CHAPTER - V

RAJIV GANDHI AND INDO - SRI LANKAN RELATIONS

India, being one of the most dominant countries in South Asia, occupies the strategic location in the South Asia. It has been encircled with big and small countries and has become a helping hand to most of its neighbouring countries because of its military power and strategic location. In fact, this has greatly helped India to play a significant role in South Asia apart from China. Above all, India, which imbibed the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, i.e. peace, non-violence, and brotherhood, not only established friendly ties with, but also developed the ideas of peaceful co-existence among, the countries of the world. Further, the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi influenced to a great extent both the neighbouring states to a considerable extent to establish bilateral relations with India.

But for one or the other reason, the relations with certain neighbouring countries like China and Pakistan got deteriorated even if India intended to forge good and friendly relations with them. These immediate neighbors of India posed a great threat to its security and integrity. Apart from this, there are also countries, like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and others whose relations started souring in the nineties. Efforts were being made to establish good and cosy relations between India and its immediate neighbours since the independence days. However, it was under the dynamic
leadership of Rajiv Gandhi that India determined to open a new chapter of peace, harmony and good neighbourliness in so far as south Asia is concerned. Rajiv Gandhi, while talking on the foreign policy soon after assuming the office of Prime Minister aptly said, “special attention would be given to strengthening ties with our immediate neighbours in South Asia with whom we have deep historical and cultural links”.¹

A Brief History of Indo-Sri Lankan Relations:

Sri Lanka, a tiny island spread in the Indian Ocean, is the immediate of neighbour of India, which has long cultural and historical relations. The historical relations between the countries can be traced to the great epic Ramayana. Among the South Asian countries, it was also one of the members of the SAARC Association since its inception. Though Sri Lanka is our immediate neighbour, it had no land links with India, but has historical relations since ancient days. As far as the historical relations between the two countries are concerned it goes back to the days of the great epic Ramayan. Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) is that island which the heroic Rama subdued after his righteous war against Ravana, a king of Lanka. It is the place where Rama liberated Sita from the clutches of Ravana. Further several Missions were also sent to Sri Lanka from the Indian shores. It was during the regime of great Ashoka, a Mouryan Empire that he sent his daughter Sangmitre

¹ Asian Recorder, 31 (5), Jan 29-Feb 4, 1985, p-18155.
and son Mahendra with a mission to spread Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Therefore, over several centuries there existed good and friendly relations between the two countries.

The relations between India and Sri Lanka since pre-independence were very much cordial. But it was the Britishers, "in order to entrench their designs of commercial exploitation through a plantation economy, they introduced a cheap labour force to recruit the Tamils from India, into the Kandy area and thereabouts". 2 As a result, a large number of Indian Tamils migrated to Ceylon in the middle of the 19th century, which caused discontentment among the people of Kandyan land. In the meanwhile, the leaders of the Ceylonese-political and trade union began to express concern over the effects of free immigration from India. This depression worsened the employment situation on the island, and inescapably, curbs began to be placed on free immigration of Tamils. The Tamil workers who have been the mainstay of the economy of Sri Lanka for years together were mainly responsible for the economic growth of the country. But these workers were subjected to low pay, ill treatment etc. The Tamils, who constitute nearly one million, have been in Sri Lanka for more than one generation. They have maintained their traditional, cultural links with India and have maintained Tamil as their mother tongue without mixing up with the local Sinhalese. This separate identity of the Tamils irritated the Sinhalese and regarded Tamilians as persons not willing to join the national

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2 Seminar, No.337, September 1987, p-16.
mainstream, and as those desirous of securing a dismemberment of Sri Lanka. Besides, Sri Lankan Sinhalese did not like the Tamils tendency in achieving their objective.

The Tamil plantation labourers who migrated to Sri Lanka dominated in the North Eastern part of the Jaffna peninsula. These two Provinces of Sri Lanka became highly populated by Tamils. Historically speaking, the conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils was political in nature rather than racial. Firstly, the problem has arisen precisely because the Tamils in Sri Lanka, who were people bound together by a common heritage, a culture, and a language, have been denied their basic rights as equal citizens with the rest of the Sinhalese population.

The minorities in Sri Lanka particularly the Tamils, have been made to feel for too long that they are a part of the country and this process had been systematically enlarged ever since Ceylon was granted independence in February 1948. Taking into consideration the conditions of the Tamils, “the first Prime Minister D.S.Senanayake, had then appealed to the Tamils to accept the new soul bury constitution and declared on behalf of the Sinhalese that “I give the minority communities the sincere assurance that no harm need you fear at our hand in Sri Lanka”. But the assurance of the Sri Lankan Prime Minister did not last long, and soon things began to change and took a different turn.

3 The Hindu, 2, September 1988.
To begin with, the Tamil plantation labourers were deprived of citizenship in 1948, and there after, disenfranchised in 1949 by the Sri Lankan government soon after it assumed the power. Apart from this, regulations were enforced wherein proof of citizenship was made mandatory for issue of travel documents, for obtaining licenses and taking part in business or any other meaningful activity and for employment in the public and private sectors. These harsh measures imposed by Sri Lankan government were clearly in violation of the universal Declaration on Human Rights, which provides “Every one has a right to a nationality. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality, nor denied the right to change his nationality”.4

**The Nehru - John Kotelawala Pact: 1953**

The citizenship issue became a complex one during the Premiership of Nehru and John Kotelawala later on which culminated into an ethnic problem. Therefore, in order to find a solution to the ethnic problem an agreement was signed in 1953 by the two Prime Ministers. The main features of the agreement were as follows.

1) The Sri Lankan Government would register the name of all those people of Indian origin who desired to stay permanently in Sri Lanka.

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4 Ibid.
2) Those who did not wish to become citizens of Sri Lanka would be sent back to India.

3) Illegal migration from India to Sri Lanka was to be effectively checked.

4) Sri Lanka was to quickly dispose of the applications for citizenship pending for two years or more.

5) A separate electoral register was to be maintained for people of Indian origin to enable them to elect their representatives proportionately.

6) Those persons of Indian origin who desired, but could not be granted Lankan citizenship, would be allowed to stay on as aliens”.

However, the Sri Lankan government did not implement the Nehru-Kotelawala Agreement sincerely. As a result, large number of people of Indian origin could not get Sri Lankan citizenship as enshrined in the Agreement. Therefore, the people who were deprived of their citizenship became “Stateless persons”. This naturally aggravated the already tense situation and then relations between India and Sri Lanka further worsened over the ethnic issue. Annoyed over the implementation of the agreement the stateless persons indulged in large-scale violence and disturbances for which Sri Lanka blamed India.

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The Official Language Act: 1956

During the regime of Prime Minister Dudley S. Senanayake justice was assured to the Tamils. However, the discrimination against Tamils allegedly began after Senanayake's death. The subsequent government discarded the two-language system adopted by the United National Party during Senanayake's period. The conflict between the majority Sinhalese community and the sizeable Tamil minority aroused during the year 1956, when the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) government headed by S.W.R.D. Bandarannaike passed the Official Language Act in 1956. Which declared, “The Sinhala language would be the only official language of Sri Lanka”. In one stroke it deprived Tamilians of the use of their own language in official transactions and dealt a severe blow to their employment in government services and public bodies.

Tamils who constituted a majority in the North-Eastern Provinces instantly opposed this. Since they were already suffering from minority complex (though constituting majority in Northeastern Province) with many political, economic disabilities and inequalities saw a danger in the language decision which wanted to keep the Tamils out of the national main stream and to deprive them of the economic benefits of post-colonial economic development. Therefore, the Tamils strongly protested against the move and also took an opportunity to press their demand to have

\[^{6}\text{Foreign Affairs Reports, 36 (7-10) July-October, 1987, p-125.}\]
autonomy in the North-Eastern Province where they constituted majority. This laid the foundation for the beginning of the ethnic violence in Sri Lanka, which recurred with varying intensity in 1958, 1961, 1971, and 1983 and recently in 1987.

Subsequently, in 1957 the government led by Bandarnaike signed an agreement with federal party leader, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam to reconcile the Tamils. Under this agreement, Tamil was recognized as the official language of the minority. But unfortunately Bandaranaike backed out of the agreement owing to the Sinhala nationalist pressure. To soothe the Tamil feeling the government enacted Tamil language (special provision) Act in 1958, but in 1960 the government declared that Sinhala would be the only official language as envisaged in the only act of Sinhala 1956. This indifferent attitude of the Sri Lankan government made the Tamils unhappy and paved the way for further discrimination.

The Shastri-Sirimavo Pact of 1964:

In order to find a lasting solution for the stateless people of Sri Lanka both Shastri and Sirimavo Bandaranaike signed an Agreement on the vexations issue during the latter's visit to New Delhi in October 1964. “According to the agreement, out of 9.75 lakh persons Ceylon would accept as Ceylonese citizens 3 lakh and India 5.25 lakh persons. The status and future of the remaining
1.50-lakh persons would be the subject matter of separate agreement between the two governments. It was also agreed that the admission to Ceylonese citizenship should be spread over to a period of 15 years and the two processes should keep pace with each other. This obviously created a permanent barrier between the two ethnic groups i.e. Tamils and the Sinhalese towards an amicable relationship.

The Indira Gandhi- Sirimavo Pact of 1974:

To further the agreement of 1964, on 24th January 1974 Indira Gandhi – Sirimavo Pact was signed. In the earlier 1964 Pact which did not take up the issue of 1,50,000 stateless persons, the matter was taken up by the two, taking the respective quota shares of two countries to 6,00,000 and 3,75,000. Nevertheless, the notable feature was that the 1974 Pact was not implemented as the 1964 (Shastri-Sirimavo Pact) was extended up to October 1981. Therefore, the non-starting of the Indira Gandhi-Sirimavo Pact (1974) resulted in accumulation of a large number of applicants for both Indian and Sri Lankan citizenships. “As per the quota prescribed for India and Sri Lanka under the 1964 and 1974 Agreements, the number of people still to be granted citizenship by the former raised around 2.26 lakh while the latter was to absorb a total of 2.12 lakh persons. After the inclusion of 75,000 persons in

8 Quoted in Shri Ram Sharma "Lal Bahadur Shastri: An Era of Transition in Indian Foreign Policy, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, p-28
India’s quota, it still had a shortfall of around 94,000 persons to fulfill its commitment. In the case of Sri Lanka, the surplus of applications remained substantial.\(^{10}\)

In 1978, President Jayewardene initiated his efforts to find a solution to the problem of stateless persons. On 30\(^{th}\) October 1981 the 1964 agreement was further extended till September 1987. In September 1987 all the 9,75,000 who were identified as stateless under the 1962 Pact were to be conferred either Indian or Sri Lankan citizenship so that the problem could be solved.

**The Ethnic Crisis During Indira Gandhi’s Period:**

The reemergence of Indira Gandhi to power in 1980 was an important development in so far as the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka was concerned. Because, it was during August 1982 - May 1983 that she played the important role of a mediator in defusing the ethnic tension through her good offices. But,\(^{11}\) it was during July 1983; the worst ever riots broke out between the Sri Lankan security forces and the Tamil militants. It was during which attacks were carried out on lives and property including the business and industrial establishments. Regarding the 1983 riots it was suspected that those within the government perpetuated the violence. The large-scale violence was in reply to the government attempts to accommodate the moderate Tamil leadership by the Tamil Chauvinists.\(^{11}\)

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\(^{11}\) M.S Kodandswami, *“Sri Lankan Crisis”*, Authors Press, New Delhi, 2000, pp-92-93.
The most important and immediate provocation for the 1983 riots was the killing of Sri Lankan soldiers by the Tamil militants. This ensued intense fight between the Tamil militants and Sri Lankan army, resulting in heavy causalities from both sides and damage of hundreds of buildings and factories. Some 300-500 prisoners broke out of the high security Wellikada prison and killed nearly 35 Tamils. As a result of these riots 400 Tamils died and nearly 1,75,000 were rendered homeless. However, the July 1983 riots badly shaken the political authority of Jayewardene and also exposed the flaws in the administrative system that had been built up under Jayewardene. His image suffered a lot both locally as well as internationally. Commenting on the ethnic issue in Sri Lanka Indira Gandhi said, "The loss of property of Tamil speaking people there and of stateless persons and those of Indian origin have sent a wave of anguish not only in Tamil Nadu alone but all over the country." Indira Gandhi once again reiterated that the political solution would be the only way to resolve ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. By the 1983 riots Sri Lanka realized that military solution would not be the effective means to crush the Tamil militancy.

In the wake of the ethnic violence of July 1983, about 30,000 refugees had entered India from Sri Lanka. Despite grave provocation by Sri Lankan Prime Minister, New Delhi reaffirmed its

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12 M.S.Kodandswami, Supra No.11, pp-92-93.
desire for peace and its opposition to secession by any group and to all forms of situation violence. In fact, the total mishandling of the ethnic situation by the government of Sri Lanka had taken the island to the brink of a civil war.\textsuperscript{14}

After 1983 riots the Tamil militants renewed their demand for autonomy and separate "homeland" consisting of Northern Jaffna peninsula with eastern district of Batticalao. However, the Sri Lankan government was reluctant to go beyond the existing D.D.C's (District Development Councils) that had little power, meager funds and were ignored by the local officials. This naturally made the Tamils express resentment on the working of D.D.C's. Accordingly, in June 1984, President Jayewardene came out with his own formula to solve Tamil's problem. He wanted that the TULF should renounce its demand for a separate state. He further, assured them that power would be devolved to Zonal council, which would be constituted by merger of DDC into Provincial Council. His scheme will be subject to approval by referendum in the entire island. He also wanted that Trincomalee to be administered by the Central government\textsuperscript{15}. However, Jayewardene's fresh proposals failed to influence the Tamil Militants, and the Tamil militants, who were not willing to discuss any thing less than a separate "homeland", rejected it.


Therefore, from 1983 onwards the Tamils apart from the issues of citizenship, language etc, decided to concentrate more on demand for a separate "homeland", i.e. Tamil Eelam comprising of Northern and Eastern parts of the Sri Lanka's Jaffna Peninsula which were mainly dominated by a sizeable Tamil population.

**Ethnic Crisis During Rajiv Gandhi's Period:**

As we have discussed earlier, Rajiv Gandhi had to deal with several internal as well as external problems as head of the government. Soon after the assassination of Mrs.Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi assumed the office of the Prime Minister of India. During his broadcast to the nation after assuming the office he said, "We have inherited a well tested and consistent foreign policy which serves our national interest. We have always believed in working for peace. Our policy is to be friends with all countries on the basis of reciprocity and mutual benefits". Rajiv Gandhi emphasized the need for immediate solution to the complex Sri Lankan ethnic problem that has become a bone of contention between the Indo-Sri Lankan relations. Accordingly, Rajiv Gandhi appointed Romesh Bhandari as Prime Minister's special envoy to deal with the crisis.

Therefore, the first and foremost issue that Rajiv Gandhi dealt with was the Tamil stateless issue. In order to find a lasting solution to the stateless Persons issue India under the leadership of

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Rajiv Gandhi reached an agreement with Sri Lankan government in January 1985. According to the understanding reached in Colombo, India agreed to go ahead with the process of conferring Indian citizenship on all those who had sought it prior to October 30, 1981".17

In continuation of the 1985 understanding, another settlement was reached in January 1986 following the talks between the then Indian high commissioner to Colombo, J.N. Dixit, Lalith Athulatmudali and S. Thondaman. As per the 1986 settlement, Sri Lanka agreed to confer its citizenship on an additional 94,000 stateless persons. India, on its part, gave an undertaking to grant citizenship to all the 5.06 Lakh persons who had applied until 30 October 1981. The figures were also to take care of the natural increase".18 Further, 94,000 stateless people were the result of "the breach of the 1964 and 1974 agreements". As part of the settlement, India had already granted citizenship to 4, 21,207 persons. It therefore had to absorb the balance of only 84,793 to make the 5.06 lakh. As regards Sri Lanka, it agreed to absorb all the 4.69-lakh persons within a span of 18 months. By 1986 only 1,97,535 persons were conferred Sri Lankan citizenship and the government was expected to absorb the remaining 2,71,465 persons by September 1987 in order to complete its commitment (i.e. 4.69 lakh). 19

18 Quoted in P.Saghadevan, Supra No. 10, p-219.
19 (Ibid.,) Quoted in P.Sahadevan, Supra No.10, p-219.
However, Sri Lanka, which was supposed to carry out its obligation of granting citizenship, started hob-knobbing on the residual stateless persons and adopted dilatory approach in granting the citizenship. Further, Sri Lanka deliberately linked the residual stateless persons issue to the ethnic crisis in the island. As a result, Sri Lanka failed to adhere to the period set for granting the citizenship to those stateless persons. This naturally made the Sri Lankan Tamils unhappy and provoked them to indulge in violence. Perhaps, it was during Rajiv Gandhi’s period that the stateless issue assumed more significance along with the LTTE’s demand for a separate independent Eelam.

The ethnic issue, which was a burning problem during the time of Rajiv Gandhi, aroused mainly because the minority Tamils in Sri Lanka were deprived of their fundamental rights and were treated as second-class citizens. This kind of an attitude on the part of the Sri Lankan government created an atmosphere of discontentment and animosity in the minds of Tamils. It is also due to the ill treatment meted out to the Tamils by the Singhalese that further widened the gap between the two groups. Therefore, the Tamils in Sri Lanka decided to fight for their rights and wanted to have their own separate homeland, which was mainly dominated by Tamils in Sri Lanka. As a result, the Tamilians joined hands with Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam, in Sri Lanka to fight against injustice. When the LTTE became a savior and sole representative of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Tamilians heaved a sigh of relief.
The ethnic violence, which broke out during the first half of the 1987, was one of bloodiest ever in the history of Sri Lanka. The main reason behind the violence was the minority Tamils’ demand for an independent Eelam, which should be an autonomous body as an integral part of the federal state of Sri Lanka. But the Sri Lankan government was reluctant to concede the demand put forth by the Tamils. Because Sri Lanka was under the impression that conceding the demand of the Tamils might not only endanger its interests but it might also go against the interests of the Singhalese as well. This naturally aggravated the tense situation.

It was during this critical juncture that the Tamils, who were a minority in Sri Lanka, whole-heartedly supported the LTTE, which was fighting for the cause of autonomy of Northeastern part of Jaffna peninsula as the sole representative of Tamils. The LTTE under the leadership of V. Prabhakaran received both material and moral support from the Tamils of Sri Lanka and decided to continue to wage a war against the Sri Lankan government to protect their interests. Commenting on the financial assistance received by the LTTE leader, Lalith Athulathmudali, the then National Security Minister of Sri Lanka said, “MGR (M.G.Ramachandran) was giving the money not for relief but directly to the LTTE. In the past all his donations have been used to buy arms and ammunition. We thought this time the money would be used to buy sophisticated anti-air craft missiles”.20

The Thimpu Talks:

Sri Lankan government did not concede the demand put forth by the LTTE, which was against giving autonomy to the North Eastern Province. At last the LTTE in order to meet their legitimate demand geared up its people with arms and ammunition and went on a large-scale violence throughout the country. Killings and counter killings continued unabatedly in spite of several appeals of the Sri Lankan government to ceasefire. Even Sri Lankan President held continuous talks with Prime Minister of India at various levels to provide a reasonable measure of autonomy to the Tamil areas, failed to convince the Tamil militants. In June 1985, at the initiative of Rajiv Gandhi, “the leaders of the Tamil militant movements which were engaged in an armed struggle for the establishment of a separate Tamil Eelam state in the North and East of the island of Sri Lanka, agreed to a ‘cease-fire’ as a preliminary step to creating a ‘congenial’ atmosphere for peace talks”.21 In response to Rajiv Gandhi’s initiative, the Sri Lankan government decided to send a delegation led by H.W.Jayewardene, the younger brother of President Jayewardene to Thimpu for talks. “On 18 June 1985, a ceasefire was announced and talks were held at Thimpu from 8 to 13 July between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamils represented by the TULF and the militants- LTTE, TELO (Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization) EPRLF (Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front), EROS (Eelam Revolutionary

21 www.tamilnation.org.in/frame/india.
Organization of Students) and PLOT (Peoples Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam). However, the offer of the Sri Lankan government marked no substantial advance on the earlier proposals of 1984. They envisaged only District Councils and Provincial Councils with very modest legislature and executive powers and further more, they were to be totally dependent on the president".\textsuperscript{22} These proposals were rejected by the Tamil militants, and talks discontinued, following the massacre of more than 200 Tamils by the Sri Lankan armed forces.

Great hopes set on the Thimpu talks failed to provide provincial autonomy to the Tamil areas of Northeastern province by the Sri Lankan government. Even the efforts made by the Indian diplomacy to bring the Sri Lankan government around to accept the legitimate demand of some form of provincial autonomy failed to yield any desired effects. Commenting on Thimpu talks, Bandaranaike on 16 July 1985 told that she had anticipated the results because in her view Jayewardene was not sincere about coming to terms with Tamils. She also emphasized the negative approach of Prime Minister Premadasa and the National Security Minister Athulathmudali, which would affect the negotiation process as well as India’s mediatory efforts\textsuperscript{23}. The subsequent developments proved that she was correct in her assessment. Even India also expressed its apprehension on the talks. The continued negative

\textsuperscript{22} Quoted by A.M.Vohra, Indian Peace Keeping in Sri Lanka, in Satishkumar (Ed) Year Book on India’s Foreign Policy 1989, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-85.
approach of the Sri Lankan government made the Tamil militants choose the path of violence to meet their legitimate demand.

**The Second Thimpu conference:**

The talks during the first conference of the Thimpu failed to arrive at a consensus on the proposals put forth by the Tamil groups to settle the ethnic issue. As a result, the second Thimpu talks held on 12 August 1985 and H. Jayewardene led the Sri Lankan delegation. Before the talks, "The Tamil militants and the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leaders forwarded four proposals as a framework for resolving the crisis, namely,"

- a) recognition of the separate national identity of the Tamils,
- b) respect for the integrity of the traditional Tamil homeland,
- c) recognition of the right to self-determination of the Tamils,
- d) citizenship rights for all the Tamils living in Sri Lanka".24

However, at the second Thimpu conference Hector Jayewardene rejected the demands put forth by the Tamil militant groups and TULF and bluntly stated that the negotiation had taken place between two governments and in the APC (All Party Conference) meeting government has already announced its intention to grant Sri Lankan citizenship to all stateless persons. "He said that implementation of any agreement reached at these talks require as a pre-condition, the pre-renunciation of all form of militant action.

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All militant groups must surrender their arms and equipment. All training camps inside Sri Lanka and abroad must be closed. Refugees must be permitted to return, unmolested to area in which they resided. An amnesty for all violation of criminal law pursuance to agitation and the militant group will only be granted after the government is satisfied that their pre-condition have been observed.²⁵

The pre-conditions of H. Jayewardene were not in the interests of the Tamil militant groups, and therefore, they decided not to accept the same. While the talks were going on, reports came in that a large number of Tamils had been brutally massacred in Vavuniya in the north. As a result, the six Tamil organizations walked out in protest. The Tamil group also called off ceasefire, which was in the operation from June 18 after Rajiv–Jayewardene summit talk. The Tamils, right from the beginning, were of the opinion that the Sri Lankan government was indifferent to their demands especially after the Thimpu talks.

Therefore, “the collapse of the Thimpu process and the failure of fresh attempts in New Delhi left both India and Sri Lanka, as well as the Tamil groups in a bitter mood. By March 1986, New Delhi began to wonder whether Jayewardene was keen on a political settlement at all. A full-scale civil war threatened the Island”.²⁶ Further, the continuing violence after the Thimpu talks was

²⁵ Quoted in Ravikant Dubey, Supra No. 15, p-105.
²⁶ Quoted in Shipra Mehra, Supra No. 14, p-122.
primarily due to the dilatory approach, which the Sri Lankan government adopted in responding to the legitimate demands of the Tamil’s.

Sri Lanka, which wanted to solve the Tamils problem solely, depended upon military solution. Several appeals made to Sri Lankan government by India for using the political solution to resolve the ethnic problem went unheeded. Even, Rajiv Gandhi soon after assuming the office of the Prime Minister asked the Sri Lankan government to exercise restrain from military action and seek peaceful settlement for the Tamil problem. However, his appeal too did not influence the Sri Lankan government. As a result, the government of India threatened to withdraw its good offices as a mediator in resolving the ethnic issue, if Sri Lanka continued the use of its military force. Accordingly, “then Indian High Commissioner called on president Jayawardene and stated that India saw no point in continuing its peace efforts in face of military offensive.”  

Further, Romesh Bhandari Rajiv Gandhi’s Special envoy commenting on the ethnic issue said, “The problem in Sri Lanka is not our problem, but we have got sucked into it”. He also said, "India had offered her good offices for a political solution to the problem. Military interference would not help to solve the problem. “The Tamil movement can not be crushed, and neither can the Tamils overthrow the Government in Sri Lanka”.

27 Quoted in A.M.Vohra, Supra, No-22, p-85
28 Indian Express (New Delhi) 23 May 1986.
of this, government of India threatened to withdraw its good offices in resolving Sri Lankan ethnic problem, if the islands government continued with its military offensive.

**December 1986 Proposals:**

After the failure of Thimpu talks, there was no progress whatsoever in respect of ethnic conflict of Sri Lankan Tamils. But when Jayewardene had attended the second SAARC Summit at Bangalore in November 1986, both Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene discussed the ethnic conflict and reaffirmed their commitment to a political solution of the Islands ethnic crisis. As a follow up of the discussion Jayewardene had with Rajiv Gandhi, at Bangalore, the then External Affairs Minster K.Natwarsingh and then Home and Public Grievances Minister P.Chidambaram initiated a new round of talks on the Indian side. These talks were devoted to the task of bridging the difference in the positions of the Sri Lankan government and Tamil militant leadership. Accordingly, “both Natwarsingh and Chidambaram visited Sri Lanka in 1986 to discuss a political solution along the lines of “Eastern Province Trifurcation Proposals” of J.R.Jayewrdene. India suggested that the predominantly Sinhala Amparai electorate to be delinked from Eastern Province and attached to Uva Province. The proposals that emerged as a result of discussions of this Indian delegation (who left Sri Lanka on December 19, 1986) came to be known as the
“December 19th Proposals”.29 (also sometimes, as Chidambaram proposals).

In short, these proposals sought to grant the Tamils an important part of their demand, namely, to leave the Northern and Eastern Province in a unified form, but minus the Sinhala dominated Amparai District, of the Eastern Province. In effect, therefore, it was an attempt to create a Tamil homeland by another name. Rajiv Gandhi welcomed the finalization of the “December 19 proposals” in Colombo by Natwarsingh and Chidambaram during their visit. His plan was to use it as a basis for further talks with TULF, LTTE and other Tamil groups.

However, the Sri Lankan government did not implement these proposals, because of the Sinhalese insistence on a military solution to the ethnic conflict. Therefore, the Sri Lankan government had not only gone back on the formula it agreed with the two Indian Ministers K.Natwarsing and P.Chidambaram, but had in effect rejected the mediating services of India and moved towards a clearly military solution. The initiative failed, “largely due to President Jayewardene’s failure to use either his forceful personality or his towering parliamentary majority to assert himself at such a critical moment in his country’s history. At this point of time Sri Lanka was ready for and required statesmanship of the highest order”.30

29 www.tamilnation.org/intframe/india
As a result, India which sought to reconcile the interests of Sinhalese and Tamil communities by elaborating a political formula, to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Tamils for one form of autonomy or another within the frame-work of a united and territorially integrated Sri Lanka failed in its initiative. This was due to the Sri Lankan move towards military solution to the ethnic conflict. In view of this, the government of India threatened to withdraw its good offices in resolving ethnic problem, if the Sri Lankan government continued with its military offensive.

But Jayewardene commenting on the ethnic issue, in January 1987, said, “I shall have a military solution to what I believe is a military problem and that now I have more weapons and countries like Pakistan are training my men”.31 The tough stand of J.Jayawardene on the military solution to the ethnic problem resulted in a large-scale violence in the Jaffna peninsula where a majority of Tamils under the banner of LTTE renewed their struggle against Sri Lankan government. But the determined Tamil resistance, the continued blood letting in the fratricidal conflict and the pressure of India compelled Sri Lanka to go in for political negotiations.

Economic Blockade:

The talks between India and Sri Lanka over the ethnic issue froze and were put into the cold storage/backburner. As a result, the Tamil militant groups saw no breakthrough in their legitimate demand for Tamil Eelam and lost faith in Sri Lankan government. Disgusted over the failure of a series of talks the Tamils had with the Sri Lankan government over the autonomy issue, decided to continue their violent struggle to meet their legitimate demand. The fight ensued between Tamil militants and Sri Lankan security forces. When the violence escalated and went out of control, the Sri Lankan government, which was bent upon military solution to the ethnic problem, asked the LTTE to declare ceasefire. “When there was no sign of ceasefire from the LTTE cadre, the Sri-Lankan government announced “Operation Liberation” in the first week of May 1987 to end violence in the Jaffna peninsula. Sri Lanka, which continued with a policy of crushing the Tamils through military force, made all possible efforts to impose “economic blockade” on the northeastern part of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government imposed an economic blockade on the Jaffna peninsula in January 1987”.

As the first step of blockade, the Sri Lankan government cut-off all the communication with Northeastern province of the island. Food grains, oil and other essential commodities were barred from

32 A.M.Vohra, Supra No.22, p-86.
entering into the province. The Tamils found it difficult to procure the essential commodities and suffered a lot with the shortage of food, medicine, oil etc. India expressed its deep concern over the economic blockade imposed by the government of Sri Lanka on the Northern Jaffna Peninsula where the Tamil population is concentrated. Taking into consideration the inhuman act of the Sri Lankan government and after understanding the wretched conditions of the Tamils, Indian government asked J.N.Dixit to convey its concern to Sri Lankan President. “Accordingly, he called on the President Jayewardene and spelt out these concerns in some detail, also stressed the impact these developments would have on the whole situation in the island and particularly the on-going negotiations for a political settlement of the ethnic problem. Dixit also drew the attention of the President to the “serious and grim situation” prevailing in the peninsula for the last few days following suspension of distribution of petroleum products’.

Sri Lankan President Jayewardene was reported to have taken note of the Indian concern but did not commit himself as to what his government proposed to do to alleviate the hardship of the civilians in the peninsula. “In the mean time reports from Jaffna said normal life in the area was coming to a standstill due to the shortage of essential commodities. Thirty to forty lorries loaded with petroleum products and other items were held up at the security

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camp at Elephant Pass, the gateway to the peninsula. Even after expressing serious concern over the conditions of Tamils in Jaffna, the Sri Lankan government continued its economic blockade and military offensive against the Tamils. Accordingly, it was during this period that the then Indian High Commissioner J.N. Dixit in a message to Jayewardene, said, “the Sri Lanka government should stop pursuing the military option and stop the violence it was unleashing against the Tamils in the North and East. It should immediately lift the economic blockade of the Jaffna Peninsula; it should affirm its commitment to the December 19, 1986 proposals as a basis and a beginning point for negotiations with the representatives of the Sri Lankan Tamils, and if these steps were not taken but the military option pursued by Colombo, the fighting “will be prolonged” and the situation “will escalate.” This political message was conveyed to Jayewardene on behalf of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

After the strong message from India, Sri Lankan government started changing its attitude towards Tamils in Jaffna. It also took into consideration the plight of the Tamils and the gravity of the situation prevailing in the peninsula and decided to ease the situation by lifting the fuel blockade. Accordingly, “the Sri Lankan government officially lifted the fuel embargo on Jaffna on March 1987. A government statement said, restrictions on the sale of

kerosene, engine oil and firewood had been removed and petrol and diesel would be rationed'.

While the normalcy was returning to the blockade affected island, suddenly the violence broke out and the massacre took place in the eastern Trincomalee district. 'At least 107 persons, majority of them believed to be Sinhalese, were killed and 60 others were injured on April 17 1987, when militants sprayed machine-gun bullets on three passenger buses and two lorries. Within few days a powerful blast took place in Colombo, which killed several people, and some 400 injured'. The Sri Lankan government believed that it was the LTTE and EROs (Eelam Revolutionary Organisation) together that were behind the massacre and the Colombo blast respectively.

Immediately after the blast incident, there were several cases of looting of shops owned by Tamils. Some Tamil passengers were dragged out of their vehicles and assaulted'. The situation became tense and started taking a different shape in the island because of continued attacks on Tamils. Curfew was imposed, and both police and army were pressed into service to contain the violence. However, the situation was brought under control at last. But the Sri Lankan government, which had decided to crush the militants, continued air attack on the Jaffna peninsula. Tilak

Ratnakar, the then Chairman of the government's media center, said, Air Force planes stuck four locations in the rebel dominated Jaffna peninsula. The government would continue bombing raids against known militants targets to try to get them to end their attacks on civilians.39

India felt severely upset and deeply disturbed over these developments. As a result, “in a statement the government of India strongly condemned the escalation of violence represented by the arial attacks and other military measures taken by the Sri Lankan government, which had resulted in large-scale civilian casualties. Further, the government also expressed deep concern over the reported statement of Prime Minister Premadas foreclosing the political option.40

However, India's strong protest did not bear any fruit as the pressure was mounting on the Sri Lankan President Jayewardene both within and outside the government to take possible stringent action on the Tamil militants to wipe out from the Jaffna Peninsula. Bowing to the pressure, the Sri Lankan government announced “Operation Libberation” in the first week of May 1987 to end violence in the Jaffna Peninsula. Sri Lanka continued its policy of crushing Tamils through military force, made all possible efforts to impose “economic blockade” on the North-Eastern part of Sri Lanka. Accordingly, on 26th May 1987 Jayewardene was forced to

40 Ibid.,
launch an operation involving 8000 Sri Lankan ground troops to fight to the finish". They cut off all food supplies to the Tamil areas. Jayewardene's action resulted into large-scale influx of refugees into India, thus adding to the already unbearable burden on Tamilnadu. The presence of refugees had posed great threat to the Indian economic and social system.

Taking note of the military action and the ruthless attitude of the Sri Lankan government towards the Tamils, on May 28, Rajiv Gandhi, addressing a press conference "gave a clear warning to Sri Lanka that India would intervene to safeguard the welfare of Sri Lankan Tamils against the military onslaught. "The military operation is adding to the carnage. Hundreds have died in the last few days. Horrific losses in innocent lives of this magnitude are totally disproportionate to the avowed aim of exterminating the Tamil militant groups. It is apparent now that Sri Lankan government was buying time over the last few years for pursuing a military option". When the statement was brought to the notice of Jayewardene, he got enraged and reportedly saying "India can go to hell".

The Sri Lankan government's rigid policy towards Tamils naturally posed a great challenge to Rajiv Gandhi's leadership. Because the ethnic conflict altogether took a different turn due to

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41 The Hindu, 28 May 1987.
42 J.N.Dixit, Supra No.23, p-97.
43 Ibid., (J.N.Dixit, Supra No.23, p-98.)
the unleashed violence against LTTE by the Sri Lankan government. The Tamils within Sri Lanka were hard-pressed in a near-chaotic situation. The situation became a boiling cauldron. At the same time, opinion in Tamilnadu was hardening and there were serious possibilities of it taking independent action to support the Tamils in Jaffna. In addition to this, there were political and emotional pressures on Rajiv Gandhi compelling him to take some concrete action to safeguard the interests of Tamils and bringing the Sri Lankan government to the negotiating table.

This was the context in which Rajiv Gandhi’s leadership decided to break the blockade of Jaffna by sending essential supplies by sea on 2nd June 1987. Accordingly, prior to the dispatch of essential supplies Rajiv Gandhi sent a message to Jayewardene that "India would be sending 20 fishing boats from Rameshwaram which would reach Kalmunai Point, five kilometers off the Northern coast of Jaffna Peninsula. Escorted by an India offshore patrol vessel, "Vikram" of the Indian Coast Guard fleet".44 However, the Sri Lankan Navy blocked the Indian vessels carrying essential supplies and asked them to return to India. This obviously prompted Rajiv Gandhi to search for other avenues to supply the humanitarian assistance to the Tamils.

**The Air-Dropping:**

In view of the situation that has developed in the Northeastern part of the Sri Lanka, India decided to render urgent humanitarian assistance to the Tamils.

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aid to the people of the area affected by the bombing and economic blockade. Accordingly, India sent vessels flying with Indian Red Cross Society flag to Jaffna with food and medicine without any military escort. However, the Sri Lankan security forces did not allow these boats to enter the Trincomalee harbour. Taking into consideration the plight of the Tamils, “Consequent upon the refusal by Colombo to allow our unarmed relief supplies to get through Jaffna on June 3, 1987 New Delhi, decided to airdrop relief supplies on Jaffna on June 4th with five AN-32 transport aircraft, and four Mirage fighter-bombers with full authority to return any ground fire or aerial resistance to destroy its source (Operation Poomalai)”. Indian government with the help of Indian army on June 4th 1987 airdropped the food grains, medicines, clothing etc., over the hard-pressed Tamils of Jaffna peninsula thereby blatantly intervening the border and violating the air space of Sri Lanka. This act of air dropping by the Indian army evoked strong opposition and resentment from the leaders of the Sri Lankan Government. Condemning the air dropping of relief material, the then Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Premadasa while addressing a function in Colombo to mark the Environmental day said, “Coming here and dropping food and running away is an act of cowardice. The Sri Lankan people unitedly condemn this act of India and express our opposition and hatred”. At this juncture the leaders of the Sri Lankan government could not do any thing except protest.

45 Quoted in Shipra Mehra., Supra No. 14, p-128.
46 Asian Recorder, Supra, No-1, p-19600.
Nevertheless, prior to the air dropping the Indian government had informed well in advance the Sri Lankan government about the proposed airdrop. It was the then Minister of State for External Affairs summoned Sri Lankan High Commissioner to India Bernard Tilakratne...and told him that "the government of India would commence air dropping relief materials over Jaffna and also gave a six-point written message which asked him to convey to this to his government".\textsuperscript{47} Therefore, India's act of air dropping the relief materials over the Sri Lankan territory was not an act of cowardice as stated by the Sri Lankan Prime Minister Premadasa but an act of courage (valour) which was carried out with prior intimation to the Sri Lankan government.

After airdropping of relief materials by the Indian Air Force on 4\textsuperscript{th} June 1987, the relations between Sri Lanka and India got deteriorated further. Following the violation of its air space by India, Sri Lanka approached Pakistan for a sophisticated air-defense cover, which is expected to heighten tension in the region. It also received assistance from Israel and Britain in the form of mercenary training and aerial combat. The visit of President Jayewardene to Lahore in 1985 was the beginning of this bilateral military agreement against India and the air defense cover to be provided by Pakistan is a clear joining of forces against India. Taking into consideration the arming of Sri Lanka, Rajiv Gandhi, on the eve of the mercy mission to Sri Lanka, while addressing a convention of

\textsuperscript{47} J.N.Dixit, Supra No.23, p-105.

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the Gujarat Pradesh Congress (I) in Surendranagar, he said, “Foreign mercenary groups were aiding the Sri Lankan army offensive. Forces from Israel, Pakistan, South Africa and the UK are present in Sri Lanka”.

The act of air dropping (Operation Poomalai) by Indian Air Force on Jaffna Peninsula was criticized by some leaders at home and abroad for violating the air space and infringement of Sri Lanka’s sovereignty. It was the general opinion that India should not have got involved at all in Sri Lanka’s internal affairs. Bangladesh’s Chowdhury commenting on India’s airdrop said, “we are clear on our opposition to the violation of neighbours air space. You have not been able to get a single supporter from any countries in the world. Even Subramanian Swamy, a hawk on Sri Lanka viewed that “either we don’t violate the air space of a friendly country or we go in for a full scale in invasion and solve the problem. What we are doing is training the militants and violating Sri Lankan air space and still claiming the right to mediate. No wonder our neighbours hold us in contempt.”

Even some people equated Indian action of air dropping to the US invasion on Kampuchea, “the Soviet intervention in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), the British-French intervention in Egypt leading to the Suez crisis, Turkey’s intervention in Cyprus, breaking up that country, the USA’s uninhibited interventions in Vietnam,
Cuba, Granada, Panama, Libya and Haiti, the Chinese intrusion into Vietnam in 1979 and into the South China Sea, to lay claim to the sprately islands etc.,\textsuperscript{50} But, India’s violation of Sri Lankan air space and Its intervention in Sri Lankan affairs, can not be equated with the above interventions. But India’s air dropping of civil supplies was on humanitarian ground which was the “closest parallel to the Berlin airlift 1961”.\textsuperscript{51}

Further, some countries also held that India’s interference in Sri Lanka was not only against the principle of Panchasheel but also against the SAARC declaration of peaceful settlement of disputes and non-interference in the internal affairs of the member countries. Nevertheless, “these countries were not aware of “the consistent violation of Human Rights of the Sri Lankan Tamils by their own government, and the tension it has generated in India, which might have affected the unity and integrity of India itself”.\textsuperscript{52} However, the decision to airdrop relief supplies was taken under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi “after much cogitation and extensive consultations with the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, Intelligence agencies, Service Chiefs and the Foreign office”.\textsuperscript{53}

On the contrary what India should do in that hour of critical circumstances was not made clear by any of the critics. The act of Indian air force in airdropping on Jaffna was justified on the

\textsuperscript{50} J.N.Dixit, India’s Foreign Policy, 1947-2003, Picus Books, New Delhi, 1998, p-186.
\textsuperscript{51} J.N.Dixit, Across the Borders: Fifty Years of India’s Foreign Policy, Picus Books, New Delhi, 1998, p-186.
\textsuperscript{52} J.N.Dixit, Supra No.23, p-111.
humanitarian ground at that point of time; otherwise thousands of innocent Tamil people would have died of starvation. It was after this the relations between India and Sri Lanka got deteriorated still further. In fact, Rajiv Gandhi had four objectives in mind while ordering the airdrops; “help for the Tamils; a message to Colombo that Delhi could not be a silent spectator to a military onslaught on the civilians of Jaffna; a message to the Tamils that in the final analysis it was not the Tiger or even Tamilnadu which could be their protector but India; and warning to foreign powers that India was not going silently to suffer their intrigues in the internal affairs of a non-aligned country that belongs to the Indian realm”.54

The reaction of the Western countries was ambiguous and mildly critical. They however, acknowledged that the Indian action was a political necessity and inevitable in the context of India’s involvement in the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis”.55 It would be relevant to mention here that States do deviate from the formal stipulations of international law for the sake of stability, security and peace. Nevertheless, in the Indian context the air dropping of relief supplies was purely on humanitarian ground and it was not aimed at interfering in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka.

After the June incidents, the Tamils lost faith in the Sri Lankan government and started looking more towards India to protect their rights and save them from the Sinhalese wrath. It was during this

54 Quoted in Shipra Mehra, Supra No.14, pp-128, 129.
55 J.N.Dixit, Supra No.23, p-111.
period that Indian government also decided to take active role as for as the Tamil issue is concerned. Because, India feared that a persistent instability in its small Southern neighbour might spread over to Tamilnadu or give other powers an opportunity to intervene. By the time, the President of Sri Lanka came to realize that Sri Lanka would not be able to take on the Tamils on its own, indicated his desire for some kind of agreement between the two countries for resolving the ethnic problem. As a result, a stage was set to work out the modalities for an agreement between the two countries by the representatives of the two countries.

The Indo - Sri Lankan Agreement: 1987

In order to resolve the long-standing ethnic crisis both India and Sri Lanka under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi and Jayawardhane signed the historic Agreement on 29th July 1987 in Colombo. The Accord provided an opportunity for joint action by the two countries to settle the ethnic conflict. Under this accord "the government of Sri Lanka permitted the northern and eastern provinces to form one administrative unit with one elected provincial council with one Governor, one Chief Minister, and one board of Ministers. A referendum was provided to enable the people of the eastern province to either decide to remain linked with the northern province or to constitute its own provincial council. The devolution of power to the councils was a "residual matter" to be negotiated between the two governments within a period of six
weeks on the basis of negotiations conducted between 4th May and 9th December 1986 (between the TULF and the government of Sri Lanka). The objectives of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement were as follows.

1.1 Desiring to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka:

1.2 Acknowledging that Sri-Lanka is a “multi-ethnic” and a multi-lingual society” consisting, interalia, of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims (Moors) and Burghers:

1.3 Recognizing that each ethnic group has a distinct cultural and linguistic identity, which has to be carefully nurtured:

1.4 Also recognizing that the Northern and the Eastern Provinces have been areas of historical habitation of Sri Lankan Tamil speaking peoples, who have at all times hitherto lived together in this territory with other ethnic groups:

1.5 Conscious of the necessity of strengthening the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, and preserving its character as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious plural society in which all citizens can live in equality, safety and harmony, and prosper and fulfill their aspirations:

56 Quoted in Satishkumar., (Ed) Year Book on India’s Foreign Policy, 1989, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p-86.

57 http://www.tamilnation.org/intframe/
It was also resolved that the Indian Government will take all the necessary steps to ensure that Indian Territory is not used for activities prejudicial to the interests of Sri-Lanka.

The Sri-Lankan government will ensure that no such activities are carried out on its soil, which is detrimental to India's security concerns.

The Indo-Sri Lankan agreement was a testimony to the fact that non-aligned countries through their own efforts are fully capable of demonstrating the political will to resolve the crisis in their mutual interests. The pivotal role-played by Rajiv Gandhi in resolving the ethnic problem of Tamils in Sri-Lanka with timely action resulted in peace to a considerable extent in the strife-torn Island. In fact, his role in resolving the ethnic problem was highly commended and widely appreciated from all sections of the international community. "President Reagan hailed it in a personal message to Rajiv Gandhi. The USSR, France, Australia, Algeria, Bangladesh, the Netherlands and the EEC welcomed it. Soviet Deputy Prime Minister, Y.Kamentsev, officially declared that the Soviet Union regards the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord as an example of how a regional conflict could be solved. Even the weekly Beijing Review acknowledged in an article that the "peace accord is bound to bring about at least a temporary truce between Sri Lanka's Tamil minority and the Buddhist majority Sinhalese."58

58 A.M.Vohra Supra No.22, p-87.
Rajiv Gandhi while addressing a public meeting in Madras on 2nd August 1987, said, "This Agreement is a major landmark in these four decades of India's freedom. I am told that no such Agreement has been signed by any country in the world, at least in this century. It is an Agreement, which does not have a parallel in the world. It is an Agreement, which vindicates the principles of good-neighbourliness; peaceful co-existence and non-alignment".59

The historic peace pact was signed between Rajiv Gandhi and Jayawardhane on the ethnic issue of Sri Lanka was no doubt a great achievement in establishing peace on the island. Rajiv Gandhi, by signing the Indo Sri Lankan Accord, demonstrated to the whole world that the Third World countries could solve their internal problems without the interference or mediation of the Super Powers. This, in fact, brought name and fame not only to Rajiv Gandhi but also to the Non-aligned countries of the world at large. The anti imperialist forces of the world welcomed the Accord as it defused tension between two neighbouring countries. It frustrated the aggressive designs of imperialism in this part of the world.

For the successful implementation of the Accord certain prerequisites have been included in it. "They are maintenance of the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka ensuring conditions of peace and security for the Tamils there and no foreign intrusion or foreign

59 Rajiv Gandhi., Selected Speeches and Writings 1987, Vol-lll, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, p-381.
bases of any kind in Sri Lanka". In order to implement the Accord, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was sent to Sri Lanka to supervise the ceasefire, the surrender of arms and to protect the interests of the minority Tamilians in the North East Province.

**The Indian Peace Keeping Force:**

Barring the LTTE all the Tamil groups in Sri Lanka welcomed the Accord. Although during the last stages of the Indo-Sri Lankan efforts for peace, the LTTE also decided to accept the agreement. According to the agreement, the LTTE was supposed to lay down arms. However, in an interview to the *Hindu* on August 1987 at Jaffna LTTE Chief, V. Prabhakakaran said that he was unhappy because “the problems of the affected people have not been taken care of in the agreement...The LTTE could not give up arms without protection, without security for our people and fighters, without any safeguard for their future.” India believed that the apprehensions expressed by the LTTE were without any basis in so far as security to the Tamils was concerned. But LTTE was not satisfied with the assurances from both the governments. It started drifting from the Sri Lankan agreement in spite of assurance from both the countries that the Tamils interests will be protected.

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61 A.M. Vohra in Satish Kumar's Supra No-.22, p-87.
Despite the continued efforts from the Sri Lankan government to implement the Agreement, the opposition from the extremists continued unabatedly thereby hampering the peace process. When it became extremely difficult and was not in a position to withstand the LTTE's violence, the Sri-Lankan government sought India's assistance to contain the escalating violence. Thousands of Sinhalese had to take shelter in the refugee camps in their own country due to the attack of Tamil guerillas in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. Accordingly Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was sent to Sri Lanka in July 1987 to restore peace and normalcy in the violence ravaged island. The IPKF was sent Sri Lanka at the request of the Sri Lankan government to honour the Accord. Therefore, Rajiv Gandhi in his statement to the Rajya Sabha on 31st July 1987 said, “Our troops have landed in Sri Lanka in response to a specific and formal request of the government of Sri Lanka who have invoked our obligations and commitments under the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement. Our troops have gone there to help implement the Agreement, to end the ethnic strife in Sri Lanka and their dispatch underlines our firm commitment to the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka”.

The Indian Peace Keeping Force was not only sent to meet the obligation as enshrined in the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement but also due to the apprehension expressed by the Indian strategic thinkers that in the event of not supporting the efforts of Sri Lankan

\[\text{62 Rajiv Gandhi, Supra No.59, (Vol-III), p-376.}\]
government, there was every possibility that Sri Lankan leadership would seek foreign military assistance. Even, there were several foreign countries ready to support Sri Lanka to contain the growing violence. However, India expressed the view that if there were foreign intervention in Sri Lanka, this obviously would threaten the security in South Asia. Prior to this, there was a report that Colombo had sought help from the United States, Britain and Bangladesh, the then External Affairs Minister P.V. Narasimharao, reportedly warned all powers to keep out of the turmoil in Sri Lanka in 1983”.

Therefore, the rational behind sending IPKF to Sri Lanka was to avoid the entry of foreign mercenaries in Sri Lanka.

The IPKF found it very difficult in dealing with the LTTE and also had a tough time while dealing with JVP militants and failed to contain violence. As a result, the situation in Sri Lanka further worsened with the entry of IPKF instead of expected normalization. The Peace Keeping Force, instead of establishing peace, joined hands with Sri Lankan government in killing hundreds of innocent Tamilians. Therefore, accusing the IPKF, the LTTE leader Prabhakaran said, “having engaged themselves in a war with violence, brutality and terror, the IPKF has lost its status as an instrument of peace but has assumed the role of a repressive invasion army, typically eliminating both the Tamil freedom fighters and innocent civilians”. At last, the IPKF, which failed in its primary objective, had to come back to India half way.

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Withdrawal of the IPKF:

India sent the IPKF with an objective of achieving peace and tranquillity in the war-torn island. But India could not succeed in accomplishing the task with the assistance of the IPKF because of poor strategy, lack of communication with the various agencies. Though the IPKF was landed in the island at the request of the Sri Lankan government, it started sabotaging the IPKF operation by supplying weapons to the LTTE to fight against the IPKF.65 Therefore, the main objective of the Sri Lankan government especially of some Ministers in the Jayewardene’s cabinet wanted to make the IPKF unpopular and send it back halfway. Further, Premadasa then Sri Lankan Prime Minister who opposed the induction of the IPKF since beginning brought pressure on Jayewardene’s government for immediate pullout of the IPKF from the island.

Even, the J.V.P (Janatha Vimukti Perumana) militants who stubbornly opposed the entry of the IPKF involved in large-scale violence and posed stiff resistance to the IPKF. As a result, the IPKF had to face a tough time while dealing with the JVP. Further, the IPKF presence in Sri Lanka gave a new lease of life to the JVP, which launched a ruthless campaign of murder and mayhem and demanded the IPKF’s withdrawal and the scrapping of the Agreement.

65 S.D.Muni, Supra No. 63, pp.276-77.
By 1989 the IPKF became unpopular in Sri Lanka and was Premadasa elected President. He renewed his earlier stand and immediately sought the withdrawal of the IPKF from the island. The pressure mounted for the withdrawal of troops. In spite of Rajiv Gandhi’s assurance, Premadasa demanded the withdrawal of the forces by 29 July 1989 and put the unilateral deadline for himself without consulting the Indian government. Prior to this even Premadasa threatened to boycott the Fourth SAARC Summit to be held in Pakistan in December 1988, if India failed to withdraw within the deadline set by him. Rajiv Gandhi initially turned down the demand on the pretext of fulfilling the terms of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement. The demand of Premadasa and refusal of Rajiv Gandhi resulted in a serious deadlock between the two countries. In the mean while, the growing criticism of the IPKF in Sri Lanka prompted Rajiv Gandhi to think in terms of withdrawal in phased manner. But, this incident brought tremendous pressure on Rajiv Gandhi’s government, which was gearing up to face the country’s general elections. Therefore, due to the pressure from Prime Minister Premadasa, Rajiv Gandhi decided to pull out the troops in a phased manner before accomplishing the complete task of bringing normalcy to the war torn island. Accordingly, a contingent of around 5000 IPKF arrived in India by May 1989.

However, "In a sudden development, the LTTE entered into negotiations with the government in which one of the demands was the IPKF withdrawal. On 25 June 1989, the LTTE and the Sri
Lankan government declared cessation of hostilities, with the obvious desire to send IPKF from the island". Though the pro-Indian groups insisted on the necessity of IPKF, still the LTTE was adamant that normalcy would be restored only, if the IPKF was withdrawn from Sri Lanka. Apparently, the LTTE, which earlier welcomed the induction of the IPKF for the safety and security of the Tamils, subsequently joined hands with the Sri Lankan government in pressing for the withdrawal of the IPKF. Even JVP also joined the bandwagon of the groups, which sought for the withdrawal of the IPKF. Owing to the pressure from all corners," the talks were held and on 18 September 1989, the then Indian High Commissioner, L.L.Mehrotra and Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary, Bernard Tilakratne signed a communiqué setting out a framework under which Indian forces would leave the island by 31st December 1989". On 20th September 1989, the IPKF suspended its almost two year long operations against the LTTE and announced that it would not attack the IPKF unless it was attacked.

In a dramatic turn, in December 1989, V.P.Singh of the National Front leader became the Prime Minister of India replacing Rajiv Gandhi. Taking advantage of the same, Sri Lankan government engaged the attention of V.P.Singh’s government for the immediate withdrawal of the IPKF. At the insistence of Premadasa, the then President of Sri Lanka, the then Prime Minister of India

66 P.A.Ghosh, Supra No. 9, p-133.
67 Quoted in Shipra Mehra, Supra No.14, p-147.
V.P. Singh decided to withdraw the remaining troops of the IPKF from Sri Lanka as agreed earlier.

**Achievements of the IPKF:**

The IPKF made some remarkable achievements for establishing peace and tranquility in war-ravaged Sri Lanka. Broadly speaking, the following are some of the achievements of IPKF.

1) The biggest achievement of the IPKF as stated by A.S. Kalkat, General Officer Commanding of the IPKF is that it had maintained and accomplished the objectives of the government of India's policy towards Sri Lanka which is to have a friendly and united Sri Lanka in which the minority Tamil issue is resolved politically to ensure the Tamils' right.  

2) The IPKF entered Sri Lanka under the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987 to disarm largely the LTTE and to restore normalcy. The IPKF disarmed the LTTE at a time when the Sri Lankan army was desperately fighting on two fronts against the LTTE and the JVP.

3) The IPKF was sent to Sri Lanka to prevent the entry of foreign mercenaries that were eager to interfere in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka with a view to assisting the Sri Lankan army in the guise of establishing peace in the island.

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68 Quoted in Ravikant Dubey, Supra No. 15, p-135.
4) As a consequence of the IPKF's operation, out of all the militant groups, four gave up their demand for Eelam and swore their allegiance to the constitution and integrity of Sri Lanka and joined the political process in September 1988. The remaining one, the LTTE too, after further operations by the IPKF, reconciled and accepted the sovereignty of Sri Lanka. 70

5) The IPKF helped step by step in the implementation of the Agreement and in the peaceful conduct of successive elections to the democratic institutions, despite the "threats of terrorist violence in the North-East."

6) The IPKF was ordered not to inflict casualties on civilians and not to annihilate their adversary. The IPKF General told their men, "This war was not to destroy your adversary but to guide him in the right direction to accept the political settlement". 71

7) The Indo-Sri Lankan Accord led India to dispatch her troops to the island at a time when the situation seemed headed inexorably towards the break-up of Sri Lanka. 72

8) The IPKF was greatly responsible for preventing the continuation of the Sri Lankan policy of seeking a military solution to the Tamil problem on which it had embarked since 1983.

70 Quoted in Shipra Mehra, Supra No.14, p-152.
72 Avatar Sing Bhasin, Supra No.64, p-156.
Causes for the IPKF Failure:

The IPKF, which was sent to Sri Lanka to maintain peace, and disarm the militants, failed in its primary duty on account of the following reasons.

1) Though the Indian military used to counter insurgency operations in the North-Eastern states of India, still it “failed to counter revolutionary warfare, particularly in fighting an urban guerilla force that had mastered landmine technology”.73

2) At the beginning, the IPKF troops operating in the jungles had machine guns and SLR weapons while the LTTE used AK-47s and M-16s which had greatest fire power”,74 apart from the shortage of manpower.

3) The IPKF was sent to Sri Lanka to protect the interests of the Tamils. But, it forgot its basic duty and involved in killing the innocent Tamils in Sri Lanka.

4) After the entry of the IPKF, several Sri Lankan Tamils migrated to countries like Canada and Australia because they found themselves placed between the devil and the deep sea within their own country. On the one hand, they faced the Sri Lankan army and the JVP, and on the other, they perceived the threat of being massacred by the IPKF.

73 Rohan Gunaratna, Supra No.71, p-259
74 Ibid.
5) The non co-operation and hostility of the then Sri Lankan Prime
Minister, Premadasa and the National Security Minister,
Athulathmudali, and the persistent demand of both the Sri
Lankan government and the Tamil militants ultimately
demoralized the IPKF. As a result, the IPKF had to face an
embarrassing situation in Sri Lanka.

6) The biggest failure of the IPKF was that it allowed Prabhakaran
to slip out of its net thrice. According to Gamini Dissanayake,
this was confirmed to him by no less a person than General
Sundarji, the Chief of the Indian Army".75

India’s Foreign Policy towards the Sri Lankan Affairs:

The formulation of foreign policy towards Sri Lankan ethnic
problem was primarily difficult due to the complex nature of the
ethnic issue. Therefore, India found it difficult to formulate a clear
foreign policy strategy as far as the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict was
concerned. India firmly believes in the policy of non-interference in
the internal affairs of another country, respect for sovereignty and
integrity of other countries etc., as laid down in the Panchasheel.
While dealing with Sri Lankan ethnic problem, it appears that India
diluted its basic principles of foreign policy. In fact, LTTE openly
condemned India’s interference in Sri-Lanka and considered that
the ethnic problem is between Tamilians and Sri-Lankan
Government, and Indian Government had no role to play. Further,

75 Avatar Singh Bhasin, Supra No.64, p-142.
the LTTE was the main actor in dealing with ethnic crisis, but it was not made party to the Accord. Even they were not invited to witness the ceremony on 29th July 1987, while signing the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord. Therefore, commenting on the Indo- Sri Lankan Accord Vellupillai Prabhakaran the LTTE leader addressing a rally in Jaffna on 4th August 1987 said, "India was overtly keen on striking an Accord (because it) protected India’s interests in the region”. It was his view that the Accord deals with Indo-Lanka relations and that the Tamil question was not central to it”. He stated that the Tamils were consulted only ex post facto and that he was not bound by the Accord”.

Therefore, during the time of ethnic crisis in Sri-Lanka, the foreign policy decision makers found it difficult to formulate a comprehensible policy on the Sri Lankan issue. Perhaps, the ineffectiveness of Sri Lankan Accord would not be incredibly attributable to the Indian foreign policy mechanism headed by the political leadership. Perhaps, it was Rajiv Gandhi after assuming the office of the Prime Minister reviewed the relations with neighbouring countries with G.Parthasarathy the then Chairman of Policy Planning Committee. He also asked the Ministry of External Affairs to examine various possibilities of improving relations with neighbours including China, Bhutan and SAARC nations”.

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76 B.G.Verghese, Beyond the Truce, Seminar, No-337, September 1987, p-41.
77 Vandana Asthana, India’s Foreign Policy and Sub-Continental Politics, Kanishaka Publishers, New Delhi, 1999, p-170.
Further, Rajiv Gandhi consulted all the parties concerned before signing the Accord. This clearly indicates that Rajiv Gandhi adopted a democratic way of formulating India's foreign policy in the context of ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka.

In the formulation of democratic foreign policy and strategy to face the challenges, the decision makers (political leaders) play more important role than the bureaucrats do. On the contrary, as the then Foreign Secretary, A.P.Venkteshwaran once said, "Today diplomats should not be blamed for not framing an effective foreign policy, since they were "mere file carriers", while decisions were taken by the Parliamentarians". But in actual practice the decision makers don't have the required skill and they are dependent on bureaucrats. Therefore, bureaucrats play more important role than the policy decision makers. As a result, it was due to lack of coordination in formulating the foreign policy by the various agencies that the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord ended in chaos and confusion, without bearing any fruit. Therefore, Rajiv Gandhi, who was instrumental in signing the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord and sending the IPKF, had to sacrifice his life at the cost of the so-called Accord, which is an irony. Even, the Sri Lankan political leaders did not implement the Accord in its letter and spirit. Besides, the Tamil groups did not co-operate wholeheartedly with the foreign policy makers of both countries.

78 The Times of India, 28 August 1987.
The Major Irritants and Short Comings of the Accord:

The Indo-Sri Lankan Accord went awry for several reasons. Firstly, the most important factor was the desertion of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran who after having given consent to surrender arms reverted from the stand taken at the meeting with Rajiv Gandhi at New Delhi. As a result, the LTTE indulged in large-scale violence and soon were on the warpath against the IPKF, which was called to restore order in the embattled island. Obviously, this brought neither glory nor peace in the Sri Lanka.

The revolt of the JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Premuna) activists who carried out the campaign of murder and terrorism against the bureaucrats, monks and ordinary people further added fuel to the fire. The JVP ruthlessly killed most of the Sinhalese prominent politicians of both ruling and opposition parties of Sri Lanka. As a result, the administration in the island increasingly paralyzed, and peace process came to a stand still. The JVP inflexibly opposed the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord and came in the way of its implementation.

Another important factor was the un-remitting hostility of the then Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranasinghe Premadasa who openly expressed the dissatisfaction over the signing of the Accord and carried on a virulent campaign against India accusing her of imperialism, colonialism, hegemony and visions of dominance. Even Athulatmudali, the then National Security Minister in Jayewardene's cabinet opposed the Indo Sri Lankan Accord tooth
and nail. This naturally hindered the way of successful implementation of the Accord.

The fourth factor was that the major actors in the conflict, especially the LTTE, were not made party to the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord. It was not taken into confidence while signing the Indo Sri Lankan Accord though it was dealing with the question of Tamils in Sri Lanka. This no doubt resulted in discontentment among the Tamil guerillas.

The mediators and the government's special envoys, who were entrusted with the job of bringing conciliatory process among the warring sections, were not successful in their task. Romesh Bhandari, the special envoy to Sri Lanka to deal with Sri Lankan issue, "was unpopular among the militant leaders for his pressure tactics and insensitivity to the legitimate aspirations of the Tamils".79, unlike G. Parthasarathy who was efficiently trying for rapprochement between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

Lack of co-ordination between the various governmental agencies and the bureaucracy involved in the preparation of Indo Sri Lankan Agreement to be signed by Rajiv Gandhi and J.Jayewardene was the major shortcomings of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord. The Indo-Sri Lankan Accord was prepared by the Indian foreign office without the direct involvement of the Ministry of

Defense, resulting in a very inadequate preparation for military operations in Sri Lanka.

Frequent changes of emissaries/mediators who were entrusted with the responsibility of dealing with Sri Lankan ethnic crisis created instability in their position and broke consistency in the process of dialogue and negotiations. Further, Indian mediators sidelined the moderate Tamil groups and leaders like A. Amrithlingam during the peace process, and also promoted the militants to become the sole representatives of the Sri Lankan Tamils, which was a major cause of adversity to the Accord.

In spite of all the hostile reactions amongst the Sinhalese, the Agreement otherwise had been hailed as the “triumph of statesmanship and courage under the most trying and tragic circumstances.

From Mediator Role to Participatory Role:

Since the outbreak of the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, India had played a limited role of a mediator or facilitator of communication between the two adversaries, i.e., Sri Lankan Government and the minority Tamils. Even during Jawaharlal Nehru’s period, India chose to be facilitator of communication and offering good offices to the ethnic problem of the minority Tamils in Sri Lanka rather than to become a party. Perhaps, it was during Jawaharlal Nehru’s period that there was no pressure whatsoever from the Sri Lankan government to assume participatory role or the
guarantor to the Sri Lankan ethnic issue, unlike during Rajiv Gandhi's period. Like Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi too played a similar role while dealing with the Sri Lankan Tamil issue. However, it was from the mid 1983 that the Indian government under the leadership of Indira Gandhi "tried several times to become a mediator". It was clear that India wanted to play a role of mediator in order to secure its own interest, which was unacceptable to Sri Lanakn government. However, Jayewardene's leadership, which was not satisfied with India's mediator role, started pressurizing it to assume the role of a guarantor (participant) instead of a mediator/intervener role in resolving the ethnic issue. Though there was intense pressure to play direct role in resolving the ethnic issue, Indira Gandhi assumed the responsibility of playing the role of a mediator and fought for the cause of the Tamilians. As a result, during Indira Gandhi's period India chose to be a mediator between the Tamil guerillas and Sri Lankan government rather than to be a party to the ethnic problem unlike Rajiv Gandhi. In fact, she did every thing stopping short of a direct intervention in the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis. Therefore, it was clear that India was never a party to the ethnic problem. Instead, it played the role of a mediator since the outbreak of the ethnic violence.

So far, India had been playing the role of mediator between the Tamil groups and the government of Sri Lanka. India tried her best to bring the two parties together to resolve the ethnic conflict, to

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narrow down the misunderstanding and communication gap and to make them negotiate a peaceful political settlement. This role of a mediator and offering good offices, India played for the most period since August, 1983.81

However, it was during Rajiv Gandhi's period that the Indian mediator role between Sri Lanka and the Tamils started losing its ground when Sri Lankan President Jayewardene insisted on direct participation on behalf of the Tamils. But soon it had become clear, especially after the failure of two rounds of Thimpu talks in July and August 1985, that this limited intermediary role did not yield any concrete result. With the stalemate persisting on the peace front, India was compelled gradually to expand its role—from that of a facilitator of communication to an actual participation in the conflict by becoming a signatory to a bilateral peace Agreement in July 1987. Thus, it took almost three years for India to change its role, much against its desire and interest and at the initiative of the Sri Lankan government. This was a major political decision taken by the then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in so far as the Tamil issue was concerned.

Rajiv Gandhi was reluctant to accept the direct participant position in the ethnic issue. But it was Sri Lankan President Jayewardene who pressurized him to accept the participatory role as proposed in the early August of 1986. But, Rajiv Gandhi taking

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into consideration the complex nature of the ethnic issue did not accept Jayewardene’s offer of participatory role and stuck to playing a mediatory role. When, Jayewardene insisted once again, in the early 1987, that any agreement to settle the conflict must be between the two governments and not between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil groups. This naturally put Rajiv Gandhi, who was eager to resolve the ethnic problem, on the horns of a dilemma. However, Rajiv Gandhi, taking into consideration the plight of the Tamils and the seriousness of the ethnic issue, hesitantly agreed to become a direct participant by signing the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord. “In envisaging such a role, the Sri Lankan President’s objective was very clear. He wanted to use Indian power to disarm the Tamil militants, especially the LTTE, whose position was quite entrenched to Eelam, to accept Sri Lanka’s unity and sovereignty. In other words, by seeking India’s direct participation, Jayewardenke was ultimately aiming for an intervener role for India. His objective was fulfilled when the Indian government committed its forces to implement the Agreement”.82

At last, President Jayewardene succeeded in pressurizing Rajiv Gandhi to assume India the role of a party to the Sri Lankan ethnic issue by signing the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord. Though the conflict was between Sri Lankan government and the Tamils, India had no role to play as a party to the Accord. However, India was made

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party to the Accord, which was not in the interest of the Sri Lankan Tamil militants. Therefore, the LTTE Chief Prabhakaran expressed discontentment over the Accord and said, “Accord is between India and Sri Lankan government and Tamils were consulted ex-post-facto hence he was not bound by the Accord”. As a result, the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord got the first jolt when the LTTE leader opposed India’s participatory role in resolving the vexed ethnic issue.

Nevertheless, Jayewardene achieved his goal of making India a party to the Sri Lankan Accord. Though it was made clear in 1987 by the LTTE that it would not accept peace without achieving Eelam, India should have taken into confidence and should have encouraged at least the moderate Tamil leaders to become signatory to the Agreement with Jayewardene. India should have been a guarantor to implement the agreement. India’s overconfidence in getting the LTTE involved in the peace process in 1987 caused India a serious trouble. The irony is that despite Rajiv Gandhi’s positive attitude and approach, he ultimately had to intervene directly in Sri Lanka with good intention of resolving the crisis.

83 The Hindu, 14 August 1987.