support for such peaceful settlements. Since 1983, India had been playing the role of a mediator between the Tamil Eelam groups and the Sri Lankan government. During these years India tried her best to persuade the two parties to narrow down their differences and misunderstandings and to make them work for a peaceful political settlement. From July 29, 1987 onwards India's role as mediator changed. India's role changed from that of a promoter to that of a party to the settlement. 59

India involvement in Sri Lankan ethnic conflict became far more direct than even before. As a result the dormant Sinhala Buddhist nationalism became activated and anti-Indian forces were promoted. Further, the absence of any effort by India to restrain the activities of the Tamil militants of Sri Lanka in South India also added to the already virulent anti-Tamil and anti-India feeling among the Sinhalese. A major weakness of the Indian diplomacy has been its lack of enough leverage with the rival parties in the ethnic conflict. India never succeeded in persuading the Tamil groups except the TULF. In the ultimate analysis India's mediation did not bear first either in bringing about a political settlement of the Sinhalese Tamil conflict, or in bringing down the ethnic tensions. However, the Indo-Sri Lankan accord could reaffirm India's important role in safeguarding the security of South Asian countries.

CHAPTER IX
In the foregoing chapters an attempt has been made to consider and analyse in some detail the Indo-Srilankan relations with special reference to the ethnic problem, more particularly the question of Tamils in Srilanka, which has continued to baffle analysts and elude a solution. It may not be necessary to repeat in this final chapter what has already been described at great length. Therefore, some general observations on the role of India as mediator may be made by way of summing up, and a few tentative suggestions for resolving the ethnic crisis could be advanced. However, it is fully realised that since the prevailing situation in the island nation is very complex and complicating even a comprehensive grasp of it is not easy, let alone offering a solution.

The relation between India and Srilanka have not been as cordial as they ought to be. This is most unfortunate, because friendly relations between them, if established, would be advantageous to both in the immediate present as well as in the long run. From the point of view of India's security establishing tension free and cordial relations with Srilanka is very essential. In spite of continuous attempts made to establish friendly
relations with India's neighbours in the east, west and the north threat to India's sovereignty and territorial integrity from across the borders has persisted. The peninsular nature of half of the country, and the very long sea coast make India vulnerable to attack from the sea, therefore good relations with an island nation like Srilanka which is very close to India's southern border and strategically located in the vast Indian Ocean are most essential to the country. And to have a reliable friend in India is equally advantageous to Srilanka. However, want of mutual trust, suspicious about each others intensions have stood in the way of reaching a proper understanding between the two countries. Srilanka has had always fears about that India may have territorial ambitions and designs on its sovereignty, because of some ill-advised statements made by some politicians in either country. Much as India has tried, their apprehension has not been removed from the Srilankan minds entirely. In the world of politics where every one tries to play the game of hide and seek with adroitness, building mutual confidence and trust is more difficult. However, unless it is done, the world will cease to be a secure place for human existence.

The study of Indo-Srilankan relations reveals that the ethnic conflict - the conflict between Sinhalas and Tamils including those of recent Indian origin - has its origin in the country's historical past, and social, economic and demographic factors
have contributed from time to time to intensify it. The relation between the two countries began to experience strains since they freed themselves from colonial rule. The Srilankan Tamil question is in fact a legacy of the imperialist British. Wherever the British have been as colonial rulers, it would seem that they have encouraged ethnic rivalry to serve their own ends. Ethnic politics, which sometimes leads to sporadic roots among different ethnic groups, is not an uncommon feature of pluralistic societies such as India and Srilanka. But it does not necessarily mean that such conflicts cannot be avoided or a solution for them found. Malaysia, which is also a multiracial pluralistic society, has demonstrated that ethnic conflicts can be avoided and that the different ethnic groups can live together in peace.

But in Srilanka the ethnic conflicts have brought the nation to the very brink of its disintegration, for which the responsibility lies with all concerned, though not to the same degree. The steps taken by the Srilankan government to contain ethnic violence all failed, because of the disagreement between the leaders of Simhalas and Tamils. The Tamils who felt that all along they had only an unfair deal so that in 1976 they declared in favour of a separate state for themselves. This move naturally was outright opposed by the Srilankan government and the Simhalas, it did not receive support even from Indian Tamils.

As large numbers of people of Indian origin - Tamils living in Srilanka were involved in the ethnic conflict, India
could not but taken an interest in the ethnic question of the Island nation to start with as a friendly outsider. But subsequently she got drawn into the ethnic conflicts as the safety and security of the Tamils were gravely threatened because of the hardening prejudices against them, and also because of the unhelpful policies pursed by the Srilanka government. From the time of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, till about the time of the first tenure of office of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the consistent attitude of the Government of India was to regard the Tamil question as an internal problem of Srilanka and therefore not to interfere in that country's internal affairs, however, disturbing the reports might be. During the time of Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Sastri, India agreed to take back from Srilanka on humanitarian grounds a considerable number of Tamils of recent Indian origin, although this step did not meet with the approval of Tamil Nadu itself. In Srilanka the attitude of Simhalas the majority population, and that of the Buddhist, towards the Tamils became increasingly rigid and even hostile. Their right to vote which they had enjoyed in the British days, was withdrawn. Every form of discrimination against them came to be practiced so that the Tamils felt compelled to demand, for their survival, a separate state for themselves in the island, comprising those districts where they were a majority. With time the demand for "Eelam" has became insistent and the common goal of all the groups of Tamils in Srilanka the moderates and extremists alike the latter snatching
away from the others leadership. The continuing intransigence of Sinhalas too contributed to the Tamil demand.

India, could not remain for long a mere spectator of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. In 1971 the Government of India, on request from by the Government of Sri Lanka, even tried to play the role of mediator between the conflicting groups. Political pressures and opinion in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, influenced considerably the Government of India's stand regarding Sri Lankan ethnic problems. Without changing its basic policy of non-interference it moved towards taking a more active interest in the Tamil question. After the unprecedented anti-Tamil riots of July 1983, which have been described sufficiently in the preceding chapters, Indian involvement in some form became inevitable. Indian ships assisted in the evacuation of Sri Lanka Tamils in thousands and brought them to India as refugees, and medical supplies were sent to those who were left behind. The leaders of Tamil Naadu, and its Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, now deceased, pleaded insistently with the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi for a more direct intervention to restore order in Sri Lanka. As a result of discussion between representatives of both governments, India's offer of assistance in resolving the Sri Lankan Tamil problem was accepted by Sri Lanka. The proposal was to seek a viable solution by mutual discussion among all the parties concerned. However, to bring them to the conference table was no easy task. The Tamil United
Liberation Front (TULF) which was then more influential than the other more aggressive Tamil groups in Srilanka, welcomed the idea of India's mediation and hoped that there would be meaningful discussion which would change the situation, provided no preconditions were set by the Srilankan government. The TULF also affirmed that the Tamils would not renounce their aspiration for the creation of a separate state for Tamils in Srilanka. On the other hand the Government of Srilanka wanted the TULF to renounce its demand for a separate state before it could be invited to any round-table conference on the Tamil question. Despite these extreme stands taken by the contending parties, India could bring them together for discussion, and make them accept a sort of solution to the problem.

Unfortunately the understanding reached because of India's mediation did not yield the experienced results, because India, which backed to the full the TULF, completely under-estimated the influence wielded by the militant Tamils, especially the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), among the Tamils of Srilanka. It took some time for India to realise that no solution for the Tamil question would be possible within the active participation of the LTTE in a direct dialogue with the Srilankan Government. The militants, who were lead by their leader Prabhakaran, assured Government of India that they had no objection to meeting the Srilankan President or his colleagues, while they reserved their demand for a separate Tamil linguistic
unit At subsequent events showed to India's utter dismay, the LTTE could not be relied upon at all, and that it was wholly untrustworthy.

On India agreeing to take an active interest in the Tamil question of Sri Lanka and even mediate, a number of suggestions were made regarding the kind of role that India could play in solving the ethnic crisis. One of the suggestions, which came from the Secretary General of TULF was that India should intervene militarily as she did in the case of Bangladesh. A similar plea was made by the DMK in Tamil Nadu too. Apparently, it looked a very easy solution the basis for this suggestion was the infinitely superior might of Indian armed forces. But wisely the Government of India refused to take it. Among the determining factors for this wise decision was that in Sri Lanka a section of the people, the Tamils led by the militants, was struggling against a democratically elected government and demanding a partition of the country on the basis of language. Secondly any military intervention by India to help the Tamils, as it was suggested, would tantamount to violating India's avowed policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, it would go against the spirit of non-alignment and of the SAARC. And India would not be playing the role she had undertaken that of the mediator. Internationally there would be other repercussions damaging India's international interests.
Another suggestion, made to India, by some Tamil leaders of Srilanka and India, which also involved Indian military intervention was that a Cyprus type solution could be found for the ethnic problem, with Indian army supporting the Tamils. In Cyprus, which was a British colony the conflict was between the Greek speaking Cypriots belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church, who formed the majority, and the Turkish minority. Superficially, the situation in Srilanka resembles the situation that prevailed in Cyprus. The Greek Cypriots who were supported by the Government of Greece, wanted union of Cyprus with Greece. The Government of Turkey, which naturally supported the Turks, wanted the rights of the Turkish minority protected. After much conflict and struggle and even intervention by the United Nations, as things stand today, there is a separate Turkish state of Cyprus which survives with the support of the Turkish army. Those who suggested to India a Cyprus type solution to the Srilankan ethnic crisis, wanted that the Tamil militants and the TULF should be permitted to declare Tamil Eelam and India should give it recognition as well as armed support. Even this suggestion was rightly and firmly set aside by India because to accept it would have meant the partitioning of Srilanka, and India going against the assurance she had given Srilanka that she always recognised her sovereignty and territorial integrity was anxious that it should be preserved and was opposed to any attempt at disrupting it.
A third suggestion to solve the ethnic crisis in Srilanka made to India was that the issue be referred to the United Nations as it involved gross violation of human rights. Even though Pakistan offered to support this move and the secretary of the Commonwealth nations hinted at raising the issue before this international forum, India outrightly rejected this suggestion too. She was quite right in doing so because the United Nations in the past had succeeded very little in dealing with such issues of conflict. And India was opposed to any form of internationalising the question of the Tamils in Srilanka as it would only complicate matters rather than help to find a solution to already vexed problem. India also opposed firmly efforts made by Srilanka's Prime Minister to internationalise the ethnic dispute and give it a global dimension, by enlisting the support of a country like Pakistan, Indian mediatory efforts and her opposition to internationalise the issue were landed by the USA, in spite of its own vested interest in the area.

The pace at which Indian mediatory efforts was indeed slow, the odds against them being many, although uncharitably India was accused of being immature and inexperienced in such matters, and adhoc in her approach. Efforts to speed up negotiation with all concerned led to the signing of the Rajiv - Jayawardane agreement on 29th July 1987 in Colombo, in spite of considerable opposition within Srilanka and the ruling party itself. This was indeed a major step in India's mediatory role.
in Sri Lanka. This was significant for several reasons. First, India was directly entering Sri Lankan affairs in a bid to solve the ethnic crisis, regarding it as an extension of its mediatory role rather than as an external interference. India was to balance the aspirations of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and the stand taken by the Government of Sri Lanka which was totally opposed to the idea of a separate state for the Tamils. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) whose role was defined clearly, was to protect the interests of the vast majority of Tamils, to disarm the Tamil militants, and make them come forward to participate in the democratic process within the framework of Sri Lankan constitution, and thus pave the way for resolving the protracted ethnic conflict. But the subsequent developments showed that India's well-meant intervention only aggravated the ethnic conflict rather than resolve it.

The Rajiv - Jayawardane accord and the direct entry of India and its Peace Keeping Force into Sri Lanka became necessary because things were going from bad to worse in the island state. The reconciliatory policy which the Sri Lankan president wanted to pursue was opposed by men in his own party and the Tamil Insurgents. The militants and the Government forces stood facing each other. The LTTE took over many of the administrative duties in the Jaffna peninsula. The Sri Lankan government even feared that the militants might unilaterally declare the secession of the Tamil majority areas in the east. Therefore
it reported to economic blockade of that region as well as military action against the insurgents. Supply of essential goods to the region was stopped, and the Jaffna region was bombed causing a lot of suffering to the innocent. It looked as if the Sri Lankan government had launched an all out war against the militants. The flow of Tamil refugees into India continued unabated and therefore the Government of Tamil Nadu wanted the Government of India to play a more direct, positive and effective role and not be content with air-dropping relief materials to the afflicted Tamils in Sri Lanka, and with finding fault with Sri Lankan government for taking the help of foreigners to put down the militants. India had to do two things simultaneously; first, tell the Sri Lankan government in unequivocal terms to stop bombing the Jaffna area and lift the economic blockade, lest the consequences should be dire, second, tell the LTTE and other militants with equal emphasis that it would not do for them to defy the Sri Lankan government, and that running Jaffna as a separate and independent administration was out of question. If the militants did not pay heed to this warning, they would incur India's wrath.

The Government of India realised that the Sri Lankan Government and the insurgent militants had been taking undue advantage of the restraint it had been showing in the ethnic question, to serve their own ends, and making India look small as a mere silent observer. It was in this situation that India moved
forward to urge in firm language the President of Srilanka to withdraw the economic blockade of the Jaffna region, suspend unilaterally all military operations against the militants, and declare the Eastern province as a Tamil majority area. If these were complied with, India then would prevail upon the militants, the LTTE in particular, to accept the December 19, 1986 proposal as a sound basis for negotiated settlement of the long drawn ethnic conflict in Srilanka even though the Srilankan President faced stiff opposition from some of his own men to these Indian proposals, particularly to declaring as a Tamil majority area the Eastern province to which belonged the much coveted trincomale port, he knew that to the ethnic question there could only be a political rather than a military solution. All these factors contributed to the signing of the Rajiv - Jayawardane accord of July 1987, after detailed negotiation with all the parties concerned.

Ironically, from the time the accord was signed, it got into rough weather, because of opposition to it from a section of the Srilankan ruling party and of the Tamil militants. Two of President Jayawardane's ministers, Premadasa Athulatmudali, opposed it. So did Sirimavo Bandaranaike, a former Prime Minister of Srilanka, and a prominent leader of the opposition. The Buddhist monks, who have a say in the politics of Srilanka, and the Sinhalas were not in favour of it which they regarded as a sell out. Again, the ratification of the Agreement by the Srilanka
Parliament was delayed, because of an attempt on the life of the Srilankan President. The hard-core militant Tamils too were not satisfied with the accord, although initially they kept up an appearance of accepting it by seeming to surrender their aims in accordance with the terms of the agreement. For them this was not a negotiated settlement but only a decision made by the Government of India and accepted by the Srilankan government and the Moderate Tamils (TULF) and some of the militants. The leader of the LTTE maintained that until a satisfactory agreement which was acceptable to them was worked out the demand for Eelam would remain as before. It was his complaint that there was no satisfactory understanding regarding the formation of interim administration of the merged north and eastern province, the TULF and the LTTE vied with each other for a major share in the interim administration.

The most controversial issue for the Tamils was the conditional merger of the Northern province with the Eastern province. The final decision on the merger would be made after a referendum in the eastern province, which not a predominantly Tamil area. What would happen if the referendum went against the merger scheme itself? Would the militants accept it with good grace and give up the demand for a separate homeland for the Tamils? Again it was not made unambiguously clear in the accord how powers would devolve on the provincial council. It was difficult to envisage that sharp differences of opinion would
not arise during the negotiation between the Srilankan Government and the LTTE and the TULF, even with the mediating India participating in it. These and other misgivings about the accord would make one doubt very much whether it would succeed in normalising the relation between the Srilankans and Tamils. The Indian Peace Keeping Force, as per the Accord, was to protect the interests of the Tamils, their safety and security. But either because India trusted a little too mainly the assurances of surrender of arms by the LTTE or did not or could not infuse enough confidence among the Tamil population of Srilanka, it found itself caught in a war with the LTTE. To start with, the IPKF could free Jaffna from the control of the LTTE by the end of October 1987. Thereafter it became a battle of attrition. It was no easy task to fight on an unfamiliar jungle terrain with the LTTE, expert in guerilla warfare. Having to fight with the militants, who naturally gained popularity, the IPKF could not succeed in distancing the Srilankan Tamils from the Tigers, in spite of its best efforts. The IPKF found itself engaged in a thankless task, doing what was to have been done by the Srilankan forces but looked upon with suspicion as an alien force both by the Sinhalas and the Tamils. With Premadasa becoming the President of Srilanka the demand for the withdrawal of the IPKF became louder and more insistent than ever before. Whatever hopes had been raised the Rajiv - Jayawardane accord were belied before long. It was quite clear before long that it stood not many chances of succeeding. Part of the blame
rests with the LTTE. It is possible to argue that India was not astute enough in dealing with all aspects of the problem so that it allowed itself to be outwitted by the LTTE which could disturb with impunity the political process of reconciliation. So much seems certain that India could not or did not estimate Prabhakaran's potential for dangerous mischief.

What should India do under these circumstances not only to retrieve her badly damaged image, but more importantly, to help to solve the vexed and vexing ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, for which she had to assume the role of an active mediator? It is indeed an unenviable task full of complications and requires wary walking lest she should be trapped once again. It would be wise not to expect any quick and dramatise results, and plan moves bearing in mind long term benefits for all concerned. India will have to win back the trust and confidence of the Sri Lankan Tamils and wean them away from the path of terror and violence. They must be made to realise that it is in their interest and welfare not to demand or fight for a separate state for themselves, but press for their legitimate rights within the frame work of Sri Lanka's constitution. If this is achieved, the gulf between the Tamils and Sinhala in Sri Lanka may narrow down. The Tamil leadership in Sri Lanka has to be made to realise the wisdom of reconciliation with honour and the unwisdom of reckless and violent confrontation. It must be persuaded to work for a negotiated settlement of the issues.
Simultaneously the Government of India will have to impress on the Srilankan government to convince the majority community to see reason, and to give up the senseless hostility towards whatever is deemed non-Sinhala and non-Buddhist. It must be made not to resort to the use of force against the Tamils all too readily, India will have to convince Srilanka, that not only does she not have any territorial designs on the island, but wants to preserve her solidarity and integrity. Therefore it is in the interests of Srilanka to retain India's friendship and make it endure for long, and also seek the cooperation and advise of India in solving problem which affect both countries. Srilanka would do well to give India a long term say in the Islands affairs, especially in the issues and problems created by the ethnic crises. It goes without saying that to resolve the ethnic crisis, people on both sides will have to work with restraint, generosity, understanding and imagination and work towards a lasting solution. They must realise that any solution reached may not completely everyone in the short run.

Here are some concrete measures suggested for the Srilankan government to take to resolve the ethnic issue:

(a) The present unitary constitution should be replaced by a federal constitution which recognises the autonomy of the Tamil speaking areas

(b) Maintenance of law and order and recruitment of police
personnel be left to the particular states within the federal set up. As a result the police in a particular state will be recruited from a particular ethnic group in it. Of course, protection to the minority in each state must be assured. As in India, high officers may be recruited from the Central Government and seconded to the state government. The same method may be adopted in recruitment to other areas, such as public services, corporate sector etc.

(c) A major cause for conflict between the Tamils and Sinhala has been the question of land settlement. The Sri Lankan government has deliberately tried to settle Sinhala in Tamil majority areas to weaken the Tamils. This complex issue is better entrusted to a National body in which all states are represented. This body is to evolve a national land policy. Settlement should not be imposed on unwilling states.

(d) The boundaries of the states should be so demarcated that a particular ethnic group enjoys a comfortable majority in a given state. The number of provinces may be decided on this basis.

(e) The relationship between the Federal Government and the state government should be clearly defined so that there is no room for conflict in future.
(f) High courts should also be empowered to hear and decide constitutional cases

(g) The territory of a state, once established, should not be altered without its consent

(h) Special provision should be made for the protection of the Tamils of recent Indian origin, who have suffered most in the ethnic conflict. Scattered as they are over the island, they must be ensured of their security. Provision must be made for their participation without any discrimination in the Government and in the Administration.

(i) The legislative power of the union shall rest in Parliament.

(j) No bill or resolution affecting any particular nationality be passed unless a majority of members of Parliament belonging to that nationality or part thereof agree.

(k) Special provision should be made to ensure the representation in parliament of Muslims and Tamils of recent Indian origin, who do not occupy contiguous areas.

(l) The drawing up of Federal Constitution be entrusted to a body in which all ethnic groups and recognised political parties are represented. Help from Indian constitutional advisers may be sought in this exercise.

In a plural society ethnic, cultural, and linguistic conflicts
are bound to arise. A federal form of government is the best safeguard against such conflicts and frictions.

These tentatively made suggestions are not difficult of achievement provided there is the political will, especially in the Sri Lankan Government. The Indian Government, as a neighbouring democracy with its own geopolitical interests, should be able to help Sri Lanka in this endeavour. In any case it calls for perseverance and continuing effort.

A short Postscript has become necessary for this chapter. According to the plan of enquiry the present study stops with the beginning of the return of the Indian Peace Keeping Force from Sri Lanka, with India’s continuing efforts against a number of unexpected odds to solve the ethnic crisis. Since then a number of political changes of major significance have taken place in India. The IPKF has been fully withdrawn. Just a trickling of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka have gone back home. The worst of the development is the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi on Indian soil executed with brutal precision by the men of LTTE, for which there is no parallel in history so far. Prabhakaran, the leader, is now accused number one in the conspiracy against Rajiv Gandhi’s murder. The LTTE is now outlawed in India and whoever sympathises with its members and its activities risk facing dire punishment. It is natural and appropriate that the Indian attitude towards the LTTE has changed and hardened. By engineering the murder of one who
was doing his best to serve the Tamils and safeguard the Tamil interests, the very Tamil cause has suffered a grievous setback. In Srilanka itself there is for sometime now a regular war going on between the government forces and the Tamil militants what may be the outcome, it is difficult to say, although the Srilankan forces now seem for more confident of their offensive and success than before. The losses on either side have been heavy, formerly the losses used to be on the side of the Army. Significantly the Government of India has merely taken note of these developments and has not protested against the attack on the militants, in which surely some innocent lives too must have been lost.

At present there is a lull in Indo-Srilanka diplomatic activity regarding the ethnic problem. The situation in Srilanka remains uncertain. What would be the next move of the Indian Government to resolve the ethnic problem has not yet been spelt out. With bitterness increasing in every one concerned, the solution has farther receded. However the Indian commitment to the solidarity and integrity of Srilanka remains unchanged. The Tamils and the Simhalas should rouse themselves from their unrealistic notions and work for a harmonious and peaceful pluralistic society in Srilanka. That is all one can say on the ethnic question at present.