CHAPTER II
GENESIS OF THE CONFLICT

INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, Sri Lanka has been in the throes of intense conflict and violence. Throughout this phase people living in the conflict zones of the North and East, and the country at large have been affected by violence in several ways. There has been widespread displacement of people, both within and outside the country. This is of primary concern to the present study. However, since conflict and refugee generation do not have a simple cause-effect relationship, and cannot be explained so simplistically, it becomes imperative to understand the background of the problem itself. This chapter, therefore, attempts to explain the genesis of the conflict.

Most scholarship on Sri Lanka considers the conflict in Sri Lanka as 'ethnic'. So the first question that needs to be addressed is whether the situation in Sri Lanka can be termed as 'ethnic conflict.' As mentioned in the previous chapter, the term is steeped in controversy about what exactly is 'ethnic'; since ethnic boundaries keep changing, how a wide array of incidents of conflict is loosely termed as ethnic. The problem becomes further confounded when one has to explain the Sri Lankan situation, because the country is not divided into 'pure' categories of religion or language. Sri Lanka
presents a mosaic of overlapping categories. Moreover, these categories also often overlook questions of class and gender.

It must be admitted that the present study will have to contend with the term 'ethnic conflict', to explain the Sri Lankan situation. It is a 'new term which explains newer social realities,' as Glazer and Moynihan had stated in the 1950s. Also, that there is no alternative term to explain the complex scenario that Sri Lanka presents.

The main argument in this chapter is that the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalese are not two antagonistic groups alienated since time immemorial. The antagonism between them has developed over a prolonged period when people have been mobilized as two distinct ethnic groups with mutually opposing interests. The conflict is a combination of various social, political and economic forces in society. The present chapter analyses how the conflict has emerged in Sri Lanka. A plausible starting point would be to understand the demography of the country.

**DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS OF ETHNIC CONFLICT**

Regardless of who first settled in Sri Lanka, it is an established fact that the island has for centuries been a home for the Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims

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1 Neolithic cultures seem to have existed in Sri Lanka, around 10,000 B.C. The oldest known culture in Sri Lanka, is supposed to be the Balangoda around 5,000 B.C. H.L.Seneviratne, “Identity and the Conflation of Past and Present,” in Seneviratne (ed) *Identity Consciousness*
(Moors), Burghers and Malays. In fact the country has one of the most complex plural societies in the world with as many as four of the world's major religions and more than two different languages. According to the census of 1981, Sri Lanka has a population of 15 million people - 74 per cent of them are Sinhalese, 18.2 per cent Tamils, 7.4 per cent Muslims (Moors), 0.3 per cent each Malays and Burghers and 0.2 per cent others, which include Borahs and Memons. Based on religion, the population could be divided into four distinct categories - Buddhists (69.3 per cent), Hindus (15.5 per cent), Muslims (7.6 per cent) and Christians (7.5 per cent).

These two categories are overlapping in the sense that of 74 per cent Sinhalese, 69.3 per cent are Buddhist, the rest 4.7 per cent are Christians. Again, of 18.2 per cent Sri Lankan Tamils, 15.5 per cent are Hindus and 2.7 per cent Christians. The Muslims include 7.1 per cent Moors and 0.3 per cent of Malays.

These categories are further divided along caste and regional lines. The Sinhalese are of two categories, the Low Country Sinhalese and the Kandyan

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3 Borahs and Memons are Muslim communities from Western India particularly Gujarat and Maharashtra settled mainly for business purposes.
4 Christians also include the 0.3 per cent Burghers of Dutch origin.
Sinhalese. The former is concentrated in coastal areas. They were accessible to Portuguese, Dutch, and British influence and, therefore, to Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and English education. On the contrary, the Kandyan Kingdom maintained its independence for a long time and therefore was late in coming under the European influence.\(^5\) The Kandyan Sinhalese have preserved their own culture. The difference between the Kandyan Sinhalese and the Low country Sinhalese is also based on English education, religious orthodoxy, and conservatism. There are also caste divisions among the Sinhalese population - the dominant 'goyigama' (cultivator) caste, 'Karava' (fisher folk), 'Salagama' (cinnamon peeler) and 'Durava' (toddy tapper) castes.

Likewise, even the Tamil community is not homogenous, as it may seem to be. According to Valentine Daniel, "a deep dividing line runs through the Tamil community."\(^6\) They are broadly divided into the Sri Lankan Tamils, who live in the North and East (also called 'Ceylon' Tamils and 'indigenous' Tamils) and the Estate Tamils (also called 'Plantation Tamils', 'Indian Tamils, and 'Hill country Tamils'). The Estate Tamils live in the South-Central region.

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\(^5\) The Kandyan King had staged two rebellions against British administration in 1817-18 and again 1848. They have been able to maintain their own indigenous culture and social organisation. In 1927, a number of Kandyan Sinhalese politicians had insisted before the Donoughmore Commission for a federated criterion in which they could look after their own affairs with a fair degree of autonomy. However by 1931, they had forged other political links. A.J. Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka: 1947-1973*, (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp.38-41.

They were brought as indentured labour by the British to work on tea and coffee plantations, in the nineteenth century. Most of them belong to Thiruchirapalli, Madurai, Tanjore, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu. Some of them are from Salem and Arcot districts in Tamil Nadu. According to 1981 census, they constitute 5.6 per cent of the population; in 1953 they formed 12 per cent of the country's population.\textsuperscript{7} The Jaffna Tamils have a deep and abiding sense of cultural superiority over the Indian Tamils. The two groups also deride each other's dialect (though both speak Tamil) and have even given derogatory epithets to each other.\textsuperscript{8}

Sri Lanka also consists of smaller but by no means insignificant groups. Prominent among them is the Muslim community which traces its origin to Arab traders (even before the advent of Islam); Indians from the Southern and Western region and some Muslims from South East Asia. Though the Muslims by and large speak Tamil at home, they have been asserting their identity as being distinct from the Tamils. Socio-political and demographic compulsions have urged this erstwhile acquiescent minority to be assertive of its identity.\textsuperscript{9} This adds yet another dimension to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[7] ibid. pp.18-34.
\item[8] The Jaffna Tamils call the Estate Tamils \textit{Vaditakkathayan} meaning Northern due to their recent origin and the latter call the Jaffna Tamils \textit{'panangkoddai cuppis}, i.e., 'suckers of Palmyra seeds', ibid. p.18.
\item[9] For details on the Muslim community in Sri Lanka see Vasundhara Mohan, \textit{Identity Crisis of Sri Lankan Muslims}, (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987). Also see Qadri Ismail, "
\end{footnotes}
These differences show that groups in Sri Lanka are by no means homogenous cultural units. There is a lot of overlapping between categories, as well as internal schisms. According to Kearney, caste, region, religion and class have all been sources of identity in Sri Lanka. Though it was anticipated before independence, that caste would play a crucial role in creating identities, the caste factor remained confined to localities and constituencies, and did not come to the fore in the way it was anticipated. The most important source of division has been what Kearney calls' broader primordial groups,' generally referred to as 'communities'. Till the census of 1911, the term 'race' was used, but it was later replaced by 'nationality'. The ambiguity of the terms as well as the categories point to the fact that the present differences and antagonism are based on selective ethnic histories.

However, a key element in the development of the ethnic conflict has been the regional concentration of various groups. This has proved to be an important factor for the growth of the conflict to the level of being a

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11 E.B. Denham mentioned in 1911that “despite political connection, the two races are distinct today in Ceylon “E.B. Denham, Ceylon at the Census, 1911 (Colombo, Government University Press, 1911), p.126 as quoted in ibid. p.6).

movement for self-Determination. Though the Sri Lankan Tamils are spread out throughout the island most of them are concentrated in the North and East. According to the 1981 Census they have an absolute majority in five districts, namely Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Batticaloa and Vavuniya, and are numerically the highest in Trincomalee.

Geographical location of a majority of the Tamil population in the North and East has been crucial in the crystallisation of their ethnic identity and the idea of a Tamil homeland, 'Eelam'.
**Table 2.1** DISTRICTWISE DISTRIBUTION OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN SRI LANKA (IN PERCENTAGE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Sinhalese</th>
<th>Sri Lankan Tamils</th>
<th>Indian Tamils</th>
<th>Moors</th>
<th>Burghers</th>
<th>Malays</th>
<th>Others</th>
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Another key element in the growth and emergence of the ethnic divide has been the majority-minority sentiment. The majority Sinhalese community has viewed the Tamils with suspicion because of their concentration in the North and East and also its geographical proximity to Tamil Nadu.

This has prompted the Sinhalese Buddhist majority to assert its identity and sought constitutional safeguards to protect and preserve their distinct language and religion. Emergence of a strong Sinhalese identity was predicated on two points: (i) the distinctiveness of the religion and language, and (ii) the belief that since all religions and languages have their own land and country, the island should be the pristine land for the Sinhalese Buddhists.

One of the most potent ways of forging identity awareness is by recreating history. It is by recreating the past that the claims of the community in the present are guaranteed.\textsuperscript{13} Ethnic groups awaken when there is a threat or perception of threat from the 'other'. The past is then integrated with myth and fantasy and a new "perception is created of a past that is glorious and pure and exclusive."\textsuperscript{14} Sinhalese and Tamil identities in Sri Lanka are both reflections of the past, which replicate and reinforce contemporary


\textsuperscript{14} Seneviratne, n.1, p.5
antagonism between the two communities. Despite the fact that the history of the island is unclear, both the Sri Lankan Tamils and Sinhalese claim to be original inhabitants\textsuperscript{15}. According to Hoole, "Modern political ideologies based on selective ethno-histories have compelled ordinary people to construct themselves as 'pure Aryan' and 'Dravidian' ancestries and take their place behind ideological barricades."\textsuperscript{16} It needs to be mentioned in this context that Sihnala-Buddhist revivalism was pioneered by Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and Tamil revivalism was championed by Arumugam Navalar (1822-79). Their views were specifically beset against the proselytizing efforts of the Christian missionaries at the time. These views later became crucial in shaping distinct Tamil and Sinhala identities based on history, which was both real and 'imagined'. Since the Tamils have traditionally lived in the North and East, this has reinforced their exclusiveness and imagination of a homeland.

\textsuperscript{15} According to the Sinhalese view they are descendants of Aryans from North India specifically Bengal and Orissa and came to the island led by Prince Vijaya. The \textit{Mahavamsa} (a political document which was written by Buddhist monks probably in the Sixth century B. C.) postulates an unbroken history of Sinhalese Buddhism since the arrival of Prince Vijaya. On the contrary, the \textit{Damilas} or Tamis are not original inhabitants of Sri Lanka but belong to South India. The legend of Dhutagemunu against the Tamil King Elara has been used to establish their historical linkage and traditional rivalry between inhabitants of the island and outsiders from South India. Diametrically opposed to this is the Tamil view of history. According to them Tamils are legitimate and traditional inhabitants of the island living in the North and East of the island since 1\textsuperscript{st} century B. C. The Tamil Kingdom of Jaffna has existed since 1250 till the arrival of the Portuguese in 1621.

COMPETITIVE ELECTORAL POLITICS IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

In the period prior to independence Sri Lankan politics worked within the parameters of British values and institutions. However, with the onset of independence and the introduction of universal adult suffrage, leaders began to assess the possible outcomes from the perspective of their own distinct communities. There was fear among ethnic and caste minorities that majority groups would dominate representative institutions. The key issue was therefore the sharing of power between different communities. Michael Roberts locates the political divergence between the Tamils and Sinhalese in the 1920-21 split of the Ceylon National Congress (CNC), when Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam broke away from the party with a majority of Sri Lankan Tamil members. Even though there were attempts at forging a unity with a moderate leader like C.E. Correa the effort seemed futile. He led a delegation to Jaffna in order to discuss seat adjustments with the Tamil leadership on the basis of the Mahendra Agreement, but it failed. Ironically F.A. Obeysekara went on record saying in his speech at the Annual Session of

17 It would be interesting to note that caste groups like the ‘Karawa’, ‘Durawa’ and ‘Vahumpara’ advocated for special and separate representation of their interests. In fact Gate Mudaliyar W.F. Gunawardena even demanded that each minority caste should be allowed to have its own elected member. See Jayadeva Uyangoda, Questions of Sri Lanka’s Minority Rights, (Colombo: ICES, 2001) pp.16-17

the CNC, 1924, that, "there is too much communalism with us yet... A mere pretence of unity will not do." Correa reiterated his anti-western pro-accommodation stance in the CNC handbook, 1928 and said that their "social fabric was built on the wholesome and holy principle of nationality. The period is also marked by the formation of political parties along on ethnic lines, like the Tamil Mahajana Sabha, the Sinhala Mahasabha and the Tamil Congress.

With the granting of universal adult suffrage under the Donoughmore Constitution 1931, the Tamil fear of becoming numerically outnumbered began to take shape. This fear was vindicated when the first State Council under the Donoughmore Constitution was formed on July 7, 1931. It consisted of fifty elected members, nine nominated members and three officials of the Colonial administration. Of the fifty elected members, forty were Sinhalese, nine Tamils and one Muslim. The second State Council

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19 The speech was quoted in the editorial of the Ceylon Morning Star, (10 December 1924), see, ibid. p.6.
21 Before this, politics was based on communal representation. From 1833-1899, the Governor nominated 6 members - 3 Europeans and one each from the Sinhala, Tamil and Burgher communities. In 1889 a Muslim, and a Kandyan Sinhalese was also nominated. The electoral principle was first introduced in 1912. The 1920 and 1924 Constitutions combined territorial and communal representations. Hence there were nominations as well as elections to the Council. The final abandonment of communal representation came with the inauguration of the Donoughmore Constitution, 1931. In its report issued in 1932, the Donoughmore Commission denounced communal representation on the ground that it was a barrier to communal harmony. See Robert N. Kearney, n. 10, pp.30-37. Also see Jane Russel, Commercial Politics Under the Donoughmore Constitution: 1931-1947 (Dehiwala: Tissara Press, 1982), pp.2-14.
elections further reinforced this fear. From 1936-47 the Cabinet was composed of Sinhalese members only, except one Tamil member in 1942.\textsuperscript{22} In 1937, G.G. Ponnambalam, put forth a demand for 'balanced representation' based on a 'fifty-fifty' division of Parliamentary seats. As per this scheme the majority Sinhalese community would get fifty per cent of the seats and the remaining 50 per cent would be shared between the Tamils and other minorities.

With the appointment of the Soulbury Commission in 1943 to discuss the future political setup, there was renewed demand for 'balanced representation' and Constitutional and statutory guarantees to protect minorities against the Sinhalese domination.\textsuperscript{23} However, it was felt that a democratic polity itself would ensure the protection of minorities. Hence, the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy with a unitary system was introduced in Sri Lanka. Its negative political consequences become clear when the democratic system began to function in the period after independence.

**DISCRIMINATORY POLICIES AND CREATION OF THE CONFLICT**

The schisms that were developing in the period during the Donoughmore and Soulbury constitutions got sharpened in the post-


\textsuperscript{23} Kearney, n.10, p.36
independence period. In fact, this phase marked the crystallization of 'ethnic'
identity along lines of religion and language.

In the years after independence, the economic scenario began to
decline. Like a typical underdeveloped economy dependent only on three
main products Sri Lanka began to show signs of decline. The price of rubber
crashed in the international market after the end of the Korean War. The
improved health facilities brought the death rates lower, but Sri Lanka could
not maintain a steady balanced growth to keep pace with the growing
population. The balance of payments position (per cent of GDP) fell sharply
from 3.2 in 1950 to (-) 9.6 per cent in 1952. The government responded by
cutting down on welfare programmes and the gradual dismantling of the
public sector. As a result of changes in economy, there was a realignment of
traditional classes. The new urban middle class came into prominence and the
rural and urban petty bourgeoisie as well as the working population was
adversely affected. It is with these concerns that the educated youth, peasants,
workers, fisher folk felt marginalized and expressed their grievances. In the

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24 Central Bank of Ceylon, Annual Reports (Various Years) and D.R. Snodgrass, Ceylon: An
Export Economy in Transition (Homewood: Richard D. Irwin Inc., 1966), p.111 as quoted in
Saman Kelegama, "Development In Independent Sri Lanka: What Went Wrong?" Economic
years to come these grievances were heightened and eventually took them towards militant political activity.\textsuperscript{25}

There was a gradual change in the composition of the area of administrative jobs, and the Sinhalese community was increasing its number where the Tamils and Burghers were earlier predominant.\textsuperscript{26} It was from this rising, competitive class that the Sinhala-Buddhist revivalism received impetus. "Alien traders" against "sons of the soil" became the popular slogan in the Sinhalese press during that period.\textsuperscript{26}

**Official Language Policy**

The economic concerns and Sinhala aspirations, culminating in the 'Sinhala only' language policy of 1956, and were decisive factors in shaping the politics of independent Sri Lanka. Though it had been stated in 1944-45 that Tamil and Sinhala would gradually replace English as the Official Language, the tenor of the Sinhalese leadership changed with the demand for 'Sinhala only' language policy.\textsuperscript{27} This had a three-fold impact: (i) Reassertion of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. (ii) Affront to Tamil language and identity,


and (iii) Effect on opportunities for education and employment. It had a diametrically opposite impact on the Tamils and the Sinhalese. For the majority Sinhala community, it meant an access to government employment. But for the Tamils it reduced their access to employment. More importantly, it indicated that "they had not been given a place in the Sri Lankan state."

The 1956 elections were fought on these issues and the Kotelwala Government, which was initially opposing the SLFP's policy eventually backtracked, and accepted it. The election results proved beyond doubt the potency of Sinhala language in Sri Lankan politics as also the majoritarian nature of both parties.

The Official Language policy was passed amidst protests from the Federal party led by S.J.V. Chelvanayakam. The Bill was referred to as the 'breaking point' in ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The impact of the Official Language policy was felt more acutely in the area of education and employment and was crucial in shaping future relations between the two communities. According to A. J. Wilson, the three aspects of Sinhala Buddhist interest were religion, language and education and employment. They have a long nurtured grievance against the Colonial administration and Tamils in

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particular for not having access to English education and therefore white-collar jobs. To redress this grievance they had a three-pronged strategy in the post independence period. First, make the mother tongue the medium of instruction, declare Sinhala as the sole official language, and third, nationalise all schools. This would ensure the end of the predominance of English educated section mainly Sri Lankan Tamils from government jobs and professional courses.29

The steps that were adopted to arrive at a compromise solution also proved ineffective. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact, 1957 and the Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact, 1965 were two major instances of this failure to reach a compromise. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact recognized Tamil as the language of a national minority and undertook the establishment of Regional Councils in the North and East30. The Pact abrogated because of protest Sinhala hardliners led by J.R. Jayewardene who led the Kandy Yatra and pressures from the Buddhist Clergy. Later another

29 A.J. Wilson, n.5, pp.19-21
30 The Pact which was signed on July 26, 1957 between the Prime Minister, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and representatives of the Federal Party led by S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, specifically mentioned, “After discussions it was agreed that the proposed legislation should contain recognition of Tamil as the language of a national minority of Ceylon....” The Pact further stated that the “Northern Province is to form one Regional area whilst the Eastern Province is to be divided into two or more Regional areas. Provision is to be made in the Bill to enable two or more regions to amalgamate even beyond provincial limits and for one Region to divide itself subject to ratification by Parliament.” For details see Satchi Ponnambalam, Sri Lanka: The National Question and the Tamil Liberation Struggle, (London: Zed Books, 1983)
Pact was signed between Prime Minister Dudley Senanayke and the Federal Party leader S.J.V. Chelvanayakam on March 24, 1965. The Pact sought to make 'special provisions' for Tamil as the language of administration and introduce a provincial council system in the North and East. This Pact also failed because of strong Sinhalese opposition, this led by Srimavo Bandaranaike this time.

Colonisation of Tamil Areas

One of the first development schemes adopted by the Government in the period after independence was the Gal Oya Multipurpose Scheme. It had a three-point programme, which included flood control, irrigation for cultivation, and electricity generation for domestic and industrial use. About fifty per cent allotment of the scheme was made to the local Tamils, Muslims, Sinhalese and Veddas. The other fifty per cent of the allotments was made to Kandyan Sinhalese of the Central Province and other Sinhalese belonging to the Southern Western and Sabaragamuva provinces. 31

31 Stanley Tambiah, n. pp.82-83
TABLE 2.2 POPULATION OF NORTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Sinhalese</th>
<th>Tamils</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>567650</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>758684</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>925060</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>1288040</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1592200</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>2087943</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The minorities in general and the Tamils in particular were irked by the fact that a substantial portion of the first development initiative in the East was allocated to the Sinhalese. The other cause for concern was the rationale of the Government in settling Sinhalese in the Tamil areas. The geographical location of the Multipurpose Scheme was to break the contiguity of Tamil majority areas by bifurcating the North and East. Table 2.2 explicates the change in the demography in the Northern and Eastern Provinces after implementation of the colonisation scheme.

The impact of the Colonisation Scheme was most evident in the Eastern Province. Table 2.3 indicates, that between 1946 and 1981, the Sinhalese population in the Eastern Province had increased from 9.9 per cent to 47.1 per cent. The Sri Lankan population for the same year had decreased from 47.1 per cent to 44.5 per cent. In Trincomalee district, while the Sri Lankan Tamil
population decreased from 40.1 per cent to 34.3 percent, the Sinhalese population rose substantially from 20.7 per cent to 33.4 per cent. Due to the colonisation scheme, Amparai, a new distinct was carved out of Batticaloa district in 1963.

**TABLE 2.3 ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF POPULATION IN THE EASTERN PROVINCE, 1946-81 (IN PERCENTAGE)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Community</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sinhalese</th>
<th>Sri Lankan Tamil</th>
<th>Indian Tamil</th>
<th>Sri Lankan Moors</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batticaloa</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trincomalee</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amparai</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Eastern</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of Sri Lanka, 1946 and 1981

The Delimitation Commission, 1959, later carved out the Amparai electorate as well. In 1985 Amparai had 37.3 percent of Sinhalese population, 41.5 per cent of Muslims and 20 per cent of Tamil population. The Seruvavila electorate was also formed in Trincomalee district. These two electorates returned Sinhalese M.Ps, which increased the Sinhalese representation in Parliament to 80 per cent. This was, much more than their population of 71.9 per cent under the 1971 census.33

33 ibid. p.3.
This has increased insecurity and alienation of the Sri Lankan Tamils. However, the government maintained that since Sri Lanka is a single country, citizens have the right to stay in any part of the territory.\(^{34}\) Though the government tried to pacify this grievance, by a formula devised in 1984 and endorsed in 1986, after negotiations between the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and the Sri Lankan government. As per this formula, state owned land on major irrigation schemes would be distributed in proportion to the population of communities. The Sri Lankan Tamils would be allowed to use their quota in other areas, where they are less in number.\(^ {35}\) The issue was put to rest for sometime, but this was not considered a permanent solution and thus remains a key issue in the Devolution Proposals.

**Disenfranchisement of Estate Tamils**

The Ceylon Citizenship Act no.18 of November 15, 1948, which disenfranchised nearly one million Estate Tamils, did not directly affect the interest of the Sri Lankan Tamils. However, the significance of the Act lies in the fact that it exposed the nature of the State in addressing key issues in the newly independent state. It created two categories of citizenship, either by birth or descent or by registration.\(^ {36}\) Since it was difficult to prove citizenship


\(^{35}\) K.M. de Silva, n. 2, pp.26-27.

\(^{36}\) For details see A. J. Wilson, n.5, pp.28-38
based on these criteria, nearly one million Tamils of Indian origin who had been living in Plantation areas became stateless. They were disenfranchised the following year, as per the Parliamentary Elections no. 48 of 1949. Their names were not excluded in the Electoral Register 1950 in the Central Administrative districts of the country. This was instrumental in substantially reducing the non-Sinhala electorate in the country.

Though they were included in the Scheme of Independence in 1948, presented by D.S. Senanayake, they were excluded in the process of nation building immediately after Independence. Between 1947 and 1950 after the Act was passed, Estate Tamils were reduced in all the constituencies in the Hill Country. The steepest decline was registered in Nuwara Eliya where the number of Indian Tamil voters were reduced from, nearly 25,000 to about 9,000 approximately. The following chart elucidates the point.

![Chart 2.1 Number of Voters in General Elections, 1947-50 ('000)](image)
The political scenario during this period indicates a widening divide in ethnic relations. But the Tamils demanded a federal set up.

INTENSIFICATION OF THE CONFLICT IN THE SEVENTIES

The seventies was marked by two important changes:

(1) A change from the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy to the de Gaullist Presidential system.

(2) The New Economy Policy.

These decisions proved ineffective in countering the growing dissent among minorities. On the contrary it resulted in radicalization of youth politics-both Sinhala and Tamil.

For the first two decades after independence, the country had roughly adopted a mixed economy with a combination of capitalism and socialist reforms, though the emphasis shifted with a change in government. It was felt that state protection was more relevant when the private sector was at a nascent stage. However, in due course, the picture began to change and in 1977 the UNP government launched an extensive liberalization program in 1977.\(^\text{37}\)

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\(^{37}\) The economic liberalization package meant two changes. (1) Relaxation of controls and regulations for goods services and finance, to encourage foreign investment, (2) privatization of state owned enterprises and reduction of state bureaucracy. The relaxation of state controls on domestic prices, internal trade, licensing, imports and exports and foreign exchange transactions was undertaken to increase private entrepreneurs. For
This led to substantial expansion of the urban informal sector, in retail trade, goods and services, transport and communication services particularly in Colombo. It helped urban people especially women who were employed in the Free Trade Zones producing readymade garments for the Western Market. But it wiped out the rural handloom industry. Therefore, the problem of unemployment remained. The jobs offered in the Free Trade Zones were low paid and unskilled, so the educated youth were not accommodated and rural areas were not affected either. Even though the entry of foreign capital increased from 1 per cent of the GDP to 11 per cent in 1982, the terms of trade did not register much change. This was because (1) technology in areas like garments was of a shallow nature (unlike sectors like automobiles), and (2) the export earnings were mostly (70 P.C.) ploughed back to secure raw materials. While export earnings increased in 1976 from 500 million SLR approximately to 1000 million SLR in 1988, import payments also rose steeply from 500 SLR to 1700 SLR during the period. Foreign debt obviously shot up from a modest 6 billion to 124 billion during the decade.

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38 Hettige, n. 25, p.304.

39 Central Bank of Sri Lanka (Report), 1989 (pp.24, 25, 52) as quoted in Rajanayagam and Banda, n.26 , p.112.
If the effect of the economic liberalization programme did not cut much ground for the economy, its impact on the society was far-reaching. School education, which was free till 1977, was henceforth opened to the private sector. This made it inaccessible for the lower and middle classes. White-collar jobs became scanty. Food subsidies were severely reduced; it hampered opportunities for social mobility. The impact of the New Economic Policy has been studied by Hettige to explain the new class formations and further polarization of society. It led to the emergence of a new social urban elite, which he termed as the 'New Urban Middle Class' (NUMC) with a privileged status. These classes of people belonging to both majority as well as minority communities have moved up, while the alienated groups belonging to both communities have taken to particularism. To some extent, this grievance was reflected in the second JVP insurrection by the Sinhala youth in 1987-90 and the separatist struggle by the Tamil youth in the North-East. However, they used cultural capital to largely class character of their struggle. "The same process has pushed them in opposite directions, while the Tamil struggle led by the LTTE is separatist, the Sinhala youth uprising, termed their movement as 'national liberation struggle'. Ranaweera has made the point succinctly, by stating:

40 Hettige, n.25, p.315.
"The present revolt of the Tamil Tigers, is a continuation of the struggle of the deprived youth which started in 1971 - though there is an ethnic label. This rebellion is not against the 75% Sinhala community but against the elites and the bureaucracy. Rural masses are deprived and discriminated whether Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim, by an elitist bureaucracy who act in collaboration with the political parties or party in power. The latter is based in Colombo. Thus this is a class struggle of the deprived, with the youth at the helm, revolting against the power groups, the rulers and the bureaucracy."41

It should also be noted that the 1977 economic policy of liberalization was grossly counter productive for the future political decision making of the country, which was already in the throes of a communal antagonism. Political stability was one of the crucial prerequisites to bring in foreign investment. But, this led to greater authoritarianism with the concentration of power in the presidency as per the 1977 constitution. It led to repressive measures against student movements and trader unions, postponing of elections and intimidation of opposition parties. The military strategy and the enactment of the PTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act), were some drastic steps adopted 'to eradicate terrorism in six months'. Instead of adopting a more accommodative policy towards minorities and alienated sections of society, the government followed authoritarian measures which increased the ethnic divide.42

The structural alterations that occurred in society as a result of the New Economic policy actually paved the way for spiraling of the rift between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. The escalation of riots by the disgruntled Sinhalese youth who did not benefit from the economic policy increased the frequency and scale of riots. Most of the programmes adopted were concentrated in the South, these alienated the Tamil minorities who were already alienated. At the same time, the state adopted strict measures to curb ‘terrorism’ in order to attract foreign investment. This estranged the Tamils further from the state system and drew them towards militancy. The relative deprivation was most acutely felt.

Until the 1960s the Tamils had opted for a democratic struggle, but their numerical strength was not enough to exert considerable pressure on the Government. The 1972 Republican Constitution established beyond doubt the supremacy of Sinhala language and Buddhism. This resulted in anti-government demonstrations in Jaffna. These groups expressed their resentment with the government as well as the Colombo-based Tamil

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44 "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and, accordingly, it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana... ” Quoted from Art. 7 para 1, Chapter II, M. Somasundaram (ed.) Constitution 2000: Parliamentary Debates, Ethnic Affairs and National Integration Division of the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional Affairs, Ethnic Affairs and National Integration, Colombo), p.3
politicians.45 Along with the 1972 Republican Constitution, the Tamils had lost their trust in the Sinhala majoritarian rulers, because instead of securing their interest, they revoked even the basic rights that were guaranteed in the earlier Constitution. The Tamil leadership realized that a unified force was the need of the hour. This gradually led to the formation of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which proposed the idea of a separate state. Thus, Tamil Parliamentary politics also began to take a more militant stance with the formation of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) under the leadership of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam at the Vaddukoddai Resolution passed on 14 May 1976 stated:46

The Resolution categorically stated: "This Convention directs the Action Committee of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) to formulate a plan of action and launch without undue delay the struggle for winning the sovereignty and freedom of the Tamil Nation. And this convention calls upon the Tamil Nation in general and the Tamil Youth in particular to come forward to throw themselves fully into the sacred fight for freedom and to flinch not till, the goal of a Sovereign Socialist State of Tamil Eelam is reached."47

46 "This Convention resolves that restoration and reconstitution of the Free, Sovereign, Secular Socialist State of TAMIL EELAM based on the Right of Self Determination inherent to every nation has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil Nation in this Country." See text of the Resolution Unanimously Adopted at the First National Convention of the Tamil United Liberation Front, held at Vaddukoddai, 14-5-1976 p.6
Despite its attempt to forge a unified struggle for the creation of a separate state, the TULF did not prove to be successful. This was due to two reasons. One, the political programme of the TULF was not able to accommodate Tamil interests within the framework of the Constitution. It could not take the struggle beyond the parameters of the existing Constitution. Two, the Constitution could not accommodate the demand for a separate state. In such a situation, a militant struggle for the creation of a separate state remained the only option.

This in effect meant two things. One, there was a split between the established elite Tamil politicians and the youth. Two, it led to radicalization of the youth reflecting in the establishment of the Tamil New Tigers (TNT), ostensibly the first of the secessionist Tamil groups in the country. The name itself was symbolic, because as opposed to the Sinhala lion race, they proclaimed themselves tigers, and also because the tiger was the emblem of the Chola Kings who had defeated the Sinhala King in 1017 A.D., making him retreat from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruwa. These were early signs of political violence in Sri Lanka. The assassination of the Mayor of Jaffna, Duraiyappah (an SLFP supporter) in 1975 was first decisive step in this direction. Since then the activities of the insurgent-has groups escalated. A

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48 The TNT was split into the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) in 1976.
A spate of political killings of Tamil politicians who belonged to Sinhala majority parties like the UNP and SLFP and police officers continued during the period. The TULF, though it had won the 1977 elections, was fast losing the people's support. (The period is also marked by the radicalization of the Sinhala youth in the South with first the JVP insurrection led by Rohana Wijeweera in 1971.) The UNP government after coming to power was also resorting to more repressive measures to curb violence, in order to attract foreign investment after the 1977 Liberalization (economic) policies. The 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and the proscription of the LTTE in 1977 were some of these measures. Political violence, in August 1977 is reaction to the elections set off another spate of communal riots in the country. It was first directed against the losing political party, but soon took a communal dimension. As the tension and alienation escalated, there was renewed violence in 1981 due to attacks on the police in the North and detention of Tamil youths. Political killings, arson and looting by the police forces became an organized pattern.


50 It was first directed against the losing political party, but soon took a communal dimension.

51 It began with the shooting of two policemen by Tamil Youth in the North who were spurred by the speeches of Tamil Leaders and the desire for separation. For details of the 1977 violence. See Sansoni Commission Report, 1977.

The Admission policy was another factor in the intensification of the conflict. Admission to courses in higher education has been decisive in shaping events in the post 1970 period. The admission policy introduced by Srimavo Bandaranaike was detrimental to Tamil interests. According to this policy, admissions would be based on a standardization system of selection in which Tamil students had to secure more marks to get admission. Admissions were to be based on statistical weightage of communities. The policy led to a steep decline of Tamil students in universities. Though it was slightly modified in 1974 by adding the district quota system to accommodate the rural-urban differences, and the imbalance in the educational standards of different districts, the impact on the Tamils was severe. The number of Tamil students declined from 39.8 percent in 1969-70 to only 19 per cent in 1975. Correspondingly the number of Sinhalese increased from 57.7 percent to 78 percent during the same period. This was really crucial in shaping inter-ethnic relations and shaken the confidence of the Tamil youth in the majoritarian system.53

The referendum of 1982 in order to postpone elections emphasized the undemocratic character of the government. This showed that the response of

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the state to people's grievances has essentially been to delegitimize challenges. The above discussion indicates the growing divide between the Sri Lankan Tamils and Sinhalese while the State was unable to redress the grievances and deprivation of the minority Tamils. Intervals between violent clashes decreased, the intensity of violence increased.

HISTORY OF DISPLACEMENT

1956:

Each spell of violence in Sri Lanka has produced its own set of refugees. The year 1956 is often considered the beginning of this trend. The violence that began in the aftermath of the 'Sinhala Only' language policy set off a disorder resulting in the first ever riots of independent Sri Lanka. Though they were not adequately documented, the 1956 riots provide an insight into the forthcoming issue. The disturbances were essentially rooted in two main issues (1) the resettlement of 5,859 landless Sinhalese peasants in the Gal Oya valley of Amparai district in the Eastern Province. The Gal Oya Multipurpose scheme was in effect the first development project of independent Sri Lanka. (2) Sinhala was declared as the only official language of the country. Members of the Federal Party led by S.J.V. Chelvanayakam opposed and mobilized the people against the Bill even before it was tabled in Parliament on June 5, 1956.

With these two major concerns, the riots of 1956 occurred in the capital Colombo and the newly developed Gal Oya Valley. In Colombo, riots started
when a Sinhalese crowd attacked the 200 odd Tamil protestors on June 5. The following day there was more violence and looting of Tamil shops in the market area of Pettah. Official estimates put the damage at 87 injured and 43 shops looted with 113 people arrested.\textsuperscript{54}

The more serious impact of violence and displacement was felt in the Gal Oya Valley. Tarzie Viltachi considers these riots in Gal Oya as the 'first outburst of racialism on such a large-scale' - with over 150 casualties.\textsuperscript{55} In a report submitted to the Vice Chancellor of Peradeniya University, Stanley Tambiah recalled the events during the Gal Oya riots between June 11 and June 14, 1956. The disturbances were actually a continuation of the Colombo riots and reflected the general mood of political unrest in the country in general and the newly colonized area in particular. There was a climate of unrest in the valley as well as Batticaloa and Amparai, because Batticaloa-Amparai was the main supply route to Gal Oya. There were attacks on the Tamils on 11\textsuperscript{th} June. There were rumours that a Sinhalese woman had been raped, which further heightened tensions. The police force was small and therefore unable (or unwilling) to protect the Tamil from attacks by Sinhalese mobs, which consisted mainly of construction workers and truck drivers.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p.85.
\textsuperscript{55} Tarzie Vittachi, 'Emergency' 58, \textit{The Story of Ceylon Race Riots} (London: Andre Deutsch 1958, p.4).
Though figures of displacement are not available, the pattern is discernable. There were arrangements to shift the fifty or so Sinhalese families from Batticaloa to Amparai. At the same time, the Amparai Tamils had fled in large numbers and took refuge in the Circuit Bungalow and police station. When the Sinhalese families were not transported on time, they had 'gheraoed' the Circuit House and threatened to blow it up. The arrival of the army on the 12th night finally controlled the situation. The Tamils were then shifted to Batticaloa under security the next day. On the same day, many Sinhalese refugee from Bakiela arrived in Amparai. There were rumour that a six thousand strong Tamil group was approaching Amparai. This led to mass exodus from the Gal Oya valley through the Inginiyagala - Moneragala road. By the third day, violence had spread to the valley. This led to large-scale displacement of the Sinhalese settlers towards Amparai. There was also an exodus of Tamil and Sinhalese Board officials from the valley, which reduced the strength of the civil administration substantially. Emergency was declared by the Governor Oliver Goonetileke, which continued till March 1959.

Though the 1956 riots were not as severe as the violence that engulfed Sri Lanka in the years to come, its significance lies in the following:

(i) It was the first instance of group violence in the hitherto peaceful country.
The role of the police especially in Amparai was 'questionable' or inadequate in handling the situation.

It indicated how rumour could lead to violence and displacement.

1958:

The 1958 riots were also a repercussion of the Official Language policy and more specifically the Bandaranaike - Chelvanayakam Pact 1957, which gave some concessions to the Tamils. In this case violence was more intense, the riots were more organized and displacement occurred at a much larger scale. The rioting began in Polonnaruwa on the night of May 23; later it spread to Batticaloa, Colombo and its suburbs - Dehiwala, Ratmalana, Pettah, Slave Island, Wellawatte, Maradana and Mount Lavinia. Tamils traveling by train, were killed by Sinhalese mobs, a priest was dragged out of a temple and burnt alive by the mobs. Armed goondas were in action and went on killing and looting in a planned manner. The rioting continued for four days (indiscriminately) from May 23 to 26. The rumours that were being spread added fuel to the fire. Government officials, even from the Sinhalese community, who were also helping the victims, were attacked, including the Government Agent of Pollonaruwa, Mr. Aluwihare.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{56} ibid., p.8-11.
There was widespread displacement due to the riots. The number was between 12,000\(^57\) 20,000\(^58\) and 25,000.\(^59\) According to Fontgalland, 12,000 Tamils fled from the Southern and Central provinces. The government set up refugee camps in the capital Colombo. When police stations could not accommodate the growing number of refugees, the Colombo Royal College was converted into a refugee camp. There were also a large number of refugees who took shelter outside camps with friends and relatives. Most of the people displaced were from the Sinhala majority areas where they felt insecure and isolated.\(^60\)

When the administration could not cope with the increasing exodus, Tamil refugees were later sent (under security) by ship from Colombo to the North East - Jaffna and Trincomalee. Nine foreign ships were used to transfer about 20,000 refugees to reach Trincomalee and Kankesanthurai. The ships were sent at night and had to circumnavigate the route to ensure safety of the refugees.\(^61\) There was another aspect of displacement: The Sinhalese people living in the North were moved, and put up in camps in the South. Though the Tamils did not attack them, they were relocated, as a precautionary

\(^59\) Virginia Leary, n.52, p.19.
\(^60\) Fontgalland, n.57, pp.42-43.
measure. Thurston College Colombo was one such camp where the Sinhalese were accommodated.

The 1958 riots brought the following facts to light:

(i) The role of the state: During the Prime Minister's address to the nation on May 26, there was a reference to the fact that violence was a result of the killing of the Mayor of Nuwara Eliya, D.A. Seneviratne, on May 25. However, the killing of the Mayor was due to a private dispute, and therefore not a political issue as it was made out to be.62

(ii) It took four days to impose Emergency.

(iii) It is stated that the Prime Minister visited only those refugee camps where Sinhalese 'evacuees' had been housed.63

(iv) Another issue was that the government officials were not spared by the mobs.

1977:

The reasons behind the 1977 riots were far more complex than the previous cases. In the two decades since the last riots, the political and economic situation had changed substantially. These riots happened in the aftermath of the elections in which. The TULF had won many seats with an agenda for an "Independent, Sovereign, Secular, Socialist State of Tamil

62 Vittachi, n. 55, p.10.
63 Fontgalland, n.57, p.43.
Though violence was brought under control within a week, the schism was further sharpened and Tamil militancy began to grow.64

The riots which began in Jaffna on August 15, spread to the south where Sinhalese mobs began killing Tamils.65 Over three hundred Tamils were killed, Ten thousand were injured, 200 Tamil women were raped and about 50,000 Tamils were displaced.66 In 1977, the number of displaced persons had risen sharply. This reflected both the magnitude as well as the emerging complexity in Sri Lankan politics in the years to come. For the first time, many non-governmental organization like Tamil Refugee Rehabilitation Organization (TRRO), and several other organizations worked to rehabilitate refugees. The displaced people went to Vavuniya by road or were sent to Jaffna by ships from Colombo.

**1981:**

The riots of 1981 indicated that violence in Sri Lanka was escalating in terms of frequency and magnitude. The 1981 riots did not happen suddenly, but over a period of time since the tension was increasing in March 1981. The

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65 Narayan Swamy, n,58
66 M. Amirthalingam and R. Sampthan, Genocide in Sri Lanka, Open Letter to the President of Sri Lanka, Moolai, Chulipuram, 10.8.83.
epicenter of violence was in the north i.e. Jaffna and also Ratnapura, Negombo and the plantation areas.  

In Jaffna the riots were a reflection of the built-up tension due to arbitrary arrests of Tamils in the last two months culminated in a 'scuffle' on May 31, at a TULF election meeting. Two policemen, one Sinhalese and a Tamil were killed and a Muslim policeman injured. This was followed by burning of over 100 Tamil shops, also the house of Jaffna M.P., V. Yogeswaran and the offices of the headquarter of the TULF. The Public Library in Jaffna was burnt and over 90,000 rare books and manuscripts destroyed. This was a symbolic attack and that to when the police station was within close reach.  

In the South, the violence broke out in August and was brought under control only after the declaration of emergency on August 17. By then, at least 10 Indian Tamils had been killed and more than 5,000 rendered refugees. Some of them even sought refugee with the Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, since they were Indian passport holders under the 1964 agreement.

68 Virginia Leary, n. 52, p.21.  
69 MIRGE Report, n. 68, pp.11-14.  
71 Leary, n.52. pp.21-22.
Though the 1981 riots are better documented, the nature and extent of displacement of people is rarely and inconsistently mentioned. Leary mentions that a large number of people became refugees; over 5,000 people were displaced in the plantation areas. Other studies do not mention figures except one which put the figures at 40,000 Tamils.

The above discussion shows that the scale and intensity of displacement had increased with each successive violent outburst since the 1956 riots. However, despite the rise in the level of displacement, riots were a sporadic affair. The process had not been routinised till 1983. One of the key features was the fact that the Army was not yet involved, as it would happen in the years to come. People who were displaced in the riots were in most cases able to return to their home. The other discernable feature was the fact that international dimension of displacement was negligible during the entire period.

CONCLUSION

The conflict in Sri has grown from discrimination and a feeling of discontent to a full-blown war between the Tamil militants, mainly the LTTE and the security forces. This has led to crystallization and assertion of identity

72 ibid, p.25.
that is based on real and ‘imagined’ history. The programmes and policies adopted by the State have been decisive in the growing sense of alienation among the Tamil community. This has expressed itself in the escalation of violence. Though each phase of violence has resulted in the displacement of people, the process has become routinized since 1983. This can be located in the intensification of the conflict and militarisation of Sri Lankan society. The subsequent chapter analyses studies the interplay between militarisation and refugee generation in Sri Lanka since 1983.