INTRODUCTION

INDO-SRI LANKA RELATIONS: NEHRU TO INDIRA GANDHI

With the failure of Norway-brokered another peace effort, to bring the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE to the negotiating table in the month of July 2004, once again the need has arisen to analyse prospects for peace in South Asia. Following post-cold war trends in international politics and with the emergence of new power equations and calculations, the great powers of the world shifted their focus from ideological confrontation and objective of containment to the making of a new world order, where patterns of 'calculated cooperation' would be followed, and also where no single country should be allowed to impose hegemonism or to be exorbitantly communal in any region of the world.

Given to these considerations, this is the most suitable time to analyse Indo-Sri Lanka relations right from the day of their independence as since its independence, India has been blamed to be hegemonistic in the region and Sri Lanka is one country whose more than two decades old communal problem, has the potential to inspire other secessionist movements in the South Asian region. To understand the connections between India’s 'Big Brother' attitude and Sri Lanka’s ethnic havoc, we have analysed the policies and attitudes of the successive Governments of both the countries simultaneously since their independence.
In the post World War II period the entire world entered into a period of cold war, consequently two hostile blocks emerged on the basis of ideology. The Capitalist one was headed by the USA and the Communist was led by the former USSR. This precarious situation created hazard for the newly independent and small countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America etc. All those were struggling for their political stability, economic prosperity and social strength. But in that condition it was very difficult for them to choose any independent idea. Many options emerged – whether to align with either of the block or to have an independent philosophy. In these conditions Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, the architect of Indian foreign policy, introduced a new concept that would be followed in the realm of foreign affairs and that was the concept of non-alignment. He favoured the policy of not aligning with any of the big powers but to follow the policy of peaceful co-existence.

Pt. Nehru formulated this policy of peaceful co-existence in order to maintain congenial relations with our neighbours. Our neighbour Sri Lanka is a country with whom we have shared numerous ethnic, linguistic, cultural and strategic bonds. Nehru was well aware of the strategic importance of Sri Lanka as had been stated by Ravi kaul, a former Commander of the Indian Navy, he said, “Sri Lanka is as important strategically to India as Eire is to the United Kingdom or Taiwan to China. As long as Sri Lanka is friendly or even neutral, India has nothing to worry, but if there be any danger of the island falling under the domination
of a power hostile to India, India cannot tolerate such a situation endangering her territorial integrity".¹

The cultural and historical heritage of Sri Lanka goes back to 2,000 years. The reference of Sri Lanka as the "resplendent land", is found in the ancient Indian epic Ramayana.

So first tie was the religious tie which binds the two neighbours. The Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the 3 century B.C. from India, where it had been established by Gautam Buddha three centuries earlier. During the reign of Indian Monarch Asoka, Buddhism was elevated from a minor sect to an official religion enjoying all the advantages of royal patronage. According to Mahavamasa, the most valuable source of knowledge for scholars probing the legends and historical heritage of Sri Lanka, Asoka’s son and emissary to Sri Lanka, Mahinda introduced the king Devanampiya Tissa (250 B.C. – 207 B.C.) to Buddhism. Devanampiya Tissa became a powerful patron of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Devanampiya Tissa employed Asoka’s strategy of merging the political state with Buddhism, supporting Buddhist institutions from the state’s coffers, and locating temples close to the royal palace for greater control. With such patronage, Buddhism was positioned to evolve as the highest ethical and philosophical expression of Sinhalese culture and civilization. “Buddhism appealed directly to the masses, leading to the growth of a collective Sinhalese cultural consciousness”.²

The Asokan missionary approach featured preaching and carried the principles of the Buddha directly to the common people, achieved
greater success in Sri Lanka than it had in India and could be said to be the island’s first experiment in mass education.

Buddhism exerted great impact on island’s literary development too, as the Sinhalese studied Pali, the language of the Buddhist scriptures, thus influencing the development of Sinhala as a literary language.

Early Sri Lankan society adopted the system of social stratification i.e. the caste system from its Indian prototype, but it obviously inculcated its own characteristics. In the caste structure of the Hindu Tamils, the vellala (cultivator) is the highest caste, in the same way, all Sri Lankan heads of state have, since independence, belonged to the Goyigama caste, the highest Sinhalese caste. It is however worth noticing that Sri Lanka developed neither the exclusive Brahmanical social hierarchy nor, to any significant degree, the concept of impurity by contact with impure persons or materials that was at the centre stage of the Indian caste-system. Nevertheless, it was the impact of Buddhism which never allowed the intensification of the institution of caste. The cultivator’s class occupied a very high position in the caste structure of both the Hindu Tamils and the Sinhalese.

The earliest records of the history of Sri Lanka reveal the fact that Sri Lanka was a multi-ethnic society. Evidence suggests that during the early centuries of Sri Lankan history there was considerable harmony between the Sinhalese and Tamils.
With the usurpation of the Sinhalese throne at Anuradhapura, by two adventurers Sena and Guttika from southern India, in 237 B.C. challenged, for the first time, the peace and stability of the island. For the first time Sri Lanka was ruled by Tamils, continuously for twenty two years. The two were subsequently murdered, and the Sinhalese royal dynasty was resorted.

In 145 B.C., a Tamil general named Elara, of the Chola dynasty (which ruled much of India from the ninth to twelfth centuries A.D.), took over the throne at Anuradhapura and ruled for forty-four years. A Sinhalese king, Dutthagamani (or Duttugemunu), waged a fifteen year campaign against the Tamil monarch and finally deposed him. Duttagamani’s victory is generally interpreted as the beginning of the ‘Sinhalese nationalism’ which still has the potential to stir the religio-communal passion of the Sinhalese.

In the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., owing to the assertion of three Hindu empires in southern India—the Pandya, Pallava, and Chola, the Tamil threat to the Sinhalese Buddhist kingdoms had turned to be very prominent. In India, the absorption of Buddhism by Hinduism and subsequent rise of Tamil identity assertion (as now they had identified themselves as Dravidian, Tamil, and Hindu, respectively) further intensified Sinhalese insecurities. Under the rule of these kingdoms, Hinduism flourished and Buddhism received a serious setback.

The Cholas were driven out of Sri Lanka by king Vijayabahu I in A.D. 1070 who mainly concentrated on rebuilding the Buddhist temples and monasteries that had been neglected during Chola rule. He left no
clearly designated successor to his throne, and a period of instability and civil war followed his rule until the rise of king Prakramabahu I, known as the Great (A.D. 1153-86). His reign was not only a time of Buddhist renaissance but also a period of religious expansionism abroad. The Sinhalese monarch, in order to provide aid and assistance to a Pandyan claimant to the throne, also involved himself extensively in Indian politics.

By thirteenth century the Sinhalese Kingdom lost its ground and faced threats of invasion from India and the expanding Tamil Kingdom of northern Sri Lanka. Exploiting the situation, Tamils established control over the ‘valuable pearl fisheries’ around Jaffna peninsula. And this was the time when the Tamils and the Sinhalese were separated by the gigantic stretches of forests which overlay north-central Sri Lanka.

Foreign rulers took advantage of the disturbed political state of the Sinhalese Kingdom and Prakramabahu VI (1412-67) was the last Sinhalese king to rule the entire island. This was the beginning of European dominance (1500-1948) over the island. First the Protuguese ruled over Sri Lanka followed by the Dutch rule which was replaced by the British rule. The point to notice here is that in India too the Mughal Empire (1526-1757) was facing threats from the major European powers which were trying hard to fill the power vacuum in the subcontinent. After loosing the Indian port of Madras to the French in 1758, the British exhibited great interest in the excellent harbor at Trincomalee and ultimately they captured the harbor in 1796 and expelled the Dutch from the island.
Now our period of study starts right from the day when India and Sri Lanka became independent. India got independence in 1947 and Sri Lanka in 1948. So far the regional policy priorities are concerned, for last five decades, India has noticeably laid attention to Sri Lanka. Though the relations of both the countries have witnessed the phases of divergence as well as convergence but the fact of the matter is that the relations have never touched the point of saturation or have never been completely broken up. Both the countries had evolved a different pattern of strategic thinking and different approaches towards defence and security matters.

To know the roots of the problem between the two neighbours who have for centuries been tied with numerous cultural, linguistic, ethnic ties, we will have to understand and analyse viewpoints inculcated in the national psyche of Sri Lanka and articulated by its ruling elites which, after independence designed and shaped the foreign policy structure of Sri Lanka. Being a small South Asian country, Sri Lanka has always suffered from threat and insecurity perceptions. These threat perceptions were intensified by the geographical location and strategically strong position of India in South Asian Region. The first Prime Minister and elder statesman of Sri Lanka, Don Stephen Senanayake was the first to consider India to be a potential threat to the island's security. This faith of him was blindly followed by the successive UNP (United National Party) ruling elites. Sri
Lanka’s defence Agreement with Britain* was an instance of Sri Lanka’s insecurity perceptions against India. As John Kotelawala once explicitly expressed about aggression from “quarters closer home” and also exhibited the fear of absorption of the island by India if British bases were withdrawn and Englishmen were completely dispensed with.⁴

The UNP leaders particularly Senanayake and Kotelawala suspected the presence of about eight lakh Indian Tamils as India’s potential fifth column and misinterpreted the concept of ‘strategic unity’**, supported by some of the Indian leaders and strategic thinkers. These Sri Lankan leaders termed the concept of ‘strategic unity’ as a political ploy to make Sri Lanka a part of India. These fears or charges were quite unjustified and Nehru*** later on attempted to lessen them by assuring the UNP leaders of India’s goodwill and peaceful intentions. But UNP leaders could not be convinced and preferred a defence policy with extra-strategic considerations.

* Negotiated and concluded when Sri Lanka was still a British colony, the Agreement came into force on the day (4 February, 1948) it became independent. Under the Agreement Britain ensured Sri Lanka’s defence against external aggression and agreed to assist in the training and development of its armed forces. In return Britain was provided with military base and facilities in the island and assured of military assistance if it suited Sri Lanka’s interests.

** K.M. Panikkar in his book ‘India and the Indian Ocean’ has propounded the idea of strategic unity of India Sri Lanka and Mayanmar, as one of the pre-requisites to a realistic policy of Indian defence.

***Nehru himself, in 1945, maintained that given its ethnic, linguistic and cultural linkages, Sri Lanka would inevitably be drawn into a closer union with India particularly as an autonomous unit of the Indian Federation.
Now the extra-strategic considerations were, breaking India’s obstinate position on the issue of stateless Indian Tamils and the ambition of Sri Lankan leaders to acquire stature as Asian leaders.\(^5\)

Senanayake and his UNP wanted Indian Tamils to be repatriated to India as it was a political necessity emerged out of the electoral reality of the island in the late forties. They emphasized that it was must for the nation-building process in Sri Lanka. Hence, strategic partnership with Britain would strengthen Sri Lanka’s bargaining power and would compel Indian Government to renounce rigid attitude on citizenship status issue. Nehru, however never compromised on the question of compulsory repatriation of Indian Tamils but his successors Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi adopted an accommodative approach and thus, failed where Nehru was successful to a large extent.

Secondly, personal identity aspirations of the UNP leaders never allowed them to accept Nehru as a “leader of opinion in free Asia”.\(^6\) They always admired Nehru as a statesman but wanted to nullify India’s pre-eminent position in the region by following a shrewd strategy of military cooperation (1947 Agreement with Britain) by utilizing Sri Lanka’s advantageous location in the Indian Ocean. This was nothing but an identity assertion of a small country against a big neighbour India. Nehru however very intelligently avoided to criticize this move of Sri Lanka rather assured his small neighbour his country’s good intentions.

To India’s relief, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) regime under S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike (1956-1959) and Sirimavo Bandaranaike
(1959-65; 1970-77) exhibited a friendly and sensitive attitude towards India's strategic concerns. But as a step ahead to terminate the British bases at Katunayake and Trincomalee in 1956, the Sri Lankan Prime Minister did not ask for an abrogation of the defence Agreement altogether. This attitude made it clear that SLFP regime though considered India as a friendly power but was not prepared to ignore the 'big power's threat factor' to the island's security. So here the difference between the approaches of two leaders D.S. Senanayake and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike is evident. The former preferred "the strategy of counterpoising India through military involvement in the island and the latter preferred friendship with India". So far Sirimavo Bandaranaike's regime is concerned, though she followed her husband's foreign and security policy, she preferred cultivating strategic relations with China and Pakistan as compared to India. The examples of such approach are; the neutral stance of Sri Lankan Government on the Sino-Indian war and Sri Lanka's extension of air transit facilities to Pakistan during the 1971 war and a delayed recognition to Bangladesh.

Later on Indira Gandhi's personal friendship with Mrs. Bandaranaike, in a way compelled India to accommodate its interests in some of the contentious bilateral issues like the citizenship question of Indian Tamils and the Kachchativu dispute. Even India's immediate military assistance to suppress the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurgency in 1971 did not exert much influence on the bilateral relations of two neighbours. During eighties the relations were marked with
Introduction

personal incompatibilities between the Congress Prime Ministers and UNP Presidents as Mrs. Gandhi had followed a pro-SLFP foreign policy. Not only the personal incompatibilities but the UNP’s pro-western attitude was also responsible for spoiling the relations. Sri Lanka’s choice was for military assistance and strategic presence of the west in the island. China and Pakistan willingly accepted military supplies to Sri Lanka while US arranged the services of the Israeli intelligence agencies. UK at the same time arranged the finances for the Sri Lankan Government to hire the services of former British Air Service Personnel to train its commando units. India made its annoyance clear on such intrusion of foreign mercenaries as it would have an adverse impact on the bilateral relations.

In place of respecting India’s security sensitivities, Jayewardene Government tried to be strategically closer to US by offering certain strategic gestures viz., extention of refueling and recreation facilities to visiting US naval ships, grant of a contract for leasing of oil storage tanks in the strategic harbour of Trincomalee to a Singapore based US company*, and December 1983 Agreement of Sri Lanka with the US to establish a powerful Voice of America (VOA) station on the island. Furthermore Sri Lanka gave a fresh lease of life to the 1947 defence Agreement and sought Britain’s direct involvement in the conflict. India however expressed its disliking on the set up of VOA as US navy could use it for intelligence purposes in the Indian Ocean.

* The contract was subsequently revoked when India exposed the manipulation in selecting the tender.
Here the point to be noted is that despite supplying of arms, military help or training facilities, none of the major western countries viz., US and UK were willing to accept Sri Lanka’s charge against India as a potential aggressor and followed a very realistic approach by advising the Jayewardene administration to seek India’s help in resolving the ethnic conflict. China and Pakistan, however owing to their anti-India foreign policy continued providing military support to Sri Lanka.

With the intensification of ethnic crisis, Sri Lanka also realized the ground realities and agreed to consult India on the relevance and employment of external military and intelligence agencies. Sri Lanka also decided to review its agreements with foreign broadcasting organizations to ensure their use solely for public broadcasting and deny Trincomalee port for military use by “any country in manner prejudicial to India’s interests” \(^8\). In return India too assured Sri Lanka of the removal of those Sri Lankan citizens advocating separatism or involved in terrorist activities and that military supplies and training facilities would be extended to Sri Lankan security forces. Though India too accommodated its security concerns yet the general impression was that India, a regional power coerced a strife torn small country to make extensive unilateral security concessions and offered its military help to the Sri Lankan army with a view to restrict the island’s external defence contacts. But here we should always keep in mind that it is a general tendency among smaller countries to seek concessions and accommodation of their interests by big powers.
and for them, an equal relationship with a big country should mean “taking more” and “giving less”, if not nothing.

In the late eighties, in order to perish the ethnic conflict UNP leaders changed their strategy and decided to conclude a friendship treaty with India. As early as in 1948, also, as western countries showed their disinterest in Sri Lanka’s security, Jayewardene proposed a friendship treaty with India but Indira Gandhi did not accept the proposal as Sri Lanka wanted a military solution to the ethnic conflict. But when Rajiv Gandhi came to power, this Sri Lankan demand was accepted by India but unfortunately the draft of the treaty was prepared in a hurry and the materialization of any treaty on the basis of such draft would have benefited Sri Lanka more than India.

According to the bilateral peace Agreement of July 1987, India took over the task of mediation, one of the most delicate practices of International politics. India’s preference was for a military stalemate so that the adversaries viz. Sri Lankan Government and the Tamil militants would be compelled to seek a political settlement of the conflict. But some of the mistakes were committed on the part of Indian Government and this diplomatic mission proved to be a big failure. Firstly, it was a grave mistake that the Indian actors in the conflict had sidelined leaders like A. Amirthalingam and, instead, promoted the militants to become the sole representatives of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Secondly, the frequent replacement of Indian mediators broke consistency in dialogue and negotiations. Thirdly, it was a failure on the part of Indian leaders and
foreign policy experts that they could not understand the actual cunning motive of Jayewardene who through seeking Indian military intervention, wanted to use Indian power to disarm the LTTE. Fourthly, the Agreement was not only prepared in a great hurry but it was also filled with many impracticable provisions. Lastly, sending of Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) which was the most crucial point which revealed the emptiness of 1987 Agreement reached between India and Sri Lanka and which proved to be a major diplomatic failure of Indian Government. After facing great political and military embarrassment India had to withdraw the IPKF. Since then, all the successive Indian Governments have shown indifference towards the developments in the island.

Here we can compare the way of functioning of different Indian leaders. As we know that ethnic crisis was an outcome of an enhanced and unsolved citizenship problem of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. During Nehru’s regime which covers the period 1947-62, the world witnessed an assertive and principle based leadership which never agreed on the issue of mass repatriation or ‘compulsory repatriation’ of Indian Tamils from Sri Lanka to India as it would be a sort of injustice with those who had given their flesh and blood to the development of the island. Therefore, till the date Nehru was alive, Sri Lanka could not be successful in its shrewd policy of ‘mass repatriation’. But Nehru’s successors, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi could never be as assertive as Nehru was so far the solution of citizenship status issue was concerned. They perceived the problem as a major irritant in bilateral relations and therefore complied
with the Sri Lankan Government's pressure by entering into bilateral agreements for the Indian Tamils' repatriation, "in the deliberations of which the various organizations of the Indian Tamils were virtually ignored". Under the leadership of Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi, India gave up its insistence that the stateless people were Sri Lanka's responsibility and accepted that they were the joint responsibility of both the Governments. The Sirimavo Shastri Pact of 1964 and Indira Gandhi Sirimavo Pact of 1974 led to the beginning of a planned mass emigration of the Tamils from Sri Lanka to Indian subcontinent. These successive Indian leaders however gave preference to personal relationship with Sri Lankan leaders over national interest. This move of Indian leaders however had an adverse effect on the family system of about five lakh Indian Tamils who had to repatriate and their family members were divided for both Indian and Sri Lankan citizenship. For this, India should be blamed more than Sri Lanka, because it, by entering into an unfair deal, approved Sri Lanka's policy of mass repatriation.

Similarly, India could not handle skillfully the Kachchativu issue. Nehru on several occasions exhibited his ignorance about the location of the Kachchative island. Though both the countries expressed their claim over this "tiny" and "barren" island but Nehru never made it an issue where "national prestige" was involved and he never entered into an agreement with Sri Lanka and ceded it to the same. But Indira Gandhi considered this as a major irritant in bilateral relations and finally entered into an Agreement with Sri Lanka in 1974 and accepted Sri Lankan claim.
over Kachchativu island despite the availability of enough evidences that Kachchativu had been a part of India, and it is also a fact that this move of Mrs. Gandhi was completely against the wishes and interests of Tamil Nadu. The Kachchativu island, although, had no strategic value for India at the time of this Agreement but, today, its importance has increased considerably in view of the expanding maritime activities of the people of coastal Ramnad and the steady rise in the commercial value of marine products, especially prawns. Unfortunately, Indian leadership ignored the future commercial value of the Palk Strait Region. Had Indian leadership been a bit considerate that time, Indian fishermen would not have faced problems what they are facing today.

The political and strategic irritants have however always affected the relations of two neighbours but so far relations in economic sphere are concerned, both the countries have progressed towards a modest level of economic interaction over the years. Although many political initiatives, within an institutionalized framework, have not been taken to strengthen bilateral economic relations. Bilateral Trade is still governed by the Agreement signed in 1961, and the Joint Commission for Economic, Trade and Technical Cooperation which remained temporarily inactive during the late seventies and for most part of the eighties.

---

* The island was supposed to be a part of the Zamindari of Raja of Ramnad who had regularly leased it and was also receiving rent from that land. During the British rule in India it was the Zamindari of the Raja of Ramnad in the erstwhile state of Madras and present day Tamil Nadu.
From the beginning, India has been a highly desired market for the Sri Lankans and an important source of supply of primary products at a lower cost. Though the volume of bilateral trade is not quite high, there has been a steep increase in imports and exports of both the countries. The difference is that India has increased its export by nearly five times, whereas its imports have merely doubled in value. This has created a huge trade deficit for Sri Lanka. India’s exports rose from US $24.6 million in 1965 to $88 million in 1980, registering the highest growth rate of about 42 percent per year. At the same time, India’s imports increased from $9.7 million in 1965 to $38 million in 1980. During 1985-95, India became the second largest supplier of Sri Lanka’s imports. Its exports accounted for Sri Lanka Rs.7,668 million in 1985 which rose to Sri Lanka Rs.24,045 million in 1995. Its imports amounted to Sri Lanka Rs.1,616 million in 1995. The trade deficit for Sri Lanka has been soaring from $37.89 million in 1977 to $62.4 million in 1980, $268.1 million in 1993-94 and $523.4 million in 1996-97. In view of its chronic nature the Sri Lankan Government has been constantly urging the Indian Government to take measures to reduce the adverse trade balance. Finally, in January 1997, India issued an unilateral decision, when the then External Affairs Minister I.K. Gujral visited Colombo, to remove quantitative restriction and reduce tariffs on some 80 items of export interest to Sri Lanka was a small step to reduce the island’s trade deficit.

On other areas of economic cooperation joint ventures bilateral credit and technological assistance the progress has been very moderate.
India had as many as 14 joint ventures in Sri Lanka by 1991 and transferred intermediate technology under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme. In this context, Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement that was concluded on 22 January 1997\textsuperscript{12} between the two Governments further strengthened the bilateral economic ties. Regarding bilateral credit, India extended about Rs.944 million up to March 1990 and another $30 million was agreed upon in March 1995 for the purchase of capital goods and spares from India. Besides, during his visit to Colombo in January 1997, Gujral announced India’s contribution of Rs.50 million to Sri Lanka’s rehabilitation programme in the north-east. Even though Sri Lanka is not economically dependent on India, there are many areas in which both the countries can come ahead for economic cooperation.\textsuperscript{13} The Free Trade Agreement which India and Sri Lanka entered on 28 December, 1998\textsuperscript{14} was a progressive step towards trade promotion between two countries. This Free Trade Agreement has resulted in narrowing the trade deficit of Sri Lanka with India. In fact in the words of India’s Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, “In fact, the success of the India – Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement has inspired us to exped its scope to cover services and investment in a comprehensive economic partnership agreement”.\textsuperscript{15}

Now India has to determine its Sri Lankan policy in the context of ethnic strife. Owing to the Norwegian sponsored peace bid, for the last more than 12 months, not even a single person has died of ethnic violence. Now the question is how this ethnic violence can be ended? Is federalism
The terms devolution, federalism, power sharing and decentralization are critical words in ethnic conflict resolution. As the available tools there can be two models of ethnic crisis, the integrative model which presupposes an overriding centre, while the consociational model prescribes for fully autonomous federating units. Devolution is the most often used word in Sri Lankan ethnic parlance, “but as far as the model is concerned there is a fierce debate between the protagonists of the consociational model, mostly the Tamils and “Colombo liberals’, and those of the integrative model, mostly the Sinhalese and so-called Sinhala Buddhist hardliners”.

Devolution received immense importance with the emergence of Chandrika Bandaranaike kumaratunga on the political scene in 1994 with the victory of her coalition People’s Alliance (PA) in the general election, which was soon followed by her own victory at the presidential poll. She made it the central point at her election campaigns that “historic injustice had been done to the Tamil community in the island and that she would solve the problem permanently through a massive dose of devolved powers to them after working out a federal structure for the country”. This is however different point that she failed in her mission. Here we have to analyse how effective federalism is as a remedy to the inter-ethnic problem and in particular how viable it is in the Sri Lanka situation. In Sri Lanka there are two popular concepts; one arguing for
federalism as a solution to the ethnic problem thereby securing the state from disintegration, and the other arguing against federalism.

The first argument draws heavily from the current literature on constitutional law, human rights, minority rights and international conventions dealing with questions of self-determination, group rights, etc. The argument is that the territorial basis to Tamil ethnicity, their 'homeland' in the northern and eastern provinces, should be recognized as a province in the Sri Lankan federation with some modifications and the basis of granting them power to govern themselves should be conceptually based on the theory of self-determination.

While the second argument draws heavily from Sri Lanka’s history and comparative federal experience around the world. Those who support this argument believe that throughout history both the Sinhalese and the Tamils have shared one heritage and the entire island belongs to both and other communities. To make northern and eastern province the homeland of only Tamils, would only be a harbinger of disintegration of the country. Although, Sri Lankan Sinhalese elite have failed miserably in their job during the past five decades as a result of which the ethnic problem has reached at its culmination. The biggest mistake that President Kumaratunga committed, according to this school, was by drawing a new package of devolution, completely ignoring the evolutionary process.

If one compares these two arguments one finds differences between them. The first concept is theoretical in orientation and advocates drastic and innovative changes. In a way it is willing to take the risk. The
second one is empirical in its orientation and believes in a slow and evolutionary process to handle the crisis. It does not want to take a risk, particularly in the context of the LTTE's Eelam demand.

If we analyse the current situation, the Sri Lankan Government would never allow LTTE to create a new Eelam state as it is completely against the territorial unity and integrity of Sri Lankan state. LTTE had completely ignored Chandrika Kumartunga's devolution package. On 23 December 2001, the Government of Sri Lanka declared a unilateral ceasefire, the LTTE immediately reciprocated. After the expiration of one month the ceasefire was extended further, for another month, in the course of which the ceasefire was converted into a long-term truce that Ranil Wickremesinghe and Vellupillai Prabhakaran signed on 22 February 2002. Simultaneously, the Government followed several proactive policies such as the release of a large number of those who had been incriminated under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and the lifting of the ban on goods and services reaching LTTE-controlled areas. Both parties agreed to first build one another's confidence, brick by brick, and then to address the vexed political question of devolution of powers within a federal model. President Kumartunga's concept of 'Union of Regions was also federal in all respects, but unfortunately it had certain drawbacks. She did not enjoy the two advantages that Wickremesinghe did. One, there was no international pressure on the LTTE at that time, and two, there was personal animosity between her and Prabhakaran. As a result,
Kumartunga’s choice was limited to depending upon the Tamil political parties alone, most notably the TULF, which really did not help.\textsuperscript{18}

India’s Sri Lanka policy can be summed up on the following lines,

- India is fully supportive of the legitimate political, social, economic and cultural aspirations of the Tamils of Sri Lanka whether Sri Lankan Tamils or Indian Tamils (settled in Sri Lanka since the middle of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century). India, however opposes LTTE’s violent methods to achieve these aspirations. India would definitely prefer political dialogue to resolve the ethnic crisis.

- India believes that any settlement achieved should be within the framework of the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

- In the background of the failure of the Indian mediatory efforts in the 1980s and 1990s, India would not actively and directly mediate in Sri Lanka in the near future. But India would not oppose mediatory or facilitating efforts undertaken by other countries or international organizations, provided such initiatives are accepted by the Sri Lankan Government and LTTE.

- India would not be interested to deal with LTTE owing to its direct involvement in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, till the guilty of the assassination be punished. Besides, India would attempt to strengthen and extend bilateral relations and economic cooperation to the extent that Colombo wishes such cooperation, subject to its sensitivities about any excessive Indian
involvement in Sri Lanka. And also to ensure that LTTE does not have bases or sanctuaries in India, as India is against any secessionist or terrorist group operating from its territory. This is however another point that Indian Government has been unsuccessful on this front as some Tamil political parties like MDMK still support LTTE. India’s relations with Sri Lanka have been cordial but the question of the status of persons of Indian origin in Sri Lanka has caused frictions between the two countries.

Hence, it can be said that there has been a sort of continuity in India’s Sri Lanka policy especially after the withdrawal of IPKF from the island in March 1990. There might occur changes in the orientations of India’s Sri Lanka policy in foreseeable future with the rise of Congress led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government in New Delhi. These new developments are, however yet awaited.

References


3. Ibid., p.45.

5. In his autobiography, *An Asian Prime Minister's Story*, (George G. Harrap and Co.: London, 1956), Kotelawal himself was pleased to refer to a description of him by the *Manchester Guardian* as “one of the statesmen of Free Asia”, p.126.


7. Ibid., p.166.


9. n.6, p.183.


11. n.6, p.188.


17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., p.426.