villagers were siphoned off to new irrigation projects, generally in the north central and southern dry zones, have become increasingly important since independence. The recruitment for the colonization schemes took place from crowded village areas. Settlers were often chosen by the local members of parliament, from among their party supporters. As a result settlements, not communities, were created. Often, as in more recent projects, total outsiders have come in and taken over the political control of these colonies. In addition, outsiders from the city of Colombo and its suburbs have begun to infiltrate into the old villages as small-time merchants and entrepreneurs. Practically all civil disturbances—postelection riots which have become endemic after the sixties, and race riots—have occurred primarily in these lumpen colonization schemes, in the anomic market towns and in the city of Colombo.

One of the features of the politics of Sri Lanka since the sixties is the use made by politicians of all parties, of the dissatisfied urban people. To use them to intimidate opponents of voters has become a matter of routine. Furthermore, there have been increasingly disturbing trends in the use
of such people for political "thuggery." Thugs who are at
the service of politicians in power are linked on the local
level to merchants, some of them genuine businessmen but others
involved in a variety of illegal activities, the most common
of which are kassippu moonshine distillation, marijuana culti-
vation and distribution, and felling of timber from the forest
reserves. Members of Parliament serving remote areas also
seem to be actively involved in these activities.

The Police who oppose these activities or prosecute
these involved in them often are transferred out of the area
or cowed into acquiescence in these illegal activities. As a
result there has been demoralization and corruption of the
police force. That the police are in the hands of the local
MPs or local undesirables is a widespread view.

The most disturbing trend in the institutionalization of
violence occurred in the massive election victory of the United
National Party in 1977, in its relations with a trade union
known as the Jatika Sevaka Sangamaya (National Workers Orga-
nisation) generally referred to as JSS. Prior to the election
of 1977, the JSS was only a miniscule working-class trade
union (most unions being controlled by the Marxist parties
of Srilanka). But soon it became the single largest trade union
in the country and have an effective say in the working of
government offices and corporations. The name of its president
Cyril Matthew, who was the Minister of Industries in the U N P government was explicitly mentioned by several foreign correspondents as an inveterate enemy of the Tamil minority. How could the J S S acquire such prominence? Traditionally the leftist unions provided a Trotskyite or Marxist ideology for the working classes. Whatever reservations one might have about these ideologies, they had the effect of filling the empty space in the conscience of people with a specifically working-class ideology. With the massive election victory of the UNP, the J S S came into prominence. Several political leaders who had access to, and control over, the slums and anomic areas of the city, emerged, prominent among them being Premadasa who became the Prime Minister and Minister of Housing. His power base was central Colombo (once the power bases of the communist party), one of the most crowded areas in the city. M H Mohammed, who became Minister of Transport, who was the Parliamentary member of Borella (which also contains one of the largest slums in the city), was another leader to emerge. With the expansion of the economy, produced by the free enterprise policy of the government, jobs in the working-class sector were increasingly given to members of this lumpen proletariat who swelled the ranks of the J.S.S. Soon members of other unions were intimidated and forced to join it. The J.S.S. was without a working-class ideology; its leadership owned personal allegiances to party bosses.
However, before 1977 the bands of thugs served their masters but had no institutionalized authority. The JSS changed this. They were now organized, and effectively controlled government offices and corporations and wielded enough power to transfer and intimidate even high officials unpopular with them. Furthermore, the JSS was provided with an ideology, the Sinhala-Buddhist political ideology.

The precarious identity of a marginal people was thus given a new reality and meaning a political and nationalist ideology. The nature of this ideology was spelled out by their president, Matthew. His thesis was that they should adopt the Malaysian example as set out by Mahathir Bin Mohammed in his book, *The Malay Dilemma*. In this book, Mahathir states that while the Malays were for a free enterprise system, they should not allow other racial groups to compete within whose interests must be protected first. Next, Islam should be upheld and propagated. Whereas the Chinese could go to China and the Indians to India, the Malays had no place to go. They were the indigenous people of Malay and the only people who could claim Malaysia as their one and only country. In accordance with the practice all over the world this conferred on the Malays certain inalienable rights over the forms and obligations of citizenship which could be imposed on citizens of non-indigenous origin.
It was Matthew's contention that this dubious thesis could be applied, even better to the Sri Lankan situation Malaya had 53 per cent Malays and 35 per cent Chinese whereas Sri Lanka had 74 per cent, Sinhalese and 17 per cent Tamils. In spite of this disproportion, Tamils had been dominating every aspect of professional and economic life. The Sinhalese also had nowhere to go, but Tamils could go to India. The Sinhalese had been extraordinarily patient.

Such an ideology propagated by Matthew had a great deal of appeal to the Sinhalese, but it was also fostered unwillingly by the Tamil elite in Sri Lanka who self-consciously identify themselves with the Tamils of South India. The historical reality is that perhaps for the oldest stratum of settlers prior to 500 B.C. almost all subsequent settlers in Sri Lanka came from South India, mostly from Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Kerala and quickly become Sinhalized. In fact, some of the most vociferously anti-Tamil castes among the Sinhalese were post-fifteenth-century migrants from South India. By contrast, the Tamils of Jaffna and the East Coast have been in Sri Lanka from at least the tenth to the fourteenth centuries A.D., if not earlier. They also came from diverse parts of South India though the Jaffna (Northern) Tamils now claim that they came from Tamil Nadu. As noted earlier the only group of recent Tamil immigrants are the estate Tamils brought over by the British in the nineteenth century. Both sides
share antagonistic myths that are opposed to historical reality and like human beings everywhere act in terms of the former—
with tragic consequences.

Matthew's ideology was doubtlessly shared by a vast number of Sinhalese, but the J S S gave it an unprecedented militancy. The union spread its tentacles into other areas of the country. Thus, today, the members of Parliament have created through the J S S, and through other local groups in small market towns, a complex, powerful series of organizations that can be put to political use. At the same time there has occurred a remarkable change in the composition of political power-brokers in the country, even in village areas. Traditionally the vote, and especially the village vote, was delivered or controlled by an educated village elite, coming generally from "respectable" families. This was true for all parties but especially the UNP, the country's most important conservative party. Today this has changed or is fast changing. Political power on the village level is in the hands of those who can control the unemployed and the discontented, primarily the youth.

It is against this background that one must examine specific examples of political violence in recent times. A large number of these events have been documented by the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) of Srilanka whose chairman is a highly
respected Anglican bishop, the Rt Rev Lakshman Wickramsingha.

Here are a few instances taken from the CRM files:

A series of violent acts occurred in Jaffna in the end of May and early June, 1981, of which the most serious was burning of the Public Library by thugs from outside while the security forces did nothing to stop them. The burning of the Library was a profoundly symbolic act as it contained priceless manuscripts especially pertaining to the identity of the Tamils of Jaffna. On the Buddhist side not only was it an unparalleled act of barbarism but totally against these very spirit of Buddhism the people of Jaffna identified the outsiders indulging in arson as the thugs of a prominent cabinet minister. The rumour in the Sinhalese areas too was the same. Yet no action was taken by the President. Next year, the action was repeated in certain parts of the Sabaragamuva province where Tamil shops were destroyed and the homes of Tamil plantation workers pillaged. Again no action was taken by the President against the minister involved in this affair.

When a gathering of artists and writers protest against their being refused work at the government-owned broadcasting corporation, a gang of thugs brandishing clubs and knives broke up their meeting, tore up the microphones, and chased away the participants. They shouted, "What kind of artists are you" we are Premadasa's Boys". It is of course not likely
that Prime Minister Premadasa had any hand in this matter but that the thugs could unabashedly use his name was an index of the state of lawlessness. Even more disconcerting was the disruption of a meeting arranged by a Sinhalese-Buddhist organization where Ediriweera Sarachchandra, Sri Lanka's best known dramatist, was beaten up. Sarachchandra had written a satirical book called Dharmishta Samajaya (A Just Society) where he highlighted the decay of cultural values brought about by the social and economic policies of the government. The ruffian came in buses belonging to the state-owned bus corporation whose license numbers were published by the Communist Party paper. Sarachchandra himself made a complaint to the police. As in previous cases, no police action was taken against them.

The Civil Rights Movement in a publication of October, 12, 1981, documented thirty-five instances of intimidation and assault. Here are a sample:

On July 4, 1980, teachers at Maharagama Teachers Training College were picketing peacefully when a government transport Board bus no 23 Sri 2549 came through the college gates, carrying twenty-seven people including a leader of the J.S.S. They got out of the bus and assaulted the picketing teachers with rubber belts, stones, bicycle chains etc. Women picketers were knocked down to the ground and waste oil was poured
over them. Even an attempt was made to run the bus over a girl. The Police arrived about 4:00 p.m. and took a statement; two hours later the injured people were taken to the Colombo South Hospital. Four of the women teachers were seriously injured.

On June 15, 1978, about 400 members of the JSS threatened six section heads at the Ithulhiriya textile mills and drove them off the premises. They were forced to resign. The management was warned not to take the six people back into service. It appeared that only JSS members and those who accepted their terms were allowed to stay in the mills.

The pattern of the activities of the JSS and other men documented by the CRM is clear. The gangs were organised, they came in government vehicles, sometimes accompanied by MPs. These men formed the trade union arm of the government in power. That is why there was little or no police action against them. These activities received little comment in the public press largely because the news papers were either directly owned by the government such as the Lake House group of Newspapers, or supported by it. The exception was Attha, the Sinhalese newspaper of the Communist Party, but its circulation was limited and its offices closed and sealed by the government for various periods of time.
Public opinion received the greatest shock when the government appeared to have openly flouted the Supreme Court decisions. Here is an example. In a public meeting held in 1982 by an inter-religious organization, a police officer seized leaflets that were being distributed. A Buddhist clergymen filed a suit against the police officer. The court held that the police officer had violated the fundamental rights of the petitioner and decreed that damages and costs be directly paid by him. The cabinet, however, promoted this police officer and ordered that the costs and damages be paid out of public funds. This was justified by the government on the ground that "public officers should do their jobs without fear of consequences from adverse court decisions.

Most Tamils were of the opinion that the violence against them was organized by the Government, and especially by the J S S, and the influential politicians who controlled this union. Given the pattern of political intimidation and their extreme nationalist ideology, the view has considerable plausibility.

One of the most shameful events was the refusal of the minor staff of several hospitals to tend or care for the wounded Tamils. A certain upper-class Tamil woman broke her leg while jumping from the balcony of her house as it was caught fire. She was removed to a hospital, but it refused to admit her.
because the minor staff (orderlies and labourers) threatened to go on a strike if she was admitted. Another instance of inhuman violence of the JSS men against the Tamils is, a Tamil was actually stabbed to death in a hospital bed, allegedly by a minor employee. In these and many other instances, the culpability of the JSS is quite evident since the hospital system is almost totally controlled by it. Protests and complaints by the government Medical Officers' Association about indiscipline and insubordination in the hospital system by the members of the trade unions have been of no avail.

Since Srilankan Independence in 1948, the deepening hostility between the Sinhalese and Tamils has become a depressing fact of political life. The repeated outbreaks of violence against the Tamils after 1956 seem minor upheavals compared to the scale and ferocity of the carnage, arson and looting in July 1983. The resulting exposure and comment in the foreign media seriously embarrassed the government and despoiled the conventional image of Srilanka as a haven of democratic peace and harmony in the Indian Ocean. A stringent censorship imposed on the domestic press proved an insufficient barrier to the escape of truth in the international media. Strenuous attempts at covering up were made, in order that the true dimensions of these sad tragic events might be concealed or thwarted in their discussion.

To diligent and discerning observers of the degenerating trends in public life in Sri Lanka since 1977, the massive bloodshed did not come as a surprise. The democratic process had been eroded by a combination of ad hoc constitutional amendments and legislative enactments, demagoguery accompanied by overt and covert forms of thuggery had virtually institutionalised political violence, while the electoral process received its final coup de grace in 1982. But most menacing of all, perhaps, was the open incitement of racial prejudice at the highest levels. Though well-meaning efforts at reconciliation and contrition abound, however, and sincere exponents of moral re-arrangement are busy building bridges of national unity and communal concord, their work, as in the past, is not likely to be conclusive.

It is not far from the truth that a high degree of political pusillanimity and moral cowardice have contributed largely to this "crisis civilization" in a Buddhist land hitherto reputed for its tolerance or other faiths, and respect for its tolerance of other faiths, and respect for human rights in theory and in practice. Little, if anything, seem to have been learned from past experience, and from the tragic catastrophe of July, 1983. A Round Table Conference, promised since 1977, and subject to prolonged misgivings, misconceptions and false starts, got off the ground at last in January, 1984. It raised more problems than it originally agreed to solve, and frequent
adjournments and changes in dramatis personae improved neither the climate of accommodation nor diminished the potential for conflict. The continuing reliance on a military solution, repressive legislation, and a near-permanent emergency visited the arena of reconciliation and mutual trust. The conduct of the conference itself appeared to have favoured the exacerbation of conflicting positions and inflexible attitudes without advancing, in any significant measure, an acceptable approach to an enduring political solution of the problem of an oppressed national minority, through institutions of genuine devolution of power.

There is obviously a serious lack of self-awareness in both combatants Simhalese and the Tamils. They also seem to have failed to face up to the realities of their respective situations in the world of today, within their national borders and outside. But this is not to deny to the Tamils the right to espouse their legitimate demands for the satisfaction of national self-respect and dignity, and the freedom to pursue the same privileges and opportunities which the Simhalese now seek to proclaim as their sole prerogative.

During the past three and half decades since the independence of Srilanka, the Tamils in the Island have undergone numerous ordeals: their political rights curtailed, their economic status completely shattered, their language relegated to the background, their culture and heritage trodden underneath,
Buddhist flag flying atop on many a Hindu temple and Christian Church

These and other ignominies have made the Tamils a disgruntled lot. The frequent and brutal onslaughts on them, with the active assistance of those in power have driven them to the extremity of demanding a separate sovereign Eelam State for themselves.

Srilanka, had been strife-torn since the mid 50’s of this century, but what happened during the last week of July, 1983, was unprecedented. Ever since December, 1982, when Jayawardene’s UNP through a referendum, secured an extension of 6 years tenure, the political sky of Srilanka could not be calm. On the contrary it forebode the onset of a gale.

Many of the Tamils who had been disappointed and frustrated by the constant discriminations against them and their talks with the Government having failed to ameliorate their conditions as the Sinhalese leaders never kept their assurances, naturally were ingratiated into the movement of TIGERS. The prevention of Terrorism Act of 1981, instead of cowing down the Tamils, only infuriated them, and with much more vigour than before, they began to advocate the cause of separate Eelam. This cause gathered momentum, day by day. Even the TULF, which had been advocating Federal status to the Tamils, was
forced in 1983 to raise its banner for a separate Eelam. Thereafter the Tigers and TULF differed from each other chiefly with regard to the means to be adopted for achieving their objective. The Tigers put their faith in taking to arms, while the TULF, even in its Conference at Italai Manner on 23rd July, 1983, reiterated its faith in Parliamentary democracy, advocated only non-violent means for achieving its aspired goals, and resolved not to participate in future in any of the conferences convened by Jayawardene's government. On the same day, 13 army men were killed in an ambush, allegedly by the Liberation Tigers or some such terrorists. It was a generally known fact that this was in relation of the rape by army men of 4 Tamils, all inmates of a hostel, 2 of whom committed suicide subsequently. Though this was dismissed by the authorities as a 'mere story', there was evidence to show that the crime was actually committed and that only the culprits concerned were attacked in this ambush.

As a consequence this ambush of July 23, there was an outbreak of violence in the Island, the dimension of which was unheard of in the annals of the world, with the only exception of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis in the concentration camps during the second world war. The orgy of violence let loose devoured more than 2,500 lives and more than a lakh of persons were rendered homeless. No one know
how many women's honour was violated. The loss due to the organised looting and arson was estimated at Rs 2000 crores. What was most intriguing was that the police and the army personnel, instead of putting down the violence, remained as silent spectators, and in many cases, they were alleged to have been even active participants. Most scandalising was the fact that, the notorious character in the Cabinet, Cyril Mathew, was seen in many places in Colombo, inflaming passion, and encouraging the looting Sinhalese. It seemed very much a well-planned attack on the Tamils, very cruelly and callously executed, with the connivance and protection of the powers-that-be. The outside world was prevented from getting an accurate picture of what had been happening because of the Emergency which was proclaimed, the enormous powers given to the army, and strict censorship of the press. The scraps of information that could leak out and the evidence of those few who were lucky enough to escape the brutal massacre, and the reports of some of the newspaper correspondents are enough to reveal the brutality as well as the magnitude of the attack against the Tamils. Some samples of such reports of the July 1983 events are given below.

A group of people from Colombo who landed at Trivandrum on July 29, 1983, said, "It is a Jungle law there'. No place is safe and Tamil word uttered at a public place can mean
you death or torture" Natarajan, Paul Pandian and Rajachoodamani, who were partners in a hardware business in Colombo and whose native place was Tiruchendur, in Tamil Nadu, also arrived in the same flight. They had lost all their property, worth about Rs 30 lakhs and they looked dazed. "We are luckily to be alive" they said.

Most of the repatriate Tamils seemed to be scared, even after landing in India. They were reluctant to reveal their identity fearing retaliation against their friends and relatives who were stranded in Colombo. According to two persons belonging to Chettinad, who were employed in the "free trade zone" in Colombo, the Tamils in Srilanka were identified from the voters' list and attacked. Their properties were first looted and then their houses were set on fire. Some narrated the gruesome story of having been fleeced by the Sinhalese even when they were fleeing for their lives. They said: "Bands of armed Sinhalese stop the cars and buses and loot them. The Sinhalese taxi-drivers fleece the Tamilian passengers. The minimum rate to cover the 42 km run to the airport is Rs 1,000 if the passengers included men and women". The distinguished musician the late M L. Vasanthakumari and her troupe were among those who were caught in the middle in Srilanka. After three days of "total confinement" in a five star hotel in Colombo, they arrived at Madras on 29th July, almost on the verge of collapse. All their belongings were looted, includ-
ing their chappals, their musical instruments but for a violin had been lost

"Colombo is burning", we saw it, "said a passenger who returned to Madras on 30th July, by an IA flight. Another passenger belonging to a nine member group which had gone to Colombo for shooting a film and returned by the same flight said, "we have come back alive- that is enough to make the people in India understand the ordeal we and other people of Tamil origin underwent in the past few days in Colombo. From the hotel opposite to Ramakrishna Math in Wellavetti, where we stayed, we saw buildings and shops burning, columns of smoke leaping on three sides, on the fourth side, there was only the sea" He also said that with great difficulty they could contact the official of the Indian High Commission and ask him help. But the official told them that the families of the High Commission Officials themselves were confined to their houses. The officials, however, advised the members of their troupe to lock their rooms inside and remain there till help arrived. Venkat, a Tamil film director, was chased at Colombo on 26th July, by the Sinhalese mob and was cruelly done to death on the road while the police and soldiers were silent witnesses to it.

Mr Subbaiah Pillai (age 53) who had been living in Srilanka for the past 40 years, said that he had sought asylum
in the third floor of a hotel in Kaisar Street in Colombo, during the riots. According to him, 100 Tamils were arrayed opposite to that hotel, all their hands having been tied backwards. They were all shot dead by the Sinhalese, who danced over the dead bodies. Some of them used abyonets to ascertain whether any of them was left alive. Mr. Subbaiah Pillai said that he had lost about 20 lakhs worth of property and returned to India, penniless.

Mrs. Selvamany Ganesan, a 36-year-old mother of three, who survived the Budulla massacre told "The Guardian", through an interpreter on July 27, that a crowd had attacked the house of a neighbour named Ramanathan, a camphor dealer. His 15-year-old son, who had climbed on to the roof of their house was shot by a soldier and fell on the ground. Mrs. Ganesan fled with her children to her aunt's house nearby. There she heard firing outside and then an explosion. The house in which they took shelter was also set on fire. She fled with her children down a lane at the back of this house. She saw pools of blood. On the main road in front of Ramanathan's house, there was a pile of bodies including those of her husband, brother-in-law, father-in-law and her sister-in-law's husband. They all appeared to have received gunshot wounds.

A young man, a native of Mannachannelur in the Tiruchi district, who was running a hardware shop at Kandy returned
from Colombo by flight on 7th August, 1985. He said that his shop was completely looted and by God's grace, only he could escape. He also said that the Muthumariamman temple at Mattallai had been ransacked by the Sinhalese mobs. The idols in the temple were broken to pieces. The temple car had been set on fire and the temple elephant had been driven away. Finally, the Buddhist flag had been hoisted on the top of the temple.

Mr. J. Ramaswamy (60), a native of Turaiyur in the Tiruchy district, who had a flour mill, besides a pawn-broker shop in Hatton said (August 19) that on the night of July 24, rioting Sinhalese mobs threw "petrol bombs" on all the shops, houses and industrial premises belonging to the Tamils.

A middle aged man, a Tamil of Indian origin, who had settled in Colombo two decades ago, flew to Madras on 16th August, 1983. He told the Hindu correspondent: "We have seen the army and the Navy personnel walk into Indian's homes and take away unmarried girls of India origin. What is their future? We are leaderless and look to the Indian Government to ensure our protection by taking up our cause with the Sri Lanka Government. At least for the time being, a UN peacekeeping force is a must" (The Hindu).

According to a report that reached London on 28th July, 1983, the whole village of Velvettithural, which was the native
place of Kuttimani (a Tiger who was done to death in the Wellikade prison) was ransacked and number of Tamils were shot dead. The entire village was set ablaze.

Mrs Anita Pratap of Sunday gives a very touching description of the happenings in July 1983. She has written, "This correspondent left Colombo with the feeling that racial prejudice had gone beyond the point of return. The Sinhalese and the Tamils cannot live together in amity ever again. The scars are far too deep and the mistrust far too keenly entrenched. The Tamils of Sri Lanka are a spurned lot, spurned by their own government. How can they live in security in a country where the president has told foreign correspondents (to Sunday Observer of London) that he did not care about the Tamils?"

Instances of insults and indignities heaped on the Tamils, atrocities committed on their women, arson, looting and destruction of their property, callons killing of people, sheer bloodthirstiness etc., are so numerous that even a cursory account such as the above would be both shagging and lawseating.

It is possible that the accounts of the ruthlessness of the mobs in Sri Lanka given by the Tamils who could escape their wrath and the reports of all the Indian pressmen may be dubbed as 'prejudiced', or 'biased' against the Sinhalese. But the eye-witness accounts of the foreigners, who have got no prejudice or predilection, and who may not have any axe to grind, cannot be so easily dismissed. Here are some of them:
Mrs Skarstein a Norwegian, who returned to Oslo on 29th July, 1983, told the newspaper Verdens Gang that she saw 20 Tamils burnt to death in their minibus, after it was set on fire by the looters, and that she saw the burning on her way to the international airport of Colombo. "A mini-bus full of Tamils was stopped by the Sinhalese, who poured petrol over it and set it on fire. All the doors were kept closed, and 20 Tamils were burnt to death." She described the capital as an inferno, where she saw burning houses everywhere and the Tamils were the only target of attack. Holiday makers from West Germany who returned to Dusseldorf on 28th July, said that hundreds of Tamils had been murdered and even their hotel waiters told them proudly and gleefully, "We have killed several of them."

According to "The Guardian" several European tourists in Colombo saw (on 28th July) nine Tamils burnt alive at Colombo's main railway station. All nine died under horrifying and agonising circumstances. These reports were later confirmed by the Colombo police. According to the special correspondent of "The Guardian", the men, after being beaten up by the Sinhalese mob, were tied down on the railway track by the leg Using papers and other debris as kindling material, they set fire to the horribly battered, but still living people. They died in a few minutes."
A British tourist returned (on 28th July) from Srilanka, where he had gone for his honey-moon. He said, "there were gangs of looters in Colombo It was quite frightening. We saw lots of shops and buildings on fire and people staggering through the streets with as much as they could carry from looted shops.

Alan Gates, a teacher with the British council, returned from Colombo on 5th August, he said that while he and a friend of his were on a beach in their bid to escape the violence, they saw smoke billowing from behind the trees and were told that a Tamil house had been set on fire Shortly afterwards they saw boys walking away from the scene clutching boxes of goods looted from the building.

Jaweed Jaffar, a former newsman of Pakistan flew to Singapore on 28th July He stated that the Sinhalese action was aimed at annihilating the Tamils He could secure a taxi from the hotel only after proving that he was not a Tamilian. On his way to the airport, the Sinhalese Taxi driver told him "you see, we have completely annihilated the Tamils."

Mrs Renald Libro, a teacher of West Germany had been to Srilanka on tour On her return to Bonn, she told that she saw a number of Tamils being butchered, and also a number of Tamil women raped by the Sinhalese She said, "I was also chased by a mob, I had to run to a police station. The
police instead of giving me protection, drove me out at the point of bayonet.

Mr Garry of California (US) had been to Srilanka on tour, along with his wife. He returned to Madras on August third and told the reporters that he and his wife were attacked by the mob while they were travelling in a car in Colombo. They had to flee for their lives and when they reached the US High Commission, they saw there 10 Tamils with serious injuries. These Tamils narrated how cruelly they were attacked by the Sinhalese mob. He said "Srilanka seems to be a cemetery and if this continues, we can see no Tamilian alive in Srilanka and we are still in the grip of fear."

The above testimonies, though only few in number, are enough to depict the sordid state of affairs that prevailed in Srilanka during the last week of July, 1983.

The riots which began on the night of the July, 24, 1983 ended by August 5, in a state of smouldering embers. Apart from huge loss of lives, and thousands rendered homeless, another terrifying aspect of these riots was aside from Tamil homes, there was systematic destruction of shops and commercial and industrial establishments, many of which employed Sinhalese labour, and which were an essential arm of the UNP government's policy of economic development. Beresford of the Guardian reported that government officials said that about
100 industrial plants were severely damaged or destroyed, including 20 garment factories. The cost of industrial reconstruction was estimated at 2,000 million rupees ($55 million). This did not include damaged shops.

Around the same time in early August, the New York Times supplemented the information on the scale of the economic destruction: "Damage estimates are uncertain and incomplete, but the total economic loss has been placed at $300 million or more and 1,50,000 are said to have been rendered jobless. A significant portion of the jobless included Sinhalese workers, some of whom had participated in the very destruction of their own places of work. Badly hurt by this conflagration were some of the Island's biggest industrialists. Some well-known Sri Lankan Tamil victims were K. Gunarathnam, whose interests spanned textile trade, film distribution, and transportation. A.Y.S. Gnanam, who controlled major manufacturing firms such as St. Anthony's Hardware, Syntex, and Asian Cotton Mills, and R. Maharaja, whose constellation of enterprise included the Island's largest cosmetics manufacturing firm. The contractorship for large sections of the Island's major development "lead project," namely, the Mahaweli Scheme, and the distribution and retail of imported goods. In sum, textile mills, oil, rubber, and other factories situated in Industrial locations such as Ratmalana and Peliyagoda were reduced to ashes."
But this destruction of a good part of the island's commerce and nascent industry was confined not only to Sri Lankan Tamil interests, it did not merely include South Indian Tamil interests, it extended to include all Indian enterprises and persons who happened to stand in the explosive and undiscriminating path of the rioting. Thus the victims included prosperous and famous Hindu, Sindhi and Muslim Bohra business owned by the Hirdaranis and Jafferjees, names familiar in Colombo for some fifty years

Perhaps even more awesome was the virtual destruction of Colombo's colourful and bustling bazaar of shops, the Pettah, dominated by South Indian retail merchants, but also dotted with the shops of Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamil businessmen. An unexpected victim in the center of commerce was the Indian Overseas Bank Whose building and records were set ablaze, it was the principal bank used by Indian citizens, and Sri Lankans of Indian origin

Yet another disconcerting feature of the 1983 riots was the complete breakdown of law and order, a breakdown that was caused as much by the active participation or passive encouragement of the ultimate guardians of law and order -- the police and the army -- as by inflamed criminal excesses of the civilian marauders. There were several instances of the authorities' active or passive condoning of the destruction of life and property
In Trincomalee, the beautiful, coveted harbour on the east coast, where Tamils and Sinhalese (the majority of the latter being considered by the Tamils as recent intruders) were poised in equal numbers, sailors, later assisted and accompanied by civilians ran riot, killing and looting and setting houses and shops ablaze. Moreover, a district of Tamil residential concentration, was reduced to ashes. But the most disquieting spectacle was the behaviour of segments of the armed forces and police right in the capital city itself. One noticed a distinct change in the pattern of behaviour of the police and the armed forces. In 1958 they had saved many Tamil lives and earned their reputation as upholders of law and order; In 1977 they turned indifferent, but from 1981 onwards they became a party to the riots, frequently figuring as the prime villains. Of course, the most proximate cause of the army’s degeneration was the sporadic puncturing of their sense of honour and martial invincibility by the ambushes of Tamil guerillas. But there was more to their conduct than outraged vengeance seeking. What their conduct further signified was the politicization of the armed forces and their being drawn into the vortex of populist and chauvinist causes to a degree never before known.

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In any case, the degeneration of the armed forces and the police did signify that, at least for a short time, the government—that is, the president, the cabinet, and the civilian
bureaucrats—were rendered powerless to act. Moreover, during this period the government itself perhaps had lost its hold on the country as indicated by not implausible stories about its "panicky" appeals for military help to certain countries other than India (such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Singapore, the United States and Great Britain).

It was perhaps a sense of being overwhelmed by the aroused conduct of the Sinhalese en masse, a feeling of being crushed and pressurised by a massive tide of collective aggression, that made the president of Sri Lanka delay the imposition of curfew in Colombo for twenty-four hours, until the worst had already been done. He made no public statement on the radio and television for some four days, and when he finally did, he could say only that the riots were "not a product of urban mobs but a mass movement of the generality of the Sinhalese people." He then asserted: "The time has come to accede to the clamour and the national respect of the Sinhalese people." Therefore, the TULF had to be banned for there was no other way to "appease" the natural desire and request of the Sinhalese people. In the first days after the holocaust, when the Tamil refugees remained in the camps, neither the president, nor the cabinet, nor even a single prominent Sinhalese politician had a word of sympathy for the frightened Tamils. None of the dignitaries visited them to commiserate even briefly, or to promise relief and rehabilitation.
In all this one may see perhaps not so much a racist indifference and lack of pity as cowardly fear that a tidal wave of Sinhalese mass action had expressed itself and had swept aside the frail craft of the politicians. The sense of being overwhelmed released dark fears of conspiracy as well. The same president who admitted that some of his armed forces had participated in the riots, and who also claimed that the Sinhalese people as a whole had acted, at the same time pointed his finger at a communist conspiracy (both external and internal), hinted at a naxalite plot and wagged his finger at India for its alleged expansionist and interfering ambitions. However, at some level the president also knew that the most dangerous tendencies had been stirred up by elements within his own ranks, he had to face the unpalatable fact that the strongest threat to any responsible statesman-like action came from hardliners within his government who had encouraged punitive acts against the Tamils as a means of intimidating them.

The question is how to understand the driving force behind this short-lived but devastating Sinhalese mob behaviour, which had indisputable signs of manipulation by organized factions and interested groups, among whom one cannot but include elements within the government itself, indeed, within the cabinet and the armed forces, and within their retinue of clients and followers.
On the one hand, the phenomenon went against the grain of all that the government had tried to accomplish in the economic sphere. And why did the Sinhalese engage themselves in a war from which they too were bound to emerge as losers of the recent economic gains and expansion of employment? About 1,000,000 persons were put out of work because of the riots. Ironically, the Jayawardene government had claimed to have provided as many jobs in the six preceding years as were not the Sinhalese cutting off their noses to spite their faces?

To all appearances, the UNP regime in Sri Lanka was firmly in control during the last few years. When soon after Jayawardene came to power in 1977, he was able to change the constitution and introduce a presidential form of government somewhat on the French model and a proportional system of representation that was advocated as a means of avoiding the wildly oscillating consequences of landslide electoral victories that had been the result of the British form of majoritarian politics. His own parliamentary five-sixths majority was manipulated not only in the alleged interest of stabilizing politics in the long run, but also to hold a referendum that enabled (by the use of booths) the prolongation without election of the life of the present parliament for six years. Thus the president's power and the UNP's rule seemed assured until 1989 at least. The feeling of strength and the accompanying slide toward
authoritarianism was also reflected by the deployment of an army of occupation in Jaffna (and the Northern Province) and the passing of the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1979.

In retrospect, the horrible aspect of the events during the riots, and the government's action soon afterwards, should not unduly prejudice our assessment of President Jayawardene's positive acts towards setting the Tamil issue and reconciling both the Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils to his regime. First of all, consider the suspicious deal he had struck with the Indian Tamils. They had voted overwhelmingly for him and the UNP in the landslide 1977 elections, the promises he had held out to them had brought the Ceylon Workers' Congress, the largest trade union of the Indian Tamil plantation workers, into the government. Jayawardene did make provision in the Constitution for Tamil to be awarded the status of national language together with Sinhalese, although the latter was to continue as the "Official" language for purposes of administration. He had negotiated with the TULF over the establishment of District Councils throughout the Island. These Councils were to be given certain powers concerning local government, peasant colonization, and primary as well as secondary (but not higher) education. It was hoped that the delegation of such minimal powers would appease Tamil sentiments. In the event, however, there was much delay in implementation, giving the impression that the
government was being deliberately slow, not quite willing to carry into effect the many provisions in the face of alleged hostility of the Sinhalese population at large. Strangely the granting of these powers ended up by strengthening those of the centre, especially the President's powers. The Central government held all the purse strings, and alienated the Tamils by the appointment of several presiding Sinhalese district ministers invested with overriding powers even in the districts where the Tamils were the majority. Obviously President Jayawardene was willing to go to a point, and no more. He had also tried to mediate the contentious issue of an equitable admission policy to the universities. For the Sri Lankan Tamils, the application of equal and even-handed criteria of merit and performance at entrance examinations was vital; indeed, it constituted a lifeline for them. The admission policies were therefore, a crucial test of their equal rights as citizens of Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese on the other hand favoured an admission policy based on a quota system that would give an edge to their population ratio. They defended this curious "affirmative action" on behalf of a majority in power on grounds of undue privilege enjoyed by the Tamils in this sphere. The veracity of this Sinhalese view has to be tested. For the Tamils this Sinhala demand was death blow to them, and the Sinhalese knew it. The SLFP, and subsequently Jayawardene, had helped in the formation of what was called a "Standardization policy"
that claimed a rise in the number of Tamils admitted to universities. But since university admissions were calculated largely on the basis of district populations, and since the Tamils formed a majority in only six of the total of twenty-four districts, the Sinhalese students enjoyed a conspicuous advantage over their Tamil counterparts on the basis of demography rather than merit.

All in all, there was just the chance that under Jayawardene's presidential rule and virtual one-party government an accord might be reached on the same lines as the far-seeing but tragically abandoned Bandaranaike Chelvanayagam Pact of 1957, which had been scotched, incidentally, by a movement led by Jayawardene himself, who was then in the opposition. Jayawardene had convened an all-parties conference to settle matters, and a popular rumour had it that he was slow to act when the riots of July 1983 broke out so as to nudge the beleaguered Tamil leaders into negotiating with him. If there is any truth in this, it is only part of the truth; and the ploy turned out to be a miscalculation. For what was imagined at the beginning to be little more than a camp-fire lit by Sinhala campaigners turned into a raging forest fire that took at least seventy two hours to put out.

On the economic front, the UNP claimed to have initiated a "liberalization policy" marked by a pro-United States stance, encouragement of foreign capitalist investment, and a greater
reliance on market forces than on state intervention, protection, and subsidization. The UNP had decided on the implementation of four major projects: the Mahaweli scheme, particularly the speeded up construction of the dams, the housing programme, the creation of the Gree Trade Zone, and the building of the new administrative capital at Kotte. Fortunately, the last one was scaled down as it had more to do with fulfilling monarchical fantasies of a new capital than with economic development or rational administration. To be sure, the Mahaweli scheme and the housing project had created new employment, especially in the field of construction, but the returns of these projects were expected to be a long time in coming.

The most publicized feature of the government's economic strategy, which it considered its chief means of creating economic growth, was the encouragement of foreign private investors to return to Srilanka, after their flight or reluctance to come during the SLFP regime, and invest in and promote export activities, some of which were labour intensive. Cheap Srilankan labour would be a major attraction in the context of the establishment of "Free trade zones", especially in the immediate vicinity of Colombo, where more infrastructural investments would be provided to supplement the existing facilities. The south-west littoral of Srilanka where Colombo is situated and which is a heavily populated Sinhalese zone, would be the hub of this industrial development, and also the primary bene-
ficiary of an intensified tourist trade. To achieve these goals, the government had established the Greater Colombo Economic Commission.

All in all, by one method of accounting, the UNP Government had between the years 1977 and 1983 had increased the rate of national economic growth, created significantly more employment, and had relaxed import restrictions, which made available more consumption goods in the market. These features combined to create an air of increased prosperity and activity. So in the face of all these indications of economic expansion and political aggrandizement the questions remain to be answered: why did the riots occur against "the grain" of events, to undo a great deal of the gains made by the government? why did the riots occur in a spectacularly virulent form in 1983, when, most observers of the scene did not expect them? Were there invisible protents and cracks in the UNP regime which could be identified and interpreted after the events?

First of all, one may notice a paradoxical symptom in Jayawardene's seemingly successful assumption of near-total power and his initiation of seeming progress. Although there were shows of aggression by the Sinhalese against the Tamils during the earlier regimes (for example under the Bandaranaike and SLFP regimes in 1956 and 1958), there were four successive punitive actions, including the worst ever, against the Tamils in the seven years of the Jayawardene regime since 1977. How
do we explain a spate of anti-Tamil riots in an atmosphere of confident Sinhala domination and progress? A very revealing remark was made by Neelan Thiruchelvam, a member of Parliament and a member of TULF, a remark that bore the mark of despair. "This time the Tamil professional and enterprising class has been destroyed" (India Today 31st August 1983).

There was an effort for many years to diminish Tamil participation in the professions and white-collar occupations. A more clouded issue was the reason for the destruction of Tamil—both Sri Lankan and South Indian—commercial interests in Colombo. There were rampant rumors that the "hawks" in the UNP cabinet of the bind of the Industries Minister Cyril Mathew, whose notoriety has already been noted, were thinking of taking punitive action against the "terrorist" activities of the Tamil insurgents and the intransigence of the TULF politicians in an attempt to make them forswear any intention to secede from the body politic. They were alleged to propose a ruthless crackdown on the Tamils, whom they charged with the control of 60 per cent of the wholesale trade and 80 per cent of the retail trade in the capital. Whatever the truth or otherwise in these numbers be, the rumors revealed the deadly strategy of "punishing" the Tamils in the city of Colombo itself, where most of their professionals, entrepreneurs, and white-collar workers were aggregated. India Today (31 August, 1983) asserted in print, what other sources had also suggested, that Minister
Cyril Mathew, who controlled the powerful government labour union Jatika Sevaka Sangamaya, was implicated in pinpointing the Tamil-owned shops and factories to be destroyed. The same jingoist, in a speech made in parliament on 4 August, 1983, at the tail end of the dying riots, defended them with the words: "If the Sinhalese are the majority race, why can't they be the majority?".

If, the riots then were even intended at any stage by its organisers and participants as an attack on the Tamils resident in Colombo at their most vulnerable and exposed front, then it would be most natural for the Tamils to wonder whether the perpetrators merely intended the violence to be a coercive twist of the arm to inflict on them some pain, or, more diabolically, to be an utterly crazy, "total solution" that would pluck out and expel once and for all the Tamils from the midst of the sinhala. The contemplation of such deeds in itself is symptomatic of the rising tempo of a problematic Sinhale-Buddhist Chauvinism. There must have been tendencies within the Sinhalese social and political domain (irrespective of the Tamil irritant), which were conducive to generating such volcanic and sinister enthusiasm, evidence such outburst of violence, utterly wild and crazy though brief in duration. But a volcano temporarily spent can erupt again. One is inevitably fitted with frame apprehension regarding the turn of events in the future.
An analysis of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka poses two sets of dilemmas. Firstly, the reconciliation of mutually conflicting historical perceptions which over time have not eased racial tension but which have instead increased the rigidity of the political leadership of both communities. The strongly assertive Sinhalese national identity is confronted with a defiant expression of Tamil national identity. Secondly, the question arises whether it is either fair or useful to determine how resources should be shared in a low growth economy, thus linking racial considerations to the collective economic well-being of the respective communities.

The discussion of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka raises the following question with regard to certain issues, some of them self-evident. One of the primary assumptions of the third world development process is that nationalism has been a progressive and important force in modern history. It is also important to consider that nationalism is often said to be based on ultimate loyalty and has its origins in the self-identity of individuals.

Another consideration is the concept of affirmative discrimination or standardization of a means of distributing scarce resources.

The third consideration which is important in understanding the effect of government policy, is the strategy of racial
integration as a measure of reconciling ethnic decisions. Another aspect which comes to mind, especially with regard to the politics of the Tamil opposition, is the dogged determination of such an opposition for over three decades. Ill recently, the Tamil political movement in Sri Lanka had not accepted the ideology of violence. For the Tamil leadership was committed to a policy of Satyagraha. In reviewing the issues concerned with ethnic violent conflict in Sri Lanka, the implications for continued violence, tension and anxiety are inevitable.