CHAPTER III
UNDERSTANDING REFUGEE GENERATION IN SRI LANKA

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, there has been a qualitative and quantitative change in the nature of conflict in Sri Lanka. The conflict has moved beyond its initial causes and there is a belief that a decisive battlefield outcome will determine the nature of political settlement. This has markedly increased the scale and frequency of violence. The nature and course of the conflict has resulted in large-scale refugee generation. Unlike previous years, displacement in Sri Lanka can no longer be treated as sporadic or isolated. Since 1983 displacement has become routinised.

As envisaged in the analytical framework, militarisation has been central to refugee generation in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan society presents the different aspects of a militarized society in terms of (a) acceptance and institutionalisation of violence, (b) escalation in the scale, intensity and sources of violence, and (c) functioning of the inter-related dynamics of violence i.e. political, economic, psychological and international determinants. Broadly speaking, the policies and programmes of the government and their economic outcome, leading to alienation and identity assertion, have contributed in militarising the conflict. Existing rivalries became sharper and violence played a key role in widening the chasm. It has
been used as a means towards achieving political ends, both by the state as well as different militant groups. Violence has worked both as a cause and effect in the Sri Lankan situation. Refugee generation has emerged within this complex web of factors.

At a specific level, people are driven due to the particular ground realities of violence and its repercussions. The general and specific factors are not sharply differentiated into unassailable compartments, but shade into each other and result in refugee generation. The specific factors in refugee generation are:

(i) Exact location of the conflict determines the combat zone, (this will be explained in the chapter). It determines the location from where people flee, and the escape routes available to the fleeing population. If, for instance, the conflict is located in a coastal area, people flee by boat. If, on the other hand the epicenter is land locked, people run through the jungles.

(ii) Direction in which the forces are moving - the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army. The fleeing population usually moves in the opposite direction, anticipating approaching forces unless there are other constraints, natural or man-made.
(iii) Tactics of warfare - army operations, guerrilla attacks, shelling, naval warfare, urban attacks, landmine explosions.

(iv) Sources of violence - the Sri Lankan Army, the LTTE, other militant groups, the Special Task Force, (STF), and Homeguards. The source of violence determines the groups that are being attacked or persecuted.

(v) Economic concerns during escalation of violence include food scarcity, non-availability of essential commodities and medicines, adverse impact on the sources of livelihood like business, fishing and other sources of employment.

(vi) Freedom of movement is restricted in a militarized society. Parties to the conflict may engage in forceful evacuation by making announcements over radio, airdropping messages, or even sending messages to the Government Agent’s office.

(vii) Repercussions of violence - destruction of houses, farms and property, forceful conscription into the Tiger army, extortion and coercion compel people to move.

(viii) Availability of resources and infrastructure affects refugee generation in two ways. People who were fleeing to India needed money to pay for the boat trip. The minimum cost was
2000 Sri Lankan Rupees; at times it was as high as SLRs 10,000 to 15,000. In the last two decades of continued violence fishing has been affected so that there are no boats available anymore. In a situation where people wanted to flee by boat, they could not escape due to the non-availability of boats. Creation of security zones had put constraints on fishing. As such, there were no boats. Most of the boats had either been usurped by the LTTE or confiscated by the Army. The remaining boats were lying unused and needed repair.

(ix) Politics of displacement: the LTTE and the government have encouraged or discouraged displacement based on specific raison d'être - to internationalize, or protect the image, to use refugees as human shields, to show strength and support for the movement or to change the demography of the region for political interests.

ASPECTS OF MILITARISATION IN SRI LANKA

The ethnic divide has widened, the situation has gradually become militarized. Refugee generation has emerged as a part of the militarized society since 1983. There has been a gradual decline in the use of democratic norms to address political problems and violence has been institutionalized.
The youth in particular have increasingly resorted to militant politics to assuage grievances. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurrection in 1989-90, though not directly related to the issue under investigation, has also contributed to the 'culture of violence'. The way the insurrection was suppressed vindicated the apprehension that any form of political protest would be ruthlessly and, if need be, undemocratically suppressed. Some indicators of the militarized society are identified below.

**Failure of Negotiations:**

The last two decades of the conflict in Sri Lanka has witnessed efforts at reconciliation. But none of these have broken much ground. This in a way has rendered the conflict intractable. An explanation for the failure of negotiations to solve the conflict is beyond the scope of the present study. However, it needs to be mentioned at this stage that since the formation of the Presidential Commission on Development Councils in 1980, until the recent efforts of Norway to hold negotiations between the LTTE and the Peoples Alliance government headed by President Chandrika Kumaratunga all the attempts for peace have either failed or proved inconclusive.1 It needs

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1 In a recent study on the 'search for a solution', K.M. de Silva has identified attempts at reconciliation through devolution of power to the regions since the pre independence period. Since 1980, seven such attempts have been cited: (1) Establishment of the District Development Councils in 1981, (2) Thimpu Talks, 1985, between the Government of Sri Lanka and the different Tamil parties, (3) Delhi Accord in August 1985, (4) Political Parties Conference, 1986, (5) Indo-Lanka Accord, 1987, (6) Negotiations between
to be mentioned here that a genuine solution to the problem requires genuine involvement of both parties. But that is sadly lacking. While the Sinhala hardliners are insisting that the Government should fight to the finish. The LTTE on the other hand remains ‘committed’ to a sustained military campaign. This has resulted in accepting and institutionalising violence as the deciding factor in the conflict.

**Escalation of violence:**

The most potent indicator of the escalation of violence in any society is the casualty rate. It must be mentioned that calculating the death rate is never accurate. It is also a partial indicator of the real picture, but it works as a decisive ‘push factor’ in a refugee situation.

According to a study by the National Peace Council, the total number of deaths during the course of the conflict upto 1998 was estimated to be between 45,000 and 50,000. The number of combatants killed was roughly estimated to be between 20,000 to 25,000 and civilian deaths accounted for

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25,000 - 30,000. Though disability or injury and disappearances are also consequences of direct violence, these are even more difficult to estimate. There have also been high rates of disappearances, arbitrary arrests and abduction in the North and East, especially in the 1990-91 period. The LTTE as well as the Sri Lankan Army have adopted such war tactics. 

Patterns of Violence:

During the course of the ongoing conflict, a complex pattern of violence has emerged since 1983. They could be broadly identified as:

(1) Riots/pogroms: While riots are spontaneous, pogroms are organised. However, most riots in Sri Lanka are planned and organized. The state prefers to call them riots and Tamil leaders and militant groups refer to them as pogroms. Scholars differ on the usage of the term.

(2) Military operations: Different armed groups and the State attempt to take control of an area land or sea. Operations involve all three dimensions of war - ground, air and sea.

(3) Urban attacks: It includes terror tactics and symbolic violence like political assassinations and bombing places like airports, bus stands, religious places, university or Government buildings.

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Tactics and Strategies of Warfare

The Government and the LTTE have adopted various tactics of warfare to materially, morally, psychologically and strategically weaken each other. The main war tactics of the Army are: (1) The military operations to gain control of land in the North East. Once the army has occupied a certain area, they try to restore 'normalcy' by providing basic amenities like food, medicines, schools, hospitals, etc so that people remain or return to these areas. (2) Economic embargo in the combat zones and areas controlled by the LTTE is another war tactic employed by the Government. A number of essential items like batteries, fertilizers, polythene bags, candles etc are banned in the area because the militants could use them for war purposes. This makes 'normal' life difficult for people in these areas. They are, therefore encouraged to move into the Government controlled areas. (3) Air attacks on 'selected' targets are conducted in order to keep the militants on the run. But, by and large, the non-combatant civilian population is hit in these attacks. It causes death, disability and injury to the civilians who are

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5 This strategy was employed in the post 1990 period by General Denzil Kobbekaduwa. It needs to be mentioned that this strategy was applied in the wake of increasing international pressure on Sri Lanka for violation of Human Rights.

6 This tactic has for years been used effectively by Israelis in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and is known as the West Bank Model. Constructing bunds and barbed wire fences physically cordon of areas captured by them. Anti personnel mines are then put along the fence to prevent movement of militants. There may be one or two points for civilian movement, but these are ineffective and a harrowing experience for them.
forced to flee. (4) Artillery shelling on specific militant targets to eliminate them and also to secure the army camp. There are heavy shellings during army operations especially when the army moves to capture land. During such offensives, bulldozers and artillery are used indiscriminately to clear the way. In the process, houses, buildings, schools are destroyed or heavily damaged. This is done in order to ensure that militants do not resist or retaliate under cover. There is also regular shelling as a defensive measure, in the vicinity of army camps. For this reason civilians invariably evacuate areas where military camps are located, because of threats to their life and freedom. (5) Checkpoints and barricades on the roads to restrict mobility of militants and transport of arms and ammunition. This in effect, hampers civilian mobility as well and affects life and freedom of movement. (6) Arrests and house-to-house searches are regularly conducted to nab suspected militants. As per Emergency provisions, the Army and STF can search and check any house at any hour. People are arrested at random. The Government has given an island-wide direction that all Tamil families need to register their details at the nearest police station or army camp. Using this

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7 The rape and murder of Krishanthy Kumaraswamy and members of her family near Chemmani Checkpoint controlled by the Pungamkalam army camp in the East of Jaffna on September 7, 1996, may be cited here. For details refer, Gaps in the Krishanthy Kumaraswamy Case: Disappearances and Accountability, Special Report, UTHR, Jaffna, April 1999
list, Tamils were regularly harassed by the security forces. There have been cases of disappearances particularly in the North East. Women are particularly vulnerable during such search operations.\(^8\) (7) Torture has for years been an effective war tactic. It includes psychological harassment people. Families of suspected militants and even civilians have been constantly kept under surveillance. Other torture methods are beating, using polythene bags with petrol to suffocate them, hanging them upside down and give them dry chilly smoke, burning with cigarette butts, hitting hard with a baton and pulling out nails.

As a militant organisation committed to achieving the goal of a separate state of Tamil Eelam, of the LTTE's main strategy is to keep the anti-state sentiment of the people alive. This would help sustain the movement. The LTTE has often used romanticisation of violence to draw the youth to the movement.\(^9\) The main war tactic has been guerilla attacks on army personnel, camps, convoys and police stations. When the military launches the offensive, the LTTE gives a mild resistance for a safe retreat. They do not retaliate because during an offensive, the armed forces are well prepared and

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\(^8\) This fact specifically came to light during interviews with women respondents during fieldwork in Vavuniya.

\(^9\) An oft quoted statement of the LTTE is, "one successful guerilla attack will mobilize more people than a hundred seminars can". This was mentioned by respondents in Trincomalee and Vavuniya.
any resistance will cause heavy losses to the LTTE. The other and more long-term strategy is to let the army cause civilian death and damage, so that people are disillusioned by the state forces. The LTTE often has camps in densely populated areas. This helps them in two ways. First, they use civilians as shields. Second, civilian casualties morally affect the Government and draw international attention. The LTTE has also set up camps in dense forests so that the army is unable to the tigers. The use of landmines has been another war strategy of preventing the army from approaching their camps. Assassination of Tamil leaders, bureaucrats, academics and leaders and cadres of other militant groups has been regularly carried out by the LTTE. Sometimes it has killed its own cadres and civilians. Attacks of buildings and airports, oil refineries, temples etc have been a three-pronged strategy. One, to psychologically ‘terrorise’ people. Two, to destroy state infrastructure and cause immense economic losses to the Government. Three, to lower the morale of the army by targeting high security areas especially outside the North-East. The LTTE involves in extortion and forceful conscription to strengthen its force. International support has for long been an effective war tactic of the LTTE. It gets its finances to buy arms and communication equipment. Since the LTTE claims to have drawn support from people, it wants to keep them within its controlled areas. For these purposes it
physically closes borders and follows a de facto visa system. Thus, the people are kept in the LTTE-controlled areas. It also gets money at exit points. Despite the fact the LTTE thrives on popular support, it has had no compunctions in targeting civilians. Its strategy is two-pronged. One it claims that the ends justify the means and two, it blames the Government for the attacks.  

Agents of Violence

The sources of violence are as follows:

(i) The Sri Lankan armed forces (the Army, Navy, Air force, and the Special Task Force (STF)), which are involved in counter-insurgency operations.

(ii) The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), till now the fiercest and resilient militant group with a wide international network.

(iii) Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), which was deployed in Sri Lanka between 1987-1990 under the Indo- Lanka Accord of 1987.

10 In this case reference may be made to the artillery attacks on the Madhu camp in Mannar on 20 November 1999. 38 refugees were killed and over 70 injured. Though reliable sources in the Church claimed that it was the work of the LTTE to target the army which was then in the premises, the LTTE has squarely blamed the Government for lapse in civilian security. For details see INFORM Situation Report, 1999, p.7
(iv) Other Tamil militant groups, which have been active in different areas at different times mostly in the North-East\textsuperscript{11}. Most of these groups have now opted for Parliamentary politics but some of them still possess arms for self-defence. The People’s Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization, (TELO), and Eelam People’s Democratic Party (EPDP) are formally registered as political parties. But they are also functioning as auxiliary forces of the Sri Lankan Army. Tamil Eelam Revolutionary Organization (EROS) was formally dissolved in 1992. After that, a section of its s including its leader Balakumar joined the LTTE while the rest of them gave up militancy.

(v) Homeguards are armed militiamen belonging to the Sinhalese and Muslim communities living around border villages i.e. those villages, which are located between the Government and the LTTE controlled areas. They were armed by the State ostensibly

\textsuperscript{11} Some of the active militant groups were Tamil Eelam Liberation Army (TELA) led by ‘Oberoi’ Dewan, Tamil Eelam Army (TEA) led by ‘Panaguda’ Maheswaran, Tamil Eelam National Army (TENA) led by A. Pahirathan who was the son of TULF leader A. Amirthalingam, National Liberation Front of Tamil Eelam, (NLFTE) led by Visvanathan, and Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF) which, was the breakaway group of PLOTE and was led was ‘Paranthan’ Rajan.
to counter militancy. Since they were not professional military men they killed more civilians than militants.

Once violence becomes endemic, it does not remain an isolated incident. A complex pattern of inter-related dynamics emerge, which impel displacement. The process of refugee generation in Sri Lanka is an interplay of all these determinants on each other and Militarisation on each other and Militarisation as such. Each of these variables individually and collectively lead to refugee generation and vice versa.

Military Expenditure

The expenditure of the State on the Defense Budget specifically combat-oriented is another indicator of a militarised society. It explains the priority that the State accords to the area. In Sri Lanka, the defence budget has substantially increased from 1050.9 million Sri Lankan Rupees in 1981 to 57,146.0 million Sri Lankan Rupees in 1998. In terms of the percentage share of total government expenditure it has risen from 3.78 percent to 16.96 percent during the same period. (See chart for details).\(^\text{12}\) It needs to be mentioned that the periods 1995-96, there was a steep rise in military expenditure. The total Defense expenditure has increased from 34,971

million SLR in 1995 to 46,258 million SLR in 1996. The period corresponds with the Operation Riverasa (which will be discussed later in this chapter) that marks very high displacement rates as well.

**TABLE 3.1 EXPENDITURE ON DEFENCE IN SRI LANKA, 1981-1998**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Expenditure on Defence (Rs.million)</th>
<th>% of total government expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1050.6</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>1117</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>1753.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2481.5</td>
<td>4.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>5611.5</td>
<td>9.77</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>9704.3</td>
<td>15.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>11386</td>
<td>16.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>10721.8</td>
<td>12.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>8792.4</td>
<td>10.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>14601.2</td>
<td>12.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>15663.7</td>
<td>11.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>17995.8</td>
<td>11.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>20782</td>
<td>10.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>25527</td>
<td>12.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>34971</td>
<td>14.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>46285</td>
<td>17.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>45968</td>
<td>16.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>57146</td>
<td>16.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**MILITARISATION AND REFUGEE GENERATION IN SRI LANKA**

The period under study is 1983-2000. This span of about two decades, eighteen years to be precise, is divided into four phases for an easy
understanding of the complex situation. During each phase there have been
different forms and patterns of violence resulting in distinct patterns of
refugee generation. Each phase discusses the major outburst of violence and
its impact on refugee generation. The attempt here is to understand the
dynamics of displacement rather than the dynamics of the war itself. In each
of these distinct phases, there were cycles of violence, not continuous
unabated violence. There was an interplay of political, economic, external
and psychological determinants in all these phases. But their role and impact
of the different factors kept changing. The war process can be divided into
different phases:

(2) The IPKF War, (1987-1990)
(3) The Second Eelam War, (1990-1994)

The First Eelam War, 1983-87

This period covers the July riots 1983 and the large-scale displacement
that followed the military operations till the arrival of the IPKF in 1987. The
riots and ensuing displacement, the rise of militancy and proliferation of
militant groups in the North-East mark this phase. Though the riots mainly
took place in Colombo, the subsequent years saw violence escalating in the
North-East. There were efforts at brokering peace, but without success. The failure of the Thimpu talks in 1985 eventually resulted in the Operation Liberation in March 1987.

July 1983

The ambush of thirteen soldiers by the LTTE in Thirunelveli, Jaffna had an impact far beyond the locus of the incident. It resulted in large-scale riots in Colombo and its suburbs, the plantation areas, and parts of the North and the East. The riots began on 25th July, when a strong crowd of mourners at the cemetery near Borella, became unruly. But later riots became intense, organized and widespread, in the capital Colombo.\(^\text{13}\) The Sinhalese mob specifically targeted at Tamil houses, shops and establishments in Colombo and its suburbs. The victims were mainly middle class white-collar employees and shopkeepers as well as owners of large business houses.\(^\text{14}\) By the next two days, it spread to the plantation areas - Badulla, Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy, Matale and Nuwara Eliya.

In the plantation areas, Badulla was one of the worst affected. Buddhist monks and some UNP leaders led the riots, which began on The


26th of July. About fifty seven Tamils were killed and more than two hundred houses, schools, temples and even two cinema theatres were burnt down by the rioters. People had to take refuge in churches and the mosques because the temples were damaged. According to the government sources, about 6,952 people became refugees, but twice the number of people took refuge with friends and relatives.\textsuperscript{15} A similar pattern of violence broke out in Nuwara Eliya, Bandarawella, Gampaha, Kandy, Matale, Nawalapitiya and Kegalle. The government had to set-up refugee camps to accommodate the displaced.\textsuperscript{16} According to a report of the United States Committee for Refugees, (USCR), 35,000 plantation Tamils fled to the North.\textsuperscript{17} The Estate Tamils were forced to flee in such a chaotic situation. Their major concern was their vulnerable status of statelessness. The loss of their houses added to their problems. The schism in the society that was unleashed by the riots was so sharp that there was an overarching fear that they might even lose their jobs in the future.

Immediately after the ambush of the convoy in Jaffna, the army had reacted by indiscriminately Killing Tamils in Thirunelveli and Kantharamadu. Approximately seventy civilians were killed, but the


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, pp. 50-51.

incident went unnoticed. Reports of violence came from Trincomalee as well. There were rumours that a Buddhist shrine in Colombo had been destroyed by the Tamils. This spurred some members of the naval forces stationed in Trincomalee. Over eighty sailors broke the barracks and began destroying Tamil establishments including a temple. Tamils retaliated by killing two policemen.

In this charged situation, Sri Lanka experienced large scale displacement. The exodus was coterminous with the areas affected by the violence - Colombo, the plantation areas and some parts of the North East. The exodus also happened from these areas. Initially people from all areas fled to refugee camps or to homes of friends and relatives in the same district. From there they took different directions. From Colombo, the direction of their flow was as indicated below:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{AREA OF VIOLENCE} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{CAMPS / FRIENDS} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{NORTH-EAST} \rightarrow \text{INDIA} \rightarrow \text{ABROAD}
\end{array}
\]


\[19 \text{ Dissanayaka, n. 14, pp. 84-85.}\]
Depending on the economic status, Colombo Tamils either directly went to India by air or by ship or to the North-East or crossed over to Rameswaram and then went to Europe, Canada or Australia. People living in the plantation areas fled to the North-East or to India by ship from Colombo. The people of the North-East fled to Jaffna or to India. On analyzing various flows of refugees it is clear that the direction was determined by the location, economic concerns and pull factors i.e. response of the asylum giving country.

According to the USCR, about 100,000 about people were displaced and fled to fifteen welfare centers. Out of this 70,000 went to South India and a large number to western countries. An estimated 40-50 thousand Tamil refugees sought asylum in Europe.

The Federal Republic of Germany received the largest number of refugees. Until July 1985, they went to Interflug in East Berlin and crossed over to West Germany. But after an Agreement between Bonn and Berlin to prevent non-visa holding Tamils, this route was no longer viable. By the end of 1985, there were more than 21,000 refugees in Germany. The following

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chart shows the estimated number of Sri Lankan refugees who sought asylum in Europe:22

Table 3.2 ESTIMATED TAMIL REFUGEES IN EUROPE, 1985

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Refugees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FRG</td>
<td>21,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: International Alert Report

Despite the fact that the riots ended within a week, the impact was much wider. Two issues of concern were:

(1) The period after the riots brought into focus the role of the state, which was both crucial and questionable in handling the situation. It was crucial because in crisis times, it is the duty of the state to provide security and protection to citizens, especially those persecuted. However, despite the fact that riots began on the 24th night, in Borella, Colombo, and more aggressively from the 25th morning, the administration wasted precious time in imposing curfew. According to Bastian, there was a lapse of four hours.23


Senaratne on the other hand, calculates the time lapse as eighteen hours from 8P.M. on 24th July till 2 AM. on the 25th afternoon, when curfew was imposed.24

(2) The organised manner of rioting with the help of an electoral list and using government vehicles highlighted the connivance of the state in the riots.25 The role of ministers like Cyril Mathew and his inflammatory speeches caused anguish. The Welikade Prison massacre, where many prisoners broke out of their cells and killed 70 Tamil detainees, showed total dereliction of duty of the policemen.26

The Presidential speech on television did not address to Tamil grievances. On the contrary, it took an ambiguous stand by stating two different views. One, that it was a spontaneous reaction of Sinhalese people to the ambush, which killed thirteen soldiers, and two, that it was a leftist exercise masterminded by Moscow.27

27 Bastian, n.23, p.302-05.
Due to these reasons, there was a strong emotional reaction against
the state by the Tamils who lost faith in the State. There was a belief that an
irresponsive state needs to be countered by violence in order to meet the
aspirations of the people. This in effect meant institutionalization of violence
as the legitimate and correct form of solving political conflict. The political
mobilization of the youth led them to militancy. They either joined the five
existing groups namely the LTTE, TELO, PLOTE, EPRLF and EROS, or
formed newer groups. The number of trained cadre rose from two hundred
before the riots to five thousand within a year and 10,000 by 1986.28 There
was an external angle as well. India remained a powerful external factor,
which gave military support to the Tamil militants.29

The Sixth Amendment prohibiting advocacy of a separate state had
marginalized the TULF because its members refused to take oath in
Parliament to uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.
This led to, the erosion of the power base of the TULF and therefore, its
political effectiveness as the representative organisation of the Sri Lankan
Tamils in Parliament. The vacuum was filled by militant organisations,

28 These figures are taken from Tom Marks, 'Peoples War in Sri Lanka: Insurgency and
Counter Insurgency', Issues and Studies, Vol.22, No.8, 1986, pp.63-100 as quoted in
Senaratne, n.13, pp.69-70.

29 Narayan Swamy, Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas (New Delhi: Konark Publishers,
which were growing from strength to strength and became new leaders of Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{30}

The response of the state to the rising militancy added yet another dimension to the problem. The state responded by establishing the Ministry of National Security. In order to check the movement of arms and people towards Jaffna, the Ministry created security zones i.e. 'Naval Surveillance' zones. In November 1984 a 'Prohibited Zone' and a 'Security Zone' were also established to cut off the supply route between Mannar and Mulaitivu.\textsuperscript{31} This had a two-fold effect. One, it increased the alienation of the Tamils. Two, more tangibly, it affected the livelihood of the fishing community in coastal areas. Civilians were often suspected of being involved in 'terrorist activities' and arrested or killed. This seriously curbed their movement and earning opportunities and, at the same time, reinforced their faith in militancy.

Another crucial result of the 1983 riots was the location. Since the epicenter of riots was Colombo, it sent across the message that Tamils were


not secure in Sinhala majority areas. This reinforced the belief the Tamils would be safe only in their homeland.

The external dimension of the riots of July 1983 was that it brought Sri Lanka on the international map of violence due to (1) the wide media coverage of death and destruction, and (2) the refugees who had crossed the international borders. It strengthened the Tamil diaspora, which provided support to the secessionist movement through fund-raising, information networks, propaganda and lobbying in different countries.

Both the state forces as well as the militants began to get arms and training from other countries. The Sri Lankan government took military help from British and Israeli experts. On the other hand, the Tamil militants began to get training in India. The training camp began in September 1984, in a place called Chakrata near Dehra Dun. At the level of civil society, the Tamil Nadu people expressed concern over violence and accorded welcome to the Sri Lankan Tamils. They even demonstrated and asked the state government to take action.

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33 Senaratne, n.13, p.71.

34 Misra, n. 31 p p.70-71.

35 Narayan Swamy, n.29, pp.97-111.
The period between July 1983 and 1987 was thus an interplay of the above factors which increased violence and created conditions for refugee generation. There were guerilla attacks on security forces and the theatre of conflict had, by and large, shifted to the North East. The security forces retaliated by killing Tamil civilians. There were indiscriminate disappearances. There were attacks on the Sinhalese civilians like the attack on the Sri Maha Bodhi temple in Anuradhapura in May 1985, killing 125 civilians. The cycle of violence continued.

Once again violence picked up its momentum in 1984-85 when emergency was imposed. There was open confrontation between the SLAF and LTTE and the EPRLF in Kankesanthurai. There were indiscriminate attacks on the Tamil civilians in Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullailim, and Trincomalee. Eighty thousand people fled by boats to India by mid-1985 there were 1,20,000 refugees in the country.36

Another major landmark incident in this period was the Operation Liberation to secure Vadamaratchi. The army moved in from all the camps and zeroed in on Vadamaratchi. The LTTE moved out of the area, and the entire Vadamaratchi population became refugees.37 As the army was


37 Somasundaram, n, 32, p.73.
advancing towards Tellipalai, people took refuge either in the camps or moved on to the islands and then to India.

Refugee generation in this period had two important facets. One, a large number of people especially the Colombo Tamils, fled because of the psychological fear, and alienation from the system. The riots came as a big shock because of the fact that it happened in the Capital and the State was unable to protect them. The fear was that there would be such violent outbursts in future, which would throw their lives out of gear. They feared that their life, business interest and education of their children would be seriously affected. Colombo Tamils felt threatened and persecuted in their own country. The only recourse they had in such a situation was to leave the country and seek refuge elsewhere. “They left because they had lost faith in the Rule of Law.” However, they did not suffer the exact gory impact of the war that was to happen in the years to come. Second, the other facet was what happened in the period after the July riots. There was spiraling violence in the North and East. People were living on the edge of war and suffered the impact of an ongoing military warfare. Creation of security zones affected livelihood chances. There was acute shortage of food and basic commodities. Survival instinct was the basic concern in their case.

38 S.C. Chandrachasan in an interview with the researcher
The IPKF War, 1987-1990

This was a mixed phase in the sense that it began on a quiet note with hopes for peace and cessation of hostilities. The Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi and the Sri Lankan President, J.R. Jayewardene signed the Indo-Lanka Accord on July 29, 1987. The Accord was signed in order to restore peace in the country. India's main concerns were its protection of its security interests and maintaining political order in Tamil Nadu. The main features of the Accord were:\(^{39}\)

a. It guaranteed the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka

b. It recognised that Sri Lanka is a ‘multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, plural society consisting of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Burghers having a distinct cultural and linguistic identity which has to be carefully nurtured’.

c. It recognised that the Northern and Eastern Provinces have been areas of historical habitation of Tamil speaking peoples, who have been traditionally living in those areas with other ethnic groups.

d. It ensure power sharing through the establishment of Provincial Councils.

Amidst this hope, repatriation was initiated. But soon the picture changed and a complex pattern of violence emerged. There was open fighting between the IPKF and the LTTE, and the LTTE and other militant groups and later the Sri Lankan forces were supporting the LTTE to oust the IPKF. The location of violence was first Jaffna, with Operation Pawan in 1987, and later the Mullaitivu jungles.

Due to the internecine warfare among different militant groups, a significant number of militants of the pro-IPKF faction were taking refuge in India. When the Indo-Lanka Accord was signed on July 29, 1987, it seemed a major breakthrough in improving Indo-Sri Lankan relations. The hope for ethnic reconciliation arose from the introduction of provincial autonomy for Tamil areas instead of a separate state. India agreed to guarantee the Accord and an 8,000 strong peace keeping force was sent to Sri Lanka, which grew to 50,000 by the time the IPKF left in 1990.40 This itself is an indication of the growing violence in the three years that followed.

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Nevertheless, the period started off well. Violence was clearly on the decline, so much so that repatriation of the Sri Lankan Tamils in India was initiated. But peace was short-lived, and the simmering hostilities between the LTTE and IPKF came to the fore on October 10, 1987, when the latter launched the Operation Pawan. The Operation had three main objectives: One, to capture Jaffna city, two military domination of the North and East, and three, making the LTTE adhere to the Accord. The IPKF had a substantial presence in the Jaffna Fort as well as the coastline. Their strategy was to spread out in such a way that they could link with the Fort, envisaging a naval blockade to seal their escape route and supply of arms.

Though the LTTE suffered initial setbacks, its strength lay in the mass support it had in the area and also knowledge of the terrain. The main strategy of the LTTE was (i) to wear down the IPKF, psychologically, militarily and morally, and (ii) to maintain a secure base both at home as well as abroad. They opted for guerilla and non-conventional tactics of war. Their cadre did not wear uniforms, and easily mixed with the local, non-combatant population, which was 'fleeing' in search of refuge. Using

41 A MoU was signed between the GOSL and UNHCR on 31 Aug. 1987 to help repatriate, 1,50,000 refugees.
42 Senaratne, 13, p. 92.
43 Sardeshpande, n.39, pp.30-31
civilian cover, the LTTE was able to attack and, to a large extent, frustrate the Indian Peace Keeping Force. In retaliation, the IPKF resorted to heavy shelling. Jaffna was wrested from the LTTE, but the trail of civilian death and large-scale destruction of houses, buildings as also a temple, made the IPKF morally uncomfortable even in victory.\(^4^4\) Using civilian cover was a strategy that helped the LTTE sustain its struggle against the IPKF, but it had a serious impact on non-combatant population. For the IPKF it was difficult to distinguish between civilians and combatants.\(^4^5\) There was large-scale displacement of people mostly within the peninsula from one place to another. People were caught between the two forces. The psychological impact of the IPKF operations went far deeper. "More than anything else it was sudden change in the role of the Indian Army from the friendly saviour to belligerent destroyer that most found difficult to accept or adapt to," \(^4^6\) The LTTE retreated to Vanni jungles and continued guerilla warfare from there. After securing Jaffna from the LTTE control, the IPKF began smaller operations covering the areas from Mannar in the west to Mullaitivu in the East and again from Elephant Pass to Vavuniya. Two operations — the

\(^{4^4}\) Narayan Swamy, n. 29, pp. 270-73.

\(^{4^5}\) "This was very difficult, since in this area it is not easy to know as to who is a civilian and who is an LTTE" (sic.) Depinder Singh, *IPKF in Sri Lanka*, (NewDelhi: Trishul Publications, n.d.) p.2

\(^{4^6}\) Somasundaram, n.32 p.221
Operation Trishul and Viraat - were launched between April and June, 1988. This time the IPKF was careful not to operate from heavily populated areas such as in Jaffna. However, the war dragged on resulting in grave atrocities and casualties on the civilian population.

Two other events of political significance were the provincial councils elections in 1988, which brought V. Perumal of the EPRLF to power and the 1989 Presidential elections, in which Ranasingha Premadasa became President. The provincial councils elections made the LTTE the single largest militant organization fighting for a Tamil Eelam, and henceforth, the battle lines were clearly drawn. Premadasa came to power with a promise of the IPKF ouster, which brought his government and the LTTE closer. The IPKF was seen as a common enemy.

Political violence was escalating on two other fronts - one, among different Tamil militant groups and two, the JVP insurrection in the South. Though the latter had no direct impact on the North-East, it nevertheless added another dimension to the war and sent across the message that any resistance against the state would be ruthlessly suppressed without much scope for dialogue.

In the North and East, the rivalry and open fighting between different Tamil militant groups was escalating with the help of the IPKF. This had a dual impact on the pattern of displacement. One, it was affecting civilians caught between different territories controlled by the LTTE or non-LTTE groups. Two, combatants particularly from the non-LTTE factions were being persecuted and killed by the LTTE. These people had to flee for safety and a large number went to India. In 1991, there were five refugee camps in Tamil Nadu, where 1757 militants belonging to the LTTE, PLOT, EPRLF, TELO, ENDLF and EROS were housed. There was a complex pattern and varied sources of violence at different times during the course of the conflict. They were the Sri Lankan Armed Forces, the Special Task Force (STF), the LTTE, the IPKF and other militant groups.

The IPKF operations and the patterns of violence had a direct impact on the pattern of refugee generation. In the first two months till September, there was so much hope for peace. There was no displacement at the time. The next phase started when Operation Pawan was launched resulting in

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49 For details of militant refugees see Table 5.2 in Chapter Five. Also see C. Amalraj, Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees on a Road to Nowhere: A Situation Report in India. Report of IIRS, Dindigul, 1992.
serious fighting and ensuing displacement. The beginning of 1998 witnessed a cessation of hostilities but, displacement continued because of the disappearances, sporadic attacks, and political attacks on militants. The withdrawal of the Indian Army in 1990, forced other militant groups to take asylum in Tamil Nadu and other Western countries.

**The Second Eelam War, 1990 - 1994**

When the IPKF left Sri Lanka in March 1990, there was lull before the 'storm' that erupted on June 10th. The violence began when the 300 LTTE cadres surrounded the Batticaloa police station. The real issue was, however, rooted in the failure of negotiations between the Tigers and the Premadasa government after the departure of the IPKF. The main issue was surrendering of arms by the Tigers. Broadly the LTTE demand was that conditions be created for them to surrender arms. Specifically, they wanted that four to five thousand of their cardres be regularised in the army, police or both. For two months the talks continued, but proved inclusive till the Tigers decided to challenge the movement of the SLAF.⁵⁰

Initially the LTTE was able to gain much ground and captured most of the populated areas of the East and parts of Vanni. But later the army,

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through a number of combined operations was able to regain most of these areas except Jaffna. The period was marked by a phase of intense fighting between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Forces, probably the fiercest in Sri Lankan history. Both suffered heavy causalities and the scale of displacement was colossal.

The violence had many dimensions during this period. Apart from military confrontation between the Army and the LTTE, there was internecine warfare among the Tamil groups. After the departure of the IPKF, the LTTE decided to get rid off all other militant groups before it challenged the government forces. Yet another dimension was the violence against the Muslims living in the North and East.

The fighting began in the Eastern Province - Batticaloa and Amparai. The Sri Lankan forces were taken by surprise because according to the circular issued by the LTTE on May 29, 1990, the talks were still in progress between the Government and the LTTE. The sudden attack was not anticipated. as a result, six hundred policeman were taken captive and 200 were feared killed by the LTTE.52

51 USCR, Report, n.17, p.18.
The army retaliated on June 16 in Trincomalee by Killing 100 LTTE cadres. At the same time there were two failed attempts at reaching a ceasefire on June 13th and 16th. The Sri Lankan Armed Forces on its part intensified the offensive when it sent three thousand soldiers to Amparai under Major General Denzil Kobbikaduwa who had successfully led Operation Liberation in Vadamaratchi in 1987. This was supposed to be an important military strategy. General Kobbikaduwa was sent not just because of his proven efficiency in handling such major military offensives, but also because it had a psychological impact on the LTTE. The civilian population realized that the offensive was likely to be fierce and long-drawn. Anticipating this they moved out of the area in large numbers.

The fighting soon spread to Trincomalee, Amparai, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mankulam and Vavuniya. The Army had begun to regain lost territory in Batticaloa and Amparai. Violence spread beyond the epicenter and there was heavy civilian casualty on both sides. In the first two months after the Batticaloa round up, 279 civilians were killed by the security forces, including twenty refugees in a boat in Amparai and another thirty refugees in a camp in Kalmunai. The LTTE also killed over 175 Sinhalese and
Muslims, during the same period.\textsuperscript{53} There was a counter offensive from the Sinhalese in Amparai where about 275 Tamil civilians were killed by Homeguards in connivance with the Army. According to the LTTE, five hundred civilians were killed when the SLAF used helicopter gunships and gunboats to shell LTTE positions and civilian localities.\textsuperscript{54} The extent of displacement was so large that by the end of July there were 880,000 people displaced in 640 welfare centers in the North and the East. In Jaffna alone there were 355,000 refugees in 352 welfare centers. In Batticola, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts there were approximately 100,000 displaced persons.

The Sri Lankan Army started their June 15 operations in Batticaloa, from two directions. The forces were approaching from Amparai in the South-East and Pollonaruwa in the North-West of Batticaloa. Due to this, the people were caught between the two. This resulted in substantial internal displacement within the district itself. They took refuge in nearby schools, temples and other buildings. The Eastern University Campus,

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\textsuperscript{53} For details see, Godfrey Gunatilleke, \textit{The Human Cost of the War}, Report of the National Peace Council, Colombo: 2000

Vandaramulla, in the Batticaloa district was housing an estimated forty to fifty thousand people.\textsuperscript{55}

However, according to the UTHR Report, Batticaloa was not as severely affected as Trincomalee.\textsuperscript{56} There were 756 registered cases of disappearances in Batticaloa in the year 1990. Out of these 677 were Tamils and 59 Muslims. Since 1996, there have been a series of joint military operations in the Vanni area, which has led to multiple displacements of people. The displaced people had to keep moving with the change in the combat zones. After the Operation Riverasa I, the military launched another offensive to claim the rest of the peninsula. People were displaced once again, this time towards Vanni. Those who had taken refuge in Thenmaratchi during the earlier offensive sought refuge in India. When the Operation to wrest Kilinochchi, from the LTTE was launched in July, the same people along with the Kilinochchi population moved further into the jungles some fled to Mullaitivu.

During the same time, seven thousand refugees fled to India. They were originally from Jaffna who had been displaced in Thenmaratchi during Riverasa I and from Thenmaratchi, they went to India by boats despite a

\textsuperscript{55} These views were expressed in a personal interview with a refugee. The USCR report, n.17, puts this figure at 42,000 in September, 1990.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. p.4
strong naval presence. The fear and insecurity among the local non-combatant population was such that they would trek miles to the Roman Catholic Church in Thethatheevu in the night.

By and large the direction of displacement was from Trincomalee and other districts towards Jaffna. People were leaving not just because of the ground realities, but also due to indiscriminate shelling and air strafing by the Air Force and naval warfare in Kankesanthurai and Velvattiturai. The exodus to India was high, despite the fact that the Sri Lankan Navy was constantly on vigil. By the middle of July, 720,000 people had crossed over to India. According to the UTHR Report, Jaffna civilians faced indiscriminate aerial attacks and shelling especially around the Fort area and Jaffna Hospital. Since these were heavily populated areas civilian casualties were high and insecurity and fear became greater. Houses were also destroyed and damaged. According to a statement by a Catholic Priest, "The Government's policy of hitting terrorists from the air is like swatting mosquitoes with a hammer. Many of the aerial attacks on civilians are not necessarily planned, but come from a casual indifference to civilian life." For

instance, when the LTTE attacked passing aircrafts, airman often retaliated by bombing villages below, like it happened in Ariyalai.58

In this situation, Jaffna residents fled to India or to Kilinochchi, or remained displaced within the peninsula. There were a large number of people who anticipated that peace was elusive in the near future were trying to go to Colombo to settle there or seek asylum in western countries.59 At the end of 1990, more than 111,000 refugees were registered at the Mandapam camp in Tamil Nadu.

October 1990 marked a significant move in the pattern of refugee generation, when approximately 40,000 to 75,000 Muslims from Jaffna, Mannar Mullaitivu and Killinochchi were forcefully evacuated. According to some Muslim refugees they were served a notice to 'leave or be killed'. This obviously forced them to leave enmasse. Most of them took refuge in the predominantly Muslim district of Puttalam, while others fled to welfare centers in Anuradhapura, Kurunegala or Colombo. They were given 2-8 hours notice to leave and were not allowed to carry with them much cash or jewellery. They did not offer any resistance to this blatant move, fearing a backlash from the LTTE. The LTTE had unleashed a spate of violence

58 Ibid., pp.5-6.
against the Muslims earlier in 1987 and 1990. On August 3, 1990, the LTTE attacked two mosques in Kattanakudy, killing hundred people and injuring eighty and again in Eravur on August 12, it killed 75-89 people, all Muslims. The ire of the LTTE against the Muslims dates back to December 1987 when they killed 89 people in Kattanakudy. Since the beginning of the fresh offensive in 1990, the Muslims in Kurukamadam, Kattanakudy and Eravur have been indiscriminately killed by the LTTE.

This politically motivated move of evicting the Muslims was adopted by the LTTE for three reasons. Firstly, the Muslims were gradually asserting their identity as distinct from the Tamil identity. Secondly, there was a suspicion that they had sided with the Government and were even helping out as state informants. The state had apparently armed Muslim home guards to kill the Tamil civilians living in the North and East. Thirdly, this was a political move in order to change the demography of the region and 'cleanse' the 'Tamil homeland' of all outsiders.

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61 For details see UTHR Report No.11, April, 15, 1993 Jaffna, Land Human Rights and the Eastern Predicament, Chap VI, The Dehumanized Environment and Consequences for Muslim-Tamil Relations, pp.55-78.

62 For details see Refugees are people, Northern Muslim Refugee Organization, Report (Puttalam, 1996).
The year 1991 began with the unilateral cease-fire by the LTTE, but was violated by the LTTE itself with the attack on Kondachchi camp in February killing 45 army personnel. Military operations continued on both sides. The Joint Operations of the Army, Navy and Air force with the help of the PLOTE and the EPDP, gained ground in the Vanni area and Batticaloa town. Civilian life was severely affected in terms of lack of transport, infrastructure and essential items including fuel. By the end of August 1991, 1.7 million people were displaced in the island. On August 9, 1991, Emergency Restriction of Transport of Articles, No.1 of 1991 was imposed banning at least forty different items to the North. The Military also imposed severe restrictions on the LTTE areas in the East. The Operation Balawegaya was carried out in August 1991 in the Elephant Pass army camp. Since then Jaffna has been cut off from the rest of the country. Approximately eighty thousand people have been forced to take refuge either in camps or with friends and relatives due to the ongoing fighting.

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The next two years, up to September 1993, there was a lull in the fighting. There was a qualitative improvement in the situation. But the assassination of President Premadasa led to indiscriminate arrests of Tamils especially in Colombo where eight thousand Tamils were arrested. Nearly 250,000 Tamils were living in the capital of which over one lakh people were from the North and East. Amidst this situation, there was still hope for peace, so it was felt that conditions were conducive for repatriation. But fresh fighting began by the end of September 1993, dispelling the spirit of optimism. The following figures on displacement provided by the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction would throw some light on the magnitude of displacement in the first phase of Operation Riverasa (October 1994 and December 1995):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Approx. No. of IDPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1994</td>
<td>525,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 1995</td>
<td>625,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 1995</td>
<td>649,049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1995</td>
<td>1,017,181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: These figures include only those receiving dry rations.


Even if these conservative estimates are taken into account, the sharp rise of almost 500,000 displaced people in just two months indicates the magnitude of displacement unleashed as a result of the Operation Riverasa.


The main facet of refugee generation discernable in this period was internal displacement. The reasons can be located in political, economic and external factors. Politically, the Government of Sri Lanka wanted to downplay the effects of the conflict due to economic reasons as international concern over human rights violation were growing. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka was established in 1996, and the Committee to Inquire into Unlawful Arrests and Harassment was set up in 1998. The effort was basically to contain the movement of refugees within the country itself. But ground realities in the two-pronged policy (adopted by the Government) were entirely different. There were a series of army operations and people were forced to escape from combat zones. Due to this internal displacement was high.

This phase is marked by failed efforts at bringing peace and finally the launch of operation Riverasa that the newly elected President termed as “war for peace”. After heavy fighting in both phases of Riverasa, there has been an ongoing conflict in the Vanni, area. After Jaffna had been wrested,
the main objective of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces was to secure land route to Jaffna. There have been many smaller operations since then. The LTTE on its part has been attacking army camps and police stations. It captured in the Elephant pass in 2000. While there is an effort to resettle people in Jaffna, displacement continues within the peninsula. Unlike other phases, in this phase the same set of people keep getting displaced as the combat liner keep changing.

Chandrika Kumaratunga came to power with the promise of bringing peace to the island. Negotiations began probably in right earnest and culminated in a ceasefire in January 1995 to stop hostilities. The LTTE had three main demands. One was to completely lift the economic embargo on the North. The second demand was the removal of the Poonagari army camp in order to ensure free movement between the peninsula and the mainland. The third demand was to allow the LTTE cadre to have free movement with weapons in the army controlled area in the Eastern Province. Though the Government agreed to the first demand and partially to the second demand by agreeing to move the camp by two kilometers, the LTTE did not respond to the moves initiated by the government. There were also some practical difficulties in implementing them. Due to these reasons, once again fighting resumed after a suicide attack by the LTTE in Trincomalee on April 19, 1995;
it drowned two vessels of the Sri Lanka Navy. The renewed fighting forced the people to flee. In October the Operation Riverasa was formally launched by the security forces to capture Jaffna town. There was a loudspeaker announcement by the LTTE on the evening of October 30, asking people to leave or face the consequences. The LTTE cadres went to each house asking people to vacate the area. According to the USCR, 300,000 - 400,000 people fled mostly to Chavakachcheri, which is 15 kilometers South East of Jaffna. It is said that 'almost the entire population had left except the old and the infirm.'

The direction taken by most refugees were from Jaffna to Thenmaratchi and Chavakachcheri and then further down to Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar and North Vavuniya. People moved from Jaffna for security of life, they moved further towards Vavuniya due to arduous living conditions.

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68 The LTTE announced: “No one must take this announcement lightly. We are doing battle intensely and bravely with a demonic force. It will attack us from several directions. We too will respond likewise. Since we are going to resist every inch against a state drunk with racism, you people must evacuate for Thenmaratchi and Vadamaratchi, this same night. Jaffna town will soon become a battle zone. We are blowing up Chemmani bridge at 4.00 A.M. If you are not out by then, you will have to remain and face the consequences.” Lakshan Dias, *Situation Report on Internally Displaced People in Sri Lanka*, unpublished paper, (Moratuwa, Sri Lanka) p. 9


70 Remarks of a respondent who was displaced from Jaffna and was still a refugee in mid-2000.
Apart from fierce fighting and difficult living conditions, people also left their homes because the LTTE forced them to leave - 280,000 people were forcefully evacuated to Vanni across the Jaffna lagoon. These people spread out in the Vanni region and were later forced to go further south following operation the Sath Jaya III in September 1996. There were two different trends in 1999. Approximately 64,000 Jaffna residents displaced in Vanni were going back to Jaffna. At the same time, there were ongoing operations in Western Vanni and later Madhu. In the first phase of the operation, people were displaced from Iluppaikulam, Moondrumurippu and nearby areas, and in the second phase of the Operation, people vacated even before the forces arrived. Once Madhu had been secured, the Government began to fortify it, which led to a protest and appeal by the Bishop of Mannar. He sent a letter to the President expressing the adverse impact on civilian life. This led to yet another phase of displacement. About 20,000 refugees who were living in the Madhu Camp were displaced from the camp.

The impasse at the Elephant Pass in April 2000 produced a situation in which people were trapped in the combat zone due to the location of the

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71 British Refugee Council n.50, 1997.
violence. People were caught between the army and the LTTE because of the approaching troops from the north, the LTTE in the South, and naval presence and lack of infrastructure (boats) in the sea due to destruction of boats, ban on night fishing and other military restrictions since 1990.

It can be discerned from the above discussion that the location, intensity and actors of violence and its international impact has been different in the four phases. But at the ground level, the refugee-generating pattern has been the same. First, there is fear, then warning of impending violence. The situation leads to practical difficulties like food scarcity, economic scarcity, and restriction in movement of people.

**INTENSITY OF REFUGEE GENERATION**

In a refugee situation, the combat zone or the war-zone is usually the most affected and the intensity refugee generation is the highest in the area. The scale of displacement decreases as one moves out of the ambit of violence. The most obvious choice or lack of choice in a war situation is to flee towards safety. The following diagram shows how the theatre of violence affects displacement.
The country or society as a whole is affected by the ongoing conflict. Though the intensity of displacement is highest in the war-zone or combat-zone. People in this range flee due to overt violence and survival instinct.

Border villages are the next affected. People move from here due to threat of overt violence. But sometimes the LTTE or army crackdown on border villages, forcing people to move. Riots and violence by homeguards also compel people to flee. By and large the entire district is affected. There is acute shortage of food and other essential items; there are restrictions on fishing in coastal areas. There is also pressure on infrastructure due to incoming refugees. People in this range are marginally displaced and mostly due to the interrelated dynamics of violence.
In the ongoing war, the entire North-East has been affected and displaced at some time or other. During an ongoing operation, restrictions are clamped on the North-East in general. Restrictions on the freedom of movement, adverse effect on employment and education and stress and alienation compels people to flee.

In a war situation, the society as a whole is affected. For instance, there may be symbolic urban attacks or political assassinations. Such acts of violence put the entire Tamil community in peril. There are indiscriminate arbitrary arrests, detention disappearance, torture and even death of civilians in the immediate aftermath of any such act. This leads to displacement in the long run.

Thus, during each phase of violence, the war-zone or combat-zone changes and the intensity of displacement varies accordingly. In 1983, it was Colombo, in 1987 Jaffna, the Eastern Province in 1990, Jaffna again in 1995, and Vanni since 1995. Nevertheless refugee generation has remained a continuous process.

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion explicates the arguments set forth in the first chapter. Militarisation has been central in the process of refugee generation in Sri Lanka. The scale, intensity and location of violence determine
displacement. The immediate causes of displacement in a war-zone are related to army operations and the LTTE attacks. Shelling, bombing and the use of landmines are some manifestations of violence in the combat-zones. Survival instinct induces displacement. The other variables that play a vital role are: collapse of economic activity and employment and education opportunities. Fear insecurity, alienation, despair and cynicism have disillusioned the Tamils of the North-East. Each phase of intense violence has been preceded by a significant political event ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. Even if there is a ceasefire or cessation of hostilities, it is used as a period for recruitment, and to resume the war with renewed vigour. Due to this, there has been refugee generation even during periods of uneasy calm. Politically, refugees are both an asset as well as a liability. The LTTE or Government often induces displacement. The expulsion of Muslims from the North and East is a case in point. In recent years, Sri Lankan government is trying to downplay the conflict. So the effort is to keep refugees within the country by keeping a strong naval surveillance at all exit points. The LTTE has a dual stand, sometimes they want to keep refugees within their own territory i.e. 'uncleared areas' so that they can be used as human shields, to prove that they have public support and also to get essential food and supplies into their territories. At times they would like to use the refugees to
internationalise the conflict by compelling them to flee. The two most
important international determinates have been the role of diaspora and the
response of host or asylum giving countries. The role of the diaspora in
helping the Tamil cause has been active in funding, disseminating and
lobbying with the foreign governments and international human rights
groups. The role of asylum giving countries is also important.
Internationally, the countries of Europe and Australia have been less
sympathetic to Tamil refugees in recent years. The Government of
Switzerland signed an Agreement with Sri Lankan government to repatriate
refugees whose papers have been rejected. The largest refugee receiving
country i.e. India, has had a mixed response which has changed from
sympathy, apathy to indifference. It is due to these reasons that
displacement in Sri Lanka is more internal in the last five years. The
forthcoming chapter deals with refugees within their own country i.e. the
internally displaced people.