

CHAPTER - IV

ETHNIC CONFLICT AND INDO-SRILANKA RELATIONS

The word "ethnos" - means nation from which the word ethnicity originates. However, it does not refer to as nation-hood. Ethnicity is defined as a collectivity of a distinct nature in terms of its race, descent and culture<sup>1</sup>. Urmila Phadnis defines ethnicity as a social Collectivity which possesses, and is aware of, its distinctiveness by virtue of certain shared historical experience as well as some objective attributes such as race, tribe, language, religion, dress, diet, etc. - a combination of which endows it with a differentiated character vis-a-vis other groups as they perceive it and it perceives them.<sup>2</sup>

Ethnic conflicts in Srilanka have a strong economic dimension. It is not that Sinhalese as a class are undifferentiated or for that matter the Tamilians are also differentiated on economic lines. Both have vertical as well as horizontal divisions and other communities have also do have such distinctions. Phodnis has formulated several significant questions for a better understanding of the ethnic problems. These are as follows:

- (i) In the multi-ethnic societies, why is it that ethnic demands and competition entail some groups and not others ?
- (ii) What are the conditions under which ethnicity of a particular group progressively become demanding and competitive?

- iii) Under what situation does an ethnic community assert its status as a 'nation' and what are the requirements for its success ?
- iv) What changes occur in the various components of ethnic groups and in its boundary delineation in the processes of groups-community nationality formation ?
- v. Under what conditions does ethnicity impede or/and facilitate the processes of state - building and state-centric nation-building ? And how ?<sup>3</sup>

Socio-political genesis of the Ethnic conflicts.

The bone of present ethnic conflicts is sharing of power and privileges between the literates and elites of Sinhalese and Tamils. The Sinhalese claim to have a link with the pre-colonial sinhalese - Kingdoms, hence their legitimacy for lions' share in the cake and a decisive hand in its distribution. Srilanka's Sinhalese face has become brightened since 1956. Religion and language have strengthened "Sinhalization" in Srilanka. The sinhalese claim that they are original Settlers and they were the ruling 'race' in the pre-colonial period. Since English was to replaced by Sinhala after independence. So was the case with regard to removal of the English-educated ruling elite by the sinhalese elites having their roots in Srilanka's cultural moorings.<sup>4</sup> Table-4.1 shows that the low country sinhalese were 43 percent in 1946 and it was 42.9 percent, 42.2 percent and 42.8 percent in 1953, 1963 and 1971 respectively. The Kandyan sinhalese were 26

percent in 1946 and it was 26.5 percent, 28.8 percent and 29.1 percent in 1953, 1963 and 1971 respectively. The percentage of Kandyan Sinhalese slightly increased after 25 years but the percentage of low country sinhalese did not increase. The percentage of Srilankan Tamils were 11 percent in 1946 and it was 10.9 percent, 11 percent and 11 percent in 1953, 1963 and 1971 respectively. The percentage of Srilankan Tamils were the same. But the percentage of Indian Tamils were 11.7 percent in 1946 and it was 12 percent, 10.6 percent and 9.4 percent in 1953, 1963 and 1971 respectively. The percentage of Indian Tamils slightly increased in 1953 but after that it decreased by 2.6 percent for the last 18 years. The percentage of Indian Moors and other communities decreased but the Srilankan Moors slightly increased.

"Srilanka is no doubt a masaic of ethnic, religious and social groups"<sup>5</sup>. The Ceylon Tamils saw in the prospect of Sinhala becoming the national language a threat to their culture, their identity and their economic status. It made them frightened. They were forced to demand recognition of Tamil as a national language too, whereas previously they had been content to have English as a 'link' language.<sup>6</sup>

Initially only 6 to 8 percent of Sinhalese were educated in English. Most of the jobs went to those who were educated in English. Once Mrs. Bandaranaike with a sense of satisfaction said that the 10 percent of the people could get 90 percent of jobs as they knew English and 90 percent of the

people had to content with 10 percent of jobs.<sup>7</sup> More than 90 percent of the Sinhalese did not understand their official language, viz, English. The Table-4.2 shows that 80.8 percent of the population of Srilanka spoke only one language. Little less than 60 percent spoke only sinhala, little more than 20 percent spoke only Tamil, 10 percent spoke both sinhala and Tamil and another little less than 10 percent spoke both either sinhalese and English or Tamil and English, or Sinhalese, Tamil and English.

Table-4.1Population of Srilanka by Ethnic Groups, Census Years (in '000s and %)

<u>Ethnic Groups</u>	<u>1946</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>1953</u>	<u>Percents</u>	<u>1963</u>	<u>Percents</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>Percents</u>
All Ethnic Groups-	6,657	100.00	8,098	100.00	10,582	100.00	12,711	100.0
Low Country Sinhalese-	2,903	43.0	3,470	42.9	4,470	42.2	5,446	42.8
Kandyan sinhalese	1,718	26.0	2,147	26.5	3,043	28.8	3,701	29.1
Srilankan Tamils-	734	11.0	885	10.9	1,165	11.0	1,416	11.0
Indian Tamils -	781	11.7	974	12.0	1,123	10.6	1,195	9.4
Srilankan Moors	374	5.6	464	5.7	627	5.9	824	6.5
Indian Moors	36	0.5	47	0.6	55	0.5	29	0.2
Burghers and Eurasians-	42	0.6	46	0.6	46	0.5	44	0.3
Malays -	43	0.4	25	0.3	33	0.3	42	0.3
Others (including Europeans and Vedddhas)	49	0.6	40	0.5	20	0.2	14	0.1

Source: Sharma, K.L.: "Society and polity in Modern Srilanka", South Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1987, Table-3.1 (Source: Department of Census and Statistics, population of Srilanka, 1974 and Statistical Pocket Book, 1973, Colombo).

Table-4.2

Language spoken by Srilankan population  
(Three years of age and over - 1953)

Language/Languages spoken	Number in thousand	Percentage of Population
Sinhalese only -	4,290	59.0
Tamils only	1,570	21.6
English only -	14	0.2
Sinhalese and Tamils	719	9.8
Sinhalese and English-	308	4.2
Tamil and English	147	2.0
Sinhalese, Tamil and English -	234	3.2
	<u>7,282</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Source: Robert N.Kearney, Ibid. Kearney's Source is: Ceylon, Department of Census and Statistics, Census of Ceylon, 1953, Vol. III, Part I (Colombo: Government Press, 1960) Table-17

To sum up the above two tables show that the Sinhalese Community comprises nearly 70 percent of the total population of Srilanka. The Tamils both Srilankan and Indian are 22 percent of the total population and their language is Tamil and pursue Hinduism. The other minority communities are Muslims, Christians and Dutch. The majority Community of Srilanka are Buddhist and spoke sinhala. The present ethnic

conflict in Srilanka has its origin in the distrust between Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority, between Buddhist and Hindus, and between Sinhala speaking and Tamil speaking people in the society of Srilanka.

After the death of Mr.S.W.R.d.Bandarnaike, the Government of Mrs.Bandaranaike had taken an attempt to implement the "only sinhala policy" of 1956 in the administration of the government. the Buddhist and Sinhalese pressurised the government to declaration of 'Internal Emergency' and reduce the facilities to the Tamils. Thus for example, the percentage of Tamil students admitted to the medical and engineering courses fell from 48.3 percent of the total in 1969 to 24.4 percent in 1973, and to 14.2 percent in 1975. This led to considerable frustration and disappointment among Tamil Youth in Jaffna. They were among the various groups who put pressure on the Tamil leadership to opt for a separate Tamil state.<sup>8</sup> Land settlement has been also a burning issue in the ethnic conflicts in Srilanka.

Violence and Communal Unrest in Srilanka since 1960 have been largely due to the language tangle and Tamils were adversely affected by the policies and programmes of Sinhalese.

'Sir Ivor Jennings' had published 'The Constitution of Ceylon' in 1949. The following are the provisions in the constitution regarding the official language:

- (i) The official language of Srilanka shall be Sinhala as provided by the official language Act. No.33 of 1956.

(ii) The use of the Tamil language shall be in accordance with the Tamil Language (special provisions) Act, No.28 of 1958. The Legislation regarding the Tamil Language shall be subordinate as it would not be treated as a constitutional provision.

(iii) The National Language of Srilanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil.

(iv) All law shall be enacted or made in Sinhala .

(v) There shall be Tamil translation of every law so enacted or made.

(vi) The language of Courts and Tribunals and other institutions shall be Sinhala throughout Srilanka. However, in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and in proceedings before quazis under the Muslim marriage and Divorce Acts, Parties, applicants and persons can submit their pleadings, applications, motions and petitions in Tamil and also participate in proceedings in Tamil. A translation in Sinhala may be provided for official record. A person or applicant has a right to demand a document in any one of the two languages.<sup>9</sup>

As a result, the language problem became a major political issue of ethnic Conflicts. After the acceptance of Sinhalese as the official language the people of other languages were deprived and it made a wide gap between the elite and the masses of Srilanka.

Politics and Ethnic Conflicts:

It is evident that the present ethnic conflicts in Srilanka is entangled in Sinhalese - Tamil - Conflict. The United National Party (UNP) defeated the Srilanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1965 general election, and again the SLFP came to power in 1970 defeating its rival UNP. The Tamil Congress (TC), the Federal Party and Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) were formed to struggle for the interests of Tamils. In May, 1973 a Tamil United Front Action Committee (TUFAC) under the Chairmanship of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam was formed with a Rising Sun Flag. The Committee called for a boycott of the celebration of Republic Day and decided to draft a constitution for a separate state.<sup>10</sup> Jupp observes that this was the most dangerous tactic of all.<sup>11</sup> The CWC and other Tamil politicians joined hands with the FP and the TC, and they formed the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in 1975, which is spearheading the Tamil agitation in Srilanka at present. The TULF came out openly and unambiguously in support of a separate state for the Tamil speaking areas of the Northern and Eastern provinces. The leadership of TULF is in the hands of the educated unemployed Tamil youths. Few Tamils remained in two major political parties the UNP and the SLFP - while the chief Tamil political organisation, the TULF, campaigning for a separate state for the Tamils, obtaining a very large measure of support from the Tamils of the northern and north-eastern parts of the country at the general election of 1977.<sup>12</sup> The TULF emerged the leading opposition party in 1977 general election

and the UNP came to the power. The TULF fought the election on the issue of "Eelam". As a result, a communal riot followed the election in August 1977. Thousands of Tamils were killed, burning of houses and stores, looting of property and killing of Tamils were done on a large scale by the educated youth of Sinhalese with the help of Sinhalese policemen and their slogans were : 'Do not Loot but kill the Tamils'.

#### Demand for the Tamil Eelam

The TULF manifesto declared the 'Eelam' to be a 'Scientific Socialist State' free of exploitation. However, its full explication was not worked out. Private enterprise was allowed within certain lawful limits.<sup>13</sup>

The protagonist of Eelam observe: 'Eelam does not mean partition or separation; it means the restoration and restitution of the ancient Tamil Kingdom whose death-knell was struck by the Portuguese in 1621'.<sup>14</sup>

The TULF made a very strong demand for 'Eelam' first time in Voddukodai in May, 1976. The bitterness between Tamils and Sinhalese increased. The government officials were murdered allegedly by the "Tamil Liberation Tigers", (LTT-a youth wing of TULF). However, the TULF denied not only this charge, but also the existence of the 'Liberation Tiger'. In fact, TULF held the government responsible for all the killings. The elite from among the 'Jaffna Tamils' made the demand for the creation of 'Eelam'. However, the CWC and the plantation labour force have not supported the demand for 'Eelam'. The Muslims

also have not supported the demand. The government have been rather appreciative of the Muslim Community in Srilanka.<sup>15</sup>

Jayewardene became Prime Minister in 1977 before election of the President in 1978. The riots in 1977 were followed by another in 1981. In 1983, again communal riots took place. Since 1983 no ends seems to be in sight as guerrilla tactics have been almost a routine affairs on the part of the police and para-military forces as well as by the Tamil Tigers.<sup>16</sup>

The Ethnic Composition of Srilanka has been presented in Table-4.3. According to the Census of 1981 the percentage of Sinhalese are 74 percent. The percentage of Srilankan Tamils are 12.6 percent. After repatriation of maximum number of Indian Tamils, it reconstituted only 5.5 percent of the total population of Srilanka. The percentage of Moors are 27.1 percent. The Burghers, Malays and others are less than 1 percent of the total population of Srilanka.

The Table-4.4 represents the Religion in Srilanka from the Census report of 1981. The maximum number of Buddhists are Sinhalese and they speak in Sinhala language. Their percentage is 69.3 percent of total population of Srilanka. The percentage of Hindus are 15.5 percent including the Srilankan and Indian Tamils and they speaks in Tamil. The Muslims are 7.6 percent of the total population including the Ceylon moors, Tamil Muslim and Malays and they speak Tamil, English and Sinhalese. Only 7.5 percent of total population are Christians and they speak in English, Sinhalese and Tamils.

The distribution of Tamils according to the 1981 census is given below in Table-4.5. The Tamils of Srilanka calimed the Northern and Eastern provinces - Jaffna, Mannar, Vivuniya, Batticaloa, Mallaithivu and Trincomalee districts, majority of people are Tamil. The Jaffna, Mallaithivu and Batticoloa districts have the highest percentage of Tamils, such as 95.3 percent, 76 percent and 70.8 percent respectively. In the above six districts the Srilankan Tamils are not only in large numbers, but they are also numerically preponderant in many professions.

Table-4.3

Ethnic composition of Srilanka.

<u>Sl.No.</u>	<u>Community</u>	<u>Population</u> (in '000s)	<u>Percentage</u>
1.	Sinhalese	10,986	74.0
2.	Srilankan Tamils	1,872	12.6
3.	Indian Tamils	825	5.5
4.	Srilankan Moors	1,057	7.1
5.	Burghers	38	0.3
6.	Malays	43	0.3
7.	Others	29	0.2
Total:		<u>14,850</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Source: - Maheshwari, 8.8, India and Srilanka: Economic Relations; Agam Prakashan, Delhi, 1987  
p.158 (Census of Srilanka-1981)

Table-4.4

Religion in Srilanka(in percents)

<u>Sl.No.</u>	<u>Community and Religion</u>	<u>% of population</u>
1.	Buddhist (Sinhalese) -	69.3
2.	Hindus(Srilankan Tamils and Indian Tamils)-	15.5
3.	Muslims(Ceylon Moors, Tamil Muslims and Malays)-	7.6
4.	Christians(Srilankan Tamils, Sinhalese, Indian Tamils and Burghers)	7.5

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Source: Sharma, K.L. : "Society and Polity in Modern Srilanka", South Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1987, Table-7.5.

Table-4.5

Distribution of the Tamils in Srilanka

<u>District</u>	<u>Tamil population ( percent)</u>
Jaffna	95.3
Mannar	50.6
Vanuniya	56.8
Batticaloa	70.8
Mallaithivu	76.0
Trincomalee	33.8

Source: Sharma, K.L. : "Society and polity in Modern Srilanka", south Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1987, Tab-7.6

The Present Ethnic Violence and Indo-Srilanka Relations.

The four years bloody - Civil war started in May 1983 had devastated The Republic of Srilanka, causing atleast 6,000 casualties, costing some 15 billion Srilankan rupees( US \$ 500 million) annually and 8,000 prisoners are in prison.<sup>17</sup> The Tamils of India and the Tamils of Srilanka were close to each other due to their historical, cultural and geopolitical relations. So, the India's role in Srilanka's ethnic conflicts needs to be understood in this respect. India's External Affairs Minister P.V.Narasimha Rao was sent to Srilanka on July 29 to obtain information about the crisis by the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Mr.Narasimha Rao was visiting the island and informed his Prime Minister that the situation was serious and Srilankan government had failed to control the ethnic violence and sought military assistance from the United States, Britain, Pakistan and Bangladesh to meet the crisis. Gopalaswamy Parthasarathy, was a diplomat who plays a significant role during the early period as a mediator between the India, Srilanka and the TULF leader. Parthasarathy prepared a formula as a basis of talk between the Tamils and Sinhalese. Mr.Jayawardene rejected the formula and said that India has no role in settling the Tamil problem.<sup>18</sup> Mrs. Gandhi time and again strongly expressed her objection to Srilanka seeking any foreign help. Indo.Srilanka relations deteriorated as the Sinhalese leaders exhibited growing impatience with India.

The Srilanka charged India with harbouring Tamil 'terrorists' in Tamilnadu. Indira Gandhi's strategy appeared to be to use the militants 'to harass Colombo only to the extent of forcing it to reach an agreement acceptable to New Delhi.<sup>19</sup> Pakistan and Israel are the two countries that actively helped Srilanka in its fight against the Tamil militants.

After Rajiv Gandhi succeeded his mother as Prime Minister, Indo-Srilanka relations showed some improvement. 'Ramesh Bhandari' replaced G.Parthasarathy as the Prime Minister's special mediator. The Bhandary Mission succeeded in obtaining a peace package from Srilanka and a summit meeting had been arranged between Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene in June 1985 and produced some positive result. The new round of talks began in Thimpu, Bhutan, were held on July 8-17, with all the Tamil groups. At the same time Srilankan Security Forces had killed about 400 Tamil civilians and Jawewardene government was busy in procuring arms from foreign sources and expanding its army.<sup>20</sup> The Finance Minister informed Srilankan Parliament in June 1986 that the United States had cut down its annual aid package by half due to the effective Tamil lobby in Washington.<sup>21</sup>

The Indian Internal Security Minister P.Chidambram succeeded to a certain extent in accepting the Srilankan government for a provincial council in June 1986. These proposals did not seriously differ from the Parthasarathy's formula. The outright rejection of the Colombo proposals very

much annoyed the Indian government. But India tried to create a better climate for the forth-coming Rajiv-Jayewardene meeting at SAARC(South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Summit to be held in Bangalore on November 1986. The LTTE leader, Prabhakaran and his aid have agreed to the provincial council proposal if Jayewardene offered more concessions. At Bangalore Srilanka offered Prabhakaran the Chief Ministership of northern Jaffna province. Prabhakaran as well as the Tamil militants rejected it outright and the TULF leader, Amritalingam disputed the creation of a separate province for Sinhalese in Trincomalee.<sup>22</sup>

In the end of 1987, the Srilankan ethnic conflicts deteriorated. On January 1, 1987, the LTTE started to take over the civil administration in the north by its military control. Its plan to register motor vehicles, organise traffic police and open a Secretariate was seen by Colombo as unilateral declaration of Independence. The Srilankan government imposed a ban on supply of fuel and essential commodities to the Jaffna and take military action both in the north and east. About 200 civilians were killed in the east and more in the other northern towns.<sup>23</sup>

Srilanka refused the Rajiv demand to stop the military action against the Tamils; they also refused to lift the economic blockade of Jaffna. Once again Mr.Gandhi conveyed the LTTE position to Colombo and appealed lifting of Jaffna blockade. Jayewardene declared ten day cease fire on April 10, conditionally, "Jaffna must be recaptured", and the

Civilian Casualties "Can not be helped".<sup>24</sup> Jayewardene was determined to pursue the military campaign and said that his government had decided to fight the militants until "either they win or we win."<sup>25</sup> India condemned Srilanka on May 28 for heavy casualties of civilian and killing about 500 Tamils in Jaffna. The Indian Prime Minister once again warned Colombo "to desist from a military occupation of Jaffna".<sup>26</sup> On June 3, Colombo rejected the relief supplies of 19 fishing boats flying 'Red Cross Flag', Flotilla's entry into the Lankan territorial waters. India once again warned Srilanka and took a drastic action on June 4, five Indian Air Force planes entered Srilanka's air space escorted by Mirage 2000 Fighter jets and dropped relief supplies in/over Jaffna. However, Colombo ceased military operations and lifted the six-month old embargo.<sup>27</sup>

#### The Indo-Srilanka Peace Accord

On 29 July 1987, an Accord was signed in Colombo between Rajiv Gandhi of India and Junius Jayewardene of Srilanka embodying the following is the principal feature :-

- i. an immediate ceasefire to be effective within 48 hours after signing the agreement;
- ii. with surrender of arms by Tamil militants; and
- iii. withdrawal of the Srilankan army to its barracks within 72 hours of the ceasefire; and
- iv. combination of northern and the eastern provinces into single administrative unit ;  
with an elected provincial council ;

- v. one governor, one chief minister and one board of ministers;
- vi. a referendum to be held before December 1988 to decide whether northern province should be merged with the eastern province; and
- vii. election to be held under Indian observation before December 1987 to the northern and eastern provincial council.<sup>28</sup>

It should be noted that the agreement is only a bilateral one between India and Srilanka, the Tamils did not sign it.

On request by the Srilankan government to enforce the agreement to offer troops as well as arms and military training to Srilanka. By early 1988, more than 60,000 Indian peace keeping Force (IPKF) entered in Srilanka to collect arms from the militants and to maintain law and order.<sup>29</sup> However, the LTTE made only a token surrender to the IPKF. Prabhakaran complained that the July agreement fell far short of their political objective and continued to talk about 'Tamil Eelam'.<sup>30</sup> The undisciplined behaviour of the IPKF angered the Jaffna Tamils 'boys' and it had failed to protect Tamil lives from Sinhalese attacks. In the end, a significant percentage of Tamil people did not accept the terms of the agreement.<sup>31</sup> 'But within three months, the India's soldiers had changed from "garlanded heroes" to the hated tormentors of the Tamil. The soldiers swept through Jaffna peninsula in an operation against the tigers, which killed some 2,000

civilains, damaged 50,000 buildings, and sent 2,00,000 refugees searching for shelters.<sup>32</sup> The anti-Indian Sentiment can be understood from the Jaffna Tamils reinterpretation of the IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force) as 'Innocent people killing Force'. Not only the Tamils but also the Sinhalese were hanging black flags in protest at the accord.<sup>33</sup> After one year struggle the LTTE refused to accept the conditions laid down by the IPKF, so the prospects for implementing the agreement remained quite poor.

In the ultimate analysis, India's mediation neither succeeded in bringing a political settlement of Sinhalese - Tamil Conflicts, nor succeeded in bringing down the ethnic tensions. The 1987 Indo-Srilanka Agreement should be viewed only as a first step in direction towards a durable peace. The merits of the agreement once again reaffirmed India's role as the manager of South Asian Crisis.

SUMMARY

India and Srilanka have political, historical, cultural and religious links date back to the 3rd century B.C. The present ethnic conflicts have a strong economic dimension, share of power and privileges between the literates and elites of Sinhalese and Tamils. Religion and language have strengthened the problem.

The Sinhalese community nearly 70 percent and Tamils both Indian and Srilankan are 22 percent of the total population. The 10 percent of the people got 90 percent of the jobs, they knew english as their official language. The ethnic conflict has its origin in the distrust between Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority, between Buddhist and Hindus.

The Tamils were strongly opposed to the violence and communal riots since 1960. Sinhalese being accepted as the official language, the people of other language were deprived and it made a wide-gap between the elite and masses of Srilanka. The present ethnic conflict in Srilanka is entangled in Sinhalese - Tamil - Conflict.

The present bloody ethnic conflict which started in May 1983 causing an estimated annual cost of some US \$ 500 million per annum has some adverse effects on trade and economic development of Srilanka. This give rise to some extent of bitterness in Indo-Srilanka relations in the recent

years due to relevant significance of historical, cultural and geographical close relations of the Indian Tamils; with the Tamils in Srilanka. To help solve the problem, after a long and painstaking process of negotiations between the two governments of India and Srilanka, a 'Peace Accord' has been signed on July 29, 1987. The future events, however, would show the efficacy of the accord.

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