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**Nationalism and foreign policy: A case study of Tamil identity
and its impact on Indian policy toward Sri Lanka, 1983–1991**

Hiremath, Uma, Ph.D.

University of Pittsburgh, 1992

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**NATIONALISM AND FOREIGN POLICY:
A CASE STUDY OF TAMIL IDENTITY AND ITS IMPACT ON
INDIAN POLICY TOWARD SRI LANKA, 1983 - 1991**

by

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The current world system is characterized by many states that provide political boundaries for multi ethnic nationalities. Contrary to traditional wisdom, that predicted the demise of ethnic awareness as a natural corollary to increases in education, awareness, and interdependencies, such awareness appears to have moved from a primarily social plane to that of active politics. The modern state must necessarily incorporate or acknowledge these politicized ethnicities if it is to survive.

This study identifies the behavioral dimensions of ethno-nationalistic politics in India, with specific focus on the strictures such behavior places on the foreign policy of the state.

While Indian foreign policy dictum toward the small, neighboring island of Sri Lanka always stressed friendship, cooperation and non interference, the Indian government unilaterally intruded into the domestic politics of Sri Lanka between 1983 and 1991. The salience and intensity of shared ethnic identity between the Tamils of Sri Lanka and the Tamils of India was presupposed to provide a context for this aberration in traditional government policy.

The direct threat to Tamil identity in India dramatized by, and continuing from, Sri Lanka's anti-Tamil riots of 1983, provide a unique quasi-laboratory to study Tamil nationalistic behavior accentuated under crisis conditions.

The study illustrates that Tamil nationalist behavior was clearly enunciated as a dominant factor in the making of Indian policy. However, such behavior was unsustainable at high intensity levels, challenged by both competing dual loyalties to Indian interests, as well as cross cutting differences within the Tamil nation. This resulted in sporadic, rather than sustained, pressures on the Indian government, leading to evidently parallel fluctuations in India's policy toward Sri Lanka.

To *my* Trishul:
Rajendra-Mohini-Bala

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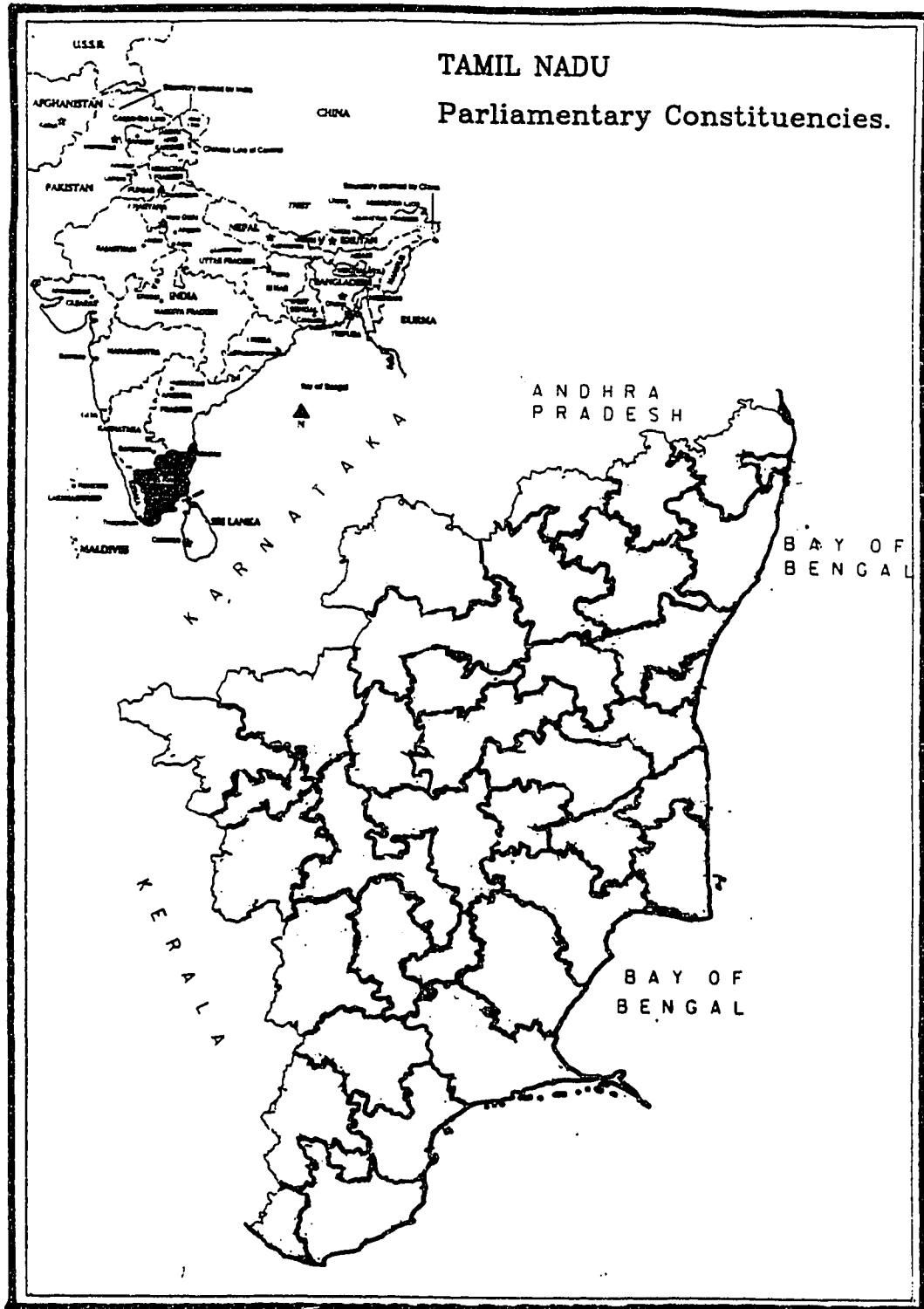
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“ All nice people like Us, are We
And everybody else is They.”
— *Rudyard Kipling*

“ At a moment of relatively high polarization, a participant is likely
to find no cognitive space for neutral men.”
— *Crawford Young*



CHAPTER I

Introduction

The making of foreign policy is ostensibly a straightforward business. Career bureaucrats, with the state's national interests in mind rigorously pursue strategies, establish relations, threaten war and initiate peace guided by the objective need of "what is best for the country". Unlike domestic politics where governmental decisions usually involve intricate balancing between one 'right' faction posed against another 'right' one, in international politics, the state government is almost always right. Like Rousseau's general will, the will of the country is assumed to cohere into a unified desire to further the country's national interests.

The preeminent assumption of a synchronous and objective national interest, however, belies the reality of a tumultuous system at work. While national interest may be clearly defined, as it is in the American Federalist, as 'security against foreign danger' and 'regulation of intercourse with foreign nations', the perception, processes, and instruments by which this interest is translated and negotiated does not follow any obvious unilinearity. Acutely aware of this disjunction between the seemingly pure notion of an overriding national interest and the complexities involved in instituting, or even defining all acts as the means to securing that interest, social scientists have long attempted to clarify and seek patterns in all that it takes to understand and predict national policy. This has resulted in studies as divergent as wholistic systemic theories of decision making to highly individualistic personality theories on decision making leaders. The entire complex of policy making is, as George Kennan once described concepts: "shy wild animals. You can never get near enough to touch them and make exact measurements of them, but you can round them up and gradually pen them in..".¹ To pen in the explanation of policies, the dynamics of the system must perforce be studied in addition to the stated objective of national interest.

¹George F.Kennan as quoted in Kenneth W.Thompson, *Traditions and Values in Politics and Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 1992, p.81.

This system includes factors external to the government, internal pressures on the government, processes of communication, perceptions, images, issue peculiarities and goals. The foreign policy system as outlined by theorists such as Brecher, Modelski, and Cottam are indicative approaches to the study of foreign policy as the result of a dynamic system.²

It is not my aim to study the system as a whole. What I hope to contribute is the examination of just one input into the system that has become increasingly pervasive in the modern context, yet failed to receive a corresponding degree of analytical interest.

This study emphasizes the relevance of internal factors, specifically of nationalist behavior, on the making of foreign policy. The complexities of group identity and dynamics cannot be ignored, as evident in practically every part of the modern world. For eight years, the United States confidently siphoned in relatively advanced arms and ammunition to the *mujahideen* of Afghanistan. The purpose had been to provide a non communist alternative to the Soviet backed regime of Najibullah. But the unity suggested by the word 'mujahideen' was in itself wholly misleading. At least seven major tribes came together to face a common Soviet enemy. Whether the State Department considered the future unity and dynamics of these tribes remains unclear. Increasing Baluchi nationalism, for example, gave the Soviet Union an indirect leverage to establish control in the region by simply 'playing the Baluch card', as Selig Harrison terms it;³ i.e. furthering sympathetic support to incipient Baluchi nationalists and thereby fostering insurgency in both Pakistan and Iran.

Nationalistic behavior becomes the joker in the pack. The United States, with its own short term interests in mind, could support Pakistan, a recognised modern state, with arms and economic aid. Yet failure to study the nationalist complex within the state could be potentially damaging. Overt support of Punjabi dominated Pakistan creates an anti American bias amongst the Baluchis of Pakistan. If Baluchi nationalism ever reached

²Michael Brecher, B.Steinberg, and J.Stein, "A Framework for Research on Foreign Policy Behavior", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.XIII, No.1, 1969, p.75-93; and M.Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); George A.Modelski, *A Theory of Foreign Policy*, (New York: Praeger), 1962; Richard W.Cottam, *Foreign Policy Motivation: A General Theory and a Case Study*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press), 1977.

³Selig Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow: Baluch Nationalism and Soviet Temptations*, (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), 1981, p.98.

fruition, American policy in the region could very well face an untidy dilemma. Moreover, a dilemma over which the United States would have very little control.⁴

That group identity has not been focussed upon heretofore, is surprising considering the overwhelming potential and realized force with which national identity seems to overtake the politics of modern states. Apart from the dramatic ethnic nations that have splintered states such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, in the Middle East, the Kurdish nation potentially complicates the politics of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. The Palestinians are affecting relations between Israel, the Arab world and the United States. In Africa, the rise of the Tutsi/Watusi majority against the ruling Hutu minority and the consequent spill of refugees, is already overpowering relations between Burundi and neighboring Rwanda. South Africa's clashing nationalists provide one of the more long standing, intractable cases of nationalistic struggle affecting the state's relations with the rest of the world. More unobtrusive is the rising differentiative nationalism touted by France's Jean-Marie Le Pen, who garnered fourteen percent of the metropolitan French electorate with his slogan of "Let's defend our colors"; explicitly anti Arab, anti African, and anti Semitic. United Germany threatens to face the rise of similiarly differentiative movements. In Eastern Europe, relations between Hungary and Romania remain calibrated by the Hungarian nationalist within the disputed Transylvania area. It requires no great sensitivity in pattern seeking, then, to perceive that viable political units must cope with increasingly assertive heterogenous communities to retain their viability.

In post colonized states, particularly, scarpily drawn boundaries are a way of life, the result of historical circumstances and immediate pressures. Emerson's *reductio ad absurdum*⁵ is very much in evidence in the various secessionist/separatist movements characterising these states. The pressure of both existing and potential group identity will play a significant part in the policy making of the state and should be recognised as such by other

⁴See Selig Harrison, *The Widening Gulf: Asian Nationalism and American Policy*, (New York: Free Press), 1978.

⁵Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self Assertion of Asian and African Peoples*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960): p.298-299, where Emerson discusses the seemingly infinite "right of any group of disaffected people to break away". Hans J.Morgenthau in *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, (New York: Knopf, 1948) also discusses this as the 'ABC paradox'.

governments. Herein lies the context of this study.

As a multinational, developing, post colonial modern state, India offers a provocative example of the validity and need for such an approach. In a land area one third the size of the United States, reside over eight hundred and fifty million people of two predominant racial strains and at least four minor ones. These races communicate to each other in seventeen official languages, over eight hundred dialects, and as many cultural and social idiosyncracies. While Hinduism and its many incarnations are claimed by eighty percent of the population, a full eighty two million people follow the Islamic faith, fifteen million the Sikh religion, and fifty three million the disparate religions of Buddhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Jainism. Superimposing and cross cutting these differences, spreads the ubiquitous caste system, classifying people into higher and lower social echelons. In addition to these cleavages is introduced the modern distinction of thirty two states and Union Territories, each with its own 'regional' language, Legislative Assembly, state budget and answerable to centralized authority.

Post independent history is replete with manifestations of these differences. Muslim identity is only the most recognised one, because Muslim nationalism achieved sovereign statehood. The truth is that struggles for sovereignizing various national identities have not been infrequent in the Indian state. The Telengana struggle of 1949, defused by the conciliatory provision of bounded Telugu territory in Southern India; the Tamil struggles of 1960, controlled by the non insistence of instituting Hindi as the national language as originally planned; the Assam movement of 1979, leading to the expulsion of 'foreign' Bengali refugees; the Sikh uprisings since 1966, consistently tempered by concessions in land, language and legal rights; the Gorkha struggles, incipient at this point, but developing into serious confrontations in the foreseeable future with an eye to some level of territorial independence in North Eastern India: the list is long. These movements are distinct from special interest groups such as the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes who agitate within the limits set by the state. Yet despite consistent bids for national independence in all parts of the Indian state, it is also true that the movements have been 'delegitimized, defused,

or channelized⁶ within the context of an Indian identity. This is not to infer that 'Indian nationalism' replaced relative sub nationalisms; only that measures and institutions aimed at serving Indian sovereignty were powerfully legitimized. If the term 'melting pot' described generations of immigrant Americans, it is 'unity in diversity' that best serves the Indian nationalist.

Juxtaposing this highly complex, modern-traditional state with the grandiose aspirations and behavior of a regional power, makes for an interesting case study. The search for prestige and status in the international world is not only evident in the speeches of India's leaders and diplomats, but also evinced by its behavior. Any increase in the power of neighboring states through aid or alliances, is seen with immediate trepidation as a threat to Indian dominance in the South Asian region, as evident in the strongly critical Indian reactions to American support of Pakistan, following Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. More recently, during the Sri Lankan Tamil crisis, members of the *Lok Sabha* (House of People), were openly suspicious of probable American involvement and complained of attempts to "balkanize India" and "meddle in our affairs".⁷ The Sri Lankan media, in turn, were able to capitalize on this sensitivity by claiming that the United States had promised to use "economic pressure" on India to prevent Tamil terrorist bases.⁸ The U.S.State Department, finally, had to issue a quick and strong denial, condemning the story as "complete fabrication". Regardless, 'anti imperialism' and 'anti CIA' slogans continued sporadically, despite the lack of immediate cause.

Proportionate to these perceptions and objectives, the Indian government can ill afford internal hobbling. Yet, in view of its constituents, divided, complex, or even opposing identity and loyalty, is almost inevitable.

The contention here is that analyses of intense group identity on foreign policy making, especially under conditions that threaten or excite that identity, could be extremely telling.

⁶Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States", C.Geertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States: the Quest for Modernity in Asia And Africa*, (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).

⁷*Lok Sabha Debates*, 'Interference in India's Affairs by U.S. Congress' Human Rights Caucus', 18 April, 1985, Vol.IV, No.27.

⁸L.Wickremetunge, "Lalith Flies to Delhi to Talk with Rajiv", *The Island*, 8 February, 1985.

It must necessarily be taken into account if explanations of foreign policy are to be at all useful.

The truth, however, is that nationalistic identity has never been incorporated as an observable factor in any of the theories and models of international relations. What has been done, instead, is the almost self defeating invocation of nationalism as an “important”⁹ and “critical”¹⁰ factor, that is ‘too abstract to study’. Held hostage to this abstraction, these otherwise admirable theorists have resorted to caricatures based on somewhat dubious self evidence. To wit: “The commonsense of the British, the individualism of the French, the tenacity of the Russians...”, is Morgenthau’s sweeping synopsis of the national character underlying nationalism, supported or ‘proved’ by random extractions from literature and journalism. “The United States...has lost its psychological drive...”, is Cline’s reified contribution, in describing the (non) salience of nationalism. The legitimacy of these statements depends entirely on the answering compatibility of the reader’s conscious or subliminal images of these same nationalities. The task then, is to treat nationalism less idiosyncratically and less as an abstraction. One way, specifically relevant to political scientists, is to study the behavioral manifestations of nationalism. Treating nationalism simply as a set of behaviors, offers a relatively practicable way of both understanding, and more importantly, utilizing the concept.

The more specific purpose of this study, is to identify intense group identity amongst the Tamils of modern India, and to analyze the actual ways in which excitation of that identity, affected the making of Indian foreign policy. The period under study covers Indo Sri Lankan dynamics between 1983 and 1991.

The study of Indian foreign policy has inevitably focussed on individual personalities. For instance: Michael Brecher, **India and World Politics: Krishna Menon’s View of the World**, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); Surjit Mansingh, **Indira’s Search for Power**, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1984); Michael Brecher, **Nehru’s Mantle**, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966); and Shashi Tharoor, **Reasons of State: For-**

⁹Hans Morgenthau, **Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace**, (New York: Knopf), 1985.

¹⁰Ray Cline, **World Power Assessment: A Calculus of Strategic Drift**, (Boulder: Westview press), 1975.

ign Policy Under Indira Gandhi, (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982). What is more, empirical evidence has justified these studies. After the significant participation of the masses in the Indian independence struggle, the decision to espouse non alignment; to join the Commonwealth and not sign the Non Proliferation Treaty; to 'liberate' Goa and 'protectively' take over Sikkim; to enter the world of nuclear powers 'peacefully'; and even to mistakenly perceive a Sino Indian axis against all evidence¹¹, has very literally been the preserve of the few. The Parliament, representative of the people was usually presented with a *fait accompli* in foreign policy decisions, except in a very few cases. The voluntary army, the largest tool for decision implementation in conflict situations, was by constitutional decree, an apolitical body. The media, in a land of twelve percent literacy, was the only steady alternative voice. This I believe, is no longer the case and shall be increasingly less so. The dynamics of spreading literacy, a quantum growth in media and communication, or "print capitalism" ¹², even in the regional languages; the increasing violability of the Congress party within the Parliament; and the growth in urbanization have not only raised the level of accountability of the decision maker, but helped translate foreign policy into a less remote activity. While the continuing importance of larger than life personalities is not being denounced in this thesis, what is being attempted is a more dimensional study that both identifies a recurring phenomenon in Indian politics, namely nationalism, and analyzes the impact of nationalistic behavior on actual decisions. Personalities, in this study are of secondary importance. This in itself, I believe, would be a significant contribution to the existing literature on the making of Indian foreign policy. The more general purpose of this study is to contribute to the study of nationalism as a concept of utility, rather than one of abstraction.

Review of the Literature

In this section I hope to both place the study within the discussion that has already

¹¹Ned Lebow, **Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis**, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1981.

¹²B.Anderson, **Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism**, (London: Verso), 1982.

taken place within the field, and extend the discussion to viable limits. It is a fact that the concept of nationalism has been consistently analyzed, interpreted and used in the study and description of both inter and intra nation behavior. Yet, it is also true that the more extensive the discussion, the less comprehensible it has all seemed.

The following analysis lays out the significant ways in which social scientists have dealt with nationalism. The guiding principle here is to mine the progress already made in the field, while gauging the limitations and misconceptions also inherent.

The major and most traditional body of work seems to accept nationalism as some kind of general explanatory factor that lends itself most easily to historical studies. In this genre, nationalism is treated as an essentially independent phenomenon with a dynamic force all of its own. "Nationalism changed the course of history" is the kind of reified use of nationalism, that could be found in the works of historians Kohn, Shafer, Seton-Watson, et al.¹³

More sociologically motivated researchers dismiss the above approach in their quest for explaining nationalism, rather than reifying nationalism to explain other events. Nationalism in this treatment is not so much an independent factor of explanation, as a contingent phenomenon to be explained. For Ernest Gellner, one of the more persuasive writers on the subject, social mobilization becomes the factor on which nationalism is contingent.¹⁴ To Karl Deutsch, one of the earlier writers, social communication, rather than mobilization, explains the phenomenon of nationalism.¹⁵

The more political rather than social, variant of a similar genre, can be found in the theory of Ronen and the empiricism of Bilocerkowycz.¹⁶ Both conceive of nationalism as a

¹³Hans Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History*, (Princeton: Van Nostrand), Revised ed. 1965. Boyd Shafer, *Nationalism: Myth and Reality*, (New York: Harcourt and Brace), 1955. Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nationalism and Communism: Essays and Lectures*, (New York: Praeger), 1964. Also, *Ibid*, *Nations and States: An Enquiry Into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*, (Boulder: Westview Press), 1977.

¹⁴Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: B.Blackwell), 1983. However, Gellner's own use of the word is confusing as evident in his contradictory statements "nationalism is not at all contingent" (p.56) and "nationalism is a contingency" (p.6).

¹⁵Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Enquiry Into the Foundations of Nationality*, (Cambridge: MIT and New York: Wiley), 1953.

¹⁶Dov Ronen, *Ethnicity, Politics, and Development*, (Boulder : L.Rienner), 1985; Jaroslaw Bilocerkowycz, *Soviet Ukranian Dissent: A Study of Political Alienation*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986.)

concomitant to politics. Politics requires self affirmation and conflict. To Ronen, the quest for self affirmation develops into what is termed as nationalism. In that sense, nationalism becomes a weapon where “the identity does not bring about the quest, the quest rather creates an identity”(p.96). Bilocerlowycz in his in-depth study of Ukranian nationalism chooses to treat conflict as the independent and constant variable and nationalism as the tool used by elites to develop conflictual strengths.

Depending on the questions motivating these researchers, nationalism itself is variously defined as a “state of mind” (the independent phenomenon) and as a “political principle” (the contingent phenomenon). The difference between these two approaches cannot be underestimated. If an independent force, then the explanatory power and potential of the concept becomes formidable. Popular usage of the word ‘nationalism’, by journalists and politicians alike, certainly seems to suggest an acceptance of such a meaning. Editorials include, without any effort at explication, comments on the gaining strength of Palestinian, Kurdish, or Irish nationalism. Neither does the usage prick the reader’s eyes or beg conjecture. It is understood. The image of immense wellsprings of loyalty surging into action is immediately conveyed and accepted.

If, on the other hand, nationalism is treated as a contingent phenomenon, the explanatory dimensions, must, of necessity, be scaled down. It is no longer a welling force appearing like a twister out of clear blue skies, but an effect, relegated to certain situations and operating only under certain conditions, be it increased communication, social mobilization, or the outcome of socio political fermentation. ‘It’ cannot ‘change the world’ as a mysterious ‘state of mind’ or ‘sentiment’. ‘It’ can only appear within a certain limited matrix of concrete events.

We have then, direct, intuitive perception of a phenomenon that powerfully ‘changes’ the world. We have in addition, a mediated perception that methodically studies the phenomenon as the direct result of socio political events.¹⁷

There is yet a third broad group that avoids explaining the antecedents or the content of nationalism altogether. Instead, they choose to identify nationalism as a condition that

¹⁷For a thoughtful review of these two approaches, see Arthur N.Waldron, “Theories of Nationalism and Historical Explanation”, *World Politics*, Vol.XXXVII, No.3, April 1985.

can be utilized for explanation or analysis. Selig Harrison uses such an approach to sensitize the U.S. government in its handling of other nationalistic nations, specifically the Baluchis. Whether approached as an independent force or a contingent one is not clear. What is clear instead is that it is a concept of utility and that the concept enables him to simplify, explain and even predict complex movements and developments in the confusion of history.

The fact that he can do so without sacrificing the validity of his work seems to indicate that maybe the apparent determination to disagree over definitions of nationalism may not be so divisive after all. In theoretical physics, the field of research misleadingly termed 'chaos', sets out to prove that certain structures may be found in seemingly chaotic formations. I believe a certain linking structure may be salvaged in the seemingly chaotic heap of definitions collected so far on nationalism.

Content, occurrence, impetus, dynamics and salience - these are some of the recurring indices of the potential structure I hope to see in the tangle of approaches. What is the concept? Why does the reality as described by the concept actually come about in some periods and not in others? In some areas and not in others? With snowballing effect in some cases and not in others? These are not questions I hope to answer. What I do instead is to exploit the discussion already established by past researchers whom I perceive as falling into the above broad fields of questioning, and then proceed from where the majority left off by examining the behavioral dimensions of nationalism.

In the broadest possible terms, linkages between the groups can be established so that their collective wisdom is harnessed rather than wasted in the fervor of self absorbed viewpoints. The confusion between cause and effect, independence and contingency, I assert, will continue indefinitely simply because the concept itself is necessarily an arbitrarily defined one ¹⁸; an adjective and not a noun.

Nationalism as historical explanation:

The first group comprising mainly historians such as Carlton Hayes, Hans Kohn, David Shafer, and Hugh Seton-Watson attempt what appears to be the most logical entry into

¹⁸Richard W.Cottam, Lecture, 1986

the subject and that is to define nationalism. In this, both by their agreements and disagreements, they set the range for understanding what the concept might be trying to capture.

Hans Kohn,¹⁹ defining nationalism as “a state of mind”, goes on to stress the even more abstract “will”, as the crucial dynamic of nationalism. Because of the loose definition, Kohn’s nationalism begins to take on all guises. In his interpretation, before the French Revolution, the English developed nationalism that respected “the privacy of the individual”, whereas that of the French Revolution stressed Rousseau’s concepts of general will and “complete union” with the nation.²⁰ In the modernizing western world of the eighteenth century, nationalism becomes a “predominantly political movement”; a “cultural movement” in the less advanced social structures of Spain, Ireland and Central and East Europe; and “romanticist” nationalism in Herder’s and Hegel’s invocation of the mystical German *volk*. The plot thickens as the post Napoleonic era is deemed as coinciding with the extension of scholarship, thus ushering in yet another “new nationalism”, this time linked to ideas of democracy. This too “changed in the middle of the 19th century...to aggressive exclusivism”,²¹ only because the “new nationalism stressed collective power”. The tautology is complete, with ‘new’ nationalism bringing about ‘new’ nationalism.

Post 1848 nationalism, lacking the “wisdom of patience and compromise” is described as entering the age of “Machtpolitik and Realpolitik”, with its concentration on economic power and self interest. This is held responsible for the series of pan movements that characterised the era. Likewise, the “growing prestige of the biological sciences” is described as creating “biological nationalism”;²² while the rise of totalitarianism in Italy, Germany, Japan and Russia is claimed to have generated “totalitarian nationalism”.²³

As a general essay in history, Kohn’s treatise is adequate. As an analysis of the “meaning” of nationalism, the word could conceivably be deleted, while still maintaining the cohesiveness of the text. It is almost superfluous only because the word is used so inter-

¹⁹Hans Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History*, (Princeton: Van Nostrand), Rev. Ed., 1965.

²⁰Ibid, p.23.

²¹Ibid, p.50.

²²Ibid, p.73.

²³Ibid, p.80.

changeably. The diagnostic properties are never exploited because the concept is never really differentiated. Nationalism “becomes new” everytime “it” is suffused with a variant ideology or faced with a changing political scenario.

The meaning of nationalism as utilised here is facetious. It appears to stand as a mere synonym for loyalty to a pre specified temporally perceived “nation”. In Kohn’s approach, nationalism the world over “differs” according to the historical context and the social structure of each nation. What then IS nationalism, a question he initially poses? Any and every ‘state of mind’ incorporating loyalty, that links itself to any and every ideology and is therefore ‘responsible’ for any and every situation, movement or ‘age’. Clearly nationalism as used by Kohn appears hopelessly inadequate in its ability to either describe, explain, or analyze events or people. It is a timid usage, easily replaceable by any number of other concepts and thereby confusing. Nationalism as a general, passionate ideology eventually becomes a tautology. The ideology can be held responsible for expanding empires, inspiring revolutions, generating wars and every international occurrence, without really explaining it. Changes in history, in turn, are held ‘responsible’ for new forms of nationalism. As an idea, Kohn’s nationalism appears far too amorphous to merit serious theoretical consideration.

However, Boyd Shafer believes in the validity of this approach and attempts to further study the ‘moulding’ of nationalism as both idea and institution. Like Kohn, Shafer too believes that “nationalisms differ”, because the “thing itself has differed and changed”.²⁴ From inference rather than any direct quote, nationalism for Shafer appears to be a sentiment, combining loyalty, patriotism, national consciousness, and “other ideas and conditions”.²⁵ “It’s nature” consists of ten common beliefs and conditions : territory, culture, institutions, government, history, love, devotion, pride, hostility of others and stake in a common future. While these could provide the genus for examining nationalism through objective indices, no particular weighting is ascribed to these conditions and they are abandoned as a perfunctory check list without any attempt at enlarging or clarifying. The book dwells instead on HOW nationalism developed, or, more correctly, how nations developed, for Shafer’s use of nations and nationalism is interchangeable.

²⁴ Boyd Shafer, *Nationalism : Myth and Reality*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace), 1955, p.4.

²⁵ Ibid, p.5.

The analysis is focussed on the critique of eight major “illusions” in the treatment of nationalism : the nation as a result of the supernatural, of physical conditions, of natural law and race, of economic compulsions, of politics, of language, of social need and of history. He then runs through Western history from around the 12th century, introducing all but two of the alleged “illusions” to explicate various events and ages. The point, if it can be called one, is to reinforce the idea that nations and nationalism are a complex business and do not validate streamlined explanations. In fact, they include all explanations, so that an understanding of nations and nationalism is necessarily an understanding of social reality in all its complexity.

Since the link with idiosyncratic conditions of nationalism is so pronounced, it leads Shafer to predict the possible obsolescence of nationalism once the ‘conditions’ - “communication, enlightenment of people, modern technology, commerce” are changed or “larger groupings... more closely meet the ends of men”.²⁶ In other words, nationalism is a process, variously referred to as “dynamic”, “complex”, “of several dimensions”, “of constantly varying structure”, “moving with time”, “changing”, “in the process of becoming”, “pluralistic”, and “evolving”. The process sees its conclusion with the evolved condition of mankind.

From such an apolitical treatment of nationalism, a strong note of personal moralizing seems almost inevitable. Men are presented as “trees”, as of a species, and therefore more alike than different. It is only the nurturing of prejudice and “debased ignorance” that force men to stress the dissimilarities and “thence it is a short road to hate and destruction”.²⁷ There appears an urgent proselytizing urge to disclose to men the situational rather than the intrinsic character of the nation, that seems to motivate the thesis of the book.

Considering Shafer published the book in racially reactive post World War II after “twenty years of reading and reflection”, the urge seems understandable. However as work claiming to clarify the meaning of nationalism, Shafer merely extends the confusion initiated by Hans Kohn. Nationalism, in both approaches, appears a thing of chameleon propensity and historical forcefulness, but not much else.

²⁶Ibid, p.10 and p.212.

²⁷Ibid, p.218.

It is left to Carlton Hayes to distill some of the confusion inherent in this approach, even while he adopts the very same method of treating nationalism as narrative idea. For Professor Hayes too, nationalism is a “body of doctrines” that is “plural rather than singular”. It is singular only in that “modern nationalism signifies a more or less purposeful effort to revive primitive tribalism on an enlarged and more artificial scale”.²⁸ However, these “efforts” are of a plural nature, which he proceeds to classify into five major types. It is this effort at organisation, that differentiates Hayes from both Shafer and Kohn and furthers the discussion on understanding nationalism.

Hayes establishes the notion that nationalism, as an idea, is neither metaphysical nor mercurial, only that ideas are compounds and nationalism is a compounded idea. Hence nationalistic ideas, when linked with humanitarianism, results in both belief in independent nationhood as well as tolerance for other nations. When associated with Jacobin ideas, nationalism tends towards exclusivism and intolerance of contemporary nationalisms. Similarly, traditionalist ideas invoke humanitarian nationalism with a difference in the emphases given to uniformity and hierarchical loyalty. Liberal nationalism stresses both individual liberty as well as national obligation. Integral nationalism focusses on national interest in preference to all other interests.

In many ways, the Hayes approach displays the same weaknesses of Kohn and Shafer in that the focus of nationalism as a factor of either explanation, analysis, or prediction is moot. The contribution he makes to the development of the concept is not so much in his general approach of “explaining history” by retroactively using the idea of nationalism to do so, but in his establishing of classifications. Each classification, while empirically described by Hayes, indirectly interprets a coordinated set of values. The Jacobin nationalist, he asserts, values force, conservatism, communitarianism over individuality, hierarchy, etc. The notion of an interrelating set of values typifying a certain nationalist, is an interesting one. Moreover, these values predicate behavioral patterns. The integral nationalist, for example, is depicted as being partial toward tariff barriers and immigration restrictions; as not averse toward encroaching on the independence of other nations and as averse to

²⁸Carlton Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism*, (New York: R.R.Smith, Inc., 1931):p.12.

cooperating with international organisations.

These could be important insights in the development of the concept of nationalism, insights that Hayes forgoes in his quest to establish what nationalism is and how 'it' evolved. I am of the opinion that it is this primary question which, while typifying the majority of studies done heretofore, is essentially flawed in the starting assumption. The question "what is nationalism" is a structurally moot one. Nationalism, after all, is not a thing. It is merely a conceptual tool employed by men to construct social reality out of a teeming universe. If one asks what nationalism IS, rather than what nationalism attempts to describe, then the fallacy of reification is almost inevitable. Worse, the answer becomes situation dependent, transient, and ultimately, mystifying. Nationalism, for Hayes living in the era of Mussolini's Brown Shirts, Spain's Falangists, and Romania's Iron Guards is, at its most acute, a 'religion' and at its least acute, 'a belief'. For post Hitlerian historian, Boyd Shafer, nationalism is the result of "debased ignorance" that could be easily dissolved in the light of evolved situations and educated ideas. For Hans Kohn, nationalism is the replacement of thirteenth century religion as the "determining force of modern history".

What is established by this genre, is the recognition that nationalism as an idea can be as subjective as man himself. Nationalism does not "change" but must be recognised as a non imperialistic concept, able to coexist with other ideologies in prefiguring the minds and actions of men. Both are important milestones. If nationalism cannot be justifiably captured as an idea, can we understand the phenomenon in terms of a movement, a value system, a social configuration, a political grouping? The question significantly shifts the level of argument within the field. Secondly, if an osmotic ideology, can the concept be either explained or used in a replicable way, ever?

It is the first milestone that has brought on the most widespread response and it is that which is reviewed below. The second has been virtually ignored and provides the socratic question for my own study.

Sociological explanation of nationalism:

One of the more quoted theorists, Anthony Smith, predicates his arguments on the

criticism that the tendency to look upon nationalism in a purely narrative, ideological and non analytical way contributes in confusing nationalism with fascism, communism, et al. It is his own view that nationalism has always appeared with a “recognisable profile and thrust” and “as a consistent set of demands and beliefs with regard to political and social arrangements”.²⁹ He therefore believes he is taking a logical step forward, by focussing on nationalism as a social phenomenon, a “self centred collective resistance to foreign rule to preserve the group”,³⁰ specifically related to modernisation. He believes there is a “core” doctrine of nationalism that needs to be elaborated. This core centers on concerns of “identity, purity, regeneration, the ‘enemy’, historical roots, self emancipation, building the ‘new man’, the new community, collective sovereignty and participation...”.³¹ The core appears “unstable” only when it takes on historical accentuations, generated by particular situations.

While nationalism, to Smith is characterized most intensely by the core, or what he synthesizes as the “ideal of independence” - autonomy, individuality and pluralism,³² the activities that the ideal creates, provides a handle for organising the concept of nationalism. That is, while accepting the historians presentation of nationalism as ideology, it is the movement, that Smith attempts to theorize about. In this lies the importance of his contribution.

The movement is classified according to ‘formal’ and ‘substantive’ criteria. Formal criteria merely study the degree of intensity associated with the movement’s aims and the level of achievement. Intensity is gauged along the continuum of primitive (parochial non national loyalty) and developed (or large nation wide loyalty). Level of achievement is simply labelled as failed (no sovereign statehood) and as successful.

The substantive criteria provides the real crux for Smith’s theory in the criterion of distinctiveness and independence of the group. This establishes the difference between the distinctive ethnic nationalist and the non distinctive territorial nationalist. What is

²⁹Anthony Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, (Harper and Row, 1971): p.6. See also *The Ethnic Revival*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

³⁰Ibid, p.164.

³¹Ibid, p.21.

³²Ibid, p.18.

important here is that despite the analytical difference he makes between the territorial and ethnic nationalist, by virtue of the fact that he is dealing with nationalism as a movement, both are treated as typologies of nationalism since their empirical behavior would appear the same. This is in marked contrast to the proponents of nationalism as ideology. In that genre, a pre defined 'nation' generated nationalism. To Smith, it is goals and aims emanating from the 'ideal of independence' that marks nationalism; i.e. it is the movement that is the unit of analysis rather than the idea.

His accounts of the origins of nationalistic movements, however, are underdeveloped. Instead, the major part of his analysis dwells on critiquing other definitions and approaches to nationalism. His own rationale for the rise of nationalistic movements is poorly secured by what he perceives to be the tension between intellectuals and the process of modernisation. Modern (polycentric) nationalism, he argues, is really a compromise hit upon in the course of tussles between the assimilationists and reformists, struggling under the pull of "dual legitimation", that modernisation unavoidably generates.

Despite the attempt at providing a formal theory of nationalism and the admittedly novel presentation of nationalism as movement rather than idea, Smith's control over the concept is ultimately as precarious as that of the historians.

Nationalism as 'compromise' in an era of modernisation is misleadingly generic. If compromising intellectuals are the genus of nationalistic movements, nationalism could once again take on any and every form. The need for compromise may be generic; the forms the compromise takes, could be wholly divergent. Nationalism as self government alone, is neither a complete description nor a potential prediction. This probably accounts for Smith's use of at least twenty four different prefixes to the word 'nationalism', in his study. They range from "millennial nationalism" to "social republican nationalism". It is not the prefix that is being decried here, but the inability or unwillingness to account for the prefixes. Nationalism as rational compromisational movement lacks something, perhaps the recognition that the movement is more multi faceted than a knee jerk reaction to modernisation, an equally ill defined concept.

Anthropological approach to nationalism:

That 'something' is the sole focus of anthropologists such as Geertz(1961), Barth (1969) and Armstrong (1982). In this approach, nationalism is treated as the product of intense identity configurations. What constitutes these configurations is the motivation of the genre. Nationalism here, is not studied in terms of goals or ideals, but in terms of substantive content. In a sense, this genre supplements the historian's bland acceptance of 'nation', by supplying the factors that constitute a 'nation'.

Clifford Geertz', "primordial attachments" presents nationalism as the product of 'assumed givens'. That is, nations are complex extensions of a 'sense of self' bound up in the 'gross actualities of blood, race, language, locality, religion or tradition'.³³ Identity is the key factor here. This is nothing novel in and of itself. Nationalism as treated by both the historians and Smith also include or assume the notion of identity, in their approaches to nationalism. What is different, is the level of accountability. How crucial is identity formation and what constitutes that formation, are the only questions asked by the anthropologists. All else is secondary.

The search for answers has run the gamut from ethnobiological theories,³⁴ to empirical³⁵ and theoretical - historical ones.³⁶ The most common approach is to define the 'essences' of a population. Geertz offers blood ties, race, language, religion, custom as some of the essences that possess a "deeply abiding strength...not always...active and immediately apparent..";³⁷ an Urvolker of timeless dimensions, able to reappear from time to time.

Reacting to the objective nature of these essences, Barth and Armstrong prefer to use 'boundaries' or self perceived essences, as the hallmark of nationalistic identity. In this, they tackle the problem always faced by proponents of the theory of recurring and abiding

³³Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States", C.Geertz (ed.), **Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa**, (New York: The Free Press, 1963): p.108.

³⁴William Sumner, **Folkways**, (New York: Ginn, 1906); E.O.Wilson, **Sociobiology: The New Synthesis**, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1975). Pierre L.Van den Berghe, **The Ethnic Phenomenon**, (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1981).

³⁵Frederik Barth (ed.), **Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the Social Organization of Cultural Difference**, (Boston: Little Brown, 1969).

³⁶John A.Armstrong, **Nations Before Nationalism**, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

³⁷Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution", (p.114).

primordially. That is, allegedly objective attachments are not, or may not be so distinctive. They may simply be the product of semantics. Shafer's definition of men as a 'species' like 'trees', conveys a oneness that could be eminently misleading. Conversely, religious differences between the American Protestant and the American Catholic do not necessarily predicate two American nationalisms. What characterizes 'essences', according to this approach, is a question of infinity and overwhelming subjectivity, more amenable to hindsight than forethought.

Instead, what Barth adopts in his study of the Swat Pathans of Afghanistan, is the concept of 'boundaries'. 'Boundaries' provide the relative theoretical rigor that 'essences' is not equipped to provide, even while it studies the same thing. Boundaries essentially stands for all that a group wilfully maintains of its presumed essences. Hence the focus is on self perception rather than objective analysis that could be biased or overly 'objective'.

38

However, while boundaries is certainly a theoretical improvement on the concept of essence, operationalizing the concept becomes a veritable quagmire of opinions. Socio-cultural diacritica could be derived from any number of indices - symbols, myths, linguistic 'border guards', gestures, drawings, musical sounds, ease in stereotyping et al. The list is as extensive as creative man. What parts of the boundaries are more salient than others is another mystifying quest. Why some boundaries if appropriately defined, are capable of developing into the bases for intense identity remains strangely untouched by this genre.

What it does provide us with is the first concerted attempt to come to grips with the compounded elements that suggest national identity. That the 'gross actualities' of national identity may be weak explanations of behavior, or remain denuded of the dynamical element that links nation to nationalism, are legitimate criticisms. But these are criticisms based on incompleteness rather than inaccuracy, to my way of thinking. On the other hand, one of the more recent and persuasive thesis on nationalism by Ernest Gellner, condemns the use of 'essences' as not merely incomplete but as wholly erroneous.

³⁸Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People, Myths of State Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia*, (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988).

Nationalism as a political phenomenon:

This genre essentially takes off from where Anthony Smith weakly ended and that is in studying nationalism as the direct and rational product of the new age of industrial modernisation. Ernest Gellner is explicitly deterministic in his use of nationalism. His definition is a strictly functional one, nationalism is a “political principle” that arises only in the context of “distribution of political power and the nature of political boundaries”.³⁹ It is not Kohn’s ‘will’; it is not abstract ideology; and it is certainly not a product of primordial identity. It is manifestly a political tool. Moreover, it is a modern context-bound tool, linked as it is with power equations in relation to the state. Having pitted nation and state within a power arena, Gellner expends a major part of his arguments in inductively defining what is a nation and its concomitant variable, culture. For this he becomes an epochal historian, slicing the centuries into agrarian and post-agrarian epochs. The utility of this approach seems to lie in the ability to contrast static agrarian epochs to literate, communicating, centralizing, industrializing epochs. Arguing against what he perceives to be the misplaced cultural bias in the study of nationalism, Gellner’s intent is very explicitly to prove otherwise.

It is his argument that culture in agro literate societies is geared toward emphasizing differences because of the structural need for horizontal stratification. Here, the study of primordialities could be relevant; communication becomes bound by the context and the state and culture remain quite divorced from each other. Industrial society, on the other hand, consists of occupational change as a permanent feature of the social order. This results in a form of egalitarianism and a breakdown of social barriers both explicitly and implicitly, in that, so-called ‘specializations’ become mutually intelligible, thereby eliminating horizontal stratifications. This results in pervasive rather than context-bound communication. A sameness is created between individuals, which eventually becomes the new ‘culture’. The need to regulate this shared culture requires a strong state and hence culture and the state get inexorably fused together. This entire process, Gellner presents as an imperative with “which we had better make our peace”.⁴⁰ Gellner’s use of ‘culture’ is the most noteworthy

³⁹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Oxford: B.Blackwell), 1983, p.4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.39.

at this point. Far from comprising the 'primordialities', or the 'essences', or the 'boundaries' premised earlier, industrial culture as used by him is closest to Deutschian concepts of social communication.⁴¹

One of the effects of this new social organisation is nationalism. To Gellner then, nationalists are the ultimate rationalists. There is an "objective need for homogeneity" which they grasp in order to be part of a "cultural pool". The particular choice they grasp is difficult to predict because of its dependency on "historic contingencies" - territory, size, historicity, intelligentsia, etc. All one can say is that nationalism is "fated to prevail",⁴² without specifying the particular nation it adopts. Nationalism, far from embodying some primordial, sleeping-beauty awakening, is a modern socio-political necessity. Culture, in the traditional sense, is simply raw material "used" by nationalists to establish normative legitimacy.⁴³ Nationalism, then, is not so much loyalty to the nation, the heretofore primary unit of definition. Rather, the age of nationalism, makes for the defining of the nation. In this "industrial variant...of the human situation", culture, polity, and will are made congruent by choice, so that nations can be formed. The fact that past attributes (primordialities) of an alleged past 'nation' are used to form the new one, is discounted as secondary, because of the highly eclectic nature of the selection and their subsequent transformations. In other words, past attributes are not really a 'nation', merely useful to legitimate a chosen nation.

He does recognize certain differences that do not crumble under the overwhelming unitariness demanded by industrialisation. These are termed "entropy - resistant", characteristics that are difficult to assimilate, but easy to politically differentiate. An obvious example is phenotypical differences, especially racially differentiated ones. Differences deriving from other sources such as culture and language he deems as transient and taking place only in "early industrial society". The only difference between 'entropy - resistant traits' and the fissures of 'early industrial society' are one of options. While both can adopt differentiative

⁴¹Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication*, (New York: Wiley, 1953).

⁴²E.Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Oxford: B.Blackwell, 1983): p.47.

⁴³The literature and use of the word 'development' is in one sense useful to Gellner, in that it supports his notion of a 'high culture' (read 'developed') that all cultures ('underdeveloped' and 'developing') attempt to emulate.

nationalism, the latter is able to adopt assimilationist strategies as well.

If there is only a difference in options, then phenotypicality is really the only relevant criterion for entropy resistance. Religion, which Gellner also presents as possibly entropy resistant, always has the choice to assimilate. That religionists might not wish to do so, is the question Gellner should be asking, but does not. The insistence on the political rationale for nationalism overwhelms Gellner's regard for the admittance of identity or other abstruse concepts. The attraction that a polity shows toward cultural congruence, however eclectic the actual choice of cultural indices may be, attests to his own working acceptance of the value of culture as identity rather than purely communication. Yet he fails to accept its coherency in his insistence on a political theory of nationalism. Similarly, the introduction of 'entropy - resistant traits' as a catch all label for all that is retrospectively unassimilable, is another example of Gellner's dichotomy between recognising the identity/cultural facets of nationalism without formally accepting it as a potential challenge to his deterministic theory of nationalism.

Nationalism, then, becomes one of the inevitable tools used in contexts forged by the relations between power (might); culture (communication); and education (access to industrial lifestyles). From these three variables, a typology is formed which allows Gellner to both describe, explain, and even predict the occurrence and nature of nationalism. In the three cases of nationalism, out of the eight situations that his matrix obtains, culture is the ultimate lynchpin in determining between the non nationalistic and the nationalistic situation. Without cultural differentiation other movements may arise, but not nationalism.⁴⁴ Whether he claims to or not, Gellner's treatment of nationalism, is in fact, not as purely a political principle as he might state. It is political in that it is forged within the context of a play for political power. But the key variable that determines nationalism from, say, revolution or revolt, is still culture and cultural resonance. Gellner's reactionary reluctance to use any of the traditional concepts of culture used so lavishly by previous theorists of nationalism is understandable, but not coherent, given his subsequent treatment and analysis

⁴⁴The exception is Case 8, which is a non industrial state, and hence, in Gellner's definition, a non nationalistic state.

of nationalism.⁴⁵

On the other hand, he does offer in a forceful manner, the idea of nationalism as a non abstruse, highly practical, eminently political response to an epochal situation. By this exercise, he manages to raise the level of discussion within the field, forcing it from abstract reifying doctrine to that of a socio political phenomenon, inherent in a particular set of conditions. It is a cultural phenomenon, but one that becomes nationalism only within a political matrix, distinctive of the industrial era. Unlike Anthony Smith's vague references to the "forces of modernisation" bringing about nationalism, Gellner clearly enumerates the relevant features of industrialisation that forge a certain political situation conducive to nationalism. But like all the others, Gellner remains in the genre that struggles to find out what and how nationalism came about, while stomping on others attempting the same question.

It is this free-for-all characteristic in studies of nationalism that leads one to more pacific considerations. Why the discordance? The understanding of religion, stamped by similarly raucous beginnings, was able to progress. Why not the study of nationalism? Maybe we are asking the more unanswerable questions. What is X and how X came about is a common and productive question - format for a disease biologist. But to ask what and how and why, a supposedly simplifying man-made code of real life configurations came about, appears to be the proverbial chasing of one's own tail. It deserves moderate energy. It provides a field of common understanding, from which the more exciting questions can emerge - namely, the utility and indispensability of the concept. Yet, ninety nine percent of the field, so far, has continued pouring its subjective energies, on what should have been a primary and short lived quest.

The time to rephrase the question, I assert, is long overdue. The debate over what nationalism is and how it came about, is adequately provided by the literature reviewed

⁴⁵In fact, a more complete rejection of culture can be read in statements like the following one, not to be found in Gellner's treatment of culture: "Cultural difference is no longer stable exotic otherness...It is rather a ubiquitous component in a world gone inexorably cosmopolitan, so that cultural identity is a matter less of ethnographic fact than of political contest - of rhetoric, litigation, lobbying, and terrorism...". Review of J.Clifford's, *The Predicament of Culture*, by Arthur C.Danto, *New York Times Book Review*, 23 October, 1988, p.15.

so far. What does nationalism do, or more grammatically, what does the nationalist do, appears to be the more imperative question. It is by the study of nationalistic behavior that the field can progress, in that the concept is being used, rather than being explained ad infinitum. Erik Erikson's preface comes to mind, when he writes a book on identity and disclaims all "definitive explanation" of the term, identity. His reason : "The more one writes about this subject, the more the word becomes something as unfathomable as it is all-pervasive. One can only explore it by establishing its indispensability in various contexts.." ⁴⁶.

Theoretical Framework

In all the definitions of nationalism reviewed previously, despite the variance in abstract definitions, the attempt was to identify the phenomenon of national identity. When "encountered",⁴⁷ rather than explained or defined, the phenomenon unambiguously associates with mass commitment to a perceived nation. Whether that commitment stems from nationalism as an ideology, primordial urgings, biological prefigurations, economic necessity, or political manipulations is the stuff of at least a century's worth of defensive wrangling. As stated before, this study is not specifically involved in that debate. What this study explicitly broaches is the dynamics of commitment itself.

The behavior of groups within modern India since 1947 provide a unique and definitive example of these dynamics. To define these groups in terms of modernization or ideology alone is to miss the dynamic element altogether. Observing behavior seems critical. One way would be to telescope all observation at a micro level, where data collected would be detailed enough to both generate and support a logical postulate. However, since my study hopes to cross the many groupings that make up the Tamil nation, I believe that the data collected is unwieldy enough to demand an a priori set of hypotheses.

The following section draws on the above reviews to propose such a framework for

⁴⁶Erik H.Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, (New York: W.W.Norton and Company, Inc.), 1968, p.9

⁴⁷Arthur N.Waldron, "Theories of Nationalism and Historical Explanation", *World Politics*, Vol.XXXVII, No.3, April 1985.

observing behavior. Both the validity and the limitations of the suggested framework will be tested by the study of Indian Tamils. It will be argued here that intense commitment to a perceived nation will be broadly manifested at three levels of analysis:

- at the level of the nationalist populace; the non elite.
- at the level of administrators of the nationalist populace or the controlling elite.
- At the level of situational variables, particularly power.

Level of non elites:

It is asserted here that the motivational complex of the nationalist would be characterized by a heightened perception of threat and opportunity with regard to the nation; a capacity for enormous personal sacrifice if directed toward the nation; and a proclivity to aggressive rather than conciliatory action in the defence or progress of the nation relative to other nations.

Level of elites:

It is asserted here that elite control over a nationalist populace would be characterized by an increased capacity for legitimate, non coercive control mechanisms, juxtaposed with relatively restricted decisional latitude in inter nation conciliatory politics.

Situational Variables:

It is asserted here that an increase in the power of nationalist states vis-a-vis other states is expected, both at the level of power instruments such as the army; and at the level of perceived power or the credibility of power, as perceived by other nations.

Before extending these ideas any further, a note on why this study believes in the suitability of hypothecating behavior, seems to be in order. Why not simply attain empirical nirvana by plunging rightaway into the easily "encountered" Tamil nationalism of the 1980's, as a great many social scientists have already done? If necessary, post priori conclusions on potentially generalizable behavioral patterns could always be deduced, once the reality has been encountered. Without introducing a major digression, I have this to say in support of the a priori framework used in this study: empirical truths can very often be siren songs. Empirical evidence while compelling in many ways, is vulnerable to the charge of

representing a “fishing expedition into history”⁴⁸. The empirical facts of India’s multi nation structure argued centrifugal disintegration to Selig Harrison;⁴⁹ cross-cultural plural unity to Crawford Young;⁵⁰ and inevitable social revolution to Barrington Moore, Jr.⁵¹ Social reality can very often be of such overwhelming complexity as to deny unitariness. I believe nationalism amongst the Tamils of India represents one such complexity.

Another way is to appeal to the common sense of self evidence. If there is a fire in the room, people will run out. Ergo if a person is intensely nationalistic, the behavior of that person will differ in x ways from that of the non nationalist. This approach, while correct in its assumptions, is less than persuasive. One researcher’s common sense may turn out to be another’s apocraphy.

It becomes evident then, that in addition to empirical and self evident justifications, the study needs to draw upon a wide variety of interconnected hypotheses, in laying down presumed behavior patterns. Some mediating tool other than direct perception of the ‘facts’, is a step in the right direction. The ‘tool’ chosen in this study is secured by expectations of nationalist behavior. In the following section, I hope to place nationalistic values and nationalist behavior within a conflux of widely discussed concepts familiar in the field. The questions preceding each discussion, address the main assertions listed above.

Orientation of non elite nationalists:

World View

- How would the world view of the intense Tamil nationalist be distinguished from that of the non nationalist? Would it be more prone to perceptions of threat and opportunity to the Tamil nation? Would it be more acutely sensitive of glory and deprivation accruing to the Tamil nation?

⁴⁸David Singer, Lecture, APSA Conference, New Orleans, August 1985.

⁴⁹Selig Harrison, *India: The Most Dangerous Decades*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960). Also, Ibid, “The Challenge to Indian Nationalism”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.XXXIV, No.4, July 1956).

⁵⁰Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).

⁵¹Barrington Moore, Jr. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

World view, treated here as a group's "social construction of consciousness"⁵² or the "sum of ideas" a group has of the "universe in and around them"⁵³, is expected to be distinctive in the case of the nationalist. Intense commitment to a perceived nation would be expected to act as a "mental principle that organizes in a distinctive way nonmaterial elements such as perception, values..",⁵⁴ especially in moments of crisis. An immediate sense of involvement, would predispose the nationalist toward heightened sensitivity in perceiving threat or opportunity toward what is an unconditional and deeply held value at the time : the nation.

This assertion is supported by both extensive historical examples and with reference to the major psychological studies on the dynamics of extended identity.⁵⁵ In the case this study analyzes, these assertions regarding the distinctive world view of the nationalist, will be evaluated by a review of Tamil reactions to specific acts in the era under study. The influx of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees into Tamil Nadu; the changing stances of the Indian government and how they were popularly received both by the local press and public action; the views on sending Tamil army contingents to establish peace in Sri Lanka, provide some of the more catalytic moments to study Tamil reactions.

Willingness to Sacrifice

- Would the extent of personal sacrifice be dramatic enough to distinguish the nationalist from the non nationalist? Did the India Tamils endure tremendous personal sacrifices in the cause of the larger Tamil nation encompassing Sri Lankan Tamils as well? Was the Indian Tamil population able to support direct austerity programmes in order to further the Sri Lankan Tamil struggle? How was the readiness to sacrifice calibrated or intensified in terms of Tamil Nadu, Tamil Indians, a pan Tamil nation?

⁵²Michael Kearney, *World View*, (Navato, California: Chandler and Sharp, 1984): p. ix.

⁵³E.M. Mendelson, in David.L.Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol.16, (Macmillan Co. and The Free Press, 1968).

⁵⁴Michael Kearney, *World View*, (California: Chandler and Sharp, 1984).

⁵⁵Erik H.Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, (New York: W.W.Norton and Company,Inc., 1968). Richard Hofstadter, *Sociology and History*, (New York: Basic Books, 1968). Edward Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred, and Civil Ties", *British Journal of Sociology*, June 1957.

The questions stem from the relatively simple proposition that the willingness to sacrifice for the nation will be very great in the case of the nationalist. This could mean the ultimate sacrifice of one's life, or lesser levels covering the contribution of goods, services, time, or thought. The proposition is again historically evident through the ages and in the workings of human inter relations. What is valued, is by definition, potentially capable of generating personal sacrifice, even if such sacrifice is not guaranteed. The more interesting question is not the element of sacrifice, so much as the acceded levels of sacrifice evidenced in this particular case.

The levels of sacrifice will be gauged by studying the involvement of the Tamil population at certain prominent flash points in the course of the crisis. The acceptance of between fifty thousand and two hundred thousand Sri Lankan Tamil refugees; the acceptance of tax raises and price index of food commodities due to the crisis; the readiness to volunteer homes and money to Tamil rebels; the readiness to volunteer services, including involvement in illegal activities in support of the rebels, provide indicative gauges of the willingness to sacrifice.

Motivation

- How will the beyond nation policies of the Tamil nationalist differ from that of the non nationalist? Will the Tamil nationalist advocate highly activist, even radical, policies to protect the security or further the glory of the Tamil nation? Is the beyond nation entity seen as clearly 'evil' and intent on decimating Tamil identity? Are advocations for aggressive military policy posited over that of conciliatory diplomacy?

The proclivity to perceive threat and opportunity has already been posited. It is now asserted that such perceptions are conducive to aggressive reactions. The rationale here is based on the idea that intense beliefs make forceful, intense reactions, a theoretical imperative. Whether it actually leads to concrete action is not being argued. What is being suggested instead is the proclivity to forceful action. Perception of threat specifically, provides an "internal condition making aggressive behavior

probable”.⁵⁶ The nationalist then is more prone to aggressive behavior or aggressive reactions than the non nationalist.

Depending on the referent group of the intense Tamil nationalist, and whether that includes a coexistent “Indian” element, a critical point that will be elaborated later, the levels of motivation to aggressive action, can be consistently gauged in the popular outpourings of both written material and active involvement of the Tamils during the 1983 to 1991 period.

Level of Controlling Elites:

Decisional Latitude

The aggressiveness and ease in stereotyping assumed to typify the nationalist populace, makes it possible to assert that the controlling elite of such a populace would be hobbled in attempting conciliatory diplomacy with regard to the perceived ‘enemy’. The questions asked here are :

- Was the decision making elite unable in any way, to attempt resolving the imbroglio at the diplomatic table itself? Was this traceable to intense Tamil pressure? How did the Tamil elite view the eventual Peace Accord? Was the initial Indian unwillingness to military involvement in Sri Lanka perceived as an outrage by Indian Tamils? What strategies did local Tamil politicians employ to approach central level decision makers? The answers should suggest ideas about how the decisional latitude of the controlling elite was affected by Tamil nationalistic behavior.

It is expected that in situations such as the unwillingness of the Indian government to explicitly involve itself in the Sri Lankan situation, the Tamil nationalist would be extremely vociferous in both condemnation of the government and in urging more definitive action. The effect of such advocacy, if widespread enough, could be a significant factor in limiting governmental decisional latitude. The level of discussion would certainly be expected to alter. By calibrating the discussions, it becomes pos-

⁵⁶Leonard Berkowitz, *Aggression: A Social Psychological Analysis*, (McGraw Hill Book Co., 1962).

sible to gauge whether intensity of nationalism, or lack of it, did indeed affect the decision making body's ability to adopt conciliatory or quietist policies.

Control

- On the other hand, a government perceived as legitimate by a nationalistic populace, would be expected to exercise effective control even in situations of extreme crisis, unlike the government of a non nationalistic populace. This contention is based on the premise that the nationalist is open to non coercive, non utilitarian control, through manipulation of national symbols.⁵⁷ Non coercive control exploits the existence of values in human society. If love of nation is an internalized value, control of the community by emphasizing the maintenance of this value, becomes relatively unconstrained. In contrast to the non nationalist who receives material benefits from the state, or obeys through fear of state reprisals, or is indifferent to the larger entity, the nationalist can be expected to respond to appeals and directives involving 'the good of the nation'. Such a response ensures relatively greater control for the government of the nationalist.

The questions addressing this contention will be: How was internal political control effected during the crisis? At the level of the local government, were the Tamil Nadu elite able to survive the economic ups and downs, and political flareups, spilled over by the neighboring Sri Lankan crisis, by appealing to Tamil symbols and pan Tamil unity? Were they able to absorb the crushing numbers of refugees by once again appealing to Tamil oneness? How did the Indian government control both the Tamil Nadu elite and the Tamil non elite in moments of upheaval?

The assertion in this study is that in the case of intense Tamil nationalism, internal control through nationalist symbols are readily available, and a breakdown of society is effectively contained without recourse to coercive means. This could be especially

⁵⁷Richard Cottam and Gerard Galluci, *The Rehabilitation of Power in International Relations: A Working Paper*, (Pittsburgh: University Center for International Studies, 1978): p.15 - 17. See also J.W.Bennett and M.M.Tumin, *Social Life: Structure and Function*, (New York: Knopf, 1948): p.53 - 54. For a case study testing this hypothesis, see Tahir Iqbal Shad, *Pakistan: The Crisis of National and Political Integration: A Comparative Study of Civilian and Military Elite Strategies, 1947 - 1982*, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1987.

relevant for a democratic state apparatus, where reliance on legitimacy through symbols and incentives rather than overt coercion, requires mass acceptance and resonance with the touted symbols.

If such control is verified, it leads to a more direct assertion in the making of policy, namely, a relative increase in power.

Power

Power 'instruments'

In a crisis situation, where the structure of the society derives and maintains itself primarily from emotional symbols, state power is enhanced in more than just the negative sense of no breakdowns in functioning. The first set of questions aimed at addressing this would be:

- Was there an increase in Tamil volunteer armies to assert the defence of all Tamils? Was there a morale problem amongst the Tamil military personnel in the struggle to resolve the situation militarily? Were the 'instruments of power', economy, military, and armaments, redirected primarily towards supporting the Tamil cause?

The intensity of nationalism, according to this assertion, would determine the instruments of power by both enhancing the size of a willing, fighting population and by assuming the ability of this population to withstand a high degree of sacrifice and physical shortages in their individual standards of living.

Perceived Power

The second set of questions derive from the power perception school of thought.⁵⁸ Extensive study on the concepts of power, has sensitized us to the duality of the concept, as both self perceived and as perceived by others. The perception of others becomes important in the context of bargaining and negotiation. If the strength of

⁵⁸See Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Richard W. Cottam, *Foreign Policy Motivation: A General Theory and a Case Study*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977); Herbert C. Kelman, (ed.) *International Behavior*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Watson, 1965); Marshall R. Singer, *Weak States in a World of Powers: The Dynamics of International Relationships*, (New York: The Free Press, 1972).

nationalistic power is perceived by other political entities, then the bargaining position of the nationalistic authority could be greatly strengthened. The question here would be:

- Was the Sri Lankan government pressured in any way into accepting Indian decisions, due to a pervasive perception of increased Indian power deriving from Tamil nationalists within India? The discussions within Sri Lanka following the air drop of supplies to Jaffna by the Indian government, the signing of the Peace Accord, the induction and subsequent increases of Indian Army personnel in Sri Lanka, provide some of the more dramatic moments to gauge perceptions in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

The concept of nationalism, as an integral part of any study of international relations is, by now, an orthodoxy. **How** the phenomenon of nationalism manifests behaviorally, is the obscure part. It is on this obscurity that this study hopes to establish some level of understanding. A brief synopsis of the structure of the study is:

- The **problem** guiding the study is whether Tamil nationalism within India could be studied in terms of behavioral manifestations so that the effects of such behavior could be evaluated in the realm of foreign policy making.
- The **concepts** generalized, in order to approach this problem, are an a priori pattern of expected behavior regarding the nationalist's world view, willingness to sacrifice, beyond nation policy motivation, elite control, decisional latitude, power perceptions and power instruments.
- The **significance** of the study will lie in the understanding, interpretation, and description of nationalism as an existing fact of social reality in India and the potential ramifications of this fact on policy making.

Emphasizing a behavioral framework necessarily ignores other aspects of the overall situation. Foreign policy, after all, is "that **compound** of factors which predisposes a

government and people to move in a decisional direction in foreign affairs..”⁵⁹ While the compounded complexity that predisposes a decisional setup is not being discounted here, I believe that some factors are more prominent, in a given situation, specifically in a crisis situation. The reasons for intense Indian involvement in the Sri Lankan imbroglio could be studied from a number of persuasive parallel angles. To suggest a few:

- Economic problems arising from the refugee influx, the rise of an active black market, the scarcity of material resources resulting from diversions to Sri Lanka.
- Cultural, ideological, or political messianic drives to be the unquestioned dominant power in the region.
- Immediate governmental interests such as diverting domestic attention from internal problems or enhancing the central government’s prestige in the pre-election period.
- Personal power drives of both Indira and Rajiv Gandhi.
- Fear of superpower involvement in the region and consequent or expected destabilizing of non-aligned policy.

It is granted that all these and more factors of understanding and explanation are necessary to create the complete multidimensional “system” outlined by theorists of foreign policy such as Brecher, Cottam, Modelski, and the Sprouts. This study does not aim at providing a complete analysis of Indian involvement in Sri Lanka. It focuses on one essential, heretofore elusive input into the system. It asserts that the nationalist’s valuation of the nation “if not the cause, is at least the single most pervasive and consistent structure by which we can conceptually bridge across various domains of life”.⁶⁰ Even a superficial eyeballing of the crisis under study, testifies to the pervasiveness of Tamil identity on the influencing of Indian foreign policy towards Sri Lanka. The nature of the elite involved in the decision making process; the interest displayed in the issue by both the Tamil and the non-Tamil public; the focus of election speeches delivered by local and central government

⁵⁹Richard W.Cottam, *Foreign Policy Motivation: A General Theory and a Case Study*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977): p.43.

⁶⁰Michael Kearney, *World View*, (California: Chandler and Sharp, 1984).

representatives; the policy subsequently adopted - all lend credence to the criticality of studying nationalistic behavior as a dominant variable shaping decisions in this particular crisis.

The importance of adopting this as a primary determinant is not trivial. It implies that no defusion or prescription to the crisis would be possible unless Tamil nationalistic aspirations within India were 'appeased, channelized or delegitimized'.⁶¹

Having argued that the intense nationalist will behave in discernible ways, it now becomes incumbent on this assertion to suggest the differing predispositions to actually exhibit such behavior. Here is where the widely flung attempts at describing nationalism reviewed in the first section contributes.

Predisposition to Nationalist Behavior

The nationalist is not predispositionally loaded to the point of total non complexity. Fine tuning the ways of predicting the actual projection of assumed behavior, needs to be suggested. While the prototypical intense nationalist is assumed to behave in the ways outlined above, the **predisposition** to such intensity needs to be evaluated.

Ideal typicality, certainly cleaves more readily with notional purity than human actuality. What the ideal typical behavior **does** represent, however, is a watermark against which other gradations of behavior may be gauged such that the Tamil universe studied, does not appear entirely random or entirely standardized.

The simplest place to start seems to be the one adopted by most early theorists of nationalism : the 'attributes' of a nation. This gives a clue into the basic source of identity. By doing this, it is being suggested that the perception of 'objective conditions' for identity is a necessary condition for nationalistic behavior to emerge. I shall continue to establish why it is not a sufficient one.

⁶¹ "Primordial attachments...must reconcile..with the unfolding civil order by divesting them of their legitimizing force with respect to governmental authority, by neutralizing the authority of the state in relationship to them, and by channeling discontent..into properly political rather than parapolitical forms of expression..". - Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States", in Clifford Geertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States*, (New York: The Free Press, 1963): p.128.

Uniqueness:

The distinction between 'civil' and 'primordial' ties, has in different manifestations, structured much of the discussion on nationalism. Right from the more basic debates over instinctivist versus structuralist human nature; to the more recent ones of whether human commitment arises from Geertz' primordiality or Gellner's modernisation, the underlying contention has always been whether human personality is inherent or structured. As with all perennial debates, both sides contain their own truths and hence their own intensities. To me it seems that the most uncontrived form of nationalism is that which sees the nation and ethnic - racial or 'objective' identities as coincidental. That certainly does not mean it is the only one. It is merely the most convenient.

To establish this level of convenience then, we study the 'uniqueness' of a community and hence its predisposition to a strong nationalist form. The assumption here is that the greater the level of homogeneity, in history, culture, language, religion, race, ethnicity, caste, et al., the easier the perception of an 'objective' basis for nationalism.

However, a direct linking of attributes to behavior would be erroneous because our observation of the facts would be a highly static one. In effect, we would be assuming far too much based on our own perception and understanding of that homogeneity. We treat it then, as a preliminary 'predisposition' and continue to analyze the developmental dynamics of the community. By this is meant the nature of its elite, and the degree of mass participation within the community.

Mass and Elite

In the context of this study, the role of the elites as "opinion formulators" is of primary significance. Elites in post colonized societies, have played critical roles in the functioning of government and mobilization of people. This is based on a complex of factors, of which the most comprehensive may be:

- In newly independent states, the role of the elite is circumstantially heightened as
 "the need for outstanding leaders and elites is most keenly felt by the population

wherever complex and difficult changes are taking place..”⁶² The ruler and ruled ethic established by colonists is sloughed on to locally trained elites, so that the reality of a ‘ruling class’,⁶³ is still confined to limited, rather than democratic, numbers of people. The importance of their role cannot be underestimated.

- While the role and function of elites has attracted intensive studies, the general functions of the elite may be adequately covered by S.Keller’s checklist of ‘goal attainment, adaptation, integration, pattern maintenance, and tension management’. This study is specifically concerned with the role of political elites in both adaptation and pattern maintenance. As links between what has traditionally been highly segmented, narrow identity configurations, the elite is to be studied here as both evaluators of the “value determinants of the non elite and how to release them”,⁶⁴ and as “bridge actors”,⁶⁵ capable of enlarging, enhancing, transforming, or translating existing values and identity brackets.
- The elite population becomes critical in determining the pace and direction by which limited identities are concentrically expanded into larger resonances. The corresponding authority of the elite, testifies to the legitimacy of the translation. Their interpretation and emphases on particular aspects of the predispositional base, in preference or exclusion of other aspects, provides an integral input into this study.

The study of elites as mobilizers is not enough if it cannot be dovetailed with a study of non elites willing or able to participate in political mobilizatory drives; that is, an “available” population.⁶⁶ The degree of political awareness presumes a willingness to be politically mobilized. The factor of ‘awareness’ could be operationalized through indices such as the extent of membership in political parties, recognition of political figures and voter turnout. One of the major contributions of nationalist struggles in most post colonized nations is the

⁶²Tom Bottomore, *Elites and Society*, (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

⁶³G.Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, Translated by Hannah D.Kahn, (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1939).

⁶⁴The International Studies of Values in Politics Project, *Values and the Active Community: A Cross National Study of the Influence of Local Leadership*, (New York: Free Press, 1971): p.7.

⁶⁵F.G.Bailey, *Tribe, Caste, and Nation*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960).

⁶⁶William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society*, (New York: Free Press), 1965.

quantum leap in political awareness and political participation. The degree and extensiveness of mass participation becomes important in terms of the validity of identity translation by the elite. The greater the population that is attracted to the elite's expanded interpretation of identity, the more it becomes a mass reality rather than a limited interpretation. Consequently, the greater the strength of that identity.

Structured Polity

Having probed both the static and the dynamic factors within a community, the community is placed within its larger environment. This is based on the recognition that the community is not an entity in and of itself, but may maintain links with a larger whole. The assumption here is that the level of complementariness to a greater entity provides channels outside of the immediate nation. If the channels are effectively devised, the widening of identity boundaries becomes potentially possible. This notion is best captured by Crawford Young when he argues that: "*cultural complexity may play a positive role in national integration if the polity is so structured as to draw advantage from it.*"⁶⁷

This criterion essentially explores the potential growth of the community. In a country like India, the significance of studying access to a larger social universe is immense. Thousands of years of interaction and exclusion have distilled a polity that is both strikingly dissimilar and ubiquitously familiar. Since the legitimate aim of the modern state is to integrate, the state apparatus is effectively or ineffectively, designed to establish the 'familiar' over the 'dissimilar'.⁶⁸ If effective, this introduces the element of choice.

What becomes important for this particular study then, is both the extent of choice and the "rules that guide" the choice.⁶⁹ The extent of choice is more easily furnished by a study of political - institutional structures such as federalized territorial autonomy, the system of

⁶⁷Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976): p.275 - 276.

⁶⁸This "inculcation process" is quoted by Harold Guetzkow as constituting the "conspiracy of institutions". See H.Guetzkow, *Multiple Loyalties: Theoretical Approach to a Problem in International Organization*, Publication No.4, (Princeton: Center for Research on World Political Institutions, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, 1955): p.24. It is also noticed by Coser who refers to modern state institutions as "greedy institutions". In Lewis A.Coser, *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment*, (New York: Free Press, 1974).

⁶⁹F.G.Bailey, *Tribe, Caste, and Nation*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960).

proportionality, and legal cultural autonomy. The 'rules' guiding an acceptance of these choices are more intractable to gauge and would involve empirical deduction rather than inductive reasoning, primarily because personal idiosyncrasies play such a major role in the dynamics of choice between alternatives. However, "when one particular choice begins to exhibit a statistical regularity" over a range of cases,⁷⁰ one could reasonably expect the rules guiding that choice to have been socially legitimized.

Viability

The final criterion probes the self perception of the community. Does the group perceive itself as both strong and capable of self sufficiency? Intense nationalistic behavior would seem improbable if the members of the community believed they were materially or tangibly "weak", primarily in the factors of:

- A large enough population seen as both able and willing to support the nation.
- A self sufficient economy, able to generate and maintain an average standard of living without undue reliance on beyond nation entities.
- A recognised territory that could be clearly differentiated as inclusive of the group alone.

Perceived or actual inabilities in these factors, could very well render the previous criteria of predispositionality as infeasible. Even if not immediately available, the possibility of attaining self sufficiency is the minimum consideration, for the criterion of viability. In the study, both objective factors contributing to the feasibility of a self sufficient Tamil nation, as well as subjective Tamilian perceptions on a viable Tamil nation, will be taken into account.

Conclusion

The predispositional base, studied in its entirety, generates the various units of analysis that are required in studying a community such as the Indian Tamils. Both the descrip-

⁷⁰Ibid, p.271.

tors 'Indian' and 'Tamil' may very well be convenient organizing terms rather than actual descriptions. The average Tamil Brahmin name, for example, *Pavoor Ramaswami Balasubramanian Balasundaram Iyer*, includes a personal name (Balasundaram), the name of the ancestral village(Pavoor), the family title(Ramaswami and Balasubramanian), and the caste title(Iyer). In addition to these is added the more modern indices of identity including the 'home state' (Tamil Nadu), the region (South), and the country (India). The key words of self identity are many. Far from assuming the pervasive, intense Tamil nationalist, the predispositional base assists in sifting the various strands that make for differing levels of intensity, and thereby suggesting different expectations of behavior. It acts as a set of criteria to evaluate both the intensity and the specificity of the proposed behavioral manifestations, within the particular case of the Indian Tamils. The a priori framework is best illustrated by the flow chart in Figure 1.⁷¹

⁷¹My thanks to Drs. B.Sundaram and G.Mayer-Kress for their input in this chart.

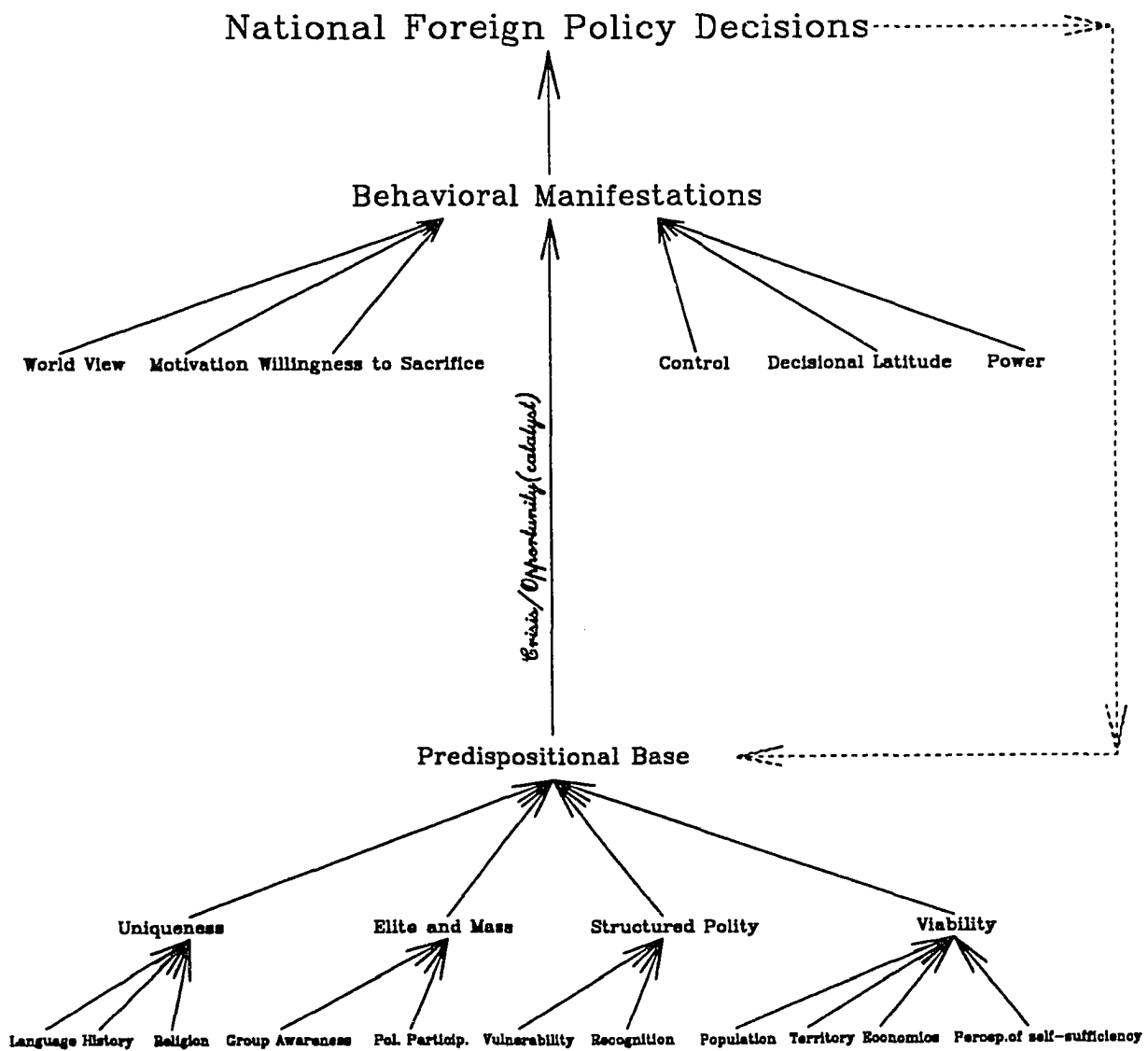


Figure 1: Schematic: Nationalist behavior and decision making.

The chapters in this study are organized so that the flow lines in the above figure are reasonably demonstrated. The following chapter describes the nature of the crisis, emphasizing the actors and events that directly confronted Tamil identity in India. The involvement of the Indian government in its dealings with the government of Sri Lanka are also chronicled.

Chapter III delineates the Tamil nation along four axes. The one studies the nation as a function of homogeneity and separateness. The language, culture, religion, and history of the Tamils is reviewed with a conscious eye toward picking out what constitutes the absolute uniqueness of the Tamil people and what is compromised by the larger Indian ethos. The ability of Tamil leaders to mobilize the people based on their perception and understanding of Tamil self awareness forms the second axis defining the Tamil nation. By this, not only are the objective characteristics of the nation presented, but the subjective intensities attributed to these characteristics are also studied. The third axis, specifically relevant in the Indian context, probes the vulnerability of Tamilians to the larger cooptive structure of Indian institutions and policies that are open and forceful proponents of a 'dual identity'. Finally, the viability of the Tamil nation to exist as a singular nation is studied through the indices of sufficient territory, population, and economy. In addition, the extent to which self perception acknowledges this viability is also taken into account.

Having studied the Tamil nation specifically as it relates to the question of predispositionality to nationalist behavior, Chapter IV fine tunes the assumption of gross behavior on the part of the Tamil nation. Behavioral variance within the nation is traced to positional attributes that lend themselves to intra-group formations. These positions are deemed to be dictated by the indices of rural - urban location, class and caste.

Chapter V proceeds on the premise of differentiated behavior and studies accentuated Tamil reactions at flash points during the 1983 to 1991 period. This is seen in parallel with the statements and actions of the Indian government and foreign office, so that it becomes possible to gauge whether dominant Tamil behavioral demands were synchronous to government acts or existed in seeming vacuity.

Definitions

1. State: The term 'state' is used in this study to refer to a "legal concept describing a social group that occupies a defined territory and is organized under common political institutions and an effective government".⁷²
2. Nation: The term 'nation' is used as a "social group that shares a common ideology, common institutions and customs, and a sense of homogeneity....there is a strong group sense of belonging associated with a particular territory considered to be peculiarly its own. A nation may comprise part of a state, be coterminous with a state, or extend beyond the borders of a single state".⁷³
3. Ethnic group: The term 'ethnic' is related to "the community of physical and mental traits possessed by the members of a group as a product of their common heredity and cultural tradition.....originating from racial, linguistic and cultural ties with a specific group".⁷⁴

I use the term 'ethnic' in close collaboration with 'nation', preferring to treat the Tamils as a nation rather than just an ethnic group, primarily because they are strongly associated with the particular territory of Tamil Nadu.

Research Data

In the first section, this study attempts to describe the Tamils as a nation. To do this, I relied primarily on secondary data relating to the history and culture of the Tamils. In addition, I interviewed members of the intelligentsia to gain an insight into what aspects of the so called 'objective' indices of the Tamil nation were most salient.

To gauge the behavioral manifestations of Tamil nationalism, I relied on primary sources of data : parliamentary debates, assembly debates, political party manifestoes and pamphlets. I also interviewed leaders from major Tamil political parties as well as parliamentary members from Tamil Nadu.

⁷²Jack C.Plano, Roy Olton, *The International Relations Dictionary*, Third Edition, (California: ABC CLIO, 1982).

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Webster's *Third New International Dictionary*, (Massachusetts: G and C Merriam Co., 1971).

The study of foreign policy decisions regarding Sri Lanka required more disparate sources of data. My sources ranged from straightforward foreign office documents and briefs; to correlating statements made by the Sri Lankan Tamil militants I interviewed in Tamil Nadu with that of foreign service, military, as well as intelligence officers interviewed in New Delhi. These statements were accepted as concrete decisions only when they were realized as either formal statements or acts by the Indian government.

The interviews were informal, except for a questionnaire on caste affiliation, sent out to all 235 members of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly and 57 Tamil members of the Indian Parliament.⁷⁵ All quotes have been directly recorded except for those provided by officers from the Research and Analysis Wing (intelligence) and certain journalists.

⁷⁵I would like to thank Mrs. Meena and Mr. Balasubramanian for their assistance in sending and collating the information.

CHAPTER II

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

Introduction:

In July 1983, anti Tamil riots in parts of Sri Lanka sparked off a battle that snowballed through the island, through neighboring India and continues even today. Politics in Sri Lanka was decisively transformed. The Indian government played a major role in this transformation. A brief note on the equations that existed before the riots may illuminate the context.

India and Ceylon, as it was known till 1972, have been traditional allies. With only a narrow strip of ocean thirty miles wide, separating the southern most tip of India with the northern most tip of Sri Lanka, a shared history dating back to almost three thousand years has been inevitable. The Sinhala of Sri Lanka trace their origins to Bengal and Bihar in Northern India. The Ceylon Tamils, as they are known, trace their roots to Tamil Nadu and Kerala in Southern India. An awareness of the separateness of their identity is very acute. Stories of military victories scored over each other sometime in the dim recesses of 2 B.C. are retold as if they were current events. A third group may be noted here, the Indian or plantation Tamils. These are essentially immigrant laborers transported over the last century by the British to work on Sri Lanka's coffee, tea and rubber plantations.

Each group remains distinct by choice and each group maintains curiously complex linkages with India. The Sinhala, both Buddhist and Christian, connect India with the plantation labor that works for them. Poor, illiterate and the unmistakable underclass of Sri Lanka, the plantation Indians are a definite object for patronage, scorn or belligerence. India, as a nation state, on the other hand, is projected in the region as the Big Power, around which tiny Sri Lanka is, in a sense, dependent even for its status.¹ The juxtaposition of an image that combines both underclass and overlord has generated a revulsion that most Indians are not even aware of. Anti India sentiments among the Sinhalese of Sri Lanka are

¹For instance, even though Sri Lanka was prepared infrastructurally for independence as early as 1931 when it held its first elections, the island gained independence only in 1948 as a corollary to Indian independence.

not very far beneath the surface, as evidenced during political rallies and crises. The fifty million Tamils of India that artificially inflate the position of the approximately two million Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, contributes to the antipathy.

The Ceylon Tamil, while benefiting from the claim of Indian heritage, is culturally ambivalent. While pictures of the Nehru family and Gandhi hang in Ceylon Tamil homes and the idiosyncrasies of Hindu culture are shared, the truth is that after 3000 years of uninterrupted domicile in the island, and as an educated elite in the last hundred, the Ceylon Tamils are rooted in the land. The Tamils of India are perceived as culturally inferior. Despite the touted commonalty in language, the Ceylon Tamil considers the language of Tamil Nadu as harsh, impure and unlike anything that s/he speaks. As the mainstay of British bureaucracy during the twentieth century ², the Ceylon Tamil is also prone to regard himself as intellectually superior to the Sinhala majority. The less arrogant can be heard describing the Sinhala as “fun loving”. Given this sense of personal dominance, the Ceylon Tamil does not want to ally himself in any way with the lowest rung, the plantation Tamil.

The profile of the plantation Tamil adheres very closely to that of any underprivileged, immigrant labor force. Miserably poor and without any clear rights of citizenship, the group is largely ignored by political parties. Legally disfranchised in 1948, the community is dependent on their party, the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and the sporadic concern of the Indian government. Neither organization has been enough. The CWC, working from a position of weakness, operates more as a special interest lobby. It concentrates on the issue of citizenship rather than aligning itself with the charged power politics of the Sinhala and Ceylon Tamil parties. The Indian government, despite prolonged negotiations, is not an adequate champion of the group. It does not want to be. As early as 1947, Nehru’s speeches in the Indian *Lok Sabha* (House of the People), made it clear that all expatriate workers were to “associate themselves as closely as possible with the interests of the country they had adopted” and that India would have a strictly “sentimental interest”

²The north of Sri Lanka where the Ceylon Tamils are a majority, is characterized by barren, rocky land. Given this natural disincentive for traditional agriculture, the Tamils primarily opted for education under the British. With the result, their representation in the bureaucracy was far above their numbers as a demographic group. The sense of a minority controlling a majority fueled much of Sinhala politics following independence.

rather than “political concern” over their welfare. This policy effectively button holed the Indian plantation workers of Sri Lanka to function independent of Indian patronage as far as possible. A series of dismal agreements followed, with the Indian and Sri Lankan government trading numbers in the thousands, trying to decide who should be granted Sri Lankan citizenship and resulting in a generation of stateless people. The plantation workers were not represented in these talks. The group is aware of its status as a weak, isolated, pariah community, evidenced by its appeals to international organizations and its conciliatory, non provocative dealings with the Sinhala parties.³

At the level of government, the Indian and Sri Lankan governments have been “allies”. Governed as a Crown Colony by the British from its base in Madras, South India, the set of western values and institutions bequeathed to Sri Lanka were similar to those ploughed in India. Democracy and sovereignty were prime directives for both nations following independence. Till the 1970’s, Sri Lanka’s left of centre economics, socialist ideology and non aligned foreign policy dovetailed neatly with India’s own. Mrs. Gandhi as Prime Minister, helped Mrs. Bandarnaike to quell a JVP (Janatha Vimukti Peramuna, a party of leftist Sinhalese extremists) insurgency in the south of the island, by lending Indian forces. Pin-pricks such as Sri Lanka’s lack of support to India during the 1961 Sino Indian war and the 1971 Indo Pakistan war, were never inflated into issues. The only seeming irritant was the matter of the plantation workers, where it became increasingly apparent that the Government of India held continued good relations with Sri Lanka, as the priority. An indication of the placid, workaday quality of Indo Sri Lankan relations can be gauged by the fact that till the 1983 crisis, the Indian foreign office at South Block, New Delhi, did not believe it needed a separate desk or an exclusive set of area specialists for Sri Lanka.

With regard to the Indian public, despite increasing disaffection of the Ceylon Tamils for the policies of the predominantly Sinhala government, Indian reaction has been noticeably absent. Public opinion in Tamil Nadu virtually ignored the intermittent outbursts taking place thirty miles from their borders. In fact, when Sri Lankan Tamil militants fled to escape prosecution by the Sri Lankan government during the 1970’s, the then state government of

³In fact, the CWC broke away from a four year union with the Ceylon Tamil party in 1976, because of the inclusion of the demand for separate Tamil *Eelam* (homeland) in their manifesto.

Chief Minister Karunanidhi, handed them back as a gesture of goodwill to the Sri Lankan government.

Riots of 1983: the start of the crisis

The July 1983 riots marked at least the fourth major riot since Sri Lanka gained its independence. Yet it was at this point that the Tamil Nadu public exploded into its most acute pitch of empathy with the plight of the Ceylon Tamils. Everything suddenly seemed to come into focus, at least among the Tamil public in India. The official death toll reported as over three hundred Tamils, was unofficially pegged at over three thousand. Anywhere between 80,000 and 135,000 Ceylon Tamils were reported to be uprooted and in refugee camps. In Trincomalee, the Sri Lankan navy personnel destroyed two hundred Tamil businesses within six hours and abducted six hundred Tamil refugees who subsequently disappeared. The primary Ceylon Tamil party, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), suspected Mr. Jayaweera (Minister of Industries) to have instigated the Trincomalee massacres. The Sri Lankan army was allegedly involved in random shooting of civilians especially in the areas of Vavuniya, Mankulam and Colombo. At best, the army stood by and watched as Sinhala mobs went on a rampage. The Sri Lankan police at the Welikade prison allowed the massacre of fifty two Tamil political prisoners, including peace activists such as the respected Gandhian, Dr.Rajasundaram. The Sri Lankan air force reportedly assisted Sinhala mobs in burning down Tamil business establishments in the area of the newly developing Anuradhapura Junction. Over a dozen Hindu temples were destroyed, primarily by lower ranks in the Sri Lankan navy. What stood out was not so much the extent of the carnage, as the shock of active participation by the armed forces.⁴

The judgment in Tamil Nadu was immediate: "holocaust", "genocide", "state sponsored decimation". Letters to the editor of Indian papers deemed it was "not an ethnic riot, it was a pogrom"; "...a deliberate, methodical and thorough..massacre..by the power wielding

⁴For details, see Robert Kearney, "Sri Lanka in 1984: The Politics of Communal Violence", *Asian Survey*, Vol.XXV, No.2, February 1985, p.257 - 263; Robert Kearney, "Tension and Conflict in Sri Lanka", *Current History*, March 1986, p.109- 112 and 127 - 128; Partha S. Ghosh, "Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in South Asia", *Conflict Studies*, No.178, 1985, (London: Institute for the Study of Conflict).

majority". The speeches, the newspapers, the broadcasts all honed on to the single question of "where are the affected to look for sympathy and redress". Jayewardene's silence for four days followed by a national broadcast that "appeased the natural desire and request of the Sinhala people" furthered public outrage within Tamil Nadu.⁵ His admittance that discipline was low in the armed forces did nothing to alleviate the anger. Any note of sympathy for the Tamils was significantly lacking. Three Tamil newspapers were put under government control and all property affected by the carnage was held by the government.

Within Sri Lanka, the separation of the country into ethnic halves was dramatically declared. As one Sinhala human rights activist wrote: "With that address to the nation, Jayewardene abdicated his right to lead the Tamil people in Sri Lanka". The apparent effort was to placate Sinhala sentiment. The TULF was effectively proscribed. Tamil business was put on hold. Having done this, Jayewardene then turned his energies on facing a critical India.

Amidst a flurry of statements aimed at placating Sinhala passions, Jayewardene inched toward initiating a dialogue with India. He first accused India of harboring Tamil militants, which was a fact. He then warned India that "Indira Gandhi should keep her hands off Sri Lanka" and that "If India by some chance decided to invade, we will fight, may be lose, but with dignity".⁶ Having established his Sinhala credentials, he was relatively free to begin talking with a now insistent Indian government.

While Jayewardene invoked fears of an Indian invasion and references to Bangladesh abounded, the Delhi government was conspicuous in its attempt to define a low profile, conciliatory diplomacy. Despite walk outs in the Indian parliament and calls for blood in Tamil Nadu, the then Foreign Minister, Mr. Narasimha Rao, repeatedly stressed the need for a solution within the "unity and integrity of Sri Lanka".⁷ The sending of a special Indian envoy to Sri Lanka was underlined as being strictly mediatory and not the sign

⁵Quotes are from S.C.Gangal, "Foreign Policy Issues Before the New Government : The Sri Lankan Problem", *India Quarterly*, Vol.XLI, No.1, January - March 1985, p.38 - 43; Robert Kearney, "Sri Lanka in 1984 : The Politics of Communal Violence", *Asian Survey*, Vol.XXV, No.2, February 1985, p.257 -263.

⁶BBC interview as quoted in S.C.Gangal, "Foreign Policy Issues Before the New Government: The Sri Lankan Problem", *India Quarterly*, Vol.XLI, No.1, January - March 1985.

⁷P.V.Rao, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: India's Role and Perception", *Asian Survey*, Vol.XXVIII, No.4, April 1988, p. 419 - 436.

of an active player in negotiations. When Mr. Parthasarathy, India's special envoy, was labelled by the media as the designer of Annexure C, a key document in Tamil Sinhala talks, the Indian government specifically addressed the Indian parliament that Annexure C was merely the essence of points congruent to both the Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Tamil parties, and not attributable to Indian initiative. The phrase most reiterated was the offering of India's "good offices" as a middleman between the Tamils and the Sri Lankan government. Jayewardene's aggressive comments were admonished for being totally off the mark and needlessly incendiary. Parliamentarians were cautioned on the need for restraint and reminded constantly of the "delicacy of the situation".

At the level of actual behavior, the Indian government was very much a player. To understand this, the situation of the Tamil groups needs to be outlined.

Political Representation by Sri Lankan Tamils

Ostensibly, the fourteen year old TULF was the sole political party of the Ceylon Tamils and thereby the major negotiating party from the Tamil side. In truth, however, the TULF, despite its history and its position as the major opposition party in Sri Lanka after the 1977 elections, was no longer a wholly credible representative of the Tamil people. One of the reasons was that despite its victory in the 1977 elections, the TULF was functioning within the logic of the Sri Lankan constitution. The active members of the Tamil youth were not. With the five sixth majority achieved by the Sinhala Buddhist dominated United National Party at the 1977 elections, the parliament, which had been eroding Tamil rights ever since the 1950's in deference to increasing Sinhala sentiment, could no longer be trusted according to the Tamil militants. Impatient with the conservatism of the TULF, the Tamil militants broke free and engaged in a sustained spate of violence against the Sinhala parties. Retribution was immediate and led to the burning of Jaffna's famous Public Library, which had housed mainly Tamil archival material. This only furthered the radicalization of the Tamil youth who urged a boycott of local elections scheduled for May 1983. The TULF participated in the elections despite the call for a boycott, only to be electorally disappointed. It was a clear indication of the growing move from the moderation of the TULF party to the

militancy of the youth groups.

In the pre 1983 period, however, the TULF was not entirely marginalized. In fact, the members referred to the members of the youth groups as the “boys” and acted as patrons or “father figures”. Politically, the militants were seen as complementary to the status of the TULF since they served to highlight the TULF as a relatively moderate party, more amenable to negotiations, in the eyes of the Sinhalese government.

The 1983 riots began to change all that. Jayewardene banned all parties advocating secession. The TULF was thereby effectively proscribed from being the major opposition party in the Sri Lankan parliament.⁸ Alongside, the increased violence generated by the July 1983 riots, pushed apart the tenuous, emotional links that had earlier existed between the TULF and the militants. Positions began to harden to the extent that the members of the TULF began to become a target of the militant revolution, rather than a part of it.

Ousted by the Sri Lankan government and rejected by the Tamil youth, the TULF was forced into exile in India with nothing but its previous reputation as the sole Tamil political party, to keep it afloat. When India’s government wanted a party through which it could negotiate with the Jayewardene government, the TULF was the ideal receptacle.

Why not the major militant party, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)? In 1983, despite the fact that the Tiger party was a decade old, it lacked status as a party of representation. It was deemed a ‘group’, as were at least a score of other similar groups⁹ by both the Sri Lankan and the Indian government. The Tigers were made up of young Tamils in their twenties who had split into enough splinter organizations to devalue their image as a legitimate party. To add to this, the cadre was made up of primarily uneducated youth, seen as a lower caste in the Tamil hierarchy. Primarily originating from the northern coast of Point Pedro and Velvitturai, the scope of the Tigers did not extend into the eastern corridor

⁸The 1977 elections are significant because for the first time since independence, the Tamil minority party became the major opposition party in the Sri Lankan parliament. Usually, that position would go to either the Sinhala dominated UNP or SLFP party. The unexpected victory may have heightened fears that the Tamil minority were once again gaining control.

⁹The relatively prominent groups from a list of nearly forty recognized ones are the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization, the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students, the Eelam People’s Revolutionary Front and the People’s Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam. For a full listing, see Rohan Gunaratna, *War and Peace in Sri Lanka*, (Sri Lanka : Institute of Fundamental Studies), 1987, p.27.

of Sri Lanka, which was more familiar with members of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front. Immersed in a bloody internecine warfare against rival militant groups, the Tigers were seen as a short lived revolutionary youth gang to be contained (by the Sri Lankan government) or used as a bargaining chip (by the Indian government). It was certainly not seen as a full fledged political group representing the interests of the Sri Lankan Tamils as a whole. The suicidal cyanide pills round the necks of each member was translated as youthful dramatism rather than an index of the seriousness of their purpose. It is indicative that the Prime Minister of India did not even attempt to talk directly to leaders of the party right until 1987, a full four years since the start of almost continuous negotiations on the part of the Indian government.

Despite its lack of real power, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), with its educated, conservative, articulate elite was regarded the only party for negotiations by both governments. Obversely, the TULF was highly vulnerable to guidance from the Indian government on which it was reliant in every way possible.

Representation by the Indian government:

Given this curious lacuna in political representation, the Indian government was actively filling in for the Ceylon Tamils. Not only did the Ceylon Tamils urge Indian participation, but domestic pressure in South India was on the boil. Tamil Nadu was in an uproar. By the second week of August, the ruling state government of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) party had declared a week of mourning and also issued calls for a state wide *bandh* (closure). An all party delegation was sent from Tamil Nadu to New Delhi, on 31 July 1983, and met with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Defense Minister and the Finance Minister to express three points. One, that the Sri Lankan riots were in fact, state sponsored genocide. Two, that if the genocide was not contained it would spread to Tamil Nadu and create a law and order problem in India. Three, that India should take the responsibility of persuading the UN Security Council to send a peace keeping force in order to contain the Sri Lankan government. The then Opposition leader, Mr. Karunanidhi, went one step ahead and urged Mrs. Gandhi to "do a Bangladesh" and

send the Indian army in immediately to protect the Ceylon Tamils. He pushed this demand with a much publicized demonstration and rail *roko* (stoppage) intended to make Delhi take some "positive steps". In Delhi, demonstrations were held outside the Sri Lankan High Commission by a majority of political parties including the ruling Congress(I). A number of Tamil MP's boycotted the parliament almost daily with the express intent of pushing Mrs. Gandhi to act more forcefully. Karunanidhi and the general secretary of the Opposition Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party subsequently resigned their seats in the state legislature and a great deal of publicity surrounded the action of all other DMK party members sending in their resignation to Karunanidhi. Despite Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G.Ramachandran's (MGR) vocal stand, his chief whip in the state assembly, Mr.T.R.Janardhanam resigned not only from the Assembly, but also from the party to denounce what he felt was the tepid response of the party, not at all representative of the strong feelings of the Tamil Nadu public. It was true that despite all the bandhs, the rail rokos, the denouncements and the walk outs, not a single party had as yet, formally supported the Ceylon Tamils demand for a separate state or *eelam*. Conspicuous too was the lack of any tabled resolutions on the matter. Yet not since the language riots and secessionist movement of the 1960's, had the Tamil Nadu public been quite so vociferous or agitated over an issue.

While strictly an internal matter of Sri Lanka, Indian officials and the news media effortlessly slipped into the perception that the Ceylon Tamil issue could no longer be just that, given the intensity of reactions and extent of disruption in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The Indian government claimed the role of mediator between the Sri Lankan government and the Ceylon Tamils.

The All Parties Conference : 1983 - 1985

The period immediately following the 1983 outburst was marked by attempts at scotching the problem via an All Parties Conference (APC) in Colombo. At the level of negotiations, future policy was pinned on the presumption of getting the Sinhala and Tamil

parties together and drawing up proposals agreeable to all factions. Almost two years were spent in back and forth deliberations. During this time, other aspects of the situation were beginning to ferment and grow until by 1985, the very concept of an amicable Conference seemed remote and out of place.

The initial reliance on a Conference was not without foundation. The possibility of negotiating an acceptable proposal was deemed feasible. President Jayewardene himself had come to power in 1977 with an explicit statement in his election manifesto that the Tamils were isolated because of language, education, resettlement and employment policies.¹⁰ Having publicly recognized these factors, that he may be open to resolving them, especially now that he was under pressure, was a broad enough expectation amongst the moderate TULF leadership.

The TULF, as outlined earlier, had their backs to the wall and were eager for negotiations. Especially at this point, when the Government of India had, for the first time, taken such a direct hand in their support. The TULF had in fact refused to talk to the Sri Lankan government in the week preceding the July riots. This was a result of disappointments accruing from the earlier Inter Party Conference from August 1981 to September 1982, and what the TULF perceived as the failure of Mr. Jayewardene to implement any of the settlements reached during the Conference. With the offer of India's "good offices", the TULF saw it as their best chance for insuring implementation. As TULF leaders wrote in a published letter, "It was the offer of offices by the late Prime Minister...that..encouraged the negotiatory process..".¹¹ Even otherwise, the TULF did not have much choice, but to try and make a success of the Conference. Despite a constant sense that it was an "exercise in futility",¹² the TULF continued to attend the Conference. There were no real alternatives. Inhered in the tradition of non violence and hence rejected by the Tamil militant movement; supported by a powerful Indian government that stressed the role of negotiations as the panacea to all ills; and exiled from its home base, the TULF very literally had to make the best of a bleak situation. The foundation for the proposals discussed at the

¹⁰A. Amirthalingum, *Glimpses of Tamil Grievances, 1977 - 1983* (Madras: A TULF Publication, 1984), p.29.

¹¹TULF, *Towards Devolution of Power in Sri Lanka* (Madras: A TULF Publication, 1988), p.17.

¹²TULF, *Tamil Efforts for Peaceful Solution* (Madras: A TULF Publication, 1984): p.76.

Conference drew from both the earlier deliberations of the Inter Party Conference of 1982 and the constantly shuttling discussions between the TULF and the Sri Lankan government via Indian envoys.

Indian Involvement

Within a week of the July riots, India's foreign minister was sent to Colombo, ostensibly to initiate talks on devolution between TULF General Secretary, Mr. Amirthalingum and President Jayewardene. The signal was clear, the Indian government was not planning on any militantly aggressive policy toward Sri Lanka but was inserting itself into the Sinhala — Tamil equation with or without invitations. The fact that a foreign government was intervening to push discussions between the Tamils and Sinhals of Sri Lanka seemed to elicit no surprise from any quarter. After all, both the Sinhalese and the Tamil propagandists were united in the opinion that India would militarily invade Sri Lanka. That it chose to enter discussions instead, was easily legitimated within that larger idea of intervention.

The Indian government meanwhile showed all signs of trying to tiptoe through the scenario as a behind the scenes mediator rather than a visible negotiator. Mrs. Gandhi made statements before the Indian parliament reiterating that India did not "pose any threat to Sri Lanka nor..want to interfere in its affairs.." but also that the Sri Lankan government could not treat India as "just any country" and that "external involvement",¹³ by any country other than India, would not be welcomed in the region.

After the Indian Foreign Minister's brief visit to Sri Lanka, it was a Sri Lankan delegation that was invited to India, so that Indian involvement could not be construed as an unwelcome intrusion. Hector Jayewardene, the President's brother, headed the delegation and arrived in Delhi as Sri Lanka's special envoy. According to the TULF leader's statement, Hector Jayewardene assured Mrs. Gandhi on five points. One, that the Sri Lankan government was willing to implement the District Development Council laws.¹⁴ Two, that

¹³P.V. Rao, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: India's Role and Perception", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXVIII, No.4, April 1988, p.419 - 436.

¹⁴The District Development Council was essentially a plan for decentralized authority so that each district could chart its own agricultural and industrial development. The Council was to be elected by the people of the district and had the power to levy local taxes. See Bruce Mathews, "District Development Councils

he would take “some actions” on the use of the Tamil language. Three, that the Sri Lankan army in Jaffna would discontinue active duty. Four, that there would be ‘discussions’ over the release of political prisoners. Five, that President Jayewardene was ready for ‘further discussions of any new proposals as long as the unity of Sri Lanka would not in any way be affected’. Given the vagueness and deliberate broad brushing of issues, it seems likely that this meeting was more symbolic than substantive. Whatever the real reasons, the view being sponsored was that of two mature governments trying to defuse and resolve a situation that affected them both.

Hector Jayewardene’s visit paved the way for Indira Gandhi to offer India’s “good offices” and select a special envoy, Mr.G.Parthasarathy. By August 25, Mr.Parthasarathy began his shuttle between the Sri Lankan government in Colombo and the TULF and local Tamil leaders in Delhi and Madras.¹⁵ In his first visit, after three talks with the President, the focus seemed to evolve onto the point of turning Sri Lanka into a Union of States rather than the existing unitary system. This alone was seen as capable of satisfying the Tamil demand for merging parts of the East and North into a single unit comprising the traditionally held ‘Tamil homeland’. The TULF, in turn, conceded on a significant issue, that a “viable alternative” would be accepted instead of an *eelam*. Having won the 1977 mandate on the promise of securing an *eelam*, it seems likely that the Indian government had a lot to do with the TULF concession.

On special envoy Parthasarathy’s second visit of November 10, he had five “long meetings” with the President where the impasse between a Union and the existing unitary state was hoped to be forded by the establishing of a “Regional Council Scheme”. This was essentially an expansion of the earlier District Development Councils. It cannot be disputed that the initiative for this proposal was wholly that of President Jayewardene and Mr.Parthasarathy. In a public statement at the plenary session of the Conference, the

in Sri Lanka”, Asian Survey, Vol.22, No.1, November 1982, p.1117 - 1134. Also, Chelvadurai Manogaran, Ethnic Conflict and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987); p.160 - 164.

¹⁵ Following the 1983 riots, the Sixth Amendment was introduced into the Sri Lankan constitution, stating that all MP’s were to take an oath on the sacrosanctity of a unitary state. Since this pointedly circumvented the Tamil demand for *eelam*, the fourteen parliamentary members from the TULF party had started resigning. By October, all had resigned and most had moved to Madras.

TULF leader categorically stated that he had “no hand in the formulation of this scheme”. The Indian government was undeniably more than the messenger boy it was touting itself to be. At this meeting of Parthasarathy’s it was decided that he would discuss the concept of Regional Councils with the Ceylon Tamil leaders and would reconvene with President Jayewardene at the Commonwealth Head of Government Meeting scheduled for November 1983 at Delhi.

Divorced from the actual give and take of discussions and presented only with the essence of negotiated issues, the TULF was quick to assert that without a north east merger of Sri Lankan Tamils in the island, participation in the Conference was pointless. The Regional Councils proposed by President Jayewardene however, promised a greater degree of autonomy than the Tamils had known after independence. The demand for control over executive, legal and financial matters were included in the Regional Councils. The demand for ethnically proportionate representation in the armed forces was also included. Measures to allay the Tamil fear of Sinhalese colonization in the Tamil homeland was formally recognized. All demands were included except the actual merger of the north and east provinces and the transformation of Sri Lanka into a Union of states. Instead of a merger, the ‘region’ was suggested as an appropriate unit of devolution. Hence the proposal for a Regional Council was finally accepted in principle by the TULF. The leader of the Sri Lankan plantation Tamils, Mr.Thondaman also gave his approval. According to a TULF statement, despite the party’s refusal to participate in the Conference unless the merger was accepted, it had been “persuaded” by the Indian government with the idea that the issue of the merger could always be raised as the Conference proceeded.¹⁶

Sri Lankan government policy:

The TULF acceptance was presumably conveyed to President Jayewardene on his visit to Delhi during the Commonwealth meeting. The President in turn assured Mrs. Gandhi that he could hold the “hawks and extremists at bay” and extend the autonomy wanted by

¹⁶Statement made by Mr.Amirthalingum at the Plenary Session of the All Party Conference, 30 September 1984. In *TULF, Towards Devolution of Power in Sri Lanka* (Madras: A TULF Publication, 1988): p.12.

the Tamils.¹⁷ To the Government of India, Mr. Jayewardene appeared a willing negotiator in the whole process.

In light of the ornery comments the Sri Lankan president made in most interviews, where barely a week before the Indian envoy's visit, he stated India had "no role", the TULF did not so much begin to trust Mr. Jayewardene's assurances, as rely more heavily on the Indian government. Mr. Amirthalingum, leader of the TULF, stated in an interview that "India will have to guarantee our safety... We have faith only in India" and "the significant role played by Indian good offices..".¹⁸

Expressing a need for increased Tamil autonomy barely three months after the bloody riots was not congruent with President Jayewardene's television broadcast stating "I am not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna (Tamil) people now".¹⁹ In the context of Sinhala public opinion which was decidedly militant and anti Indian at the time, it was not even politically coherent. Mr. Jayewardene had his reasons. The fallout from the continuing violence in the island had begun. There was a sharp drop in both exports and tourism, a major blow considering that Sri Lanka's plantation agriculture is export oriented and tourism accounts for a significant slice of the nation's resources. The Gross Domestic Product index had dropped by 1% and showed signs of dropping even further. This was accompanied by warnings from giant donor agencies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, cautioning the government against further economic down swings. The President was also severely disappointed with the negative responses he had received from traditional Western allies such as the United States and the United Kingdom with regard to military assistance. Neighboring countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan were also not openly supportive of him in this period, as it would anger domestic media, which had highlighted the massacre of Muslim Tamils in Sri Lanka. General Ershad of Bangladesh in fact canceled a visit to Sri Lanka on the grounds that the Muslim community in the island (Tamil speaking) were being killed there. On top of all this, India was crowding in with a muted stick and carrot policy, opposing all "outside interference" and offering its own "good

¹⁷Quoted in S.C. Gangal, "Foreign Policy Issues Before the New Government: The Sri Lankan Problem", *India Quarterly*, Vol. XLI, No. 1, January - March, 1988, p. 38 - 43.

¹⁸In *The Times of India*, September 1983.

¹⁹Mohan Ram, *Sri Lanka: The Fractured Island*, (India: Penguin Books Limited, 1989), p. 55.

offices". World opinion seemed to have labelled Mr.Jayewardene as the 'villain'. Given the vulnerability of Sri Lanka's economy, the image had to be shaken off. The time to appear statesmanlike was at hand.

What President Jayewardene did not or would not accurately calculate was the extent of control he had over the "hawks and extremists". Sinhala opposition was vociferous. Annexure C, the document outlining the points for discussion and crafted as the basis of the Conference, came to be denounced as "Parthasarathy's Annexure" amongst Sinhalese public opinion.²⁰ The whole idea of the Conference was seen as being orchestrated by the Government of India. Sri Lanka's opposition party made political brownie points by publicly condemning it as an "Indian product".

10 January 1984 was set as the opening session of the Conference. As the date approached, political shenanigans peaked. The TULF not only began voicing intense concern over some points in the proposals, but were increasingly suspicious of Mr.Jayewardene's very intentions. One faction believed the Conference was merely a tactical ploy to gain some time rather than a genuine attempt at reconciliation. Based on his long political career, Mr.Jayewardene had been nicknamed the "Old Fox" and this was seen as just another of his notoriously devious moves. The suspicions were not groundless. The president, pushed on to a tight rope by the unexpectedly strong criticism, was conspicuously backpedalling and playing down the Conference and Annexure C. By 2 January, Mrs.Gandhi was concerned enough to both telephone him and follow it up by sending special envoy Parthasarathy to Colombo to seek clarifications. On his return, the conclusion reached was that while Mr.Jayewardene was still keen on the the Conference, he did not find it "prudent to adopt too rigid a stand publicly".²¹ Given this evaluation, the TULF leaders agreed to attend the Conference and returned to Colombo after four months of voluntary exile in India.

The day after, Colombo's opposition party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), decided to boycott the Conference and three days later formally withdrew. Frantic negotiations continued over the next twenty four hours and by the morning of the 10th, the SLFP retracted its withdrawal and attended the Conference. India once again made its diplomatic

²⁰Mr.G.Parthasarathy was the Indian Special envoy, credited with being the force behind the Conference.

²¹The Hindu, 3 January,1984.

stand very clear by not sending Mr.Parthasarathy, even as an observer, to the Conference. "Nowhere near it" was Parthasarathy's own vigorous denial, even as he extolled it as an "event of national significance".²²

The "significant event" laboriously wound its way down over the next one year in much the same way it had started. The SLFP and the influential Buddhist party, the Mahajana Eksath Perumana, withdrew after a short while. The SLFP claimed that the TULF's visits to India had "created in the minds of our party rank and file that it is inviting South Indian intervention in the internal affairs of our country".²³ The Maha Sangha and other Sinhala Buddhist religious groups were united on the stand that the Tamils could not ask for anything more than the earlier District Development Councils and that "Parthasarathy's Annexure" deriving from Indian rather than Sri Lankan interests, was totally unacceptable.

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Soon after the infructuous concluding of the first session, Mr.Amirthalingum visited Delhi to apprise the Government of India on the proceedings which he synopsized as "very depressing". Meetings continued, however, and from all accounts, there were members from both sides who worked hard at carving out an acceptable medium. By April, the only common agreement reached was the setting up of the *grama sevaka* (local government). The question of devolution at the level of the region or the province was nowhere near compromise. Worse, the conditions for continuing the Conference were fast deteriorating. The very existence of the Conference was a red flag to militants on both sides. By 30 September, President Jayewardene suspended the Conference and TULF leader, Mr.Amirthalingum accused Annexure C of being "unceremoniously and ignominiously jettisoned". He further denounced the Conference as having been just a "Round Table Conference to which various groups were brought in, as and when it suited the Government".²⁵ Yet the door was left open by Mr. Jayewardene with the announcement that the Conference would reconvene

²²Mr.G.Parthasarathy in *The Hindu*, 11 Jan, 1984

²³*The Hindu*, 8 February, 1984. Also see Kenneth Hubbell, "The Devolution of Power in Sri Lanka: A Solution to the Separatist Movement?" *Asian Survey*, Vol.XXVII, No.11, November 1988, p.1176 - 1187.

²⁴In a later interview, President Jayewardene confessed that inviting religious groups had been a mistake. At the time, however, their presence certainly raised the stature of the Conference amongst the Sinhala public.

²⁵TULF, *Towards Devolution of Power in Sri Lanka*, (Madras: A TULF Publication, 1988); p.12.

on 14 December after the discussions had been studied by him and appropriate legislation drafted.

The drafts of the proposed legislation were circulated by 12 December amidst an atmosphere of total distrust amongst all parties. The TULF was unconditional in its opposition to the draft bills. The provisions of Annexure C were nowhere in evidence.²⁶ What was presented instead were schemes similar to the old District Development Councils. It was rejected as “repetitious” and “unacceptable”. Given the increasing militancy among the Ceylon Tamils, acceptance of the proposals would have meant instant political death for the TULF. The only concession visible in the drafts was the inclusion of an ethnically proportionate army and police.

Given the instant rejection of the draft proposals, President Jayewardene reconvened the Conference for 10 January, 1985. It never quite made it. The TULF believed the President had lost all ability to control the hawks in his Cabinet. This notion was sparked by the decision of the Sri Lankan Cabinet to drop all proposals placed before the Conference. This act caused TULF leader, Amirthalingum to formally reject the proposals, in front of the media. He then left for Madras after sending an impassioned appeal to the newly elected Rajiv Gandhi stating “We have no help but India”. He also reminded him of India’s promise of “good offices” and the fact that the abandonment of the Conference “brings to naught all the efforts of India for over one and a half years”.²⁷ It was clear that the TULF had no other genuine resource but to persuade the Indian government into greater involvement.

The sudden termination of the Conference was seen by some as a “misunderstanding of magnitude”;²⁸ as a complete “surprise” to some of the participants²⁹ and as a simple buckling of the President to unexpectedly high Sinhala militancy.³⁰ The fact is, given the environment within which the Conference labored, it was a surprise it lasted as long as it

²⁶Interview, Mr.Sampanatham, self exiled TULF leader, Madras, 1989. According to Mr.Sampanatham, none of “what had been privately agreed upon” with Mr.Jayewardene was included.

²⁷TULF, *Towards Devolution of Power in Sri Lanka*, (Madras: A TULF Publication, 1988), p.16 - 17.

²⁸Bruce Mathews, p.79

²⁹Robert Kearney, “Tension and Conflict in Sri Lanka”, *Current History*, March 1986.

³⁰P.V.Rao, “Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: India’s Role and Perception”, *Asian Survey*, Vol.XXVIII, No.4, April 1988.

did. The spirit of compromise could hardly be expected to flourish amidst an atmosphere of spiraling violence, hatred and distrust. What the Conference did leave behind was a slew of widely discussed ideas and schemes that both provided a base line for future negotiations and primed the public with a bracket of expectations for what could transpire in future years.

In January 1985, however, the All Parties Conference was synonymous with futile negotiations. The only perceived alternative was militancy. Militant Tamils were increasingly regarded as the true patriots by the Ceylon Tamil population. Retributive state policies, in turn, were seen as the only hope for bringing peace to the island by the Sinhala population. Given that the equation of physical supremacy dominated all else, the old idea of invasion by India seemed inevitable, or was at least presented as such. The militant factions on both sides cashed right in on the idea as the Government of India's publicity division grew more and more outraged in its official denials.

The insufficiency of negotiations:

The year 1984 had seen the growing legitimacy of violence. The leaders of the two governments and the TULF party seemed to have pinned their hopes on a negotiated settlement through the forum of the Conference. Their convictions were not shared right from the start by important segments of the population. The steady continuation of violent attacks by Tamil militants on the Sinhala population had garnered enough hardliners in the Sinhala Cabinet. Added to this was the Indian arm twisting and interference that raised Sinhala hackles across the board. The then Prime Minister, Mr. Premadasa, was the most outspoken;³¹ while Cyril Mathew, Minister for Industries and influential labor leader, the most militant. Politically, the SLFP as the opposition party, made the most it could out of Mr. Jayewardene's dilemma. Its members variously accused him of kowtowing to Mrs. Gandhi even as they blamed him for not making the best use of Mrs. Gandhi's good intentions.

³¹In a parliamentary speech, described by Opposition leader A. Bandarnaike as a "declaration of war against India", Mr. Premadasa said "We have tolerated India enough. Let India invade us. Let them come. We will see." Quoted in S.C. Gangal, "Foreign Policy Issues Before the New Government: The Sri Lankan Problem", *India Quarterly*, Vol. XLI, No. 1, January - March 1985, p. 38 - 43.

The sense one gets is of President Jayewardene stepping through a mine field. While he kept the Indian government placated through verbal assurances and meetings, his acts were calculated toward appeasing Sinhala sentiment. The complaint of the opposition that dealing with the TULF was like dealing with South India, led the President to impose travel restrictions in February 1984. Not only was Indian Airlines refused permission to establish a direct route to the Sri Lankan Tamil dominated Jaffna region, but all Sri Lankan nationals were permitted only one foreign travel every two years, unless granted special permission by Sri Lankan central authorities, thereby proscribing the visits of Sri Lankan Tamil leaders to India.

At the same time, a definite military option was forming. Lalith Athulathmudali was named National Security Minister, a completely new post. A naval surveillance zone was imposed in the narrow Palk straits between India and Sri Lanka, leading to a nagging new source of irritation between the two governments. The idea of a restricted zone was incomprehensible to the age old, hand to mouth existence of fishermen on both coasts. It rapidly led to a net full of captured fishermen and confiscated boats. The plight of the Indian fishermen was to become a periodic cause celebre in the Indian media. On the verbal plane, Mr. Athulathmudali was sent to India to assure the Indian government that the zone was strictly a surveillance measure and should not be construed as a blockade. The capture of seventeen boats and seventy seven fishermen in a single day seemed to suggest otherwise. In addition, there were reports that Jaffna was to be cordoned off and greater military measures undertaken in that area. In June an Israeli section was opened in the American Embassy at Colombo, through which the Mossad and Shin Beth reportedly trained Sinhala soldiers. U.S. Defense Secretary, Caspar Weinberger visited Sri Lanka around the same time. Finally, President Jayewardene began giving several interviews that openly chided India for getting involved in Sri Lanka's domestic disputes. It is a "strictly internal affair" was the message he repeated in consecutive statements.

Given these indications, it is no surprise that the TULF had begun to regard the Conference as a play for time on the part of the Sri Lankan government. Then again, given the rise of Tamil militancy and the corresponding decline of TULF legitimacy, it was no

surprise that President Jayewardene could not depend on total efficacy and representation at the Conference. Moreover, the Conference was roundly rejected by a major section of the Cabinet he was heading.

Rise of Sri Lankan Tamil militancy:

At the same time, the Ceylon Tamil militants were at war, both with the Sri Lanka government and amongst themselves in a bloody confrontation for primacy. Gunaratna lists 36 'major' active militant groups, some with cadres of barely forty members.³² While the groups still deny it, many researchers are of the opinion that the splinters were struck off along caste lines or regional lines. Personality politics may have contributed. The stated difference of 'ideology' accounting for so many groups holds little water. Various brands of Marxism - Leninism were officially touted by the groups. In actuality, as one militant leader said "that is really the only ideology that offers a vocabulary for revolution"³³ The embrace, was at best, superficial. Given the lack of any substantive differences, each group was at its most outrageous in a bid for establishing supremacy. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) headed by Mr. Prabhakaran, probably had the longest roots. In 1972, Prabhakaran had formed the Tamil New Tigers, primarily focused on bank robberies, bus burning, protest marches, and possibly, some assassinations of minor political figures. By 1984, they were also the most organized and constituted one of the only groups to have refused Indian assistance if the help came with any strings attached. A splinter group of the Tigers was the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), headed by Prabhakaran's former deputy, Uma Maheshwaran. The open gunfights between these two groups on the streets of Madras and Maheshwaran's subsequent murder gave Sri Lanka the first open proof it needed to show that its fears of Tamil Nadu harboring the militants was not unfounded. The wrongly timed bomb explosion at the Meenambakkam Airport in Madras, set off by one of the militant groups, furthered the evidence. The Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) was another of the groups that 'distinguished'

³²Rohan Gunaratna, *War and Peace in Sri Lanka*, (Sri Lanka: Institute of Fundamental Studies, 1987).

³³Interview with Mr. Shankar, one of the leaders of the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students, Madras, 1989.

itself with the kidnapping of an American couple who's release was finally engineered by the Tamil Nadu and Indian government.

Random assassinations of both militant leaders and Sri Lankan officials; sudden attacks on the Sri Lankan police; destruction of public buildings such as television and radio stations; the massacre of Sinhala citizens deemed as diabolical 'colonists' in new resettlement areas in the east, all this was creating a frightening sense of chaos and social breakdown in Sri Lanka. The TULF - Indian bid for negotiations amidst the sustained violence of Tamil militant groups was increasingly viewed as either hypocritical or anomalous.

The Thimphu Talks of 1985

Rejected by both the Sinhalese and the Tamil parties, the Conference seemed to be urged on not by a logical desire for compromise between the two parties, but solely on the insistence of the Indian government. This became even more apparent with the reincarnation of the Conference in mid 1985 at the so called "Thimphu talks". Between the breakdown of the Conference in January and the restarting of negotiations in mid June, the Indian government had been furiously working on the Tamil militants to enter into the process of discussions rather than increase the ante of violence. Despite their open reluctance to enter the field of negotiations, the Thimphu talks were a definite plus for the Tamil militants. It was the first time that they had been recognized at the level of government as a negotiating partner. From a ragtag bunch of "boys", they were now being claimed as "brothers" of the TULF and being directly approached by the Government of India as a recognizable group.

On the other hand, the TULF was predictably, a waning force. The collapse of the Conference and the violence of the militants was finally topped by the sudden death of their closest ally, Mrs. Gandhi. With the election of a new and untried Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, the TULF leaders were not too confident that his policies would adhere to that of Indira Gandhi's. Worse, his statesmanship and ability to negotiate was doubted as being on par with that of the 'Old Fox', Mr. Jayewardene. Sinhalese hardliner, Lalith Athulathmudali's open approval of Rajiv Gandhi only furthered this discomfort. It was

soon obvious that Rajiv Gandhi was working hard at establishing himself as a 'friendly neighbor'.

On 10 February, 1985, a cache of arms being transported by Air Zaire for the Sri Lankan government, was accidentally forced to land at Delhi. Knowing the contents of the cargo, Rajiv Gandhi allowed the aircraft to carry on to Colombo, earning the approval of Lankan minister, Athulathmudali and the doubt of the TULF. Further on in the month, the highly trusted special envoy, Mr.G.Parthasarathy, was removed from negotiations and replaced by a 'North Indian', Romesh Bhandari. The Ceylon Tamils inferred this move as needless appeasement to the Sinhala government as Mr.Parthasarathy was ethnically Tamilian. Rajiv Gandhi also made open promises to "curb" militant activity in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. In a letter to Rajiv Gandhi, both the President and the Secretary general of the TULF revealingly expressed how "relieved" they were about Gandhi's statement at a Press conference saying there was "no change of policy in India on the Tamil issue" and how they had been "apprehensive of some recent developments".³⁴

Indian government mediation:

Their apprehensions were given ample fuel. The Government of India under Rajiv Gandhi was making definite attempts to woo the Sri Lankan government into quick negotiations. Gandhi was being lionized as the "Accord maker" at the time³⁵ and was striving to live up to the expectations that had got him a record percentage of total votes in recently held national elections. Besides which, the refugee influx into Tamil Nadu had crossed the fifty thousand mark by March 1985. The Central government was paying over Rs.1000/- per family per month apart from sponsoring camp, food and health facilities. The collapse of the Conference had been a definite blow to the plans of the Government of India and a resurrection of some sort was openly desired.

After a volley of visits at the ministerial level between the Jayewardene and Gandhi

³⁴Letter to the Prime Minister, Mr.Rajiv Gandhi as signed by the President and Secretary General of the TULF. In TULF, *Towards Devolution of Power in Sri Lanka*, (Madras: A TULF Publication, 1988), p.18 - 19.

³⁵As the incoming Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi had been able to conclude an agreement with the Sikh agitationists in India.

governments, the two leaders jointly called for a "cessation of all acts of violence" on 27 March 1985. This was followed by a sudden capture of militant's boats carrying guns and explosives, by the Indian coast guard. Similarly, air cargoes of ammunition were confiscated by the Madras customs officials. Some Tamil militants were even apprehended by the Indian police in end April. The incidents startled the Ceylon militants who, heretofore, had enjoyed complete protection from the local Tamil Nadu and Indian forces. In fact, they had been excused from prosecution even after the accidental killings of Indian civilians during an open shoot out between warring factions on the streets of Madras. At the same time, members from various Central government organizations in India went to work on the more prominent militant leaders in Madras in an effort to unify them with a common set of demands.

What Rajiv Gandhi's government seemed to have theorized was that the failure of the Conference had been the non - involvement of the Tamil militants who had stepped up their activities, making any agreement an impossibility. What the Gandhi government did not take into account was the extent of control they would be able to exert over the militants. That some degree of control existed is indicated by the fact that the militants, on the persuasion of the Indian government, called a cease fire in June, the very first since the July 1983 riots. It was not sustained beyond a few weeks. Unwilling to trust the process of negotiations with the Sri Lankan government, the Indian government reportedly had to "frog march" the militants to the Thimphu talks.³⁶ Once there, it could not force an agreement.

Sri Lankan government involvement:

On the Sri Lankan side, President Jayewardene appeared amenable to fresh negotiations. After the collapse of the Conference, the President had blamed the intransigence of the TULF party and openly resorted to squashing the "Tamil terrorists" before any new discussions could be held.³⁷ His policy of containing terrorism by military counter maneu-

³⁶ *India Today*, 31 July, 1985. Reportedly, the militants were verbally harangued by the impatient Indian special envoy, Mr. Bhandari, who shouted them back into the proceedings with "...why the bloody hell (do) you walk out?" *India Today*, 15 September, 1985. The assumption of ultimate Indian control appears very much in evidence.

³⁷ As he explained in the Sri Lankan parliament, "If we do not occupy the border, the border will come to

vers had not paid much dividends. If anything, Tamil militancy fed on the counter violence and worsened, leading to the bloody Anuradhapura massacre of May 1985.

Given the domestic violence and the obvious efforts being made by India's new Prime Minister to play a more assertive role in negotiations, President Jayewardene proposed a string of new measures by end April 1985, following a visit by special envoy Romesh Bhandari to Colombo. These included general amnesty and a release of political Tamil detenus, suggestions for provincial councils and the role of the TULF in these councils, a relaxing of the fishing restrictions that was irritating Indian public opinion and a rethinking on the issue of Sinhala resettlement in eastern Sri Lanka.

Based on these proposals, a meeting was fixed between Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene for early June. At the June meeting, both leaders met alone for over fourteen hours and generated a great deal of media brouhaha over their personal amity and "change of heart". Rajiv Gandhi publicly denounced the concept of a separate Tamil *eelam* in Sri Lanka for the first time. Jayewardene publicly agreed to negotiate directly with the militants for the first time. He also announced a six month cease fire.

By 26 June, the talks were formally announced. By 8 July they commenced at Thimphu, the capital of the neutral Kingdom of Bhutan. Six Tamil groups attended. In a surprise coalition, the Tigers, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization came together as the Eelam National Liberation Front. The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam and the TULF comprised the balance. The Sinhala delegation, headed by Hector Jayewardene, was represented mainly by lawyers.

For the only time in its history, the moderates and the disparate militant Tamil leaders were able to sit together and mint a common set of baseline proposals. These were the recognition of :

1. Tamils as a nationality.
2. A Tamil homeland.
3. Tamil right of self determination.

us.". Quoted in Bruce Kapferer.

4. Citizenship rights for the plantation Tamils.

The four principles with their underlying demand for a merger of the north and east (“homeland”), was rejected outright. Fundamental disagreements raged on with only the Indian mediator, Mr.R.Bhandari, flitting from one group to another in a passionate bid to caulk differences and spin out bridges of agreement, however tenuous.

As the talks proceeded, the militants overriding fear that the Old Fox was merely extending negotiations in a ploy to gain time, started gaining ground. Rumors flew around suggesting violations of the cease fire in Sri Lanka. The delivery of four helicopter gunships from Pakistan and eighteen gunboats from China worsened fears. Two hundred Sinhala men plus thirty group leaders reportedly left for military training to Pakistan. Sinhalese Defense Minister Athulathmudali visited South Korea while General T.Weeratunge of the Sri Lankan army visited China. The Sri Lankan Cabinet approved a new ten thousand strong Auxiliary Force. All these factors were translated as a diabolical bid by Jayewardene to divert the Tamil militants while the Sinhalas geared for an all out offensive against them, once they returned.

By 22 August 1985, after two abortive attempts, the Thimphu talks were abandoned. The only residue it left behind was not so much in the realm of negotiations. It had served to raise the militant groups to the status of a representative political party thereby sounding the formal death knell of the TULF who’s only strength had been its power of representation. It had also served to distance Rajiv Gandhi’s government from that of the militants. In a fit of exasperation following the failure of the talks, Prime Minister Gandhi claimed that the “ball was now in the Tamil’s court”. Four days after the Thimphu failure, two Tamil militant leaders were served deportation orders in India. The timing and nature of the act was too distinct to be coincidental. The Government of India was evidently not amused.

December 19th Talks, 1986

The succeeding year, 1986, was important in that the tone set by the Thimphu talks was

extended up to its logical conclusion. While negotiations became more and more involved in unresolved constitutional minutiae, the Tigers came increasingly to define the environment within which the discussions could be held. Additionally, the crack between the Government of India and the Tigers widened into an open rift within fifteen months of the Thimphu meeting. The Indian government could no longer pretend to be a 'quiet' player and openly took over the responsibility for dialogue with the Sri Lankan government. The mediator had turned negotiator.

Whereas the Sri Lankan delegation and the Tamil representatives both rejected the Thimphu talks,³⁸ it was the Indian government that worked toward a salvage draft, the 'Draft Framework of Terms of Accord and Understanding', to ostensibly provide a "basis for future negotiations". The Indian government seemed to be the only faction, proceeding with a clear view of an eventual Accord. Given the simple clarity of this view, Indian negotiators grew openly frenetic with every threat or barrier negating it. With the end so firmly in sight, an increased impatience with the means to attain it, was bound to accrue. Each delay or refusal on the part of the Tamil groups to accept negotiating proposals, inched the Government of India just that much further into turning the rack against them.

The TULF, as before, had little alternatives following Thimphu. The leaders wrote lengthy letters to Rajiv Gandhi, carefully outlining what they could and could not accept without "losing credibility with our people". The three matters they believed they could not compromise on were listed as the need for recognizing a Tamil homeland, devolution of power (no unit stated) and ethnic representation in the forces of internal law (armed forces, police, justice department and plantation trade unions). The position was buttressed with urgent pleas devolving all responsibility on the Government of India : "It is to India that the Tamils look to save them from genocidal attack" and "...our very survival as a people depends on the good will..of India."³⁹ The increasing precariousness of their position can

³⁸The TULF leaders called the Thimphu proposals "even lower than what was offered and found unacceptable by us at the All Parties Conference in 1984". In *Towards the Devolution of Power in Sri Lanka*, p.47. The Sri Lankan delegation saw the Tamil's Four Principles as nothing more than a "restatement of the demand for eelam" Ibid, p.51.

³⁹Letter to Prime Minister Gandhi as signed by the President and General Secretary of TULF, 1 December, 1985. Ibid, p.46 - 47.

also be inferred from their fears that the Sri Lankan government would use any “alternative proposals” suggested by the TULF to “discredit us with our people”. Only their “anxiety that India’s efforts at a negotiated settlement should not be frustrated” pushed them into suggesting a draft at the end of 1985.

The Sri Lankan Government:

The Sri Lankan government responded with an equally detailed rebuttal finding the TULF draft proposals “totally unacceptable” as their implementation would “have all but attained eelam”. Sinhala fears can be seen in the statement that once this much was granted, “a final push could be made for the creation of a State of Eelam, comprising not only of the North and the East, but of at least the hill country and the N.C.P. as well...”.⁴⁰ The Government of Sri Lanka also berated the TULF for attempting to prejudice the Indian government against Sri Lanka and for trying to “alter India’s general attitude to the problem”.⁴¹ It finally accused the TULF of a lack of power to negotiate given the rising strength of the Tamil militants.

Parallel to, and in spite of all the invective, the process of negotiations was still maintained by the TULF and the Jayewardene government through the Indian government. President Jayewardene presented a ‘working paper’ to his cabinet in September even as the TULF independently prepared its views on the need for a quasi - federal structure in Sri Lanka. Both sets of proposals were summarily dismissed by the opposing parties. Ironically, the only positive outcome was the partial resolution of the old Indo - Sri Lankan problem regarding the plantation Tamil’s citizenship. By January 1986, 94,000 plantation Tamils and their children, an estimated 56,000, were given the right of Sri Lankan citizenship. This was stage managed by President Jayewardene in the teeth of Sinhala opposition, giving rise to bitter rumors among the Ceylon Tamils. In private arguments, President Jayewardene’s consistent argument against the idea of a merger or devolution of power at the state level, centered on his personal powerlessness to do so in the face of strong Sinhala sentiments. That he could master the opposition when he wished to, seemed proven by his resolving of

⁴⁰Ibid, p.72.

⁴¹Ibid, p.50.

the citizenship imbroglio.

All the more bitter was the fact that the resolution of the plantation Tamils citizen rights was a long standing aim of the Indian government, not the Ceylon Tamil parties. The inclusion of the plantation Tamil leaders into the political agenda of the TULF, had been a post 1983 move and no one, least of all the Sri Lankan government, considered the plantation Tamils and the Ceylon Tamils as a united, homogeneous group. In fact, one of the major accusations contained in Hector Jayewardene's statement of 12 August, 1985 at Thimphu, was that the Tamil groups present did not have the "status to represent or negotiate on behalf of all Tamils living in Srilanka" i.e. the plantation Tamils.⁴²

All this while, the tension between the Government of India and the militants heightened. The shock of the deportation orders, subsequently recalled, had pushed the majority of the militants to go underground. The conduit for communication was thereby forced away from official Indian negotiators to allies in the local Tamil Nadu government. By September 1985, the network for communicating was fast turning into a labyrinthine Chinese whisper. Rajiv Gandhi and his envoys conducted between President Jayewardene and the TULF leaders. The TULF, in turn, relied heavily on Indian constitutional experts it would borrow from the Indian government. The Tamil Nadu government conducted between the militant groups and the Government of India. Further, each group was partial to its own Tamil Nadu minister, thereby fueling internal Tamil Nadu politics. The ensuing cacophony can only be approximated.

President Jayewardene, at about the same time, began to talk more and more of the Tamil problem as "a military problem and any military problem has to be tackled militarily" with "decisive military action".⁴³ The meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in December 1985, where he met with Rajiv Gandhi, produced no outcome. If anything, the President was verbally brusque with Rajiv Gandhi for his lack of firmness in dealing with Tamil militants in India, "now that the elections are over", and threatened a "final assault" himself. In support of his words, military pressure to rout all militants was appreciably increased.

⁴²Ibid, p.20.

⁴³India Today, 15 September, 1985.

Deluged by frantic letters from the Tamil leaders, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi expressed "grave concern" over the situation in Sri Lanka. By February, Indian Foreign Secretary, Romesh Bhandari, publicly accused Sri Lanka of "genocide" in the Indian Parliament, much to the satisfaction of the Ceylon Tamils.

In the midst of growing hostility, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, during a visit to Delhi for the Non Aligned Foreign Minister's Meet, discussed a fresh set of proposals with India's Foreign Minister. The Indian government was quick to respond and sent a delegation to Sri Lanka to follow up. Mr. Jayewardene's decision to revive negotiations during an accelerated military operation seems understandable in the light of the United States decision to cut down its annual aid package to Sri Lanka by half. The United States had made it clear that a military option by Sri Lanka would not find favor with the American Congress.

The April 1986 proposals, while adamant on a unitary state of Sri Lanka, suggested the defining of provinces as the unit for devolution of power. This was a major move towards revving up negotiations and the Indian government was quick to assure President Jayewardene of their support for the proposal. Mr. Jayewardene convened a Political Parties Conference at Colombo in June to float the idea of Provincial Councils. The Conference was attended by Sinhala dominated political parties. Simultaneously, the Indian government gathered leaders from the TULF and the militant section, to persuade them to accept the idea of the Provincial Councils. President Jayewardene avoided the stalemate of the earlier ill fated All Parties Conference by an effective change in format. Rather than seeking consensus from the entire spectrum of Sri Lankan leaders, the Political Parties Conference was limited to non religious parties. Additionally, the parties were not asked to discuss the idea of the Provincial Councils. They were merely told to respond to the proposal within two weeks, after which the government would legislate on the matter. The President's talent for control was very much in evidence.⁴⁴

The Sri Lankan Tamils:

The Government of India was having more trouble. While the TULF objected to some

⁴⁴In fact, according to one report, Mr. Jayewardene was confident of garnering 90% acceptance of the proposals just a day after the Conference. See Bruce Mathews.

details within the proposal, the broad concept of a Provincial Council was accepted as a major move forward in negotiations.⁴⁵ The TULF leaders met President Jayewardene for the first time since December 1984 and busied themselves discussing a fine tuning of the proposals. Given their suggestions, the Sri Lankan government added an amendment to the draft legislative proposals on September 4, 1986, incorporating the TULF's suggestions or including it as a "matter to be discussed further". On 30 September 1986, the TULF once again responded via the Ministry of External Affairs in India, with further revisions. A dialogue was on.

The militant groups, specifically the Tigers were not part of it. Even as the Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, Mr. Dixit, informed President Jayewardene that the militants would not obstruct the ongoing talks,⁴⁶ the groups were clamoring for acceptance of a Tamil homeland as a prerequisite to any and every other discussion: "..for any meaningful political settlement, the acceptance by the Sri Lankan Government of an indivisible single region as the homeland of the Tamils is basic..".⁴⁷ The Tamil Nadu government and especially, Chief Minister M.G.Ramachandran, were enlisted by the Government of India to try and persuade the militants to accept the new set of proposals. While the relatively weaker militant groups appeared amenable, or at least neutral on the matter, the Tigers remained adamant on the demand for a homeland. In an interview on 29 June, 1986, Tiger leader Prabhakaran made it clear that a merger had to be an essential part of any peace initiative or he would be willing to openly defy the Indian government if necessary: "..We don't think Rajiv will ask us to pack our bags. But then if we are asked to go we will have to go..".⁴⁸

Given this stand, Prabhakaran's expectations regarding India began to materialize. Just as the deportation order had followed the failure of the Thimphu talks, an overt slap on the wrist followed the Tiger's refusal to negotiate. On 2 November, ten militants were

⁴⁵The Provincial Councils largely followed the provisions of Annexure C, but represented more flexibility on the part of the Sri Lankan government.

⁴⁶This unilateral assurance is an indication of the confidence with which the Indian government perceived the militants to be under their control.

⁴⁷Statement by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, *Frontline*, 18 November, 1986.

⁴⁸Bruce Matthews, p.90.

arrested for shooting in a public place.⁴⁹ On 8 November, 'Operation Tiger' was conducted by the Tamil Nadu police where over a thousand militants were temporarily arrested and disarmed. Two weeks later, the Tiger's radio equipment was seized leading to a successful hunger protest by Prabhakaran. M.G.Ramachandran publicly returned the equipment and denied any plan of coercing the militants. The Director General of the Tamil Nadu Police was made the fall guy and sent on long leave. The aim was clear. The Government of India, through the Tamil Nadu government was threatening a negation of support to the militants if they would not negotiate, even as they tried to prevent a total alienating of the groups.

As late as 16 November, 1986, the Government of India still seemed to be operating on the assumption that the militants could be persuaded into an Accord. At the meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation being held in India at the time, Chief Minister M.G.Ramachandran was openly treated as the only viable mediator between the Tigers and the Indian and Sri Lankan governments. He assured the governments that with a "few more concessions", the Tigers would fall in with the proposals. President Jayewardene responded by suggesting a trifurcate Eastern province instead of the merged Tamil homeland. This move would essentially cauterize the Muslim dominated Amparai district and turn the Tamils into an electoral majority in the newly demarcated Eastern district with 48% Tamils, 37% Muslims who were Tamil speaking and 14% Sinhala. President Jayewardene also offered schemes for coordinating the Northern and Eastern provinces through institutions like universities, planning commissions and land commissions that would serve the same purpose as a merged province. He even suggested that constitutional recognition of the linkages, could be afforded after a period of time and depending on the "wishes of the people", possibly through a referendum.

At this point of time, the possibility for negotiating an acceptable settlement had never seemed brighter. The Indian government was impatient for settling the matter and made it clear that this was the best the Tamils could hope for. President Jayewardene was confident he could push the proposals through in his own Cabinet without raising a storm of opposition. The TULF had agreed it was a suitable basis for negotiations. Even the

⁴⁹One Indian social worker was accidentally killed. This was not the first time such accidents had taken place in Madras. It was, however, the first time that public and legal action was taken on the matter.

militants seemed less unwilling than they had ever been. They responded with both a critique of the proposals and suggestions for the future. Prabhakaran went so far as to visit Bangalore, where the regional meet was being held, in order to facilitate negotiations.⁵⁰

It was not enough. The 'December 19th' proposals, as they were known, were flipped aside in a matter of days. By the third week of December, all that was left was the bitter residue of mutual blame. The TULF accused the Sri Lankan government of a consistent policy of "delay, evasion and retraction".⁵¹ The militants believed it was the Sri Lankan government's old policy of "playing for time". Through all this, the Indian government seemed to be audibly gnashing its teeth. The militants in Tamil Nadu were once again chastised by mass arrests. This led to the abrupt departure of Prabhakaran and the major part of the Tigers to Jaffna in Sri Lanka. The so called control the Government of India was assumed to have over the militant groups was rudely disrupted as Indian leaders lost direct leverage with Prabhakaran for the first time since 1983.

The LTTE takeover

The focus was now solely on the Tigers as they calibrated the level of action in Sri Lanka. In the Northern province, which was their traditional stronghold, they stepped up a plan for taking over all civil administrative duties. As of 1 January, 1987, the organizing of traffic police, the registration of motor vehicles and an administrative secretariat was taken over by the Tigers. The implication that they were forming a parallel rebel government was too provocative to ignore. President Jayewardene launched a major offensive against the group. As newly trained Sri Lankan troops stormed through the Northern cities, an economic blockade plugged all supplies of fuel and food to Jaffna, the centre of Tiger power.⁵²

As it was, given the failure of three years of negotiations, the embarrassment of having to

⁵⁰Prabhakaran's appearance at the Conference, was by many accounts, forced on him by the Indian government, rather than a voluntary act. Personal communication, Dr.M.Singer, November 1992.

⁵¹Letter to the Indian Prime Minister dated 6 March,1987, in **Towards Devolution of Power in Sri Lanka**,(Madras: A TULF Publication, 1988) p.142.

⁵²This was a popular move amongst the Sinhala public and one that the Sri Lankan government would have probably carried out much earlier had it not been for the restraint demanded by the Government of India.

accept or denounce the parallel government of the Tigers, and the reduced sense of control over Prabhakaran, the Indian government was hobbled into a series of reactions. Rajiv Gandhi sent a warning to President Jayewardene, suspending his good offices and calling for a lift in the blockade. At the same time, envoys were sent to persuade the Tigers to negotiate rather than fight.

The Tigers, at the end of four months of battering by the Sri Lankan army, had been backed right up to Jaffna, where they held out amidst a daily head count of casualties, mostly civilian. At India's insistence the group had first publicly declared that its aim was not to form a parallel government but to set up a working secretariat to fill the vacuum debilitating the Northern province. By April 1987, Prabhakaran stated that he was ready to negotiate, but only in a "correct atmosphere and mood". President Jayewardene promised to stop his offensive if the parallel civil administration was dismantled. He called for a ten day unilateral cease fire on 10 April to create a "correct mood". If the cease fire was reciprocated, the President offered to lift the blockade. Prabhakaran not only failed to reciprocate, but a bus station in Colombo was bombed resulting in the much publicized death of over one hundred Sinhala civilians. Sri Lankan public opinion was in an uproar, preventing President Jayewardene from any further overtures. Instead, the offensive was stepped up both verbally and militarily. Mr. Jayewardene proclaimed a fight to the death where "either they win or we win". He said the Sri Lankan government would accept "help from the devil himself if necessary to fight terrorism".⁵³ The "total war" was on and deemed necessary even by moderate Sinhalese in the face of Tiger raids and refusal to negotiate.

The high Tamil civilian death rate in the bombing of Trincomalee, Batticalao in the east and Mannar, Killinochchi, Mallaitheevu and Jaffna in the north, triggered off a heated denunciation of the "inept" and "indecisive" policies of the Indian government by the Indian public and media. In addition, it coasted a fresh exodus of refugees onto the already burdened lands of Tamil Nadu. Prime Minister Gandhi issued a series of warnings to prevent an escalation of matters, but even his most strongly worded remarks were deemed 'wimpy' in the Indian media. Once the Sri Lankan troops ran over Jaffna, the scope for

⁵³P.V.Rao, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: India's Role and Perception", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXVIII, No.4, April 1988, p.432.

any leverage in negotiations would be redundant. The eventual victory of the Sri Lankan army over the Tigers would devalue the need for sustained political negotiations and the Sri Lankan government would be free to dictate terms.

Indo Sri Lankan Agreement, 1987

The TULF had been urging "independent action" by the Indian government since 6 March 1987.⁵⁴ The Tigers had suggested "sending Indian troops" as early as 1983.⁵⁵ On 28 May 1987, the Indian government warned the Sri Lankan government that it may become "too late" very soon, to "desist from a military occupation".⁵⁶ Five days later, the Government of India sent nineteen fishing boats flying a Red Cross flag, to supply Jaffna with food and medicine. The Sri Lankan navy turned back the boats. India issued a warning. The following day, twenty five tons of humanitarian aid was forcibly air dropped into Jaffna. Four Mirage 2000 fighter planes escorted the transport planes, leaving no doubt about the Government of India's intentions.

Halted abruptly by this show of Indian biceps just before his "final assault", President Jayewardene backed down. He first attempted a full scale volley of diplomatic protest "...naked violation of our independence.."; "...an unwarranted assault on our sovereignty and territorial integrity..", but the political reality confronting him was not encouraging. The members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation did not boycott the Foreign Ministers Conference, a sign of their unwillingness to censure Indian action. No one demanded a Security Council meeting in the United Nations. Both at the regional level and at the international level,⁵⁷ the Sri Lankan government was not about to gather any overt support or condemnation of the Indian government.

⁵⁴TULF, *Towards Devolution of Power in Sri Lanka*, (Madras: A TULF Publication, 1988): p.142.

⁵⁵Mr. Balasingham, Tiger spokesman in Partha Ghosh, "Ethnic and Religious Conflict in South Asia", *Conflict Studies*, No.178, (London: Institute for the Study of Conflict, 1985).

⁵⁶P.V.Rao, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: India's Role and Perception", *Asian Survey*, Vol.XXVIII, No.4, April 1988.

⁵⁷In the U.S.House of Representatives, Robert Peck, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State stated that on the issue of Sri Lanka "...we have been gratified..that our policies and the policies of the government of India are very much parallel..".

By July 1987, Sri Lankan protests suddenly halted, the six month economic embargo was lifted, and overall military pressure eased. President Jayewardene had evidently blinked and negotiations were underway. The sudden readiness to negotiate even on a matter as prickly as the merger of the North east provinces, raised a storm of speculation which was never quite resolved. Mr. Jayewardene could have adhered to the December 19 proposals. After all, the Indian government which was forcing the Accord, had been satisfied with the provisions of the earlier proposals. The most plausible argument for the President's flexibility seems to be the most direct one. Jayewardene believed conditions were approaching criticality and another Northern Ireland could be prevented only through immediate and effective resolution.⁵⁸ Public opinion in Sri Lanka was insistent that the only reason for President Jayewardene's "about face" was a threat by Rajiv Gandhi that he would invade Sri Lanka.

On 29 July, 1987, President Jayewardene and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi met in Colombo to sign the Indo — Sri Lankan Agreement. The Agreement was necessarily vague and relied more on interpretation than directives. This seemed to insure that it would not be instantly dismissed as were the more defined proposals of previous attempts. More significantly, the Government of India for the first time, became a direct signatory in the affair. The Agreement was specifically between the governments of India and Sri Lanka with no inclusion of Tamil parties, either moderate or militant. Ironically, the Indian government assumed complete representation of the Ceylon Tamils at exactly the same time that significant sections of the Tamil population had begun to reject Indian credibility.

At first reading, the Agreement certainly embodied a sense of compromise on both sides. While the all important "unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity" of Sri Lanka was acknowledged, the pluralistic nature of its society was also recognized. The charged issue of a Tamil homeland was accepted as being the lands of the "Northern and Eastern provinces".

⁵⁸There was a parallel threat of the resurgence of right wing fundamentalists, represented by the JVP party in the south; the fear and rumors of a coup in the Sri Lankan army; high civilian casualties in densely populated Jaffna city; legitimacy of the Tigers over the TULF by the end of the offensive; durability of the militants; plus willingness of the Indian government to take direct responsibility. In addition he may also have relied on the many loopholes in the proposed Accord, through which exit was possible once the tension had been defused and social order restored.

It was further agreed that they could form one administrative unit to which elections would be held in three months and which would be finally legitimated only through a referendum to take place on or before December 1988. Tamil and English were made official languages. A general amnesty for political prisoners was declared. Retraction of Sri Lankan forces was promised within 72 hours of the cessation of hostilities.

In turn, the militants were to give up their arms. That was the only direct demand aimed at the Ceylon Tamils. The remaining points were all routed through the Government of India : to guarantee and underwrite the resolutions and their implementation; to resolve all “residual matters in six weeks”; to ensure the dismantling of the militants infrastructure; to provide military assistance “as and when requested” and to expedite the repatriation of plantation workers and Sri Lankan refugees. Presumably, the Tamils had been either consulted or informed, prior to the actual signing of the Agreement. It is a fact that the TULF expressed some minor reservations in a published letter to Prime Minister Gandhi, a day before the signing, based on a perusal of the draft agreement. The Tigers maintain that they were thrust with a *fait accompli* and the first time Prabhakaran saw the Agreement was after it had been signed.

While accounts of this seem to vary, the dynamics of the period immediately following the Agreement, could have wavered along any number of possible directions. It may be useful instead, to contrast what the the two governments hoped for, at the time, with what eventually transpired.

The Sri Lankan government:

The Jayewardene Cabinet seemed confident of parliamentary approval of the Agreement, scheduled for 18 August, a little more than two weeks from the date of signing. Given that 140 members of the 152 member Parliament were from Jayewardene’s UNP party, the confidence was justified. Additionally, none of the more vociferous anti - India members of the UNP had come out with any open criticism of the Agreement. Within three months, President Jayewardene hoped to hold provincial elections for which the Indian government would “extend full cooperation”. There would then be an Interim Administration, until the

holding of a referendum within a year. The President also specified that the referendum could be postponed at his discretion. From his point of view, whereas the existence of a Tamil homeland would indirectly be recognized with the merger, the unchanged unitary structure of Sri Lanka would continue to ensure ultimate control with the President. The increasing militancy of the Ceylon Tamils would be contained by the Indians, as would the necessary chaos of trying to reestablish peaceful conditions in the Tamil regions. The responsibility of the Indian government to disarm and control the Tamil militants would leave Jayewardene free to tackle rising Sinhalese right wing violence in the South. The Agreement would also pave the way for renegotiating external funds and pumping up the flagging Sri Lankan economy. If Tamil militants reneged on the proposals, as had been the pattern in the past, this time President Jayewardene would not carry the onus of drawing them back to the negotiating table. The Government of India, under a detailed five point clause in the Agreement, would be solely responsible.

The Indian government:

The Government of India, in its turn, seemed to have envisaged a quick ending. With the Tigers badly bruised after the Sri Lankan military offensive, the Indian government seemed confident of getting Prabhakaran to accept the Agreement. Indian Foreign Office representatives claim that Prabhakaran had tentatively accepted the draft, prior to the actual signing of it. The worst case scenario of having to quell the Tigers militarily, was argued as being a relatively quick and risk free operation. It was, however, not really an expected scenario. While the Government of India did not envisage a complete disarming of the militants, neither did it expect the groups to take on open confrontation with the Indian army. The sustained notion that the Tamil groups were under the ultimate control of the Indian government, continued as a basic assumption underlying Indian actions.⁵⁹ Besides, Prime Minister Gandhi's popularity received a much needed boost with the signing of the Agreement. On the point of the referendum, which had the potential to cause future violence, the Indian Foreign Office seemed to imply, either because of private assurances

⁵⁹ "We had saved the Tamils from annihilation. We had given them a homeland. Why should we have even imagined that they would turn against us." Interview, Undersecretary, Ministry of External Affairs, South Block, New Delhi, 1989.

by Jayewardene or on its own initiative, that it would be indefinitely postponed. TULF members were repeatedly given that assurance when they raised objections on the matter. In an appendix to the main Agreement, the Government of India also made sure that Indian interests were satisfied with regard to the port of Trincomalee and “outside” interference in the region.

If the militants had fallen in, as the Indian government had envisaged, not only would the Rajiv Gandhi government have scored a decisive victory in domestic circles, but it would be a matter of international prestige to have ‘solved the crisis’ in the region, without bloodshed and within the twin goals of increased Ceylon Tamil representation and a unified Sri Lanka.⁶⁰

This did not happen. It appeared the Government of India had once again miscalculated the dynamics of Tiger leadership. In Prabhakaran’s first public speech following the Agreement, the seeds for future developments are clearly discernible, at least with the benefit of hindsight vision.

Indian Peace Keeping Force vs. Tigers

At first, the Tigers openly refuted the Agreement. The other militant groups had already started the process of giving up their weapons so the absence of the Tigers was marked by increasing tension. The groups that had fought for primacy could not afford to bare themselves completely if the Tigers were to continue retaining their arms. The Sinhala population would not value the Agreement if they continued to be exposed to Tiger attacks. The Indian government, having committed itself so completely, had no option but to ensure the compliance of the group. It stepped into high profile diplomacy, with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, meeting directly with Prabhakaran for the very first time and “persuading” him in every way possible.

Apart from conveying to Prabhakaran that the Indian army would take on the group in the event of any intransigence, the Government of India seemed to have sweetened the

⁶⁰Stephen Solarz had already nominated the two leaders for the Nobel Peace Prize. “The Indo - Sri Lankan Agreement”, *Hearing Before the Sub Committee on Asian and Pacific Affairs*, 6 August 1987, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988):p.1.

Agreement with a series of promises and monetary cajolements.⁶¹ There was definitely talk of ensuring political power for the Tigers to replace their loss of arms. Prabhakaran was probably assured of the position of Chief Minister, judging by his sudden, out of context statement that he would “at no point of time.....accept the office”.⁶² Other members of the Tigers, however, would be granted premier positions in the new political administration, following the Agreement. As disclosed later, the Government of India via the Tamil Nadu state government, also awarded massive sums of money to the group in staggered amounts, for “rehabilitation” purposes. The whole deal was conducted with absolute secrecy and did not hit the media or public till many months later, thereby smacking of political bribery rather than a straightforward attempt at reconstruction. Judging from Prabhakaran’s speech at the time, the only reason the Tigers were laying down their arms was because of pressure from the Indian government. Prabhakaran was supposedly “holed up” in Delhi’s Ashoka Hotel until he acquiesced, albeit reluctantly. The aims of the movement were not regarded as having been satisfied by the Agreement so the struggle would carry on; the “forms of struggle” would constitute the only real change. It was evident that the Government of India had staked its all on the Agreement and was no longer willing to see it collapse. It had nearly waged war on Sri Lanka and was not going to allow, what it perceived as, a “bunch of militants” it had helped train, to come in the way.⁶³

On 4 August, 1987, almost a week after the Agreement was signed, Prabhakaran returned to Sri Lanka. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), as per the Agreement, had already moved into Sri Lanka on 30 July. They had received an uproarious welcome from the civilian Ceylon Tamil population, who believed the Indian army represented a return to peace.⁶⁴

⁶¹It was only in April 1988 that the Indian parliament was informed of the “resettlement” money granted to the Tigers, at the time of the signing of the Accord almost one year earlier.

⁶²Speech by Prabhakaran on 4 August 1987, near Jaffna town, following the Agreement.

⁶³One young Under Secretary in the Indian Foreign Service who was involved at the time, had this to say about Prabhakaran : “He looked like a *chaparassi* (sweeper - untouchable). All he wanted was to see Rajiv Gandhi personally...” - indicative of the sense of superior condescension with which officials of the Indian government seemed to be treating the militants.

⁶⁴Even Prabhakaran’s disgruntled speech had to be tempered with statements on how “We love India. We love the people of India” to resonate with the elation of the people he was addressing.

The Tigers:

Given the spontaneous response of the people, the unyielding pressure of the Indian government and the relative weakness of the Tigers following the months long physical battering it had received from the Sri Lankan army, circumstances seemed to be pushing Prabhakaran into agreeing to something to which he did not genuinely subscribe. His speech is explicitly ambivalent. He declared that the Agreement was “sudden” and concluded “without consulting our people”. It was “as if it were beyond our power to influence events”. Furthermore, it was “primarily concerned with Indo-Sri Lankan relations”. Yet the Government of India “stood unbudging on the point that whether we accepted or did not accept the Agreement, it was determined to put it into effect”. He ended this speech of grudging acceptance with a defiant note for the “motherland of Tamil eelam”.⁶⁵

Surprisingly, the speech did not create much ripples at the time as the crowds receiving it were far too busy celebrating the end of conflict to wonder about Prabhakaran’s reluctance or to heed his warnings. The Indian government had expected militant capitulation for far too long to worry about Prabhakaran’s explicitly stated fears. When push came to shove, the Government of India was relatively confident that Prabhakaran would not take on direct conflict with the Indian army. Prabhakaran himself echoed this view : “When a great power had decided to determine our political fate in a manner that is essentially beyond our control, what are we to do?”...“Were we not to hand over our weapons, we would be put in the calamitous circumstance of clashing with the Indian Army. We do not want this...”⁶⁶

On 5 August, 1987, in a subdued ceremony, very different from the splashy show preferred by the Indian government, the Tigers gave up their weapons, “the one means of protection for Eelam Tamils”.⁶⁷ The reluctance was evident. Rumors circulated that angry militants had chewed on their cyanide pills rather than give up their weapons. Less than forty percent of the cache was actually surrendered, but the very fact that the militants had come forward, was seen as the final brick ensuring the completion of the edifice. The

⁶⁵The speech is translated and reprinted in Mohan Ram, *Sri Lanka: The Fractured Island*, (India: Penguin Books Limited), 1989, Appendix II, p.147 - 149.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

rest was merely a matter of fine tuning.⁶⁸

The next few months made it painfully clear that the Tigers were, if anything, increasingly committed to militancy. Even as discussions regarding their representation in an Interim Administrative Council forged ahead, their antipathy to the Indian army was overtly rising.

In two tragic episodes, orchestrated or spontaneous, the Tigers were able to wick away public support for the Indian army. From that point onwards, open confrontation was an irresistible step.

On 15 September, the 23 year old chief of the propaganda unit, Thileepan, undertook a fast unto death until all demands were met. According to Indian officials interviewed, with talks for the Interim Administrative Council progressing, and the Tiger's demands for fifty percent representation in the Council being accepted⁶⁹, the motive for Thileepan's fast was aimed at emotional jackknifing rather than as a tool for political demands.⁷⁰ Whatever the reconstruction of events, it was a fact that Thileepan's physical dwindling was inversely proportionate to rising public consternation. Both reached their climax after ten days, when, on 25 September, Thileepan died and Tamil public emotions exploded into mob violence. Riots in front of an Indian army camp led to the first confrontations between the Indian "saviors" and the civilians. One civilian was killed.

The motions for Tiger compliance continued, however, with Prabhakaran actually signing his approval for the proposed Interim Administrative Council in a letter to the Indian High Commissioner at Colombo, dated 27 September. A week later, twelve militants, including two much wanted leaders, Kumarappa, the Jaffna commander and Puleendran, the Trincomalee commander, were arrested by a Sri Lankan navy patrol, for smuggling weapons through the northern coast of Point Pedro. Despite being armed, the militants offered no resistance, but openly threatened to commit suicide if India did not intervene and prevent their being taken to Colombo for interrogation. Given the past violent records

⁶⁸ As it turned out, not a single group had given up more than a token of their weapons.

⁶⁹ The breakdown agreed to was : 5 Tigers, 2 TULF, 2 Muslims, of which 1 would be a Tiger nominee and 2 Sinhalese. So in effect, the Tigers would be completely dominant

⁷⁰ One Indian journalist insisted that Thileepan was already incurably ill and thereby chosen as the Tiger's sacrificial lamb. Interview, Mr. Murari, Madras, 1989.

of Kumarappa and Puleendran, President Jayewardene, facing his own problems, remained adamant about retaining control over the captured Tigers. Two days later, on 5 October, the interred militants swallowed their cyanide pills and the two commanders died almost instantly.

The following day, Prabhakaran declared the Indian army as incapable of protecting the Tamils and publicly shrugged away all impositions of the earlier declared cease fire. His declarations were immediately translated into the gruesome killings of eight Sinhala hostages and a murdering rampage that resulted in more than a hundred Sinhala deaths within twenty four hours. The brief ambivalence of the Tigers following the Agreement was definitively shelved as their militancy once again crystallized.

Sri Lankan disinvolvement:

President Jayewardene's attitude was clear. While he declared a million rupees reward for Prabhakaran's head, the Tigers were the stated responsibility of the Indian government. He had his own arena of struggle. Ever since the Agreement, the President had been fighting an insidious cold war within his own Cabinet and a more open battle against a full blown insurgency by Sinhala right wingers in the south of the island.

On 28 August, 1987, a day before the Agreement was signed, there was the first news leakage that President Jayewardene was entering into an accord with India. Sinhala riots were instantaneous and a curfew was clamped over Colombo. This was soon extended to the rest of Sri Lanka. On 29 August, when Rajiv Gandhi was to arrive in Colombo, over ten thousand Sinhala demonstrated against his coming. Five were killed when the mob turned unruly and Sri Lankan police were forced to open fire. On arriving and signing the Agreement, Prime Minister Gandhi was struck with a rifle butt by a Sinhala soldier, as he inspected a ceremonial guard of honor. While he escaped with a minor injury, Jayadasa Weerasinghe, a Member of Parliament in Mr. Jayewardene's party, was not as fortunate. He was assassinated two days after the signing.

Apart from these instances of public rage, matters within President Jayewardene's own party were also simmering. All the immediate members of his Cabinet had not been in-

formed about details of the Agreement, till the penultimate minute. The then Prime Minister, Mr. Premadasa and six other Cabinet ministers were significantly absent from welcoming Rajiv Gandhi, thereby openly hinting at their hostility to the precipitate Agreement. Unrest within President Jayewardene's party was dramatic enough for him to either suggest or accept an Indian offer for protection. On 31 August, armed frigates from the Indian navy were anchored at Colombo, presumably to deter any coups against Mr. Jayewardene. In fact, there was a dramatic attempt to kill all the major UNP members, as they gathered for a meeting. Grenades were lobbed right into the meeting hall. Miraculously, the President remained unhurt and only the Prime Minister, Mr. Premadasa and the National Security Minister, Mr. Athulathmudali, were injured. More disturbing than this sporadic violence was the sudden sustained increase in JVP activity in the south. By 1 September, President Jayewardene redeployed most of the Sri Lankan troops heretofore fighting the Tamils, to tackle the JVP instead.

Indian involvement:

With President Jayewardene fire fighting on all sides, the containment or control of the Tigers fell squarely on the shoulders of the Indian government. The unilateral voiding of the cease fire by Prabhakaran; the subsequent rampage against the Sinhala; and the ongoing attacks against rival Tamil groups that had increased rather than lessened during the days of the Agreement, inexorably pushed the Government of India into a situation it had accounted for (as testified by the creation of an Indian Peace Keeping Force), but never really expected. Frantic trips to Sri Lanka were made by India's Chief of Army Staff, General Sundarji on 8 October and Indian Defense Minister Mr. K.C. Pant on 9 October. When the group showed no backing down in its aggressive stance, the Indian offensive against the Tigers began on 11 October, in what would become an increasingly surrealistic war.

The position of negotiator turned gladiator was not an easy one for the Government of India, especially since it was fighting the very Tamils it had ostensibly set out to protect. The idea seemed to be, that the Indian army should decimate the relatively meager forces of

the Tigers in a short, swift operation, just enough to bring them back into the Agreement. The already crippled cadre of approximately two or three thousand young men were not in the same league as the Indian army's well armed, professional soldiers numbering up to fifteen thousand. Operation Pawan (as in "The Wind"), launched on 14 October, against the Tiger stronghold of Jaffna,

Not only did the army sustain heavy casualties⁷¹, but all the senior Tiger leaders had managed to escape the dragnet.⁷² In addition, civilian casualties incurred during the operation had been numerous enough to lend credence to Prime Minister Premadasa's accusation of "Indian genocide against the Tamils" in Jaffna. It suddenly seemed as if all the actors on stage had got their parts mixed up and were mouthing each other's lines. Some Sinhalas took perverse pride in the militant tenacity of the Tigers in the face of Indian might : "...the LTTE had suddenly become a courageous Sri Lankan force fighting the Indian aggressors..".⁷³ So whereas the fall of Jaffna marked the success of Operation Pawan, the Indian army still emerged with egg on its face. The Tigers, far from being a beaten force, turned into a fiercely effective guerrilla force. The army's fight against shadows began and continued for two years. In fact, ever since the takeover of Jaffna, there was no definitive military victory on either side. The pattern remained unvarying. The army was instructed to "search and destroy" Tiger camps. The Tigers continued a steady barrage of "hit and run" operations against the army. Time was favorable to the Tigers as the longer the Indians stayed on, the more they were regarded as an alien, invasionary force by the local population. More ominous, leaders in the Indian army were already averse to continue fighting "somebody else's war".

Any discernible movement toward resolution, was forced to take place in the area of negotiations and political coalitions rather than direct military faceoffs. Politically, the Indo

⁷¹The statistics claimed a total of 350 fatalities and 1,100 wounded; equalling 7% of the fighting force. The rate was twice as high as casualties incurred in wars against Pakistan. *India Today*, 3 January 1988.

⁷²Some analysts believe that the Indian government ensured their escape, as total decimation of the Tigers would reduce the negotiating power of the Ceylon Tamils. Continued power was needed for instituting the provisions contained in the Agreement. After all, the merger itself was dependent on executive rather than legal or constitutional decree. President Jayewardene or the future leader of a ruling Sinhala party could revoke the merger with yet another counter executive writ.

⁷³Bryan Pfaffenberger, "The Cultural Dimension of Tamil Separatism in Sri Lanka", *Asian Survey*, Volume 21, p.1145 - 1157.

Sri Lankan Agreement would retain a semblance of legitimacy if one criterion was fulfilled : the holding of Provincial Council elections in the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. The Indian government worked furiously toward ensuring that. While negotiations with Tiger leaders was kept alive, it was accompanied by consistent military pressure. A note on negotiations seems in order. The manner of covert Indian negotiations, appears to have degenerated into Inspector Clousseau type operations. The Indian Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) worked at counter purposes with the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and with Military Intelligence. Random Indian citizens, suspected of having 'links' with the Tigers, were whisked off to Sri Lanka to try and talk with them. With coordination between all the organizations involved — the RAW, the IB, the Indian Peace Keeping Force, the Military Intelligence, the state government of Tamil Nadu, the High Commission at Colombo and the central government at Delhi — being sorely deficient, the messages from these 'links' criss crossed each other. In addition, the RAW was suspected of playing militant groups against each other by holding the carrot of complete Indian support and aid to the group that would comply with India's wishes regarding the Agreement. To further complicate matters, the focus of demands was beginning to blur once the Provincial Council elections for the North East province had failed to meet the December 1987 deadline. The Tigers now believed elections were secondary to the need for rehabilitation in the North East; that cease fire was a necessary precondition; and that the clause for a referendum was totally inadmissible. With the result, both in the sphere of negotiations and on the battlefield, arm wrestling between the Tigers and the Government of India, continued to remain inconclusive.

While this inconclusiveness served to maintain a position of status quo for the militants, the Indian government bore the onus of debilitation. The Sri Lankan government accused them of not fulfilling their part of the Agreement as President Jayewardene had already passed legislation on the proposed Provincial Councils and elections had been held in the seven Sinhala provinces. Leaders of the Indian army, touted in India as a highly professional and apolitical body, were openly upset about the lingering operations and the high casualty toll. The grouse seemed to centre on the fact that they were being asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back. The handicap was imposed by politicians who were not risking

their own lives and reputation. With a 70:1 ratio of Indian soldiers vis a vis the Tigers, the army was also losing its highly valued “face”. Blood, guts and glory, of the three sustaining indices for battle, only the first was being fulfilled and discontent simmered at all levels. The Indian media and Parliament were increasingly concerned about the wasting of the Army and “our brave soldiers”. The reason for their being there was eclipsed. The silt of unfulfilled expectations left by post — Agreement euphoria, was deepened by the Indian government’s parallel failure over the Punjab Accord. To top it all, state elections in Tamil Nadu were long overdue as its Chief Minister, MGR, had been dead since 25 December, 1987 and the state itself was under President’s Rule since January 1988.

Pressured from all quarters on the need for some decision, and barricaded from effecting its policies by the non compliance of the Tigers, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, took one more step toward unilateral control over the situation. Soon after the uneasy first anniversary of the Indo Sri Lankan Agreement had passed, he announced that Provincial Council elections would take place in the North East province of Sri Lanka, regardless of participation by the Tigers. Having declared that, the old policy of shuffling the militants toward acceptance was once again attempted. The Tiger’s political representative in Madras, Mr. Kittu, was arrested along with 150 other members of the cadre and their arms were confiscated. Alongside, the Indian army announced a cease fire from 15 to 23 September. The Tigers remained undeterred. On the contrary, in the breathing space allowed by the cease fire, the group reportedly geared itself up for a “revolutionary war”. High “taxes” were levied on shopkeepers and businessmen and according to one report, over three million rupees was collected in ten days from the Batticalao sector alone.

On 2 October 1988, filing of nomination papers for the elections began, amidst fear of militant retaliation. The quality of the elections reflected that fear. The names of candidates in the eastern province remained undisclosed during the filing process. All thirty six seats in the northern province were won uncontested. The Tigers openly criticized the Indian government for “superimposing a defective political model” by way of “conspiracy” with the Sri Lankan government and conspiring to “stamp out Tamil aspirations for self determination and self rule”. It stepped up violent guerrilla attacks against the army and

the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the group supported by the Government of India. ⁷⁴ By 19 November 1988, the elections were completed with the EPRLF forming the major party. Both the officials in the Indian government and the army maintain, even today, that the elections constituted a victory for Indian involvement in Sri Lanka.

Rhetoric aside, the reality of social chaos remained. The EPRLF, without Indian support, was unable to face the Tigers. Withdrawal of the Indian army would spell an immediate spin around of power with the Tigers forcibly taking over control as threatened by them. Amidst Indian calls for withdrawal following the elections, the Indian forces embarked on setting up a kind of citizen's army made up of Ceylon Tamil youth, to ostensibly take their place.

Meanwhile, the year long and continuing presence of the Indian army in Sri Lanka had opened wide a Pandora's box of Sinhala fears. The most clearly defined result of these fears had been the increasing ascendancy and aggressiveness of the JVP party. Accusing the Indian army of willfully prolonging its presence in Sri Lanka, the JVP launched into a virulent verbal barrage, accompanied by terrorist attacks on parliamentarians and Sinhalaes allied to the ruling party. The start of 1988 saw the assassination of the UNP President, Mr. Harsha Abeyawardene and leader of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party, Mr. Vijay Kumaratunga. The immediacy of Sri Lanka's parliamentary and presidential elections channeled JVP energies on to political contestants and the election process. They called for a boycott of both elections and organized mass strikes and demonstrations, to implement their call. The insecurity, divisiveness and fear spreading from the unresolved Tamil issue and the claustrophobic presence of India, lent support to the JVP sponsored strikes. By the end of September 1988, the Sri Lankan government was forced to call on the country's Emergency laws to deal with the series of strikes undermining the basic functioning of the island. In October, the JVP's call for dissolving the current Sri Lankan Parliament received open support from influential Buddhist clergy. President Jayewardene's attempts at negotiation were rebuffed and the violence continued. Despite the seeming social breakdown, both

⁷⁴The TULF refrained from taking part in the elections on the grounds that the Tigers had "created a situation in which it is difficult for an unarmed, non violent party...to field candidates..".

presidential and parliamentary elections were held amidst tight, tense security. Each of the contestants were surrounded by bodyguards and granted weapons for individual use. Voter turnout for the presidential elections was 50% and 65% for the parliamentary elections, relatively low figures for the energetic democracy of Sri Lanka that usually commands over 80% voter participation. The new government of Premadasa, opted almost immediately for distancing itself from the Indian army and forging direct peace negotiations with the Tigers, urged by a mutual desire to get rid of armed Indian presence.⁷⁵ The sudden linking of strange bedfellows, Sinhala hardliner Premadasa and Eelam activist Prabhakaran, kicked in the start of yet another new cycle. The Indian government was abruptly deprived of any legitimate reason for interfering in Sri Lankan affairs, save the 'legitimacy' of brute force. This could not be sustained either domestically or internationally. Withdrawal of the army, or talk about withdrawal, became a necessary concomitant.

Period of Withdrawal, 1989 to 1991

Whereas the last contingent of the Indian army did not leave Sri Lanka till March 1990, the redundancy of the army was evident almost a year earlier. The promise of withdrawal was proffered almost regardless of the earlier aims to which such a promise had ostensibly been linked.

The aim of the Indian government to ensure peace and resolution of Tamil demands before leaving was nowhere in evidence. If anything, Indian withdrawal spelt an instant heightening of violence and bloodshed in areas vacated by the armies. Intra Tamil factionalism no longer drifted along disparate and inchoate motivations, but had coalesced into viciously opposed groups comprising the independent Tigers and the Indian supported Tamil National Army. This was the militant wing of the anti Tiger group, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, precariously perched as the "ruling government" of the North east province of Sri Lanka, and wholly derivative of Indian presence in the region.

⁷⁵This, in turn, devalued the legitimacy of the JVP and the government was relatively free to militarily crack down on their leaders. By 1990, Rohana Wijeweera, leader of the JVP and his second in command were both killed.

The Government of India:

From the point of view of the Indian government the presence of the Indian army in Sri Lanka appeared to be a growing itch that the government could not immediately reach out and scratch. The presumed motivations that legitimated the initial intrusion of the army simply did not exist any longer. Domestic pressure to “save the Tamils” was backsliding into calls for ridding Tamil Nadu of its obstreperous and violence generating “foreigners”. The allied relation between the Sri Lankan and Indian governments towards which the deputation of the Indian army had been a clear offering, was distorted in the face of the army’s lack of a clear victory, followed by the Lankan government’s covert supply of arms to the ostensible “enemy”, the Tigers. The civilian Sri Lankan Tamil population whose human rights had been corroded by every organised political group wrestling for authority in the region, could no longer expect peace initiatives from the Indian army. If anything, the Indian army was reputed to be enforcing compulsory army training amongst the Tamil youth in an effort to provide a counter defense against the Tigers. As can be expected, this had led to both an intensification and spreading of violence and personal tragedy amongst the beleaguered civilians.

In sum, the role of the army was awkward in its extreme. Public opinion, in Tamil Nadu and the rest of India, was against it; the government of Sri Lanka was exploiting it to the detriment of the Indian government; and the Tamil civilians it had set out to protect were continuing to live unprotected and savagely disturbed lives.

The assumptions underlying the military imperative were also disproved. Not only was the Indian army not allowed to remain as a symbolic deterrent against militancy, i.e. as a “peace keeping force”, but in addition, it could not control the militants in one swift conclusive military battle as had been envisaged.

Yet, despite the clear imperatives to withdraw, a two hundred thousand strong force could not decamp overnight without admitting absolute defeat or being totally absent from the demands of national prestige and status. The Indian government did not show even the slightest proclivity to do either. Despite the change of government in New Delhi, that could

have condemned earlier Indian action in Sri Lanka and recanted all earlier policies as follies exclusive to the Rajiv Gandhi government, the formal stand of the government remained unvarying.

The Indo Sri Lankan Agreement continued to be held as the basis for conflict resolution. Despite promises to withdraw the army, the Indian government made it clear in the face of intense Sri Lankan hostility, that the army would be phased out in accordance with the time table set by the Indian government rather than that of the Sri Lankan president. In the year that the Indian withdrawal was planned, frantic measures were instituted to try and effect some semblance of self sufficiency and autonomy in the Tamil region. Not only were local citizens trained in defensive warfare and supplied with arms by the Indian forces, but attempts were made to sustain and strengthen the local governmental system headed by the leaders of the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front. It was clear that having ventured this far, the government was not about to retract, despite ongoing compulsions to do so, without compromising Indian credibility. This is evident in the similar synopses of the intervention given by disparate members of the political elite who projected Indian involvement in Sri Lanka as a "great achievement".

Conclusion

The need of the Sinhalese government to contain Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism as effectively as possible; the counter need of Sri Lankan Tamils to wrest autonomy through both political and militant means; and the incremental involvement of the Indian government, political ally to the Sinhalese government and emotional kindred to the Sri Lankan Tamil minority, makes for a rather densely textured chronology.

However, from the viewpoint of the Indian government with which this study is concerned, the density of history is clarified by the very deliberateness with which India's graduated involvement was marked. The structural imperative of formal talks, conferences, agreements and treaties to elicit a clear and explicit statement of objectives, acted as constant watermarks to rising Indian involvement.

The overnight transference of approximately fifty thousand Sri Lankan Tamil refugees onto Indian soil marked a well defined “start” to the crisis. The unilateral selection of an Indian Special Envoy to act as a go between the Sinhalese president and the Sri Lankan Tamil leaders, despite Sri Lanka’s public calls against any interference, heralded India’s intent to mediate even if it proved contrary to normal foreign policy dictum. The evidence of this mediation was to be found in documents such as Annexure C, the basis for the All Parties Conference, ostensibly to be conducted strictly between Sri Lankan ethnic, political, and religious parties. The de facto presence of Indian involvement, in fact, prejudiced nationalistic Sinhalese groups, who believed the Conference was nothing more than Indian manipulation. The collapse of the Conference was conclusive in undermining the legitimacy of Sri Lanka’s Tamil moderates who were seen as redundant weaklings in an environment requiring aggressive militancy.

Recognising this loss of legitimacy, the Indian government attempted to both persuade and hustle disparate Tamil militant groups into a cohesive negotiating power, through the Thimphu talks of 1985. While the militants were able to converge on a unified set of demands, these were not acceptable to the Sinhalese representatives and the talks proved infructuous.

Unwilling to accept the collapse of negotiations, the Indian government continued urging a political settlement to the crisis, presuming all the while that the Tamil militants were under their control. This is evident in the organisation of the Thimphu talks and the subsequent 19th December Talks where the location, agenda, constitutional and legal expertise, document writing and introducing of negotiators were all arranged by Indian representatives with Indian financing. Despite its alleged role of mediation, the Indian government was behaving very much as an active player in the proceedings.

The refusal of the major militant group, the LTTE Tigers to accept Indian directives and the Indian government’s policy of “punishing” recalcitrant militants, forged the independence of the Tigers from Indian protection. By 1986, the Tigers had moved their base of operations from Tamil Nadu back to traditional areas in northern Sri Lanka and were openly hostile to Indian efforts at bullying them. They also attempted to physically take

over the administration of northern Sri Lanka in a bid to establish their supremacy through a parallel government.

Sinhalese reaction was instantaneous and political negotiations were promptly replaced by fiercely mounted attacks on the part of the Sri Lankan army. The sudden telescoping of events and protagonists to a simple equation between the Sinhalese dominated army and the Tigers, sidelined the diplomatic efforts of the Indian government, without resolving or promising to resolve, any of its initial reasons for commitment. These included safety of the Tamil people, the cessation of Tamil refugees into India, the return of peaceful conditions in the island, and the prevention of external involvement by other powers in the region. In fact, continued battle between the Sinhalese and Tamils threatened to exacerbate all the issues and to isolate the Indian government from effecting a resolution compatible with its own domestic pressures and intentions.

In 1987, the Indian government openly aggressed into Sri Lankan territory in a bid to protect Sri Lankan Tamils from the Sinhalese dominated government and armed forces. This pushed President Jayewardene of Sri Lanka into signing the Indo Sri Lankan Agreement, by which certain guarantees were to be provided to the Tamil nation. More far reaching was the Indian Prime Minister's agreement to send Indian peace keeping troops into northern Sri Lanka to "stabilize" the region.

While the initial definition of stability involved both protection of Tamils from the mistrusted Sinhalese dominated army, as well as the collection of arms from Tamil militant groups, the peace keeping force quickly hardened into a fighting army of over one hundred thousand Indian soldiers, facing a resilient and militant guerilla force in the Tigers. Despite initially succumbing to the pressure of the Indian government to accede to the Agreement, the Tigers had soon opted for a military solution and held out against the Indian army with almost self sustaining intensity.

Within a year of battle between the Tigers and the Indian army, it was evident that the government of India appeared to be mired in a no win option. Outright military success against a civilian guerilla force was elusive. Domestic hostility against the "unnecessary death" of India's soldiers was voluble. The Sri Lankan Tamils continued to be victimised,

politically abandoned by the government and physically caught between the spiralling violence of Tiger and Indian army confrontations. Refugees into Tamil Nadu continued so that there were over two hundred thousand Tamils from Sri Lanka by the end of the decade. Diplomatic relations with the Sri Lankan government grew even more tense when it became evident that the newly elected Prime Minister, Mr. Premadasa, was attempting direct negotiations with the Tiger leader, including the provision of arms.

Assurances to withdraw the Indian army were made much before the final withdrawal in 1991. In preparation for withdrawal, the Indian government effected the holding of elections in the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka and also attempted to establish a local militia that could counter the dominance of the Tigers. Neither the elections nor the militia survived the withdrawal, so that the Tigers once again assumed control in the region and pitted themselves all over again, against their traditional enemy, the Sinhalese government.

With the withdrawal, however, the Indian government abdicated all responsibility toward the Sri Lankan Tamils, so that for the very first time since 1983, the Sri Lankan government was free to pursue sustained and intensive military action against the Tamil militants. The silence of Indian Tamils on this offensive against their "brethren" was reflected by the Indian government's official silence as well.

The conscious placing of events that led the Indian government through a series of dramatically differentiated policies provides the framework within which Indian mediation, negotiation, intervention, and abdication is studied.

CHAPTER III

THE TAMIL NATION

Introduction

Both the government and the media in Sri Lanka, India and even uninvolved nations, adopted the easy assumption that because the Tamils of India were ethnic kin to the Tamils in Sri Lanka, Indian involvement was unavoidable or inevitable. The only debates ranged over the level of involvement rather than the criterion for it. The assumption clearly contained an implicit belief in the homogeneity of the Tamils, leading to united action as an ethnic group or sub nation.

As this chapter shall argue, that assumption was much too facile. With a history dating back for over two millennia and a population that is spread in recognizable doses over at least six different countries,¹ the Tamils have been variously construed as both a vibrant, national group, cognisant of their shared identity, akin to the Jewish diasporic nation,² and as one of the many linguistic or ethnic groups in India with little or no living links with an extra-territorial whole.

Facts supporting either construction are easily available. "World Conferences" of the Tamils are held regularly with attendees from all parts of the globe. At the same time, non-Indian Tamils who have been away for over two generations are regarded as "outsiders" by Indian Tamils and lacking in cultural authenticity. The inherent ambivalence provides the two major contradictions along which a Tamil profile could be traced. One is the tension of "dual identity", imposed by Indian independence, that reiterates the reality of an indigenous "Indian Tamil". The other is the myriad, subtle ways in which the group differentiates and regroupes amongst itself. It is in these dynamics that I believe a more telling picture of the Tamils can emerge rather than in a teleological recital of the 'facts' that make up the Tamil

¹Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, Mauritius, Suriname, and Sri Lanka.

²For a sense of this identity, see Daniel E. Valentine's thesis on the Tamil 'ur' in *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

nation.

While there are a number of significant schisms over which the Tamils have chosen to differentiate themselves, this is true of all societies and an unremarkable fact in and of itself. It does turn interesting if we were to consider the varying levels of nationalist behavior generated by differences in self definitions. The Tamils in India who believe in a larger Tamil nation that includes a Tamil diaspora scattered through the world, propagate their belief by the holding of international Tamil conferences. The conferences, however, merely testify to a belief, without testing the intensity or salience of that belief. The conferences are invariably academic and literary get togethers, focused on Tamilian language and literature. Crisis situations occasioning personal sacrifice or involvement by the individual, separates the levels of legitimacy attributed to the easy initial belief in a Tamil nation.

During the Sri Lankan crisis, Tamils in India reacted both with vehement protests against the Sinhala (“anti Tamil”) dominated government in Sri Lanka and with anger against Sri Lankan Tamil “foreigners” who were disrupting their lives in Tamil Nadu. This seeming inconsistency was not so much a sign of community fickle mindedness, than a projection of different sections of the community being mobilized by changing socio political contexts. To understand the differences in energy drives, requires an understanding of the Tamil nation, both within the territorial boundaries of the Indian state and as they relate to their “kin” in Sri Lanka.

As Chapter 1 discussed, the predisposition to a sense of nationhood is most commonly held to derive from the cohesiveness of the group. This sense of cohesiveness can be approximated by gauging the most commonly held indices of a nation and the perceptual baggage attached to it. The “grossness of blood” involving language, culture, religion, historical memory, race, caste and the perception that all these are unique to the nation and to no other, is a critical prefix to all claims of nationhood.

Tamil Uniqueness

The thesis so far, has steadily drawn from the notion of a discernible, cohesive Tamil

unit in India. A quick eyeballing of statistics would support that basic assumption. The Tamils are listed as one of the seventeen linguistic -ethnic groups in India ³ by virtue of the fact that they speak a distinctive language, Tamil; share a relatively uninterrupted history and culture; and inhabit a defined territorial, historical and political unit called Tamil Nadu (Land of the Tamils) in the south of India. As a modern political force, the Tamils have dramatically differentiated themselves from the rest of India by mobilizing a secessionist movement in the 1950's. The group almost unanimously continues to champion the anti-Hindi cause that sparked the earlier movement.

A closer look at the fifty million Tamil people who populate Tamil Nadu today and the two millennia history and culture they bear, would give a clearer idea of how the population identifies itself. Indices of Tamil identity are many : language, literature, historical memory, dress, customs, caste, religion, drama, mythology, political institutions et al. The most defining index of Tamil identity would certainly be that of language.

Language Consciousness

The Tamil language is not only the lingua franca that networks the community, it is also the basis for the creation of a territorial boundary within modern India. Historically, the land now known as Tamil Nadu, has always been populated by Tamil speaking people. The borders of the Tamil kingdom have waxed and waned depending on a change of rulers as has the name of the territory, but the area is easily recognizable as territory populated continually by Tamil speakers since at least 5 B.C. According to Tamil historian, A.N.Sastri, "in ancient times" to about 10 A.D., Tamils spread over most of South India.⁴ In the early twentieth century as well, Tamil Nadu was administered as the Madras Presidency by the British and covered a much wider area, that included the post independent states of

³The seventeen official languages (excluding English) recognised by the Indian Constitution, are meant to approximate the major ethnic groups. As M.Nag remarks, in India the "delimitation of ethnic groups on the basis of any ...categories is not an easy task..It is more often than not that sharp boundary lines do not exist". Even recognition of the seventeen official languages has been based more on politics than on sociology. In the 1961 census, for example, 1,652 "mother tongues" were listed. It can be expected that as large linguistic groups get politically mobilized in the future, they are going to fight for status as an official language.

⁴A.Nilkanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 3rd Edition, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

Andhra Pradesh, and parts of Kerala and Karnataka.⁵ It was the States Reorganization Committee, set up in post independent India, that carved out separate states from the earlier Madras Presidency. Madras state at that point, was still not a linguistic unit as it included Telugu speaking people. The Reorganizers, headed by Prime Minister Nehru, were engaged in the uphill task of attempting to create states that were not linguistically homogeneous. This immediately proved to be an idealistic, unworkable principle. The furious Telengana riots of 1953 soon succeeded in further breaking up the state of Madras into the Telugu speaking state of Andhra Pradesh and the Tamil speaking state of Tamil Nadu.⁶ The abstract sense of being a different language group was given full blown expression with the creation of a separate state.

At the emotional level, pride in the language is clearly evident. Its antiquity and almost uninterrupted continuation as a living language since 3 B.C., has ensured a wide and profound body of literature. Modern nationalists and politicians have taken full advantage of this literary wealth. Ancient texts dating back to even 6 A.D. continue to be printed for popular consumption. Folk songs and hymns of the same vintage are still sung in temples as has always been the custom. More significantly, people are aware that these hymns snake back over a thousand years to connect them with their Tamil ancestors.

Given the periodicity of changing rulers, the use of Tamil has not been as uninterrupted as today's Tamil elite make it out to be. The dominance of Sanskrit for centuries before the coming of the British, as the language of the literate, can be attested to by the copious transference of Sanskrit words into the Tamil language. It was British Indologists and Christian missionaries, in fact, who in their attempts to administer and communicate with the people, began intensive studies of the Tamil language.⁷ Their subsequent studies offered

⁵Even today, a great many people from the northern parts of India tend to clump all groups south of the dividing central Vindhya mountains, as "Madarasis". Madras is the capital city of Tamil Nadu.

⁶However, efforts to change the name from Madras to Tamil Nadu was initiated almost a decade later in 1962 and instituted only in 1968. The creation of new states based on the criterion of language has resulted in six new states since independence : Haryana from Punjab, Assam into Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Mizoram.

⁷The highly nationalistic Dravida Kazhagam party believes that it was the "attractions that the intrinsic merits of Tamil had for them" that inspired the missionaries' "love of Tamil". In *The Modern Rationalist*, Vol. XVI, No.11, July 1989, p.17-18. Some of the most definitive scholars of the Tamil language were : Ziegenbalg and Gruendler of the German Lutheran Mission; Father J.C.Beschi who was the first to translate the book of ethics, the Tirukkural; Caldwell and G.C.Pope.

a “kind of revelation”⁸ to Tamils who were suddenly told by their rulers, that theirs was an ancient and glorious heritage. This cultural boost combined with the spread of publishing and journalism, sparked off what can be termed as a Tamil renaissance. Recouping ancient literature (written mostly on highly brittle palm leaves) and glorifying the properties of the language, not only became a literary quest, but a powerful symbol of Tamil identity and greatness.⁹

The subsequent anti Brahman movement of the twentieth century, neatly colluded with the growing Tamil renaissance leading to a methodical attempt at throwing out Sanskrit “loan words” from the Tamil language and restoring Tamil to its former pristine glory. Sanskrit rapidly became the language of “alien Aryan Brahmans” from the north. Even today, there is a regular Standard Literary Tamil text, that outlines ‘de-Sanskritized’ or ‘pure’ Tamil rules of grammar and vocabulary.

The basis for this is not merely nationalistic fiction. It is an established fact that Tamil was probably one of the only languages to flourish as a sophisticated and self sufficient medium of communication in the pre Sanskritic Age and survive as an indigenous one in the Sanskritic Age.¹⁰ Advanced treatises on Tamil grammar and literary theory existed as early as the fourth century B.C.¹¹ as did a prolific body of poetry. Further, these appeared to have been written manifestations of an even earlier accumulation of orally communicated rules and literature. As Zvelebil points out, even the metalanguage of Tamil in grammar and philosophy was never Sanskrit, as was the case in all the other Indian languages. The inexorable spread of Sanskrit through India was incorporated into Tamil without displacing the original structure of the language.

When non Brahman Tamil nationalists needed an indigenous language devoid of “San-

⁸ Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan*, (Leiden, 1973).

⁹ “Love of Tamil took a strange and militant shape...Having neglected their language for four or five centuries..the guilt conscious Tamilians overdid their love of language in a kind of jingoistic enthusiasm that has hardly any parallel..They found everything old good...”. Ibid, p.284.

¹⁰ Former Minister of State, Mr.Kandappan believes that Tamils are more outraged by the intrusion of Hindi, rather than any of the other South Indian language groups, because their language is older, richer and thereby has more to lose.

¹¹ The *Tolkappiyam*, was the earliest recorded book on Tamil grammar and structure. The *Cilappatikaram* establishes the literary tradition of the ancient Tamils. The *Tirukkural* recorded the ethical mores of the Sangam period. Together they are presented as the most persuasive proof of early Tamil culture and greatness.

skritic Aryan” influence, it was possible to spread the idea of a ‘pure Tamil’ that had withstood the ages for over two thousand years, and which gave expression to an equally non Aryan, purely Dravidian Tamil cultural ethos. ¹²

The emotive baggage attached to the Tamil language found its most vigorous expression when its usability was threatened by the assimilationist policies of a newly independent Indian government. What had been a purely emotional matter, quickly translated as the most potent political handle for Tamil Nadu politicians of the modern era.

The politics of language has dominated much of Tamil Nadu’s emergence in modern India. It is an issue that communicates and garners Tamilians from most strata, for both emotional and economic reasons. While pride in its ancestry and resilience is widespread and shows up in the Tamilians anger against Hindi being claimed as a “national language”, the anger is compounded by an economic rationale. The insistence on Hindi as an official national language would immediately put Tamils at a relative disadvantage to the Indians from the North, who either speak or are familiar with Hindi, in the race for highly valued administrative and government jobs. In the decade following independence, while Tamils made up only 7.7% of the total Indian population, they numbered over 24% of the prestigious cadre of the Indian Administrative Services, the premier institution in India. ¹³

Aware of this antipathy, Prime Minister Nehru, in 1947, had postponed the imposition of Hindi as a national language and “hoped” it would be voluntarily accepted by 27 January, 1965. As the date approached, popular sentiment against Hindi in Tamil Nadu grew to uncontainable proportions. Five students immolated themselves in opposition, leading to state wide rioting. Within days, over sixty Tamils were killed and over ten thousand arrested over the issue. Politically, the Congress party, representative of ‘Hindi imposition’ was dramatically defeated in the 1967 elections. The little known Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party, which had waged an election campaign against “Aryan Hindi”, won with 138 seats as opposed to Congress’ 47 seats. The sacrosanctity of the Tamil language could not

¹²“There exist in India only two great specific and independent, classical and historically attested cultures - the Sanskrit culture and the Tamil culture.” - Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan*, (Leiden, 1973) p.11.

¹³Baldev Raj Nayar, *National Communication and Language Policy in India*,(New York: Frederick A.Praeger, 1969): p.115.

have been more explicit.

It is evident that the attraction of the Tamil language cuts across the board. All Tamils, from all sections of society, speak Tamil and are conscious of its cultural importance at some level. All roads and shops and public signs in the towns and cities of Tamil Nadu are written in the Tamil script. English sub titles are optional. Hindi is nowhere to be seen. ¹⁴

However, in practical terms, the need for a more widespread language is deeply felt. The popularity and ubiquity of Hindi cinema (being produced at the rate of approximately one per day); the active use of Hindi and English by elite jobs requiring transfers to other parts of India; and the social superiority accruing to 'English' speakers cannot be shrugged away. Additionally, Brahman Tamils continue to revere Sanskrit, which is taught to their children as a "second language", at home or at private classes, if not at school. As long as the central ("North Indian") government does not officially impose Hindi, thereby threatening Tamil, the infiltration of non Tamil languages, while not displacing Tamil, is certainly being accepted at an accelerated rate. In fact, almost all the political elite, including the radical nationalist, Mr. Veeramani of the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) party, send or have sent their children to English medium schools where Hindi is usually a compulsory subject. A dramatic example can also be found in the recent publication of the virulently anti Hindi Chief Minister Karunanidhi's novel "Ek Hi Rakta" in Hindi.¹⁵ A more telling indication has been the registration of Tamils appearing for the six Hindi examinations conducted all over India for voluntary learners of the language. Between 1981 and 1985 there was a steady 20% increase in Tamilians registering for the exam. The entrants were primarily from urban areas. Of the 49,471 examinees appearing in 1985, 18,682 or nearly 38% were from urban Madras.¹⁶

While the Tamil language and its impressive output of literature is an easily cognisable index of Tamil identity and culture, the practical use of the language faces some degree of competition in the modern environment.¹⁷ The sanctity of Sanskrit as the language of

¹⁴In less linguistically reactive states, most signs are in English, Hindi and the local language.

¹⁵*India Today*, September 30, 1990.

¹⁶"Tongue Trouble", *India Today*, October 15, 1986, p.17.

¹⁷This appears to be a recurrent problem for most proponents of linguistic purism, as noted by Walker Connor in "Ethnonationalism in the First World: The Present in Historical Perspective", in Milton J. Esman

the Gods is far too entrenched to be completely ousted as was attempted by the earlier anti Aryan movement. The Dravida Kazhagam (DK) is the only party that continues to wage an active rally against Sanskrit. DK 'self respect' marriages are conducted in Tamil without a Brahman priest officiating. It is not the norm. Even if Sanskrit is not widely understood, it is still used in the sanctifying hymns of all traditional wedding, birth and death ceremonies, as well as in the daily temple worship so popular amongst the primarily Hindu Tamil community.

For all the potential inroads by other languages, Tamil is without question, the most unifying aspect of the Tamil community in India and provides an easy handle for political mobilization of the people. This has been proven time and again in the anti Hindi agitations that swell through Tamil Nadu with very little encouragement. However, a similar rationale for unity could not be mustered in relation to the Sri Lankan Tamils. Defense of language was hardly ever mentioned, except during the burning of the Jaffna library containing ancient Tamil manuscripts and books. The reason for this lies in the mutual perception that each other's version of Tamil is "not pure". In actual usage, the Sri Lankan Tamil finds it easier to comprehend the Dravidian language of Malayalam, spoken by inhabitants of Kerala, on the south western coast of India. The effects of this are insidious. Interaction with Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India has made a great many Indian Tamils suspect the touted claims of Tamil kinship, because of the inability to understand each other's language. Having migrated from India two millenium ago, the Sri Lankan Tamil believes he has preserved the 'original' Tamil that was spoken before the advent of Sanskrit. The Indian Tamil does not take kindly to having a "foreigner" tell him that his language is not original. Far from being a linking factor, the language issue is potentially divisive between the two Tamil communities. It is not widely recognized, however, as the script and structure of the language is the same in both the Sri Lankan and the Indian versions.

Historical Consciousness

Closely related to Tamil language and literature is the second most binding index of (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict in the Western World*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977): p.37 - 38.

Tamil identity, a sense of the past. A well researched, extensive body of literature dating to ancient times has recreated much of the history of the Tamils and supplied the community with powerful myths of their origin and relevance in the overall history of India. The “cultural entrepreneurs”¹⁸ of Tamil Nadu have proposed theories that range from Tamilians being a seafaring group who settled in the south of India, to their being the original Dravidian inhabitants of the ancient, civilized centers of Mohenjodaro and Harappa who were ruthlessly driven down to the South by violent, marauding Aryan invaders. The latter theory is the more accepted one and the only debate centers on how long ago it all happened.¹⁹ Whatever the date, the sustaining belief continues to be that the “history of India begins in the South”.²⁰ As the repository of earliest Indian culture, the Tamils commonly perceive their culture to be far more “authentic” than that of the North, with its more “recent” and heavily invaded history. The southern half of India, protected by the oceans that surround it on three sides, was less prone to Muslim invaders and settlers who dominated the northern plains of India for over a millennium. The perception of genuine “nativeness” is therefore quite real in the Tamil mind.

Additionally, the past is hallowed into a “golden age”, known as the Sangam period, to which Tamil spokesmen and litterateurs make easy and readily understood references. There is a living knowledge of the Sangam age, seen as the fount of all Tamil culture and inherent goodness. Placed between 2 B.C. and 300 A.D., the “caste less, classless serenity” of the era is touted by modern political manifestoes as the true and original Tamil spirit. The contrast is intended to highlight the inequality imposed by the non Tamil cultures of Sanskritic Aryans, who first introduced caste distinctions into an egalitarian Tamil paradise. The vision of this past is an emotive symbol of the overall tarnishing of Tamil purity. It also provides a scenario for the future that is a direct derivation of past Tamil glory. “Resurrection” is a theme that is easily picked up by the Tamil community,

¹⁸Defined as the ranks who gave “ideological form to subnational communities” in Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), p.28.

¹⁹The estimated time frame stretches anywhere between 1000 B.C. and 4000 B.C. See K.A.Nilkanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 3rd Edition, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966); and Raju Kalidos, *History and Culture of the Tamils: From Prehistoric Times to the Presidents Rule*, (Dindigul: Vijay Publications, 1976.)

²⁰S.R.Narayana, *The Fossil Charophyta of the Deccan*, (Calcutta: Geological Survey of India, 1939).

assured as they are, of their past heritage and glory.

The quality of ancient Tamil literature has much to do with this. In the early attempts to compete with Sanskrit, a great deal of poetry was explicitly dedicated to “saving” the Tamil language. Some of the more famous dramas enact tragedies about purists who gave up their lives for the language. One particularly melodramatic myth tells of a Tamil king in 6 A.D. who was warned of instant death if he were to hear a Tamil epic being recited and yet could not resist the pleasure of hearing the recital. The king’s subsequent death inspired a rash of Tamil plays of both ancient and even modern vintage.²¹

A unifying pride in the cultural heritage and strength of the Tamils is made more acute by the perception that non Tamil intruders have, through the ages, attempted to destroy or replace that culture, without success. Continued preservation against all odds, is a powerful motif for cultural and political crusades in Tamil Nadu that translates easily into modern politics.

Who precisely constitute the intruding non Tamil, however, is hard to pinpoint in the long saga of Tamil history. Ruled by different kingdoms over shifting boundaries, the “enemies” of Tamil culture have kept changing. The modern catch all phrase of Aryan North Indians is brilliant in its opacity and inherent incapacity to define any exact group in India. It stands as the amorphous composite of all that threatens Tamil culture, primarily through the alien language of Hindi. The natural corollary term of “Dravidians” is not half as successful because it peremptorily includes states to the south of India who do not share the same motivations.²²

Historical memories related to the Sri Lankan Tamils overlaps very briefly with that of the Indian Tamils. Apart from the myth of origin, that Sri Lankan Tamils moved out from Tamil Nadu around 2 B.C., the histories of the two communities have indexed very different points of glory and tragedy. The Sri Lankan Tamil’s history is dominated by seesawing conquests against the local Sinhala population. The Indian Tamil recognizes the

²¹Mr. Kandappan, a former Minister of Parliament, related the event as if it had only just happened and even quoted the brave king as having said “If I was to lose my life in the process of enjoying a Tamil poem, it is still welcome to me..”!

²²A pan Dravidian movement did not catch on in the other Dravidian states of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Karnataka, and hence was whittled down to an exclusively Tamil, non Brahman movement.

Sinhala Tamil largely in the modern context, with no personally connotative history carried over from the past. As the “parent” community, the Indian Tamil is hardly cognisant of the history and intricacies of the Sri Lankan Tamil. They are superficially aware that “Tamils like us” live across the ocean, no more no less. On the other hand, Sri Lankan Tamils are acutely aware of Tamil history in India and respect it as part of their own. There is a curious sense of identification with past Tamil heroes rather than the present population of Tamil Nadu. The one sided empathy is immediately apparent in the detailed knowledge of Indian history displayed by a Sri Lankan Tamil as opposed to a lack of interest in Sri Lankan history by the average Indian Tamil.

Religious Consciousness

Religion with its emphasis on community practices and ritualistic affirmation of faith, plays a prominent role in Tamil Nadu politics. Given the long history of the Tamils in the south, religious identity has understandably gone through many translations and divisions. Modern Tamil Nadu is listed as having 88.8% Hindus of various sub and sub sub divisions; 5.78% Christians of the Protestant, Catholic, Jesuit, and Syrian Christian faith; 5.21% Muslims, Shia , Sunni and Sufi; .15% of other religions, primarily Jains and Sikhs.²³

The Sangam age with its prolific written and architectural output, marks the earliest clearly recorded place of religion in Tamil society. Hinduism, in its many reincarnations, was the dominant religion. While the different Gods of Hinduism attracted various sects and diverse forms of worship, certain profound perceptions and ways of emotional reaction to life-events, was common to all Hindu devotees. The gaining popularity of Buddhism and Jainism in 5 A.D., organized the disparate sects into vocal Hindus. A major part of Tamil Hindu orthodoxy can be traced to the three centuries following the rise of Buddhism. Sacred hymns, recognized religious leader-saints, temples and epic myths flourished during this period. The hymns especially, were set to simple, repetitive tunes so that its proselytizing power with the masses could be enhanced. They continue to be sung even in contemporary religious rituals. The collection of hymns were slowly regarded to be as powerful as the

²³Table 1.3 of *The Statistical Handbook of Tamil Nadu, 1987*, (Madras : Department of Statistics, Government Press, 1988.)

North Indian or Sanskritic Vedas, heretofore the defining book of all Hindus. The authors of the hymns came to be worshiped as lesser deities. With the result, a uniquely South Indian (Tamil dominated) Hindu practise was established as early as 8 A. D. Gigantic and intricately carved temples testified to the projection of this indigenous Hinduism. The subsequent popularity of the Bhakti (Ultimate Faith) movement originating in the southern region and then spreading to the northern states, did much to mitigate the differences. But, the level of significance and religiosity attributed to the Vedas by most Hindus, as opposed to the more folksy Bhakti hymns, revered by Tamil Hindus, continues to echo those long ago differences.

Hindu rituals are old enough to have been incorporated as an integral part of daily living. Daily or weekly trips to the temple is the norm amongst Tamil Hindus much as it was in earlier times. Festivals, hymn singing in groups, holy pilgrimages, morning or evening prayers in individual homes, continues as it did centuries ago. A modern Christian would be shocked to see a contemporary flaying himself with nettles to expiate his sins, as did the Puritans of past centuries. A modern Hindu shows no surprise at completely shaving his or her head or bathing in a communal temple tank aimed at purification, built for the same purpose twelve centuries ago. Ancient Hindu myths, far from being treated as quaint stories of a bygone era, are the stuff of contemporary films, theatre and daily idiom. Religious figures of the past and of epic fiction, are both generalized and contemporized, so that their comparison to modern leaders and politicians is made regularly and with dramatic results.²⁴

The minority religions of Islam and Christianity have established their own momentum in Tamil Nadu. As minority religions, there are significant assimilationist indices in the religious practices followed by both religions.

Islam, according to most historians, was introduced in the region at the “start of the Christian era”, through the influx of Arab traders by sea. Active preaching of Islamic texts

²⁴ Actors portraying mythical heroes have been remarkably successful in Tamil politics as well. For studies of this correlation, see Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., “Politics and Film in Tamil Nadu: The Stars and the DMK”, *Asian Survey*, Vol.13, No.3, March 1973; and *Ibid*, **When Stars Displace the Gods**, (Austin: University of Texas, 1975); also, Susanne H. Rudolph, “From Madras: A View of the Southern Film”, *Yale Review*, 60, No.3, March 1971.

in the Tamil kingdom is traced to around the eleventh century²⁵ and attributed to a Turkish missionary prince. Later Muslim dynasties, the Tughlak, Golconda, Bijapur, Tipu Sultan and finally the Mughals, added to the Muslim population in Tamil Nadu. In more recent times, Islam with its emphasis on egalitarianism, has attracted large scale conversions of low caste Hindus so that today the group numbers over 5% of the total population.²⁶ While the religion distinguishes them from the majority Hindu community, the distinction is not as marked as it is in northern India, which saw direct Muslim rule for over a century. Additionally, the Muslims of Tamil Nadu usually speak Tamil rather than Urdu and the rules of inheritance and dress are a strange mix of Tamil Hindu and Islamic codes. Even the wedding ceremonies of Tamil Muslims is closer to that of Tamil Hindus than of orthodox Islam. The unique temples at Palani and the Muslim tomb at Tirupparangunram are pilgrimage centers for both religions.

What stands out, however, is a potentially explosive situation. Tamil Muslims share the same history, culture, language and uninterrupted homeland of the Tamil Hindus. They regard themselves as wholly 'Tamil'. Tamil Hindus, however, regard them as "Muslims living in Tamil Nadu". This has resulted in periodic outbursts, not as virulent as the bloody riots of the northern regions of India, but still symptomatic of differing perceptions between the two religious communities. In addition, greater links with the rest of India and the widespread communications network that broadcasts Hindu-Muslim riots in northern India, appears to be giving more definite shape to communal identity within Tamil Nadu. In a revealing Hindu Muslim clash in Tamil Nadu in September 1990, Muslim Tamils in Madras were accused of disrupting a Hindu religious procession by throwing a slipper and "raising pro Pakistan slogans". Identification with distant Pakistan has heretofore been unheard of, in Tamil Nadu.

The same holds true for the vibrant Christian population in the state. Christians account for nearly 6% of the Tamil population. Like the Tamil Muslims, they accept Tamil as their native ("Mother") tongue and uphold many intrinsically Hindu practices. This is

²⁵ N.Sastri, *A History of South India*, 3rd. edition, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966): p.123.

²⁶ See Muntaz Ali Khan, *Mass Conversions of Meenakshipuram : A Sociological Enquiry*, (Madras : The Christian Literature Society, 1983).

coherent in the light of their history which is essentially one of missionary conversions of lower caste and anti caste Hindus. In the 17th century, Robert di Nobili, a missionary who called himself the “Roman Brahman”, encouraged conversion to Christianity even while he allowed the continuation of traditional Hindu ceremonies by the converts. While this was presumably aimed at taking the ‘sting’ out of religious conversion, it established the peculiarly individualistic Tamil form of Christianity that is evident even today. Missionaries of different faiths established their own branch of Christianity so that even though Roman Catholicism is adopted by a majority of Tamil Christians, Tamil Protestants have supplied some of the most prominent Tamil elite citizens of the state. The development of prestigious ‘Ivy League’ colleges like the Madras Christian College and Stella Maris, run by Christian boards, has contributed a great deal toward raising the profile of the Tamil Christian community. The Society of Jesus, the Jesuit faith and the Syrian Christian Church are some of the other sects prominent in Tamil Nadu. Seeming incongruities are easily accepted by Tamil Christians; for example the celebration of the Christian New Year as well as the Tamil Hindu New Year; the practise of wedding dowries as well as a strong caste system.

Unlike the business ethic of Muslim Tamils, the Christian community places a high premium on education and is capable of strong lobbying power in the state. The Hindu community once again distances them as “Christians” rather than Tamils, even though from an outsider’s point of view, there is very little difference in the social structure of the two religious communities. Christian Tamils hold both Western or Tamil names, speak Tamil at home, regard Tamil Nadu as their homeland, revere Tamil history and continue to uphold a caste hierarchy despite formal renunciation of the system. As with the Muslim minority, tensions with the Hindu majority flare up from time to time especially during religious festivals. The tension is most explicit in districts like Kanyakumari in the southern most tip of India, where Christians constitute the majority population (52%). The district is also a holy place for Hindus, who celebrate the confluence of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean at Kanyakumari. Ancient temples dot the area as well as the gigantic Vivekananda Rock, dedicated to a modern Hindu philosopher. Counter claims on the religious significance of the Rock and the rise in Christian population through

alleged conversions have led to sporadic outbursts between the two communities. More portentously, they have also led to communal organisations as evidenced by the holding of a “Hindu Resurgence Unity Conference” at Kanyakumari in February 1982,²⁷ as well as insecurity within the minority community which has charged the police of siding with Hindus in a riot situation. While most Hindu Tamils glibly believe that Tamil is synonymous with being Hindu, the Christian and Muslim Tamil focuses on language as the defining principle of Tamil identity. Some of the most ardent Tamil nationalists in the past have, in fact, emerged from non Hindu backgrounds. ²⁸ However, the sheer fact that ‘Tamil’ does not automatically overlap with a single religion, dilutes the identity to some extent. Hindu orthodoxy, a strong force in Tamil Nadu, cannot be politically exploited or linked ideologically to any Tamil movement without alienating a voluble 11% of the population that is non Hindu. It has never even been attempted.

Additionally, the religions practised by the Tamils are not singularly indigenous to Tamil Nadu, but spill into the thirty two states and territories of the Indian union. Not only are Tamils aware of this, but religious rituals actively hustle them through the country in the form of traditional holy pilgrimages. High caste Hindus must take a sanctifying dip in the Ganges river at Kasi, deep in the heart of North India. Other Hindus have a choice of pilgrimage centers scattered all over the Indian territory, that they must visit in order to ensure their spot in the after life. A fierce belief in the validity of these centers and the determination to complete a pilgrimage is evident even in Tamil history. As early as 15 A.D., a Pandyan king of the Tamil kingdom is supposed to have named himself “Kasikondaparakramakonda” which translates as “One who has seen Kasi”. Tamilians of the Protestant faith defer to an overarching Church of South India. Muslim Tamils subscribe to all India organisations such as the Jamaat-i-Islami-Hind, the Tablique movement aimed at ensuring the continuation of Islamic rituals, and the orthodox Jamiat-ul- Ulema-e-Hind. A larger whole, then, exists. This serves to compromise the cohesive power of religion as an index of Tamil unity. Both the plurality of religions practised in the state and the lack

²⁷India Today, March 31, 1982, p.37-39.

²⁸Tamil literary specialist, Xavier S.T.Nayagam of the Jesuit faith is a representative example. See his *Nature in Ancient Tamil Poetry*, (Tuticorin : Tamil Literature Society, 1953).

of uniqueness characterizing these religions makes it a relatively weak indicator of strongly nationalistic behavior.

With regard to empathy with the Sri Lankan Tamils, however, the scope changes dramatically. 23% of Sri Lankan Tamils are Hindus and 7% are Muslims. The Sinhalese are primarily Theravada Buddhists and Christians. Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka have been one of the most vociferous groups ranged against the Sri Lankan Tamils. In turn, they are targeted as the major “villains” amongst the Indian Tamils. Historically too, because Buddhism and Jainism attracted large numbers of Tamils in ancient Tamil Nadu, a strong counter movement was started by orthodox Hindus and the religion was effectively smothered by 9 A.D.²⁹ The burning of Hindu temples in the 1983 riots, instigated the majority of outraged letters to the editors of newspapers in Tamil Nadu. The descriptor “holocaust” with direct reference to the attempted extinction of the Jewish religion, was the most favored word. However, religious differences in Sri Lanka amongst the Tamils is very explicit. Muslim Tamils occupy a contiguous, defined area in the eastern Amparai region, whereas Hindu Tamils populate the northern Jaffna area. The same idea of Hindu Tamils being the “truer” Tamils, simmers just beneath the surface. In the current crisis, the difference between the two religions was played off by the Sri Lankan government on more than one occasion. By virtue of being territorially isolated and politically organized, religious differences are pronounced enough to actively disrupt any sense of Tamil unity within Sri Lanka. This could potentially confuse the Indian Tamil’s perceptual antipathy to Buddhist - Sinhala domination, which has appeared so far as the only “enemy”.

Conclusion

While Tamil consciousness within India does not display an absolute clarity of vision and purpose, there are undoubtedly immense wellsprings of pride in language, cultural heritage and religious continuity. The uniqueness and antiquity of the Tamil language marks it as the primary binding agent of the Tamil people. Its efficacy, however, promises to be

²⁹Ironically, the reason Buddhism was originally vilified was because it symbolized exactly what the modern anti Brahman movement propogates : undercutting the preeminence of the Brahman priestly caste. However, the early dynamics are completely forgotten. What remains is the residue of belief in Buddhism as a challenge to Hindu religion.

compromised by the growing need for link languages like English and even Hindi. Shared historical memories of past Tamil greatness and a living body of rich Tamil culture aid the development and maintenance of Tamil consciousness. Religious identity, while not actively detrimental to a sense of uniqueness, is far too disparate to appreciably enhance it. While certain idiosyncratic rituals are uniquely Tamil, the major religions and religious doctrines of Tamil Nadu are inextricably linked with that of the rest of India. Additionally, the proclivity of Hindu Tamils to see themselves as “Tamils” and non Hindu Tamils as simply “Christians” or “Muslims”, portends a significant rift in how the community defines itself.

Ironically, it is a sharing of religious identity that, to a significant extent, merges Indian Tamil consciousness with that of the Sri Lankan Tamil's. A clear sense of threat from the dominant religion of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, against Tamils, both Hindu and Muslim (but especially Hindu) facilitates this sense of unity. In addition, a vague sense of sharing a common Tamil culture and pre modern history, underlines the assumption of ethnic unity. Territorial proximity has also aided this assumption.³⁰ However, disparities, and what is more undermining, a perception of graded status accruing from these disparities, in language, modern history, culture and state, negates much of the popular perception of being a homogeneous community.

A result of these ambiguities in ethnic identity is an evident vulnerability with regard to the nature of crises situations. The Sri Lankan and Indian Tamil community does not unify and form a common front, regardless of who the enemy is or what their commonalties are. There are far too many differences within the group to warrant such unshakable unity. On the other hand, there are enough similarities and perceptions of ethnic continuity, to mobilize temporal spurts of unity in the face of a recognized, common enemy figure. As evidenced over the years, it takes only a dramatic enemy like “genocide” to rev up Indian Tamil sentiment. Previous intrusions into Tamil culture and language by the Sinhala dominated government in Sri Lanka raised very minor ripples in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The “dialectics of conflict” need to be highly dramatic; the enemy to be unequivocally “alien” to catalyze the Tamils as a nation.

³⁰For example, when expatriate Tamils from the islands of Fiji were being ousted from the islands, any show of sympathy or empathy in Tamil Nadu was nowhere evident.

From this it can be expected that there is a distinct variance in the mobilizability of the community. Sections of the community are galvanized by different fuse lengths and with varying levels of intensity, based on how profoundly their individual sense of nationhood is challenged or excited. This individual, rather than group sense, draws deeply from the complexities in self definitions over what the modal Tamilian epitomizes.

A.C.Paranjpe, in an article on Third World identities asks whether “ethnicity is in the leaders or in the masses?”³¹ Believing ethnic consciousness to be a delicate mediation between the two, the Tamil elite appears to have been crucial in resonating the needs of the politicised public and defining them in easily accessible socio-political epithets and symbols. The attentive elite have attempted to ‘make conscious’ and unify the self definitions, values and aspirations held by Tamilians in many ways since the start of this century. The compacted codes of caste and class have been the most politically efficient.

Feminist Vivian Gornick says “when a sufficiently large number of people are galvanized by a social explanation of how their lives have taken shape” there is the “joy of revolutionary politics”.³² Caste and class have provided that “social explanation” for mobilizing increasing numbers of the Tamil population into political awareness and identity.

Attentive Elite and Politicized Mass

The social stratification of Tamil Nadu today, is the result of a complex weaving between traditional caste hierarchies and modern class divisions. The two are not synonymous, as may have been the case in earlier times. However social aspirations are urging an overlap of the two. Low caste members who have attained economic prestige as a group, have also managed to upgrade their caste status with sustained effort, economic clout and over time.³³ The motivation to do this, testifies to the surprising tenacity and centrality of the social dictates of the caste system. When upgrading of the caste status is not immediately feasible,

³¹A.C.Paranjpe, *In Search of Identity*, (New York: Wiley, 1975).

³²V.Gornick, “Who Says We Haven’t Made A Revolution”, *New York Times Magazine*, 15 April, 1990, p.27.

³³The most dramatic case is that of the Nadar community. A detailed study can be found in Robert Hardgrave, Jr., *The Nadars of Tamilnad*, (California: University of California Press, 1969).

a caste leader who has been individually successful falls back on championing the cause of “the downtrodden backward caste”. Either way, the populist base for political support is most efficiently secured through the category of caste membership.

The importance of economic class is increasing in modern times primarily because the notion of caste is getting to be more and more abstract. The intrusion of modern urban life into the insularity of isolated village living has begun to erode the sacrosanctity and recognizability of caste distinctions. In the cities, you are whom you claim to be. It is not surprising then, that richer groups are claiming to be upper caste members and denouncing poorer sections as lower castes. However, since the majority of the population falls under the lower middle or economically disadvantaged class, to be the leader of a “backward caste” can also be politically advantageous.

It may be helpful to remember here that though the majority of the population is from “backward castes”, it still does not make it an immediately attractive target population for leaders within the democracy. While the potential for mobilizing votes exists in theory, in practise a significant chunk of block votes are secured through a high caste landlord who patronizes and wields economic control over “his” low caste community. Ninety percent of the 583,000 villages in India have populations of less than two thousand.³⁴ The small scale and relative isolation of these villages works at retaining the old feudal type hierarchy between landlord and tenant.

Claiming higher status also greatly eases the social dealings and public persona of a politician in subtle ways, much as class distinctions do in American politics. The ideal situation is to claim exploitation by the highest caste while still maintaining a ‘higher than low caste’ position. The anti Brahman movement, which shall be explicated in this section, has served this purpose quite admirably.

Vital as the notion of caste is in the Tamil Nadu social set up, it has also become an exceptionally slippery structure to pin down and evaluate, except at a strictly micro level more conducive to students of sociology or anthropology. The idealistic voice of the Indian Constitution forbidding the recording of caste membership in national censuses has not helped

³⁴Bunker Roy, “The Wages of Sin”, *India Today*, 30 June, 1990.

any. In fact, the practise was banned as early as 1930 when British census taker, M. Yeatts found that "Individual fancy apparently has some part in caste nomenclature....Censuses can deal usefully with facts, not with fashions".³⁵ While caste solidarity and caste block votes play a primary role in political life, there is no formal or statistical recognition of this. Its recognition, like most open secrets, derives simply from the abundant evidence of its existence. Caste leaders are openly wooed or bribed by all the major political parties contesting elections.³⁶

While caste remains the most significant divider of the community into a recognisable hierarchy, the changing stratifications within caste definitions and their salience need to be traced, to fully understand the curious socio political linkages that are in operation today. Economic advancement, political successes and territorial mobility have all served to rearrange caste hierarchies, so that the earlier theoretical clarity of four graded castes is easily discredited.

Background

The notional breakdown of caste in India was ranged along the indices of 'pollution' and 'purity'. The polluted castes were traditionally those that involved manual labor whereas the 'pure' castes were those that employed the intellect. The indices served to notch out four descending categories : the Brahman (priest), the Kshatriya (warrior), the Vaishya (trader) and the Sudra (working class). The Brahmans were the highest or most 'pure' sections of society. They were responsible for both the religious and the educational progress of the community. The Kshatriyas were next, usually from princely families, in whom the security of the community was vested. The Vaishyas were primarily merchants who balanced the economic life of the community. The Sudras were the lowest caste and denoted the artisans and occupations responsible for the physical upkeep of the people. The rest were the Untouchables or outcastes who were not a part of the system. In practise, they were

³⁵From Census of India, 1931, Vol. X14, Part 1, Report by Mr. M. Yeatts, I.C.S.(Madras): p. 333-336.

³⁶For closer studies of this pattern, see F.G.Bailey, *Politics and Social Change: Orissa in 1959*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963); and Stanley A. Kochanek, *The Congress Party of India*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

integral to the system, as they worked as scavengers and gravediggers, thereby allowing the caste Hindus to retain their 'purity' (as both jobs were considered highly polluted). Hindu myth and religious texts maintained this four fold classification.

In actual fact, the logic of distance, insularity, economics and circumstances had carved a less precise system comprising thousands of 'jatis' or sub castes. The translation 'sub caste' is very loose. As Andre Beteille points out, jatis are fractured into sub sub castes as well. Ties between these jatis could be vertical or horizontal depending on any number of variables.³⁷

In Tamil Nadu, the classifications were even less precise. Brahmans were a relatively distinct group, as were the Untouchables. The indeterminate middle sections were lumped together as Sudras, by the Brahman class. Amongst themselves, they were identified by their jatis. The Kshatriya and Vaishya categories were nowhere in evidence, thereby allowing the status of the jatis to be relatively negotiable.

Up to around the middle of the 19th century, the Brahmans dominated the social network, accompanied by various jatis who were sporadically prominent in different regions of Tamil Nadu. With the encroachment of the British system into the primarily feudal, isolated, village system of Tamil Nadu, the old order began to lose its natural legitimacy. New clusters of power began to emerge around the late 19th century, as socially pre defined jatis became the most available core for political mobilization. The fact that jatis invariably defined class as well, added to the legitimacy of these clusterings.

While the old order derived from a mix of traditional prestige and economic clout, the changing order put a premium on urban, educational and bureaucratic skills. As the Brahman caste was inhered in the conventions of education, they translated easily into the new system. All over India, the Brahmans were invariably the first group to learn English and dominate the clerical and bureaucratic jobs opened up by the new system. In Tamil Nadu, while Brahmans accounted for little over 3% of the total population, their representation in universities and white collar jobs was staggering. The 1912 census shows them to have occupied 82.3% of Sub-Judge positions and 72.6% of the District Munsifs. On

³⁷See Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in Tanjore Village*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).

an average, they held 66.7% of the jobs in the Revenue and Judicial departments. Their literacy rate at the time was 71.9% of which 22.27% were literate in English. In contrast, the Vellallas, the richest, land owning non Brahman jati, showed a literacy rate of 24.6% of which 2.12% were literate in English. ³⁸

Coetaneously, the Brahmans were also emerging as the most convincing argument against the “white man’s burden” of rule. Educated, articulate and politically motivated, the Brahman dominated Indian National Congress party, was beginning to fight for self government. The non Brahmans of Tamil Nadu, while economically wealthy in parts, were relatively rural sections of the population without an overall handle on the new, urban dominated politics of the time. The economic and political success of the Brahmans was immediately resented.

With the result, by the early twentieth century, both the non Brahmans and the British were united in their mutual fear and aggravation over Brahman predominance.

The Non Brahman Movement

In Tamil Nadu, the misleading category of “non Brahmans” covered a complete spectrum of classes, ranging from immensely wealthy landowners to poor farmers and unskilled laborers, in short, the majority of the population. ³⁹ The upper classes, indignant at being disregarded by the new system and powered by a growing ratio of literacy, began organizing themselves politically. “Brahman efficiency should be sacrificed for the sake of a more general recruitment policy” ⁴⁰ asserted A.M.K.Tampoe, a non Brahman official of the Indian Civil Service. In 1912, the Madras Dravidian Association was formed by non Brahman students. It was followed by the setting up of a Dravidian Association Hostel

³⁸Real figures may give a clearer representation of the unequal ratios existing at the time. In 1918, out of 1,315,600 Brahmans in the Madras Presidency, 10,269 were graduates at the Madras University. Out of 36,521,000 non Brahman Hindus, barely 3,213 were graduates. Eugene Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1969): p.18.

³⁹In fact, the term “non brahman” seems to have first been officially utilized by the British census takers of 1931, where Mr.M.Yeatts, the editor, writes in his introductory report that since “Political tendency is to deal only in broad classifications” the term “non brahman” might be a suitable “convenience”. In *Census of India, 1931*.

⁴⁰Cited in Eugene Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India : The Non Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism*, (New Delhi :Oxford University Press, 1969): p.43.

for non Brahman students in Madras. The focus was clearly on education as a means of negating or equaling Brahman domination.⁴¹

The fight for literacy soon expanded into the realm of politics. Timing was crucial. The home rule movement in South India, heightened the awareness that British rule was not going to last for ever. Somebody would replace them. Spurred by the imminent possibility of power and the threat of Brahman rule replacing British rule, thirty wealthy non Brahman leaders in Madras met on November 20, 1916 and formed the South Indian People's Association Limited. A month later they printed a revealing treatise called the Non Brahman Manifesto, which complained of Brahman dominance and deviousness. With regard to self government it stated :

*"We are not in favour of any measure which, in operation, is designed, or tends completely to undermine the influence and authority of the British Rulers, who alone in the present circumstances of India are able to hold the scales even between creed and class.... We are deeply devoted and loyally attached to British rule..."*⁴² It further chastised the rest of the non Brahman community who *"By their attitude of silence and inaction... have failed to make their voices heard, and others more astute than they have used them for their own ends.."* Following this, the South Indian Liberation Front was formed and started publishing an unequivocally Non Brahman daily called the "Justice".⁴³

On August 20, 1917, the Montague Declaration for self government acerbated the quarrel for leadership and representation, much as the Zulu leadership and the African National Congress are engaged in South Africa in present times. British administrator, Montague's proposed tour of India catalyzed non Brahman leadership to enter active politicking. Cables were sent to Montague and anti Brahman statements were openly circulated.⁴⁴ Non

⁴¹Traditionally, the Brahman position was characterised more by social prestige than actual political leadership. The fact that "new identities in a universe of choice" was suddenly possible, instigated the socially aristocratic and relatively literate Brahman to aspire for political dominance as well. See L. Rudolph in "Urban Life and Populist Radicalism" in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XX No. 3 May 1961. Also Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society*, (Glencoe, 1958).

⁴²Eugene Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1969): p.364.

⁴³This was to provide the name for the later influential Justice party.

⁴⁴The statements were explicit: "Indian Brahmans are more alien to us than Englishmen...". Quoted in Eugene Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1969): p.51-52.

Brahmans within the Congress party were concerned enough to form a specialized branch, the Madras Presidency Association, to counter the growing power of the Justice Party.

The Dravidian Movement

A parallel movement taking place was the development of the concept of "being Dravidian". The movement attempted to establish the fact that not only were the Brahmans distinct because of their social arrogance and economic exploitation, but that they were racially distinct. They were descendents of the original marauding Aryans who had driven the Dravidians to the south of India and imposed an alien system of caste on them. The Golden Age of the Tamils with no mention of caste, was ample proof of this version of history. The whole idea, in fact, converged neatly with the traditional distrust of the South toward the North. What started as a Non Brahman movement then, employed a supporting concept of 'Dravidianness', to give added validity to its ideals. The Dravidians were the people of South India, originally ruled by Tamil kings many centuries ago, in a "golden age" where caste and inequality did not exist. The Aryans of the North (i.e. the Brahmans), imposed their caste structure and vitiated the serenity of the Dravidian culture, according to the proponents of the Dravidian movement. In effect, then, the Brahmans were "outside" Aryans, a fact which also conveniently explained their rapacity and social control over the years. The Dravidians, by definition, were Tamil Non Brahmans, with a distinct culture, history, and language of their own. This "fact" needed to be asserted against all "alien" interferences. It proved to be an effective interpretation of history and mobilized increasing numbers of Non Brahmans into political battle. Parallel to the increase in numbers, and as a result of it, the movement began to define itself more clearly.

For all the theoretical negation of caste amongst the Non Brahman Dravidian movement, the configurations of political identity continued to cluster around accepted caste hierarchies. "Higher" Non Brahmans dominated the newly opened political posts. For every twelve jobs, the ratio was set at two Brahmans, ten Non Brahmans (including Muslims and Christians). Of the ten Non Brahmans, the lion's share appeared to be reserved for high caste Non Brahmans. In a way, their prominence was supported by the style of politics prevalent

at the time, which stressed the use of petitions addressed to the British rulers. Literacy was essential. In addition, only propertied members of society were given the right to vote. Despite its use of Non Brahmanism and Dravidianism, as core symbols, the early movement was essentially composed of rich, educated, high caste Non Brahman elite. The struggle was openly aimed against the Brahmans, rather than for the Non Brahmans as a whole.

The paradox was quickly manifested as the disjunction between symbol and practise became evident to the newly activated lower caste jatis. As early as 1923, the Adi Dravidas or Untouchables, had begun to publicly renounce all association with the Justice party as they branded them the “new Brahmans”.

The Non Brahman concept quickly dissolved into its more radical interpretation. The relatively radical faction organized itself into the Self Respect League that believed in a revolutionary change of values, particularly with regard to caste and the Hindu religion. The rationalist thought, sparked by images of the “original” non casteist culture of Dravidians, was given its purest voice by a charismatic leader called E.V.Ramasami. His Self Respect league formed in 1924 and its official publication, the Kudi Arasu, was to dominate Tamil politics in the era of petitions, right up till the eve of Indian independence. The League succeeded in one important progression in the making of modern Tamil politics. With its stress on the break up of caste distinctions, it made a concerted effort to draw the lowest castes into the political movement. While the idea was one of social reform, the manifestations were felt most visibly in the realm of politics, with an increase in mobilization amongst the heretofore marginalized “backward” Non Brahmans. The Self Respect League, established the expectation for political participation amongst this section of Tamil society. However, the petitional style of politics and the skewed advantages accruing to the propertied class, prevented full entry at the time. Forward Non Brahmans continued to provide the actual leadership of the movement. In 1944, the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) was formally established in a deliberate attempt to give new form to the earlier League, and firmly expressed its antipathy to the elitism that characterized the League. The distinction between Brahmans and Non Brahmans was giving way to a further distinction between Forward Non Brahmans and Backward Non Brahmans.

With the end of British rule and the era of petitions, majoritarian politics came into its own. Backward Non Brahmins wanted the political representation they had been denied by institutional hobbles. An astute disciple of E.V.Ramasami, Mr. Annadurai, broke away from the Dravida Kazhagam in 1949 and formed a new party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). The DMK was ostensibly acting as the political wing of the same social reformist ideals that the Dravida Kazhagam stood for, since the DK had forsworn active politics. The DK, in fact, continues to work as a reform rather than political party even today. However its informal support of political factions is important in ensuring electoral success. Again, because it works independent of the Central political structure, it is relatively immune to Central government puppeteering. Its ideology continues as the most radical expression of the earlier Dravidian movement. 'Self respect weddings' conducted without a Brahman priest and the denigrating of Hindu holy books is vigorously maintained.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)

The growth of the DMK from its inception in 1949 to when it first entered electoral politics in 1956, is highly illustrative of the kind of political identity the newly activated Tamil community was groping towards.

Certain emotive symbols had already been established. Non Brahmanism was popularly accepted, as shown by the Dravida Kazhagam experience. The concept of 'being Dravidian and proud of it' was another. The extent of the 1938 anti Hindi agitation with Hindi being a totem of North Indian, Aryan domination, was a clear indicator of growing Dravidian consciousness. Certain other factors had been rejected outright by the Tamil society at large. Anti Hinduism, with its stress on atheism, while theoretically congruent with the Dravida Kazhagam's overall Dravidian thesis, only succeeded in isolating the movement.⁴⁵ Equality of castes or negation of the entire caste system, the very crux of Non Brahman philosophy, was being reinterpreted as "parity with higher castes". Equality with the Untouchables was completely discarded. The exodus of Muslims and Untouchables from the Dravida Kazhagam had testified to the rejection they experienced in the party. The

⁴⁵The state of Tamil Nadu has the largest number of Hindu temples.

extreme manifestation of Dravidian identity, a separate Nadu or state, delinked from the rest of India was received with very mixed signals.

Sounded out by the Dravida Kazhagam's experiences and feedback, within a decade, Annadurai's DMK party turned from social reformist ideals to a highly pragmatic political party. From its very first principle of non casteism, it slipped into a "one God, one caste" position.⁴⁶ From its earlier denunciation of all Brahmans, it shifted into a more generalized "non BrahmanISM", that did not criticize individuals. From the claim of a separate Dravida Nadu, it settled on a Tamil Nadu within the Indian territory. The attempt to encompass all castes and all classes into its organization was slowly relinquished in favor of the middle class, who formed the bulk of the population. With the break up of the party in 1972, the DMK came to be dominated primarily by the urban middle class and the rural intelligentsia.

The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)

In 1972, the DMK split into two factions. The rebel group was headed by one of the most charismatic leaders of Tamil Nadu, a film actor called M.G.R. (Maruthur Gopalan Ramachandran).⁴⁷ MGR's instantaneous success in Tamil politics,⁴⁸ can be attributed to both his personal charisma, honed during his years as a successful actor, and his concentration on a specific demographic group within Tamil Nadu. MGR and his party the AIADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam),⁴⁹ were unequivocally the "poor man's party", attracting primarily illiterate, non land owning farmers. MGR himself had a treasure house of movie images he could evoke at will to lend credibility to the party's credo, as he had played the "protector of the weak" in a seemingly tireless number of films.

⁴⁶In a recent interview, DMK leader Karunanidhi stated, "we are not atheists" and went on to elaborate how during the DMK government, the highly religious and orthodox "car festival" was revived. The issue of religion had evidently come full circle.

⁴⁷In the course of his career, his followers called him the most euphonious names : Makkal Thilagam (people's ornament); Ponmana Chemmal (golden hearted nobleman); Vadhiyar (mentor); Puratchi Nadigar (revolutionary actor); Puratchi Thalaivar (revolutionary leader), and Idaya Theivam (God of people's hearts), to name a few.

⁴⁸Within five years of forming a party, he had taken over the state government and won a majority in the *Lok Sabha* or House of People.

⁴⁹In 1972, at its founding, the party did not have the All India prefix. Prior to the first major elections and the electoral need for Congress support against the DMK, the prefix was added and continues to be upheld. It remains a significant indicator of the relative ease with which AIADMK followers accept the idea of 'national integration' as opposed to DMK's stand on 'hard bargaining with the Centre'.

The somewhat startling impact of films on Tamil politics needs some explication. There are a staggering 2,364 cinema theatres in Tamil Nadu ⁵⁰ and, like the rest of India, the Tamil films shown in these theatres are quintessentially escapist fare, replete with idealized situations and larger than life personalities. The difference in Tamil films is that they have traditionally been explicitly didactic. Even before 1949, when Anna, the “Dravidian Mao” had founded the DMK party, he had used theater and then films, to spread the message of anti casteism, anti Brahminism, anti poverty and the eradication of social evils like alcoholism. For the rural illiterate, no more powerful medium of entertainment and moralizing was available. MGR consistently played the role of a poor man who battled all odds to emerge as the Ultimate Protector. The theme never varied. The people never tired. What gave his roles added authenticity, was his real life story, in which his youth was marked by poverty and illiteracy. Fatherless at a very young age, MGR had to drop out of primary school to earn a living, which he did in street theater. With the introduction of film making, he moved to that medium and was a reasonable success. The DMK party, always in close contact with the film industry, ⁵¹ wooed him to their cause and away from the Congress party to which MGR had been affiliated till 1953. They then financed, directed and sponsored a spate of “MGR films”, constantly reiterating DMK ideology. The themes clove well with MGR’s persona resulting in a phenomenal rise of MGR mania. Over 20,000 fan clubs (MGR Manrams) sprung up all over the villages of Tamil Nadu and were then utilized as DMK propaganda units. At one point, just before the party split, half the six hundred thousand DMK members were supposed to be ardent members of MGR fan clubs. ⁵² Close empathy with the unvarying role played by MGR in all his films, was absolute. Empathy with the man became inextricably linked. The fact that MGR was non Tamil (born in Sri Lanka of Malayali parents) did nothing to deter the enthusiasm. ⁵³ While

⁵⁰ Government of Tamil Nadu, *The Statistical Handbook of Tamil Nadu 1981*, (Madras: Government Printing Office): Table 35.1, p.467.

⁵¹ Karunanidhi, the twice elected chief minister of Tamil Nadu and secretary of the DMK party, was himself a script writer.

⁵² R.Thandavan, *All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam : Political Dynamics in Tamil Nadu*, (Madras : TN Academy of Political Science, 1987): p.51.

⁵³ Malayalis, the people of the neighboring state of Kerala, are traditionally distrustful of Tamils and vice versa.

MGR detractors used his “alienness” any number of times, his followers always claimed that he “chose Tamil Nadu over Kerala” and was a true son of the Tamil spirit. Either way, the MGR fan clubs did not seem to care, he was both the epitome and the hope of their lives. His outstanding success in the DMK party soon combined with a niggling sense of outrage amongst career politicians who considered him a political lightweight. While “enthusiastic audiences cheered M.G.Ramachandran and almost ignored the rest”,⁵⁴ the party bureaucracy, headed by Karunanidhi, down played his position, in favor of “veterans”. In hindsight, a break within the party appeared to be more a question of time.

Personal conflicts between Karunanidhi and MGR,⁵⁵ plus Karunanidhi’s decision to scrap the long standing prohibition laws for additional funds, gave MGR both the motivation and the political battle cry to desert the DMK. Claiming that the abolition of dry laws was a symptom of the corrupting of founder, Anna’s principles, the AIADMK was formed in 1972 to resurrect the “true principles”. Aware of the impact of images and symbolism in his own meteoric rise, MGR immediately set up popular totems to identify his party. A red and black flag symbolizing the party and an AIADMK tattoo on the arm of each member symbolizing their loyalty was immediately instituted. His “protector” role was given full expression in schemes like the adoption of wards, the supporting of orphanages, the donating of six thousand raincoats to rickshaw pullers and publicized pleas for loan redemptions to poor farmers.

In 1977, when the AIADMK contested for the *Lok Sabha* (House of the People), it won 18 out of 20 seats and 126 of 234 seats in the Legislative Assembly, thus making it the ruling party of the state. The call for elections, too, appears to have been engineered by an AIADMK - Congress collaboration. The DMK was overtly anti Congress and belligerent about the power of the Centre. Karunanidhi’s initiative in setting up the Rajamannar Committee to look into Centre - State relations and the heated discussions following the Committee’s recommendations to transfer power from the Centre to the States, had not gone unnoticed by the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. In addition, her standing was

⁵⁴R.Thandavan, p.44.

⁵⁵Karunanidhi attempted to prop his son in films as the ‘new MGR’ and opened fan clubs in his son’s name.

heavily compromised following the clamping of Emergency powers in 1977. The splitting up of one of her more vociferous enemies, the DMK, into two factions was an unexpected boon. The fact that the charismatic new leader of the breakaway faction had an income tax arrears of almost two million rupees, a matter under direct jurisdiction of the Central government, was an added bonus. Given this vulnerability and the fact that MGR was not ethnically Tamil, the AIADMK openly supported a policy of “national integration”, the sounding theme of the Congress as well.

The significance of this is not trivial. From hard based principles of anti Brahman, anti Aryan, and pro Tamil nationalism, a prominent regional party had slipped into a pro Tamil, pro Indian stance. The Congress party was associated too deeply with being an “all India” party, thereby diluting the pride of being exclusively Tamil. The DMK was relatively reactionary and attracted all those who had felt the brunt of Brahman superiority in the early part of the twentieth century. The AIADMK touted both the heritage of the Tamils, with special emphasis on the language, and the relevance of the Indian whole to Tamil Nadu. Further, it explicitly concentrated on the “upliftment of the Tamil backward classes”.

In 1975, MGR petitioned the Centre and charged the DMK with rampant corruption. By February 1976, Mrs. Gandhi dissolved the Tamil Nadu Assembly and called for new elections. The new AIADMK party had already shown the potential for electoral success, judging by their victories in various by- elections, called in the event of the death of a representative while still in office. The prognostication proved to be correct. The DMK was able to garner barely 48 of the 234 seats of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. The AIADMK won 126 seats, plus another 27 seats were won by its collaborator, the Congress party.⁵⁶

The victory of the AIADMK introduced two significant notes into Tamil politics. One, it testified to the active mobilization of Backward Non Brahmins and rural communities into the political process. Two, it openly accepted the supremacy of the Centre, without sacrificing the premium on Tamil identity, the necessity of which had been established by previous movements and parties.

⁵⁶From D.K.Oza, *Report on the Sixth General Elections to the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly*, (Madras : Government of Tamil Nadu, 1978).

Conclusion

Ever since the introduction of democratic politics in Tamil Nadu at the start of the twentieth century, the success of the attentive elite in mobilizing the population through the rallying cry of “caste exploitation”, has set a precedent for much of the consequent redefining of Tamil society.

The continuous jostling for power and the increasing salience of class as distinct from caste, has further broken down the earlier singleminded antipathy to Brahman domination. Richer Non Brahmans, unwilling to be associated with the lower castes have defined themselves explicitly as high caste Non Brahmans, or what Barnett termed as “Forward Non Brahmans”.⁵⁷ Non Brahmans who are not accepted as high caste, yet do not want to be lumped with the untouchables are broadly regarded as “Backward Non Brahmans”. The lowest castes and the untouchables are recognizable as “Adi Dravidas” or “Backward Castes”. The last category promises to further break up into a “Most Backward Caste” category, judging by the current dynamics taking place and the increasing variance in social and economic status within the category.⁵⁸

Each group has coughed up its own set of leaders who have furthered the mobilizing process by elaborating on the “higher caste exploitation” theme. The highest caste, the Brahmans, rally around the “reverse discrimination” argument. As a matter of fact, barely five to eight percent of college admissions are allotted to Tamil Brahmans. This probably accounts for their widespread exodus to other parts of the country and the world. The undoubted success of the Non Brahman movement has dramatically dissipated the nexus of Brahman - Non Brahman inequality. Further divisions within the Non Brahman group has undercut much of the early vigor and simplicity of the movement. The crucial redefining of public needs and perceptions into convincing political arguments is currently finding its most telling expression in anti poverty schemes rather than anti Brahman slogans. Modern scholars like Professor G.Palanithurai of Annamalai University believe that neomarxist

⁵⁷Marguerite R. Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁵⁸There are over three thousand jatis that are currently clubbed under the Backward Caste grouping.

interpretations of class exploitation and opportunity would prove to be far more effective in predicting future Tamil politics.⁵⁹ This view is partially justified by the new voting patterns emerging in the urban centers of Tamil Nadu where caste block votes are relatively undermined by other issues of more immediate urgency. Economic and occupational differences are the primary generators of these issues.

The parallel definition, of the Tamil people being Dravidian by virtue of being Non Brahman, has been elaborated with consummate success by Tamil elites over the past few decades. While caste distinctions have carved out political communities separating the Tamil people, the cause of Dravidianism has excluded only the relatively tiny Brahman population and united all others. Being Dravidian and therefore a target of exploitation for the Aryans, struck a richly resonant note. It not only explained the niggling poverty or insufficiency experienced by newly politicized groups, it also explained the continuing dominance of the North (Aryans) with its capital at New Delhi, over the South (Dravidians), a popular complaint amongst the Tamil elite.

The third important landmark has been the elite's definition of "being Tamil". With the poor response to Dravidianism as a widespread movement amongst all the South Indian states (Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh), the focus has been on defining the Dravidian Tamil. The Dravidian Tamil, unlike all the other Dravidians, speaks the most ancient, continuously living language of India, boasts a rich cultural heritage, a "golden age" of castelessness and has ruled over large portions of South India for significant periods in history. The language issue, as described earlier, has consolidated this aspect of identity with emotional concrete.

Structured Polity

A study of adolescents describes a stage in their growth which is a "moment of resistance...a sharp and particular clarity of vision, an almost perfect confidence in what they know and see, a belief in their integrity and in their highly complex responsibilities toward

⁵⁹Written communication, 12 July 1990.

the world". In short, they "are not for sale". In the process of growth, they begin to notice how they are not "what the culture is about". It gives them "some kind of double vision" and the "moment of resistance goes underground".⁶⁰

Dual identity for the Tamil living in India is similarly structured. Growing up on stories of Tamil greatness and within a Tamil ambience that is distinguished by language, dress, food and custom, Tamil identity is "not for sale". However, with the overpowering Indian structure that overtakes the adult Tamil, the acquiring of a "double vision" is hard to shake off. The links are not merely structural, but dip deeply into a common Indian ideological stockpile. In sum, they are far too insistent to ignore. Ambivalence or acceptance is the average response. This is probably one of the more widespread values noticed by Indologists from differing fields. Anthropologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf says "an attitude basic to Indian ideology (accepts) the variety of cultural forms as natural and immutable".⁶¹ Sociologists have claimed it to be a "basic belief in the existence of various orders of humanity"⁶² or just plain "Indian proclivity to live with contradictions".⁶³ The "attitude", "belief" or "proclivity" is evidenced even in ancient Indian drama where characters from different social positions or regions are made to speak appropriately different dialects.⁶⁴ The Tamil can easily rally against a category of impalpably visualized "north Indians" on specific issues, but, as the original and authentic "Indian", s/he is both Indian and Tamil. In addition, forty three years of independent rule have consciously nurtured an entire generation of Tamils on this idea of being Indian in addition to being a Tamil. The structure of various powerful institutions have been uniquely instrumental in supporting the 'Indianness' abstractly experienced by people in Tamil Nadu. The following section aims at evaluating the "structured polity" of the Indian state in its attempt at exploiting Tamil "double vision".

⁶⁰See Carol Gilligan's study as described by F.Prose in "Confident at 11, Confused at 16", *New York Times Magazine*, 7 January 1990.

⁶¹Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, *Caste and Kin in Nepal, India, and Ceylon*, (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1966).

⁶²Richard F.Nyrop, *Area Handbook for India*, 3rd ed. (Washington: U.S.Government Printing Office, 1975): p.28.

⁶³Ambassador Muthamma, Interview, July 1989.

⁶⁴See *Area Handbook for India*, 1975, p.129.

Background

In general, despite the stark differences in regions within India, attempts for a unified whole have been recorded over the past millennium. Actual kingdoms covering most or a major part of the present territory have existed not less than nine times.⁶⁵ For all that, when the last widespread foreign rulers, the British, attempted to introduce modern forms of self governing in 1935, there were over 562 princely states that ruled independent of the nine major British provinces. As can be expected, none were willing to succumb to the strictures and curtailments of an hierarchical government. The British Government of India Act, 1935, aimed at creating a federacy, could never really be put into practise, even though it provided an invaluable basis for the later Indian constitution.

It required the overwhelming patriotic fervor of independence in 1947, plus some adroit armtwisting, to coalesce those hundreds of independent princes. Incumbent on those coalescings, was the need to sustain both the legitimacy of centralized power and an equitable equation between the centre and the disparate provinces that had previously enjoyed their own forms of governing. I believe it is this continuous tension between imposing a structure from above (a so called national centre) while allowing for, or being resisted by lesser centers of power (the so called regional states), that models the major Indian institutions, both in structure and process.

Long before social assimilation as a necessary prerequisite to effective government, was questioned by social theorists, the reality of a culturally heterogeneous population had shepherded Indian leaders into the rhythm of compromisational politics; the creation of federalized institutions; and a 395 article Constitutional tome (one of the world's longest) striving to accommodate every conceivable human need and cover every potential human aberration. It is not that early Indian leaders did not want an assimilated population. The clause to impose Hindi as a national language, the directive principles of national policy underlining India's moral stance as a whole, the creation of a strong Central power and a President who could invoke "Emergency" powers at all times, testifies to that. It was simply

⁶⁵S.Mansingh quotes approximately 100 dynasties since 560 B.C. in *India: A Country Study, 1986*, (U.S.Government:Area Handbook Series,1986): p.4.

not a feasible proposition. Instead, the theme that came to dominate both the structural framework of the Indian polity and the belief system of a large number of the population, was the one that would strike most true - 'unity in diversity'. Differences were openly acknowledged. The tangible commonalties were then stressed. This 'national value', if it can be called that, underwrites most public speeches, writings and festive occasions even today.

The deeply inherent pluralism in religion and society makes a pluralistic political system necessary. Centralized assimilation of the White Russian variety would hypothetically survive only under the aegis of overwhelming and sustainable physical power. Recognizing this, the early leaders of independent India hoped for some degree of voluntary or even non conscious assimilation, through the use of a centralizing infra structure. The need to create a system that could spread Western oriented, unifying values while being familiar enough to be accepted by the remotest village, came to be focused on institutions such as the All India Services.

Some of the structures that visibly repudiated the "dual nationalism"⁶⁶ presumed upon by the early Indian elite is presented here. The ultimate viability of such structures and whether they remain effective through the polarizing clarity brought about by crisis situations is also discussed.

Clifford Geertz⁶⁷ believed that 'civil' sentiments could be domesticated either by channeling discontent to political rather than parapolitical forms; by providing state apparatus that neutralized so called 'primordial' sentiments; and/or by divesting such sentiments of their legitimacy. His three methods are useful in trying to evaluate the nature of structured polity in Tamil Nadu.

Rather than delineating the institutions, which are many and whose structures can be (and have been) interpreted in every possible way, it may be more enlightening to review some of the actual decisions and actions taken by these institutions.

⁶⁶Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, (London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

⁶⁷In "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States", Clifford Geertz ed. *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa*, (New York: Free Press, 1968).

Administrative

The concept and execution of federal government, as translated in Tamil Nadu politics, is possibly the most revealing area. When the Indian elite of 1950 set about constructing the constitution, the overall slant was consistently poised at “holding” the disparate Indian elements and “fostering” one nation awareness. Hence the principle of centralizing all power was unequivocally projected. A “strong Centre” was not the dirty phrase it is in most other federacies. In fact, the word ‘federal’ is conspicuous in its lack of repeated usage in the Indian Constitution. Yet a wholly centralized, unitary form of government was unfeasible in the face of socio political disparities. The Constitution thus elected to be a “unitary one with federal features”. This necessitated the setting up of three organizing Lists : the State, the Central and a Concurrent List that legally divided the responsibilities and power areas between the Centre and the states. As was to be expected, the Centre was given the lion’s share and even in those areas commandeered by the states, the influence or patronage of the Centre was proved to be necessary. This has been felt most acutely in the matter of finance. With the Centre getting their revenue from all the weightier taxes : customs, corporation, excise and income, the state of Tamil Nadu has been dependent on Delhi since independence. Land revenue, which comes under the state’s jurisdiction, is a political hot potato that no state government has been willing to tackle. Increase in land taxes would immediately alienate the primarily agricultural voting population, which makes up almost three fourths of the state’s voting population. ⁶⁸ The one profitable excise duty ⁶⁹ levied on alcohol, is heavily compromised by the strong Hindu conservatism of the state. ⁷⁰ Tamil Nadu with the largest number of temples and orthodox religious practices in India, displays an ambivalence on the matter of liquor which is made felt through the sometimes comic liquor policies of the Tamil Nadu government. ⁷¹ Prohibition has been declared off and on

⁶⁸In the 1981 census, 11,596,704 workers of a total working population of 20,198,790 were listed as being cultivators and agricultural laborers. Of the total population, 32,456,202 are rural based and 15,951,875 are urbanites. *The Statistical Handbook of Tamil Nadu*, (Madras: Government of Tamil Nadu): p.5.

⁶⁹Tamil Nadu is granted three - alcohol, medicine and toilet articles, of which alcohol accounts for two billion rupees annually.

⁷⁰For an account of political setbacks accruing from the revocation of dry laws in Tamil Nadu, see “Grapes of Wrath” in *India Today*, 31 January, 1987.

⁷¹In 1987, for example, Chief Minister MGR planned a unique strategy by which he could ostensibly declare

at least four times in the past two decades.

While income sources are limited, the responsibilities of the state in the light of welfarism and planned projects, is consistently rising. Keeping parity with the individual incomes meted out by the Central government to its state employees, takes an additional toll. As one researcher put it, "no attempt was made to relate taxing powers of the state to their functional responsibilities".⁷² With the result, for a relatively poor state with a per capita income of Rs.779 at constant prices in 1986,⁷³ the idea of depending on an overall Indian pot is reinforced at every step. The educated Tamil interested in joining the public services, will first attempt to join the Central government services in Tamil Nadu (the Indian Administrative Services, the Indian Police Services, Customs, Railway etc.) rather than the relatively poorly endowed State services.

Again, the whole pace and nature of development projects in the state are dependent on how much a centralized Planning Commission and Finance Commission are willing to offer Tamil Nadu, and how much Tamil Nadu is believed to require for its projects. The process of making this decision has proven to be far more political, than a clear case of administrative or proven needs. Tamil Nadu has, since independence, managed to attract approximately 10% of the total income tax collected by the Central government, on a staggered basis. The association of 'development' with the Centre rather than the state, has produced significant political payoffs. The untouchables or Adi Dravidas of Tamil Nadu, who form the poorest section of society, are traditionally attracted to Central political parties such as the Congress, rather than to regional groupings like the DMK, because of such an association.

The financial stranglehold of the Centre over Tamil Nadu has been evident in any number of situations. The licensing policy for construction of major plants (cement, naval academy, photo color films unit, sugar factories), ostensibly in accordance with Indian

prohibition in the state and still draw in an annual revenue from the product. He disallowed the sale of the popularly consumed "arrack" or country liquor that accounted for fifty million of the seventy million litres of raw alcohol produced by the state. At the same time, he allowed and encouraged the sale of expensive Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL), that did not technically fall under the rules of prohibition.

⁷²Asok Chanda, "Institutional Base of Centre-State Relations" in B.L.Maheshwari, (ed.), *Centre-State Relations in the Seventies*, (Hyderabad : Administrative Staff College, 1973): p.135.

⁷³Statistical Handbook of Tamil Nadu, Table 3.2, p.89.

socialist ideology, is in practise held either as bait, or cancelled as punishment, from Tamil Nadu. This has led to unemployment and subsequent electoral disadvantages for the existing state government. Personal vendetta is also given ample opportunity under the existing system. For example, in 1980, the AIADMK government had agreed to write off a certain category of loans to small farmers. Since at that point of time, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was upset with Chief Minister MGR, what should have been the state government's unilateral decision, was appropriated by the Centre, through the centrally controlled Reserve Bank of India, which denied the loan writeoff. Again, in 1983, when the state of Tamil Nadu needed rice from Punjab, rail wagon availability was hindered until Tamil Nadu agreed to contribute to Central food stock, something it had not agreed to in the past.

The creation of the Planning Commission in 1949, though formulated without any constitutional or statutory basis, has in practise, instituted itself as the major organizer of financial allocations. Directly headed by the Prime Minister and central ministers, the Planning Commission, while allowing social services to be under the jurisdiction of the state, does in fact, intrude heavily on the nature of the services rendered, by granting huge amounts to the state for schemes favored by the Centre. State plans in Tamil Nadu have been thwarted or 'guided' on more than one occasion by this Central 'bribery'.

In effect, on the financial front, the Centre is consistently portrayed and behaves as the major financier of Tamil Nadu. The idea that Tamil Nadu could not thrive without Central assistance is an accepted enough one. When the DMK party suggested a restructuring of Centre State finances, its most radical suggestion was not complete autonomy, but a provincialisation of income taxes so that it came under either the Concurrent or State List. The idea of an economically attractive or necessary coupling with a larger Indian whole has been a definite contribution of the financial structures established in post independent India.

Constitutional

The constitutionally granted powers between Centre and state have also been worked out so that ultimate power rests with the Centre. While the state government is ostensibly an

autonomous bureaucratic power, with its own Legislature and Judiciary, its independence is unambiguously curtailed by certain key articles in the Constitution.

When the Constituent Assembly convened in 1948 to chart a formal Constitution, the leader of the Assembly, Dr. Ambedkar, stated that , “The Federation is a Union because it is indestructible...not being the result of an agreement...no state has the right to secede from it..”.⁷⁴ This blatantly tautological principle was hardened into law in 1961, with dramatic results. When the people of Tamil Nadu, outraged by the imposition of Hindi, milled together in a concerted bid for secession from the Indian union, a law was passed banning all secessionist parties. Demands for secession were immediately withdrawn by Tamil Nadu’s political parties and the issue was once again whittled down to the question of language, rather than the more serious one of ultimate political identity. It was probably the clearest case of how a structure (in this case , a vindictive law backed by the constitution), was able to hustle popular discontent into political rather than parapolitical forms.

Again, Article 3 of the Constitution allows a redrawing of state boundaries by simple majority vote in the Parliament. States could even be completely dissolved by the same voting procedure. The idea that no state is the mystical union of a defined nation, but an administrative unit subject to change, has been explicated more than once. Tamil Nadu, once known as the Madras Presidency, covered almost all of South India. It was reduced to Madras state in 1947 and further reduced to its present boundaries in 1953 following the Telengana agitation and the conciliatory creation of the Telugu speaking state of Andhra Pradesh. The fluidity of state boundaries stands in sharp contrast to the Indian government’s rigid stand on ‘national’ boundaries with China and Pakistan, on which there is no compromise and over which all of India’s major wars have been fought.

The articles of the Constitution allowing for the imposition of emergency powers and President’s rule on a state, are probably the clearest example of ultimate Central dominance over the State. Apart from the overt dominance suggested by the emergency clause, it plays a less than subtle ‘blackmailing’ role on opposition Chief Ministers of state. The emergency clause allows the President to proclaim a crisis situation that requires the state to come

⁷⁴As quoted in G.S.Pathak, “Centre-State Relations - The Constitutional Basis” in B.L.Maheshwari, (ed.) *Centre - State Relations in the Seventies*, (Hyderabad: Administrative Staff College, 1973): p.115.

under total and direct rule of the Centre. The Parliament is authorized to make laws during this period on items contained in the state List. The state government is usually dismantled and new elections authorized. The decision of what constitutes a “crisis”, is also under the jurisdiction of Central authority, ostensibly the Governor of the state. It constitutes the most dramatic proclamation of Central authority over the state. The state of Tamil Nadu, ruled by non Congress parties since 1962, has been particularly vulnerable, since the Congress has ruled the Centre for the major part. With Presidential rule repeatedly imposed on the state and the Karunanidhi government dismantled in 1976 through charges of corruption, the state government has had to tread warily. The DMK government of Karunanidhi and its relation with Rajiv Gandhi’s Congress government during the 1980’s is a prime example. Having fought the elections on the twin stand of complete support for the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka and outrage at central government interference in state policies, Karunanidhi, on becoming Tamil Nadu’s Chief Minister, was deafeningly silent on these issues. Members of the DMK who were interviewed, admitted quite plainly that “Kalainjar (Karunanidhi) cannot afford to be kicked out a second time after so many years of *vanavas* (living in the wilderness)”, a direct reference to DMK’s electoral defeat between 1976 and 1988. Open opposition to the Centre is feasible only up to a point. The visible result is a projection of Centre state amity as far as possible. Cooperation with the Centre is both financially and politically desirable, until those rare occasions when there is mass outrage against Central policies.

Even within the legislative field, supposedly under state jurisdiction, there are strong checks that are usually imposed through the office of the state Governor. The Governor, ideally a non political, unbiased, nationally oriented individual, was meant to provide both moral guidance to a state and act as a trustworthy link between state and Central leaders. In practise, the Governor is usually seen as a Central lackey, who has the power to circumvent State decisions. ⁷⁵ Article 200 allows the Governor to subvert bills passed through the state legislature by either direct veto or indefinite delay tactics. The Congress nominated

⁷⁵The Governor, it is true, is biased toward the Centre. S/he is not only appointed by the Central government, but can be summarily dismissed, even without the levelling of any charges. This was the case in October 1980, for example, when Governor Prabhudas Patwari of Tamil Nadu was abruptly dismissed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Governors of Tamil Nadu have used Article 200 on many occasions. The thrust of the Centre is thereby imposed quite forcefully even in the so called autonomous sphere of legislating the state.

Cooperation, reliance or interdependence with other states is also emphasized, both in the Constitution and in the actual workings of the state government. River water is probably the most explicit exemplification of this. The largest river in Tamil Nadu is the Cauvery and its many tributaries which also affect the states of Karnataka, the Union Territory of Pondicherry and Kerala. Tamil Nadu with its 2,3355,705 hectares of agricultural land⁷⁶ and the majority of its population engaged in agriculture, requires a well developed system of irrigation. Amicable inter state cooperation over sharing of river water and the erecting of mutually useful dams is a reality that is only sporadically realized. With the result, the Centre is called upon to act as an inter state arbiter. Article 262 in the Constitution also allows the Parliament to set up "extra judicial tribunals" to officiate over water disputes. In Tamil Nadu primarily through the 'neutral' offices of the Centre, the Cauvery dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka has been periodically settled ever since 1924. More recently, it was the continued inability of the two state governments to reach a fresh agreement that led the suffering farmers, grouped together as the Cauvery Basin Ryots and Cultivators Irrigation Rights' Protection Society of Tamil Nadu, to independently approach the Central government, in search of a speedier solution.⁷⁷ Political squabbles over the sharing of waters, directly affecting each and every individual in Tamil Nadu and requiring third party arbitration has enhanced the Central government's role in the case of Tamil Nadu. The very concept that there is a larger body to turn to in the face of an impasse has registered far enough in the minds of the people. This is suggested by the spate of petitions to the Centre during water disputes and the instant media accusations on why the Centre is not arbitrating. Even the anti Centre party, the Dravida Kazhagam, is insouciant in its demand that "The river water dispute between the states in the South should be given priority by the Centre..".⁷⁸

⁷⁶Statistical Handbook of Tamil Nadu, p.177.

⁷⁷See "Trying Waters" in India Today, 31 May, 1990, p.35.

⁷⁸In the DK propoganda pamphlet, The Modern Rationalist, July 1989, Vol.XVI, No.11, p.14.

All India Services

The constitutional and institutional structure of the Indian whole, then, is both larger than the state structure and intermeshed with it. The relation is reinforced by the tremendous economic and ultimate legislative clout wielded quite unabashedly by Central authorities. Yet, apart from the dramatic emergency powers, none of the other powers are immediately visible. The state holds formal authority so that interference by hydra headed agencies of the Centre (Planning, Finance, Parliament, Water Advisory, Governorship etc.) is more hidden than blatant. A Chief Minister claiming interference by the Centre, is usually not on very solid grounds, unless there is dramatic proof, as in the case of a Presidential takeover.

An even less obvious interaction with a larger whole, taking place at the level of the individual Tamil, is in the field of employment. The attraction of the All India Services, specifically the Indian Administrative Services, the Indian Police Service, the nationalized banks, the armed forces, etc., for the educated or ambitious Tamilian, is powerful. Central government and quasi central government (i.e. based in Tamil Nadu) agencies not only carry a great deal of social prestige, but promise a life of security in terms of income, housing, medical benefits and pension. The number of Tamil citizens employed in just the Central government sector (not including the armed forces) was 416.69 thousand in 1987.⁷⁹

The numbers are not charged with much significance unless one understands the nature and determined ideology of these All India Services. The express motivating principle in all these organizations is one of nation building. As the chosen elite, these servicemen are trained to be the broad based Indian for whom regional identity is second only to an Indian one.

The tradition of these services dates to the British need for a reliable administrative “steel frame” and was first epitomized by the highly elitist Indian Civil Service (ICS). In the course of the fight for independence the Service was soon dismissed as an “imperialist tool”, even though the need for such a structure was openly acknowledged. When India

⁷⁹Statistical Handbook of Tamil Nadu, p.369.

gained independence, the ICS, was recast as the Indian Administrative Service. Other All India Services such as the police, agricultural, forest, educational, engineering, metallurgy et al, discredited because of British dominance, were also gradually resurrected within a decade of independence. ⁸⁰ Article 312 of the Constitution allows for their creation without formal consultation or consent by the state governments.

The Services lay down rigorous training schedules in which an all India outlook is given the same prominence as training for the job. Impartiality in dealing with the states is consciously fostered through the paying of salaries by the Central government and through frequent inter state postings. Trainees for the Administrative Services end their two year course work with a "*Bharat Darshan*" (roughly translated as 'a close study of India'). As R.Taub comments, the Indian bureaucrat has to "succeed in promoting agriculture, development, manufacturing..distributing fertilizers, producing steel...AND changing the social attitudes of the people..".⁸¹ The attraction of these services is apparent in the somewhat stunning statistics that emerge annually, as thousands of aspirants go through a gruelling series of examinations for the few hundred jobs available in the services. In 1989, for example, over four hundred thousand applicants applied for the 4522 jobs advertised by the Centre. ⁸²

The attraction of the Centre is also evident amongst the elite from diverse occupations. Successful Tamil politicians, eager for a wider stage, tend to make Delhi their base of operation. The President of India in the late 1980's, for example, was a Tamilian.

Conclusion

The concept of a polity so structured as to draw the Tamil people into a larger Indian whole is predicated on a crucial imperative: it is intrinsically rooted in material considerations. The larger whole exudes relatively less moral authority because of this imperative.

⁸⁰Even when they had been dissolved, the nationalist elite had bemoaned it as a "necessary but unquestionably retrograde" step, and resolved to reformulate them once the negative connotation was cleared. S.P.Aiyar, "The Political Aspect", in A.G.Noorani (ed.), *Centre - State Relations in India*, (Bombay: India Book House, 1972): p.198.

⁸¹R.Taub, *Bureaucrats Under Stress: Administrators and Administration in an Indian State*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969): p.36.

⁸²See *India Today*, 15 September, 1990, p.37.

Instead it offers overwhelming material benefits in the economic or occupational advancement, social standing and intellectual status of the individual. Correspondingly, it wields ultimate power in the realm of punitive sanctions. This also suggests that if the larger whole were to lose its power to attract or control, the polity would no longer register as an index of Tamil Indian identity. It is in this sense, a volatile descriptor.

Yet, in the Indian case, it is essential to study the strongly structured polity, because over time it has provided a “formidable acculturative machinery”.⁸³ It has established some degree of moral standing amongst stratas of the Tamil population. By ‘moral’ standing, I refer to the simple behavioral manifestation noted by F.G.Bailey, namely, the disinclination to “calculate at every step what people are getting out of it”.⁸⁴ To question the co existence of an Indian identity is not the rationally comfortable argument it may have posed five decades ago. It is incomprehensible to many. The consciousness of overlaps in religion, caste, culture, and history with a larger Indian whole has combined with the overpowering cooptive structure of the Indian polity to establish some degree of a “nationally oriented ethos”. Crises situations such as the 1962 Sino Indian war and the 1971 Bangladesh war have clearly corroborated the existence of this ethos. Support for the Indian government, despite the distance of the conflicts from the borders of Tamil Nadu, was spontaneous and unanimous. In the 1962 conflict, especially, when Tamil Nadu politics had reached their apogee of secessionist fervor, the outpouring of pro Indian sentiments immediately turned the secessionists into guilty traitors and almost overnight supporters of “Mother India”.⁸⁵

Viability

⁸³Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976): p.458.

⁸⁴F.G.Bailey, *Politics and Social Change: Orissa in 1959*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

⁸⁵Through widely publicized party resolutions, parliamentary speeches, and newspaper editorials, the DMK party relinquished “any secessionist activity, however right the cause”; “pledged total support to Prime Minister Nehru”; and “salute(d) all the soldiers” upkeeping Indian democracy in the war against China. The leader, Mr.Anna, urged public support for the war effort and complimented Mr.M.G.R. for “pledging a sum of Rs.75000 for the welfare of those holding the Indian democratic flag aloft...Others should emulate him..”. Translated from *Nam Nadu*, 24, 25, 26 October, 1962 and 5 November, 1962. I would like to thank Jayanthi Sudhakar and Sriram for their assistance in translations.

A nation is considered suitably viable for independent statehood when it possesses certain minimum requirements in population, territory, economy and resources. What constitutes that "minimum" is debatable.

The original state of Pakistan was created with two disparate chunks of land separated by almost one thousand miles of hostile Indian territory. It lasted as a state for nearly twenty five years. The state of Nauru is 8 sq. miles while the kingdom of Monaco barely covers 0.6 sq. miles. The population of Tuvalu and Nauru is less than 10,000 people. The per capita income of states like Kampuchea and Bhutan is less than \$100 per annum.⁸⁶ It is no wonder then, that the "minimum" requirements are more a matter of perception and insistence than rules graven in stone. Yet these are the exceptions. It is not far fetched to comment that a perception of inviolate and separate territory, enough to support a given population is a necessary prerequisite to independent statehood. The search for the land of Israel is the most dramatic example that comes to mind. The myriads of nations bereft of landed space, have voiced the importance of this factor many times over.

The Tamils of India have that space. Not only does the traditional Tamil homeland cover 50,803 sq. miles or 4% of the entire Indian land mass (the approximate size of Greece or Nicaragua), but it is unified and historically legitimate territory, rich in natural resources. Located along the south eastern coastline of India, directly open to the Indian Ocean, the people of Tamil Nadu have had relatively open access to trade and interaction with foreign lands since very ancient times. This probably accounts for the easy transference of the population from Tamil Nadu to the neighboring islands of Singapore, Malaysia, et al. The Tamils are probably one of the first seafaring groups in India. The deep sea harbor at Madras has ensured port facilities, so that extensive trade and communication facilities have existed for a long time. The inland geography contains no formidable natural barriers, so that intercourse with the neighboring states of Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh is easily accessible. Disputes over land boundaries has not been significant, as is the case with some other Indian states.

With the northern Gangetic plains having taken the brunt of of foreign invasions, Tamil

⁸⁶All figures are from *The Europa Year Book, 1986, A World Survey, Volume 1*, (England: Europa Publications, 1986).

Nadu has been relatively protected from repeated foreign control. The British sea merchants were probably the first “invaders” to enter India through the southern region. Ironically enough, British rule is still considered “beneficial” amongst a significant majority of Tamilians. The struggles for independence and the human tragedies it necessitated were centered in the northern regions, with relatively subdued support from Madras. The bloody exchange of Hindus and Muslims following partition, was news, rather than a living reality, in the distant region of the Tamils. In effect, Tamil Nadu has been a rather self contained unit with the choice of interacting with other Indian regions. The easy access to travel has allowed most Tamils to be well acquainted with neighboring regions and their people.

Climactically, the state of Tamil Nadu is not as well placed as the parallel state of Kerala. The Western Ghats, a range of low mountains dividing Kerala from Tamil Nadu, blocks the rain clouds forming from the Indian Ocean. Drought and water shortage is a constant nightmare for the people of Tamil Nadu. While farming is a precarious occupation, given the inconsistency in rainfall, the same precariousness is transmitted to political parties whose electoral successes are hitched to the successful provision of water.⁸⁷ This has affected Tamil state policy significantly. One, it is incumbent on the state to amicably cooperate with neighboring states in the sharing of river water. Two, the research in desalination plants to harness ocean water has necessitated a dependence on the central government for both technical expertise and heavy economic assistance. The Centre also helps in frequent drought situations.

In the ecoclimactic gradient, Tamil Nadu is listed as being both semi arid (30-60 cm. rainfall) and dry semi humid (60-120 cm. rainfall), compared to Kerala’s 400 cm. rainfall. This has encouraged a specific type of agriculture, focused primarily on intensive dry farming techniques and multiple cropping of drought resistant or drought escaping crops such as millets, pulses and wheat. The less arid areas produce groundnuts, cotton, sugarcane and rice. For all that, Tamil Nadu has to depend on other states in India for essential goods.

The state has at least five principal urban centers, with populations between 3,000,000

⁸⁷In one desperate situation, faced with acute water shortage and no immediate means to procure it, the then Chief Minister M.G.R. attempted to appease public outrage by providing free plastic buckets in lieu of the traditional heavy brass vessels, to aid people in hauling water from faraway storage wells and tanks.

(Madras) and 500,000 (Salem). An extensive network of railway lines connect villages with the bigger towns, cities, as well as the rest of India. There are also over one hundred thousand kilometers of motorable roads and state run road transportation numbers 15,020 buses, as of 1986, carrying an estimated sixty six hundred thousand commuters daily.⁸⁸ A total of four domestic airports have been constructed. The uncertainty of agriculture as an occupation has also instigated a tremendous growth of industry in the present decade. With little indigenous infrastructure, Tamil Nadu has maintained an open door policy. With the result, technical know how from all regions have stepped in to make the Madras hub a highly cosmopolitan area. Migrant or non Tamil workers account for an increasing percentage of the working population in urban Tamil Nadu. The central government has also sponsored important agencies, the most prominent being the nuclear project at Kalpakkam and an international airport at Madras. (There are six international airports in India). The Avadi company of Madras is the premier manufacturer of armored vehicles for the Indian army. It may be added here that once the infrastructure described above were to stabilize, it would only add to the physical viability of Tamil Nadu as an independent entity. The physical attributes are promising : contiguous and historically legitimate land area; a large population (371 persons per square kilometer); a reasonably sound, though not wealthy, economy and a potentially strong industrial infrastructure.

Where the viability factor is compromised is in the crucial area of perception and defenses. The perception of viability has never been accepted or even articulated amongst the Tamil public. In the throes of the 1950's secessionist movement, a complete break with India was never rigorously suggested by even the most ardent Tamil nationalist. Most so called secessionist parties wanted more autonomy rather than full sovereignty. The We Tamil Movement of 1958 (Nam Tamilar Iyakkam) had initially demanded sovereignty for Tamil Nadu, the Tamil areas in adjoining states and even Tamil Sri Lanka. It never received much support and was soon absorbed by the more mainstream DMK party. Another instance was E.V.K.Sampath of the DMK party who broke away and formed the Tamizhar Desiya Katchi in 1961 with the intention of calling for a sovereign state. In practise, the party demanded

⁸⁸R.Thandavan, *AIADMK: Political Dynamics in Tamil Nadu*, (Madras: TN Academy of Political Science, 1987): p.200.

only the “right to secede” and within three years were obliged to merge with the all India Congress Party! The Dravida Kazhagam of 1944 also listed sovereign independence as one of its aims, but was explicitly a social reformist party with a priority in abolishing caste and raising the position of non Brahmans. The clause for independence soon disappeared. The DMK of 1949 aimed at a separate “Dravidasthan” or “Dravida Nadu” comprising all four South Indian states. Not only were the other South Indian states reluctant to associate with this aim, but the surge of Indian patriotism in Tamil Nadu following the 1961 Chinese war quickly persuaded the party to publicly drop the demand.

In the light of India’s immense army, a militant break cannot be reasonably entertained. Tamil Nadu has no independent defenses of its own, save the police force, which again, is headed by an all India elite. Traditionally, the Tamils have never been a very martial community, as have the Sikhs or Rajputs of India. Their numbers in the Indian armed forces is one of the lowest. Even these figures are misleading, in the sense that a majority of Tamils opt for the indirect fighting arms : engineering, supplies, signals as opposed to infantry, artillery and armored. There is a definite stigma to being “South Indian” in the army rather than being a Jat, Naga, Gorkha, Sikh, Rajput or Maratha, some of the more traditionally accepted “fighting” groups. Pacifism, as a group stereotype, seems to be accepted internally as well. One fiery Tamil journalist in Madras claimed to be “fed up with my people” because they were so “passive” and would not “fight for anything like the North Indians”.⁸⁹ Given this, the perception of a viable independent nation for Tamils is both localized and sporadic. Behaviorally, this has been evident in the short lived, essentially vulnerable calls for independence that seem to spark only limited sections of the nation for limited periods of time. Even the calls are presented more as leverages for specific demands rather than unilateral, unconditional, unabashed bids for sovereignty.

The perception of viability, as argued in an earlier section, is also continually kept at bay by the powerful cooptive energies of the Indian ‘structured polity’, that clearly aims at establishing a deep and rooted Tamil-Indian identity. The ‘cross cutting’ cleavages that both define the Tamil nation and prevent it from agglomerating, is exploited by this structure to

⁸⁹Interview, Mr.S. of The Hindu (Newspaper), August, 1989.

ensure “a degree of integrative strength (deriving) from the very complexity of its cleavages” in that Tamil “cultural segmentation” does not become “aggregative”.⁹⁰

In sum, the uniqueness of the Tamil nation would appear at first glance to present a salient, cohesive, clearly differentiated nation. However, the apparent homogeneity is compromised by two powerful schisms. On the one hand, interloping and tightly interconnected Indian culture, mores, history, and religion loop in and within the Tamil ethos so that the potential for establishing an absolute sense of uniqueness is obfuscated. Secondly, post independent Indian governments have manifestly exploited this complexity, by creating a strong network of cooptive structures that aim to feed directly into the legitimation of a dual Tamil-Indian identity. Keeping this in mind, the following chapter aims at pushing through the obfuscation and establishing those groups within the Tamil nation that constitute potentially different behavioral groupings.

⁹⁰Crawford Young argues that in both Nigeria and India as a whole, differences cut across and against each other so that the very complexity of these differences work against consolidation along any one line of commonality. See his *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976): p.324. In the field of social anthropology, Margaret Mead, in her study of New Guinea groups, observed that the larger communities were integrated because various loyalties contradicted each other “so that the man who is one’s formal foe today - qua group membership - is one’s formal ally tomorrow..”. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, July 1937, p.10.

CHAPTER IV

GROUPS WITHIN THE TAMIL NATION

Introduction

When U.S. society, barely two centuries old, can ferment a population that has to contend with psychological race barriers, class warfare, and religious fringe groups; when the origins of social strains such as the break up of traditional family values and the anomie of urban dwellers seem to 'appear' without any clear announcement; when contemporary generations assume current reality has been perennial reality so that the United States has always been and will continue to be 'responsible' for maintaining and encouraging democratic ideals in the world; when all these mass beliefs, churning social convulsions and received truths can be achieved in the cosmically short span of two centuries of American existence, the effort of over two thousand centuries of existence in the Indian sub continent must create a veritable concatenation of nuances, far too imploded to categorize in any definitive way.

Yet, with all the necessary hubris of the scholar, we sally forth through past ages and condense the centuries and the multitudes, into distinct eras and societies. We then 'explain' our condensations with the relatively frail tools of communication and illumination that we possess. We say, to take a uniquely Indian example, that "The caste system grew from a Hobbesian desire for security"¹ or "The caste system was created from occupational hierarchies"² or "The caste system was the elite's way of regulating or exploiting society".³ All true, but all partial truths attempting to grasp the far larger whole of human interaction over ages.

By the very attempt at synthesis, the intricate, incremental, non planned activities of humans in a society are, in a sense, discarded to be replaced by a retrospective, rational,

¹Discussion, Professor John W.Chapman.

²John C. Nesfield, *A Brief View of the Caste System of the Northwest Provinces and Oudh*, (Allahabad: Government Press, 1885).

³B. Moore goes further and attributes it to generic human "satisfaction in making other people suffer". See Barrington Moore, Jr. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966): pp.338.

perspective that sees order and pattern in that which combusted with no thought for order or pattern. Individual action, undeniably chaotic as individual action, forms patterns to our retrospective eyes, only because each individual act within a societal structure, appears to broadly aspire toward similar basic ends, or what psychologists such as Abraham Maslow were able to present as a “hierarchy of needs”.⁴ Group formations in the coalescing light of such needs appear inevitable and we commit no great fallacy then, to single out groups that seem relevant to our observations. The need for order and the reality of interdependence, through the chaos of centuries of existence, have forged groups of class solidarity, caste solidarity, regional solidarity and other forms of solidarity that thrust forward in an easily discernible way.

It may be noted here that the perception of groups within a larger community could be defined along any number of criteria, both allotted and self perceived. To distinguish a group, as a group, purely on the basis of self perceptions may be far too abstract an approach,⁵ except perhaps in the realm of literature where perceptual expression is the only criterion of boundary differences. For allotted groups, the initial question is all important in the separating of group classifications. In North American society, for example, the Wasp, so primary an index for the sociologist and the old town marriage broker is tertiary to the feminist for whom gender is the prime concern or the lung cancer specialist for whom smokers are the relevant category. The classification, is to that extent, consciously maneuvered by the classifier.

In the previous chapter, the existence of groups within the Tamil nation was suggested. The objects against which differences amongst the community would manifest themselves was also indicated. This was contained in the Tamil sense of personal identity with regard to culture, language, historical consciousness, religion and the extent to which this awareness was politicized. An understanding of why these groups would differ in their perception of

⁴For an insight into the development of Maslow’s theories, see Edward Hoffman, *The Right to be Human: A Biography of Abraham Maslow*, (J.P.Tarcher, 1988).

⁵In a study of the Swat Pathans of Afghanistan, F. Barth attempts to study identity through self perceived ‘boundaries’ alone. The study reveals both the attractiveness of the approach in theory and the difficulties inherent in the approach. See Frederik Barth, *Political Leadership Among Swat Pathans*, (New York: Humanities Press, 1965). Also, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the social organization of cultural difference*, (Boston Little, Brown, 1969).

Tamil identity was not elaborated. I believe it to be a necessary maneuver, if we are to make coherent, the seeming incoherence of splintered Tamil reaction during a direct threat to their personal identity as a nation.

The question of identity has for long been classified by the dictates of position. While not baldly subscribing to the view that a man is the passive product of his environment, I am asserting that, to a significant extent, a Tamil will construct his sense of being Tamil, depending on his relative position in society based on caste, class, literacy and locational environment.

Unlike the more abstruse studies of human identity as a whole, the study of Tamil identity is less ambitious and more verifiable, in that it relates to being a Tamil by virtue of speaking a certain language, adhering to certain customs and being aware of a specific culture. These are fixed points against which the intensity and persistence of Tamil identity can be gauged. These are also fixed points around which positional attributes are clearly calibrated.

A peasant maturing in a remote village of Tamil Nadu, working in isolation from dawn to dusk in his fields, is bound to evince a degree of intensity toward the 'Tamilness' in his identity that is palpably different from the Tamil literate factory worker in Madras City, competing for jobs against English literate Malayalis from the neighboring state of Kerala. Cognition of language as more than a means of communication, the need to propagate language as not only unique but superior to all else and the inextricable linking of the physicality of language to the metaphysicality of emotional possessiveness over the language are more complex manifestations of Tamil identity, that the isolated peasant has, by virtue of location and position, not yet been motivated to pursue. On the other hand, the rigorous dictates of Tamil caste and cultural hierarchy, familiar to all the inmates of small and isolated villages, are less affective for Tamil urbanites forced into the relatively anonymous span of city life.

The immense diversity of life experiences stemming from positional attributes, then, assumes primary responsibility in explaining differing perceptions of Tamil identity amongst the community as a whole. By drawing on the demographic composition of Tamil Nadu

and on previous micro case studies of Tamil regions and personalities, the relevance of Tamil identity and the salience it acquires as a function of group characteristics, shall be elaborated. By 'positional attributes' I refer to location (rural/urban); class (independent / government occupations as well as levels of literacy in the urban centers and land owning/non land owning in the rural areas); and caste (Brahman, Forward Non Brahman, Backward Non Brahman, Adi Dravidas — specifically in the rural areas). Each of these indices translates as an easily observable cluster of group identity (not solidarity), by virtue of their common needs, functions and experiences.

Rural Urban Distinction

Primary among them is the rural/urban divide. While the rural population in any country is different from its urban counterpart, the divide in the Indian context is exaggerated in many respects. Urbanization not only spells modernization as it does all over the world, it also bears the additional connotation of Westernization; i.e. ways of life that are not merely different but threatening or alien to traditional culture. A capitalist economy overtakes subsistence level economies of barter and exchange of services. Social order deriving from normative caste rankings and localized authority in the villages, is suddenly dispersed by the abstract judicial and legal dictates of remote urban based commandments. ⁶ The wealth and class status accruing from land and produce, is redefined so that the symbolists who translate the new century as entrepreneurs, lawyers, technicians, engineers and bankers, become the newly wealthy. Languages, other than those spoken at home, become a tool and symbol of relative superiority. Alien forms of dress, transport, architecture, entertainment and food are likewise tokens of not only difference, but also of advancement and social gradations. The city demands all of the above changes. While the divide is forced by overlaps in the Greater Tradition ⁷ of culture, language, remembered tradition, religion

⁶A revealing account of this aspect can be found in : Lloyd. I. and Susanne Hoerber Rudolph, "Barristers and Brahmans in India: legal culture and social change," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. VIII, No.1, (October 1965). As they state in the article: "The village tribunal, because it resides among the disputing parties and finds its own life touched by their discontents, is less anxious to find "truth" and give "justice" than to abate conflict and promote harmony." (p.28). Village justice is particularistic rather than procedural and people are judged according to their position in society.

⁷See Milton Singer, "The Great Tradition in a Metropolitan Center: Madras," *Journal of American*

and familial links, in the context of this study, it is the disparities that are significant.

Caste

The relevance of caste identity in both the rural and urban setting is essential to the understanding of attitudinal differences amongst the Tamils, even though the ways in which caste exerts an influence, differs in both contexts.

To focus the quality of caste distinctions to the needs of this study, it becomes necessary to question how the abstract distinctions in caste perception are manifested in the realities of linguistic, cultural, political and attitudinal life of the Tamil people. We have already outlined in the earlier chapter how a sense of uniqueness, awareness as a group, political participation, vulnerability to larger group identities, and perception of viability as an independent nation are both logical and empirically proven imperatives to strongly nationalistic behavior.

Amongst the caste groups in Tamil Nadu, a Tamil villager who is literate or communicates only in the Tamil language; who is consciously aware that this language is unique to him and no other and is either proud of that distinction or threatened by it; who lives in a complex of idiosyncratic Tamil rules and social codes that make all other ways of life uncomfortable, objectionable, or morally reprehensible; who perceives the Tamil nation as synonymous with a single religious code to which his spirit and conscience are in rhythm with all other Tamils; who is aware of his group as a corporate whole distinct from all others and worthy of conscious political support; who is untouched by the material gains or psychological advantages accruing to larger-than-Tamil group identity and who fervently perceives the Tamil nation as being both capable and deserving of independent statehood — such a heuristic prototype epitomizes the potential for the strongest strain of nationalistic behavior.

Deriving primarily from intensive case studies of individual Tamil villages conducted by previous researchers, a later section will study whether the above stereotype exists in the villages of Tamil Nadu. It is a well established fact that the caste system colors all

Folklore, Vol.71 (1958) : 347-387.

aspects of the social and economic life of the rural population. The extent to which caste dynamics and caste-generated perceptions are able to suggest such a stereotype, will also be discussed.

This does not mean that urban Tamil Nadu stands in direct contrast, as a community that has sloughed off all caste consciousness. Caste distinctions continue to exist, but are critically altered by differences in caste interpretation.

In the urban setting, the social control of caste is perforce dissipated. Close and random mass housing, skill based employment, and the general dynamics of urban living, make the distinguishing of castes manifestly difficult. Phenotypic traits are increasingly abstruse, even though Brahmins are popularly described as being 'fairer' or 'better featured' (i.e. sharp nosed), while the bottom rung of Adi Dravidas are described as 'very dark' and 'snub nosed'. Claims of being able to recognize a Brahmin or Adi Dravida by face alone are confidently asserted by most Tamils. Even assuming their confidence is warranted, the hundreds of intermediate jati/castes⁸ that crowd the hierarchy are preeminently a function of differing rituals, customs, and ways of life rather than any phenotypicity. Moreover, the social clout of caste ranking lacks the necessary vigor in the context of urban life and interaction. In personal interaction, it renews its old force only at the time of finding marriage partners. Where the difference in caste interpretation turns critical, is in the realm of democratic politics.

While caste in the villages, is first and foremost, a social phenomenon, controlling personal interaction between villagers, caste recognition in the cities has been translated, primarily as a political instrument, a potent means of "aggregating support".⁹ Appealing to a single caste community has never worked for any political party, who face the risk of alienating all other caste communities if they were to do so. On the other hand, appealing to caste leaders to motivate their caste members, forms a made-to-order bank of voters with

⁸While the word 'caste' has encoded the Indian system in the majority of studies done so far, this study found that the word 'jati' is far more meaningful in the context of Tamil Nadu. Jati, for lack of a better translation, is roughly defined as a sub or sub sub caste denomination. The same rules of endogamy, purity, hierarchy, and rejection apply to jatis. However, they are typically smaller units limited to specific regions. Hundreds of jatis can fall under a single caste group.

⁹Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., "Varieties of Political Behavior Among Nadars of Tamilnad," *Asian Survey*, Vol. VI, No.11 (November 1966), 614-621.

deep and profound pre existing ties and a ready index of common identity. The political efficacy of caste, thereby, has prevented the system from being swallowed by the egalitarian ethos of urban life, as earlier rationalists had predicted.

Class

In the Indian context as a whole, as well as the Tamil case in particular, caste and class have traditionally been intimately associated, if not synonymous. In the rural sector, Brahmins and Forward Non Brahmins were inevitably the landlords of the village, Backward Non Brahmins were the tenants and cultivators, while Adi Dravidas worked as agricultural laborers. This synonymity continues, but with a difference. Urbanization, democratic institutions and alternatives to the time worn equations of rural systems, have created fissures and potential chasms between caste and class.

While Brahmins continue to be landlords in the village and bureaucrats in the city, they also constitute a noticeable portion of the urban unemployed and the dependent, highly poor priests of the village. Forward Non Brahmins tussle with upwardly mobile Backward Non Brahmins for acquisition of lands in villages where land has become a market commodity only over the last few decades. They compete in urban settings where literacy dominates over traditional privilege, even though the cumulative effect of past suppressions provides a natural bias for the Forward Non Brahmin to acquire new literacy skills with far greater ease than a Backward Non Brahmin. The bias is even more pronounced in the case of the Adi Dravidas who continue to be concerned with the business of getting three square meals a day and are unable to exploit any alternative life systems as a group, so far. Yet, individual caste members do break free and prosper, portents of change yet to come. The point is that class is no longer a natural corollary to caste even though, at this point of Tamil history, they continue to be intimately linked.¹⁰

An adjunct to class and urban occupation is contained in the level of individual literacy. Government jobs, the most prestigious urban occupation, invariably require specific literacy

¹⁰It is possible that they will continue to be linked, in that caste groups that experience economic advancement as a group have been able to raise their caste status as well, but this is possible only over a couple of generations and through fortuitous political circumstances as well.

levels including bilingualism. High paying government jobs require high levels of professional education, just as low level literate Tamils are invariably eligible for low paying jobs. In contrast, within the independent occupations, formal education and bilingualism are by definition, not necessary attributes of the job.

Literacy posits a relatively clear indication of the individual Tamils' predisposition toward Tamil uniqueness and level of awareness as a group, just as affiliation to the government presupposes a set of attitudes toward state structure and institutions (the structured polity) that is variant from Tamils in independent occupations. Together, literacy and occupational type, are reliable descriptors of attitudinal predispositions.

To avoid complexity and the sense of random groupings, below is a presentation of groups in Tamil Nadu distinguished by their rural/urban location; by their caste affiliations; and by their socio-economic status as coded by literacy and occupational type in the cities and land ownership in the villages. The figures frame the attitudinal founts of the Tamil community that make predispositions and differing levels of nationalistic behavior amongst them, a coherent phenomenon.

Figure 2: Heuristic groups in rural Tamil Nadu

Class \ Caste	Brahmin	Forward non-Br.	Backward non-Br.	Adi Dravida
Land Owners	1	2	3	4
Peasants	5	6	7	8

Heuristic Groups in Rural Tamil Nadu:

1. Landowning Brahmin
2. Landowning Forward Non Brahmin
3. Landowning Backward Non Brahmin
4. Landowning Adi Dravida
5. Peasant Brahmin
6. Peasant Forward Non Brahmin
7. Peasant Backward Non Brahmin
8. Peasant Adi Dravida.

Figure 3: Heuristic groups in urban Tamil Nadu

Class \ Caste	Government literate	Independent literate	Government illiterate	Independent illiterate
High Caste	1	2	3	4
Low Caste	5	6	7	8

Heuristic Groups in Urban Tamil Nadu:

1. High caste, literate in governmental occupation
2. High caste, literate in independent occupation
3. High caste, illiterate in government occupation
4. High caste, illiterate in independent occupation
5. Low caste, literate in governmental occupation
6. Low caste, literate in independent occupation
7. Low caste, illiterate in governmental occupation
8. Low caste, illiterate in independent occupation.

The above prototypes are collations from broadly expected attitudinal founts, derivative of what DuBois referred to as the “modes of adaptation... to exigencies of the same institutions in the same society”.¹¹ The ‘exigencies’ of caste, class, location, occupation and the consequent adaptation of Tamils to these ‘exigencies’ throws up certain profitable heuristic stereotypes that, in accordance with Weberian method, “yield knowledge about actors’ orientation for social action.....for the purposes of the investigator”.¹²

Rural Tamil Nadu

Caste in the Rural Sector:

The rural Tamil prototype, as described in a number of intensive studies by sociologists and anthropologists,¹³ is defined most critically by caste, and increasingly, class.

A defined position in the caste hierarchy, decides, for the majority of rural Tamils, where s/he will live, the type of dwelling s/he will construct, the category of job s/he will work at, the economic bracket within which s/he will choose a spouse, the food s/he will eat, the dress s/he will wear, sometimes even the language s/he will speak, the places s/he will worship in, the deities s/he will worship, the areas where s/he will bathe or draw water from, and finally, the place and manner s/he will be buried or cremated. It is, to put it

¹¹Kathleen E. Gough, “The Social Structure of a Tanjore Village”. In McKim Marriott (ed.), *Village India: Studies in the little community*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p.105.

¹²Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: the political economy of the Indian state*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.335.

¹³The studies contributing to this analysis are : Dagfinn Sivertsen, *When Caste Barriers Fall: a study of social and economic change in a South Indian village*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963); Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class, and Power: changing patterns of stratification in a Tanjore village*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965); as well as his *Castes, Old and New: essays in social structure and social stratification*, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1969); Marshall M. Bouton, *Agrarian Radicalism in South India*, (1985); Robert L. Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: the political culture of a community in change*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); David Goodman Mandelbaum, *Society in India: Continuity and Change, Vol.1; Change and Continuity, Vol.2*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); C.T.Rajan, *Survey Report on Village Aladipatti, Tamil Nadu*, (Census of India, 1981, Part X-C, Series 20); Joan P.Mencher, *Agriculture and Social Structure in Tamil Nadu: past origins, present transformations and future prospects*, (North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press,1978); A.Aiyappan and K.Mahadevan, *Population and Social Change in an Indian Village: a quarter century of development in Managadu Village, Tamil Nadu*, (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1988); and Kathleen Gough, *Rural Change in Southeast India, 1950’s to 1980*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

mildly, a critical predeterminant of life in village Tamil Nadu. ¹⁴

While the opportunity to shelve caste weightings by either emigrating to cities or fomenting social revolutions is always open, the proclivity to do so is curtailed to some extent by the essentially risk - averse, status quoist, and perhaps, emotionally necessary, ways of life prevalent in the more than fourteen thousand villages of Tamil Nadu. The motivation to completely shelve caste identity sometimes appears as superfluous as questioning the choice of bats to sleep 'upside down' when they could sleep 'right' side up. For the most part, living 'right side up' is simply not considered by caste members themselves. ¹⁵ The norms of conduct in a rural environment are clarified through so many centuries of insistence that behavior in accordance with such norms is surprisingly consistent. Caste laws are obeyed not as slave laws were obeyed even though the material condition of low caste members appears as willfully degrading as that suffered by slave communities. The caste system is accepted with much the same curious, insidious, power that appoints and legitimates the female as nurturer — as a fact of life and as a moral and cosmic truth.

So, while anti caste movements have ebbed and flowed through the currents of Tamil history, a pure negation of caste hierarchy has never been accomplished or even approximated. What has succeeded instead, is either a dilution of caste rigidities, as in the case of Muslim conversions as well as intellectual conversions through progressive movements like the Theosophical Society and the Arya Samaj Society; or a promotion of so called "anti" casteists to higher caste status. This synchronicity of anti caste movements to caste promotion lobbies is recorded by the Non Brahmin to Forward Non Brahmin movement; the Shanar (low caste toddy tappers) to Nadar (middle caste Non Brahmin) caste movement; the low caste Maravans and Kallans of Tanjore to the higher caste Ahamudiyas; the Ahamudiyas, in turn, to Forward Non Brahmin Vellalas; the low caste Padayachis movement to establish Vanniya or Kshatriya warrior caste status and so on. The recurrence of this dynamic is

¹⁴ Aaron Widavsky and Karl Drake offer the proposition that all hierarchies gain legitimacy through what they term, a "labyrinth of normative constraints and controls on behavior". The hold of caste in rural Tamil Nadu is entirely normative, which is what makes it such a significant marker of individual values. See "Theories of Risk Perception", *Daedalus*, (Fall 1990): p.44.

¹⁵ Upgrading of caste status is, on the other hand, a constant consideration, pursued by every means available.

even recorded in a Tamil epigram which says : “Kallan, Maravan, Ahamudaliyan, mella mella wandu Vellalar anar. Vellalar ahi Mudaliyar shonnar”; roughly translated as: “The Kallan, Maravan, and Ahamudaliyan become Vellalars. Having become Vellalars, they call themselves Mudaliyars”.¹⁶

The principle of hierarchy as the defining mode of social order is almost unanimously accepted. The legitimacy of the caste system accrues from this. The non static element of the system derives from the fact that positions within the hierarchy are constantly reinterpreted or renegotiated. As Mandelbaum¹⁷ finds in his study, there is no “single or completely calibrated hierarchy”, just as there is no “absolute bottom” or “absolute top” to the hierarchy. With changing conditions or changing fortunes, groups inch up and down the caste ladder. In addition, each group is able to appoint a group that is deemed lower than itself. Amongst the lowest Scheduled castes or Adi Dravidas of Tamil Nadu, the two dominant jatis, the Pallas and the Paraiyas, look down on each other and maintain separate areas for accommodation and water supply.

To create one’s own role in life or treat life as interpretive rather than hidebound duty, is incomprehensible or unsettling to many of the villagers of Tamil Nadu, both high caste and low caste. Caste, as researchers like the Rudolphs found out, can be an emotional necessity, impossible to dislodge with the seemingly absurd logic of equality or freedom.¹⁸

In the Tamil village studied by Kathleen Gough,¹⁹ not only were low caste members not permitted in the high caste section of the village, but high caste members were banned from low caste residences, in the fear that they would cause disease, famine, or sexual sterility in the area. Beteille’s study of a Tamil village supports this observation. Adi Dravidas, in the village he studied, warned of the breaking of their earthenware pots and impotency in their families, if high caste members were to enter their community.²⁰ When the egalitarian, anti

¹⁶Quoted in Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class, and Power: changing patterns of stratification in a Tanjore village*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), p.98.

¹⁷David Goodman Mandelbaum, *Society in India: Change and Continuity*, Vol.2, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

¹⁸Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967).

¹⁹Kathleen Gough, “The Social Structure of a Tanjore Village”, in McKim Marriott (ed.) *Village India: studies in the little community*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p.50.

²⁰Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore*

Brahmin, Dravidian movement was brought to the village by urban based agitationists, the villagers studied by Sivertsen treated it as a passing “drama troupe” and resumed their way of segregated, interdependent living once the ‘troupe’ had passed on. The message of exploitation and revolution struck very few chords in the majority of Tamil Nadu’s villages at that point of time.²¹

Needless to add, the situation is not a static one. While caste has proven to be a hardy structure, the use and interpretation of the structure varies in significant ways, which will be outlined a little later in the chapter.

For now it may help to remember that a full thirty three million Tamils according to the 1981 census, or over 68 percent of the Tamil population, continue to exist in the acutely caste conscious environs of the village. Association with, and recognition of the immediate caste/jati group is primary, simply because it fixes “the identity of the individual in a special way”²² that is continually reinforced by the relatively isolated, tradition - oriented ethos of rural existence.

Stereotypically, the lowest caste villager will be economically poor, illiterate, occupied in a non independent laboring profession and able to communicate only in the native Tamil dialect of the region s/he lives in. All these characteristics are, of course, qualifiable. In J.Pandian’s study of a village in Tamil Nadu,²³ of the twenty one major jati groups, only nine jatis showed congruence between economic wealth and social status. High caste members with religious status such as that enjoyed by the Brahmins in the Hindu community and the Labbays in the Muslim community, continued to hold their superior status, despite low economic standing. Similarly, low caste Hindus who converted to Christianity, were some of the first economically impoverished groups to gain English literacy offered by the missionaries, and thereby secure highly prestigious urban jobs. These, however, are the exceptions.

Village, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).

²¹D. Sivertsen, **When Caste Barriers Fall: A Study of Social and Economic Change in a South Indian Village**, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963).

²²Andre Beteille, **Castes: Old and New, Essays in Social Structure and Social Stratification**, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1969).

²³J.Pandian **Caste, Nationalism and Ethnicity: An Interpretation of Tamil Cultural History and Social Order**, (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1987): p.93.

For the majority, the lowest caste members of Tamil Nadu are marked by illiteracy, poverty, dependency, and low social status. It might be added here that while a clear causal link between caste and literacy or caste and poverty is hard to establish, it is no accident that caste status is synoptic of a cluster of related characteristics. The attempt to raise low caste status by "upgrading" rituals or through economic advantage has been ruthlessly suppressed all over Tamil Nadu, so that very few caste groups have been successful as a community, to rise above their status at birth. Only sustained economic advantage by the caste group as a whole, coupled with massive political pressure, has succeeded in raising caste status. The clearest example of this is provided by the well documented case of the Nadar caste. Starting off as traditionally low caste toddy tappers, they gradually distinguished themselves as preeminently middle caste members over a prolonged period of one hundred and fifty years, through a sustained combination of economic and political clout generated by the community as a whole. The rise of one of their members, Kamaraj Nadar, as both a politician of national, all-Indian stature and as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, glossed the legal rise of the community with social approval as well.²⁴

In most other cases, where low caste members have attempted to raise their status without the necessary accompaniment of economic clout or political weight, they have been deterred by higher caste members, through both legal and violent action. In the notorious breast cloth controversy and riots of the nineteenth century, women of low caste were barred from covering their chests, a sign of upper caste status. While all restrictions were legally overruled, the women continued to be socially harassed by upper caste members.²⁵ In Kilvenmani, a village in Tamil Nadu, forty four low caste Tamil laborers were brutally murdered by high caste landowners who resented their demand for higher wages, a threat to their heretofore absolute authority.²⁶ Low caste villagers in many cases continue to be

²⁴For an exhaustive account of the evolution of the community, see Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., *The Nadars of Tamilnad: the Political Culture of a Community in Change*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

²⁵The local feudal chief's final concession was that the women could cover "their bosoms in any manner whatever, but not like women of higher castes". See L.I. Rudolph and Susanne H. Rudolph, "The Political Role of India's Caste Associations", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. XXXIII, 1960, p.10.

²⁶See account in Correspondent, "Tamil Nadu: Gentlemen Killers of Kilvenmani," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1973 : 926-28.

barred from living in brick or tiled homes, even if they are able to afford it. In a survey of one hundred and forty eight Tamil villages, it was found that one hundred and thirty six of them denied open entry into temples; one hundred and fifteen maintained segregated drinking wells; and thirty six had restricted entry into hotels. ²⁷

For the low caste villager, then, awareness of the jati group is primary. S/he is not allowed to shelve that identity and does not have the means or wherewithal to control or change it. The inculcation of Tamil culture, religion, language is effected through the crucible of jati rather than race, ethnicity, region or any larger grouping, in the day to day working of this portion of rural Tamil Nadu. Much like the control of religion as defined by Geertz ²⁸, jatis provide *“a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence, and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”*

However, the lowest jatis among the Adi Dravida caste are the only strata of society that continue to provide a pure example of the absolute conjunction of low caste with low economic means, illiteracy and social degradation. For the rest, the dictates of class, as defined by wealth and opportunity, are rapidly blurring the hegemony of caste so that the picture is far more differentiated and certainly more complex than it was even five decades ago. In deference to this emerging reality, caste and class will be presented as linked variables of identity, rather than synonymous descriptors, so that we have a truer translation of social reality in the rich and poor Brahmin as well as the rich and poor Adi Dravida rather than the stereotypical rich Brahmin and poor Adi Dravida.

Class in Rural Tamil Nadu:

As evident in diversely collected data on Tamil Nadu over the years, agriculture is the predominant occupation of rural Tamil Nadu. While it is true that some degree of diversification is being introduced in the form of local trades and transport agencies as

²⁷Sharad Patil, “Should ‘Class’ be the Basis for Recognizing Backwardness?”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 December, 1990: p.2738.

²⁸Clifford Geertz, as quoted in Mark Jurgensmeyer, “The Logic of Religious Violence”; David C. Rapoport (ed.) *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988): p.191.

well as government administrative centers, a significant portion of these occupations are agriculture related or ultimately dependent on the landowners. This is borne out by various micro studies of the region as well as macro statistical profiles such as the one given below:

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Table 1: Percentage Distribution of males and females working in rural Tamil Nadu: 1977-1978.

Gender \ Occupation	Agriculture and allied activities	Non-agricultural activities*
Male	73.9	26.1
Female	83.6	16.4

* mining, quarrying, manufacturing, utilities, construction, trade, hotels, transport, financing and services.

The index of wealth continues to be anchored solely to the ownership of land. In addition, land ownership suggests a greater degree of personal power as well as greater affordability of variant lifestyles such as the choice of literacy or migration to cities as absentee landlords. The quality of absolute dependence, most overtly conveyed by differences in wealth, differentiates the landowning class from the non landowning class, hereafter referred to as the peasant class.

Both the term landowning and peasant are necessarily gross in that they ignore variations within the class. In the villages studied by Kathleen Gough, almost 36% of the villagers who owned some amount of land, did not exceed plots over 1.5 acres. The grandiose power, wealth, and choice capability connoted by the term 'land lord' does not necessarily accrue to these owners of land, even if it does establish their relative independence over the large percentage that owns absolutely no property.

It is hoped that the grossness of class description will be evened out by the linking of class variations to caste variations. As stated earlier, the Brahmin or Forward Non Brahmin

²⁹ Adapted from "Non Agricultural Employment in Rural India : Evidence at a Disaggregate Level", by S.Mahendra Dev, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 14, 1990: p.1528 - 1529.

landowner has historically been a landlord, just as the petty landowners usually comprise members from the Backward Non Brahmin jatis. Two separate studies of two different regions within Tamil Nadu offered similiar data as seen in the table below:

Table 2: Size (in acres) of land holdings and caste ownership.

Study \ Size	below 2	2-4.9	5-9.9	10-14.9	above 15
Sivertsen, 1958	45B, 61NB, 16AD	7B, 11NB, 3AD	7B, 3NB, 1AD	2B	2B
Gough, 1976	9B, 17NB, 8AD	12B, 7NB	9B, 1AD	2B	1B

Key: B=Brahmin; NB= non-Brahmin; AD= Adi Dravida

In the rural sector, caste and class are closely connected. While there are studies that show this linkage to be increasingly inconsistent, the connection still holds as generally true, as suggested by the similiarity of data collected in the two studies (Table 2) despite the fact that almost twenty years and umpteen legal land redistributive measures separated the two researcher's findings. The primarily agricultural and agriculture related occupations defining rural existence, hoist the ownership of land as the prime index of class superiority. In various studies,³⁰ it was found that wealth without land ownership, such as that enjoyed by gold merchants and cloth traders was characterized by social prestige minus any power. The lack of control in dispensing jobs and all that it entailed such as arbitration of disputes and feudal loyalty, deprived these rich traders of social efficacy so that even their caste status was ambiguous. They came to be regarded by the faintly derogatory term of 'left handed castes'. So, not only does the owning of large acreage provide economic clout, it also generates local political power in terms of decisions like whom to hire, how many to be hired, crops to grow and so on. Large land ownership also implies an upwardly mobile population that is able to afford the modern luxury of education, as well as presupposing

³⁰Mattison Mines, *The Warrior Merchants: textiles, trade, and territory in south India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Michael Moffat, *An Untouchable Community in South India*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

some linkage with the city through travel, trade or monetary transactions.

Obversely, the peasant or laborer class is dependent in varying degrees on the hiring capacity of landowners. Generational poverty has rendered the most dependent section of this class as highly vulnerable and incapable of economic back ups. Literacy, alternate occupations, and urban migration are therefore theoretical, rather than viable alternatives to their way of living. Between these two extremes, range a diverse mix of classes that cannot be classified as either land owning (with its accompanying connotation of absolute wealth) or peasant (with its connotation of absolute dependence). Unlike the agricultural dynamics of wheat-growing regions in India, the paddy fields of Tamil Nadu require large infusions of temporary field labor that make the land owner and field worker mutually dependent. For instance, the Lloyds' data on family labor and wage labor in the rural sectors of India found that in Tamil Nadu the ratio was equal, with 24.52% of the population engaged in household agricultural labor and 24.68% in agricultural wage labor. This can be compared to north Indian states like Rajasthan where household employment accounts for almost 60% of labor and wage labor totals barely 4%.³¹ In addition, a great many small landowners work both their own acreages as well as provide part time labor for the bigger landlords. As stated earlier, this becomes necessary as the majority of "landowners" possess below two acres of land. The disparity can be seen in the data collected by Kathleen Gough over a period of twenty years, as collated in Table 3 .

It may be added here that the 88% owners, who own below seven and a half acres of land each, cover barely 52% of the available land. The minority of big landowners comprising barely 12% of the landowning population, own the rest, as of 1971.³² Class variations, therefore, are dramatically overt.

Caste and Class:

The attributes of class become more defined when they stack together with social hierar-

³¹Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoerber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: the Political Economy of the Indian state*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.344.

³²Kathleen Gough, *Rural Change in Southeast India, 1950s to 1980*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.135.

Table 3: Approximate percentage distribution of agricultural holdings among owners by size of holdings (in acres).

Year \ Acreage	Below 1	1-3	3-5	5-10	10-25	above 25
1951	18.8	32.1	17.8	16.7	10.8	3.8
1961	13.2	32.0	26.3	17.9	9.3	1.3
1971	35.8	22.1	21.2	13.3	6.4	1.2

chies associated with caste. It is no blind generalization to state that the majority of power-wielding landowners either come from, or establish themselves, as Forward Non Brahmin or Brahmin castes. Equally true is the observation that the small tenant landowner/peasant class is from the Backward Non Brahmin caste and that the agricultural laborers are from the Adi Dravida castes. For all the individual exceptions to this rule, it has held true in all the micro studies conducted by various researchers. A compilation of their individual findings is presented in the following table.

Table 4: Correlation of caste with land ownership in Tamil villages.

Caste	Caste population	Landowning	non-landowning
Brahmin A	6.2%	6.2%	0
B	52	10	
C	341		
D	135	126	9
E			mostly priests
F	8	0	temple priests
Forward non-Brahmin A	approx 24.8%		mostly landless
B			
C			
D	347	12	335
E	1401		78
F	46	1 landlord monopoly	
Backward non-Brahmin A	43.1%	30.2%	12.9%
B	543	40 tenant farmers	mostly landless
C	677	567	110
D			mostly landless
E	1603		
F	1020	1 major landlord	
Adi-Dravida A	25.9%	0.0%	25.9%
B	191		151
C	371	0	371
D	453	0	453
E	453	0	453
F	470	40	430

Key:

A: M.Bouton, *Agrarian Radicalism in South India*, 1921, Thanjavur district.

B: D.Sivertsen, *When Caste Barriers Fall*, 1958, Thyagasamuthiram village.

C: A.Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power*, 1965, Sripuram village.

D: K.Gough, *Rural Change in South Asia*, 1976, Kumbapettai village.

E: Aiyappan and Mahadevan, *Population and Social Change in An Indian Village*, 1978, Mangadu village.

F: S. Guhan and Joan P. Mencher, "Iruvelpattu revisited - I & II", *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 4 and 11, 1983, pp.1013-1022, pp. 1063-1074, Iruvelpattu village.

While the unreliability and insufficiency of numerical data available on rural Tamil Nadu makes for descriptive studies, the above table reinforces some correlations. In all the studies, the Adi Dravidas were both the lowest caste as well as the lowest class in the village. Brahmins, always comprising the minority population, were usually landowners or priests. Backward non Brahmins, constituting the majority group, were mostly small acreage farmers, tenant farmers or landless laborers. Data on Forward non Brahmins was curiously absent. All studies described prominent landowners from the Forward non Brahmin castes who, directly or indirectly, controlled large acreages of land. In the 1981 study of the village of Iruvelpattu, in fact, the researchers found that a single landlord of the Forward non Brahmin caste controlled approximately 34% of cultivable land, whereas the forty Adi Dravidas who owned land, together accounted for only 3% of cultivable land.³³ However, almost all the studies were unable to gather the exact extent of landownership among this caste group.

This may result from the fact that there is no single Forward Non Brahmin caste that represents the landed class in all the regions of Tamil Nadu. A quick scanning of the entire state shows that while the Gounders and Naidus dominate the north western districts of Dharmapuri, Salem, Coimbatore and Periyar; the Mudaliyar caste is prominent in ChengaiAnna; the Pillai caste in Tiruchirapalli; the Chettiar caste in Padukottai, the Vellalar and Kallars in Thanjavur and so on. ³⁴ As Beteille pointed out in his study, Tamil Nadu is unique in that there are no dominant Forward Non Brahmin castes in the state as a whole. This is in contrast to the neighboring South Indian state of Karnataka where Lingayats and Okkaligas fight for supremacy; the state of Andhra Pradesh where the Reddys compete with the Kammas, and Maharashtra where the Marathas are the dominant caste. The reasons for this difference are as obscure as the emergence of the caste system itself. It may be that the distinct geographical differences within the state exerted their own slant on the

³³S.Guhan and Joan P.Mencher, "Iruvelpattu Revisited - I and II", *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 4 and 11, 1983, p. 1013 -1022 and p. 1063 - 1074.

³⁴I am grateful to Dr. Daniel Muthaiah for this information.

workings of caste, simultaneously isolating each unit from the rest of the region. Ancient Tamil religious and literary texts lay down the “Five Landscapes” of the Tamil kingdom : the Wastelands, the Seashore, the Forest, the Mountains, and the Countryside. Each Landscape is correlated with an amazingly detailed set of attributes encompassing an associated season, time of day, occupation, hobby, caste, form of water supply, symbolic beast, bird, flower, food, musical instrument, musical note, manifestation of God and even poetic theme. For example, the Wastelands synopsise the attributes of the summer season, the heat of midday, the Eyinar and Maravar castes, the supply of stagnant water, occupations like robbing and fighting, animals like the wild dog, the tiger, the lizard and the elephant, birds like the dove, the eagle, the kite and the hawk, plants like the cactus, musical instruments like the desert lute and the desert drum, divinity in the form of the bloodthirsty Goddess Kali and the poetic theme of elopement or separation!³⁵ As explained by a Tamil scholar, “It is in literature and the sacred geography, in the culture of ordinary people that a distinctive and fixed set of ideas of internal regions developed...the most extensive set found in India..” even though “Internal political boundaries in Tamil Nadu never became fixed..”.³⁶ While these “internal regions” have never been politicized or even consciously adopted by the population at large, they may help in accounting for the curious disjunctions in caste hierarchy within the state of Tamil Nadu. Except for the highest and lowest castes of Brahmins and Adi Dravidas that are recognizable as such in all the regions of the state (though the sub jatis differ), the majority of the population is indexed by hundreds of jati titles that convey varying levels of hierarchy depending on the different regions of the state.³⁷ It is only in this century that the jatis are being clumped together as socio-political and economic units like

³⁵Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan: on Tamil literature of South India*, (Leiden : E.J. Brill, 1973), Chart 10, p.100.

³⁶Bernard S. Cohn, “Regions Subjective and Objective: Their relation to the study of modern Indian history and society”; in Robert I. Crane (ed.), *Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies: an exploratory study*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University, Monograph and Occasional papers series, No.5, 1966), p.22-23.

³⁷For example, the so called Vellala caste, comprises numerous jatis: the Tondaimandalam, Karkartha, Nanchinad, Konga, Kondaikatti, Saiva and Kalappalar to name the most prominent. The Chetti caste includes the Nagarathar, Kasukkarar, Beri, Komati, Kudirai and Nattukottai jatis with further sub jatis such as the Sundaram, Ariyur and Ilayattakudi. An intricate system of prohibitions and permissions grade and segregate these jatis, much as they do in the larger caste categories. See *Journal of the Madras University*, Vol.XLIX, No.2, July 1977.

the Forward Non Brahmins, the Backward Non Brahmins, the Backward Classes, the Other Backward Classes, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and a continuing variety of other experimental terms.

What has made the disparate jatis recognizable as “Forward” has been a combination of both economic prosperity over generations and the adoption of “purity” rituals over generations, or what M.N.Srinivas synopsized as the process of “Sanskritization”.³⁸ This essentially involves the adoption of certain personal habits, life styles and values that place caste groups in a ritual hierarchy. In addition, the emergence of modern politics through the anti Brahmin movement, served to politically conjoin disparate yet traditionally wealthy Forward Non Brahmin castes all through the state via the medium of mutual interests, rather than any historically grounded unity. As landed aristocracy attempting to dislodge the numerically small yet economically and socially omnipotent Brahmins, the Forward Non Brahmins cohered effectively during the early twentieth century. This cohesion continues explicitly in rural areas where land ownership and social hierarchy continue to strike the dominant note. Forward Non Brahmins along with Brahmins, occupy an economically and socially superior role in the workings of the village. This is borne out by the individual case studies of several villages carried out over the past few decades.

Forward Non Brahmins with Land.

In Kathleen Gough’s 1951 and 1976 study of the district of Thanjavur, the Vellala caste of Forward Non Brahmins owned the major tracts of land, thereby comprising what she terms as the ‘Big Bourgeoisie’ of the region. Prior to the land ceiling acts periodically imposed by the government, these landlords had owned anything from two thousand to eight thousand acres of land, a large part of which they continued to control, if not legally own, in one form or another. For example, lands could be donated as “trusts” to philanthropic organizations such as temples, schools, hospitals, etc. for which the landlord received rent or trusteeship rights. Alternately, land could be registered under the names of relatives or pliant tenants who were owners in name only. Other loopholes included the registering of

³⁸M.N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962).

land as “dairy land” or “joint stock land” which did not fall under the strictures of farm land ceilings. Or else, some landlords claimed to have gifted their land (“Bhoodan”) when in actuality they retained their control over its use and produce (“Benami” or ‘nameless’ holdings).³⁹ If anything, the ownership of land amongst the lower class-castes decreased, despite government patronage of these castes. As Gough found in her study of the village of Kirripur, the Tondaimandalam Mudaliyars, a Forward Non Brahmin caste, increased their ownership of land from 10.6% of cultivable land in 1952 to 40.8% in 1987. This was not at the expense of Brahmin owned land which also rose by 1% during the same period, while absentee Brahmin ownership increased by almost 6%. The major losers were middle and lower caste Non Brahmins, who did not have the necessary capital or risk-cushion to invest in new agricultural techniques or cope with the new ‘monetarisation’ of land. Their share of the land declined by almost 9% in the same thirty five year period.⁴⁰ The Forward Non Brahmin caste of T.Mudaliyars exerted prime control over the village, both in their capacity as landlords who resided in the village (unlike Brahmin landlords who tended to be absentee) and as power brokers dispensing employment and arbitrating disputes amongst the villagers.⁴¹

In Beteille’s 1961 study of the Tamil village of Sripuram, six of the fourteen members of the *panchayat* (village council), including the President, were Non Brahmins and represented the dominant power in the village. In Sivertsen’s 1955-1963 study of the village of Thyagasamuthiram, it was the Brahmins that owned the largest acres of land and the majority of total agricultural land. The Non Brahmins, both of the Forward and Backward castes, were primarily landless or worked on tiny plots of land suitable for subsistence level farming. Most were under the aegis of Brahmin landowners. In addition, there was no vil-

³⁹As recently as 11 May,1990, an amendment bill was passed in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, that aimed to retransfer Benami land, approximated at 154,000 acres. The Chief Minister at the time, Mr.Karunanidhi, promised that the “old bandicoots”, i.e. caste landlords, would not escape. As P.Radhakrishnan explains, in practise, the ‘old bandicoots’ are able to continue finding legal loopholes and the landless continue to be landless. P. Radhakrishnan, “Tamil Nadu: Getting at Benami Landholdings,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 July,1990 : 1497-98.

⁴⁰Kathleen Gough, *Rural Change in Southeast India 1950s to 1980*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), Table 23.7 on p.395.

⁴¹Political authority is clearly linked to resident ownership of land as indicated by the case of the Tondaimandalam Mudaliyars who lost complete political authority when, as a group, they briefly relinquished control over most of their land in 1976. *Ibid*, p.443.

lage *panchayat* (council), but separate caste organizations, loosely headed by a hereditary village headman who was Brahmin. Despite the Brahmin predominance in this particular village, Sivertsen came to the conclusion that the emergence of unions and associations in post independent India was affecting the balance or rather, dominance of power, so that Non Brahmins were beginning to assert themselves in powerful ways. ⁴²

While Brahmins and Forward Non Brahmins constitute the economically and socially dominant population of rural Tamil Nadu, the Backward Non Brahmins and the Adi Dravidas are numerically preponderant. In a constitutional system that has elected democratic politics and single adult franchise, the relevance of this factor cannot be underestimated, especially in its potential, if not its current reality.

Adi Dravidas and land ownership:

Adi Dravidas present the one caste group where caste and class are explicitly synonymous. Adi Dravidas all over Tamil Nadu are socially outcast, economically poor and, as yet, politically unawakened. Despite the fact, that like all other caste groups, the Adi Dravidas are split into various sub castes and sub jatis, theirs is the most culturally homogeneous group.

Sivertsen found that in the village he studied, the Adi Dravidas were able to settle their community disputes far more effectively than other groups, a sign of their relatively deeper level of mutual understanding, or the acceptance of common values amongst its members. In addition, as Beteille pointed out, the *cheri* where Adi Dravidas reside is the only section of the village where there is absolutely no mingling of castes. While the residential mingling of castes is rare even in the other sections, the Adi Dravidas perforce enter all sections of the village as necessary menial servants and laborers. The Adi Dravida *cheri*, however, is usually removed from the rest of the village precincts and functions in relative isolation.

⁴²It may be noted that Thanjavur district, where Sivertsen conducted his study, is skewed in that it contains the largest number of Brahmins relative to the other districts of Tamil Nadu. While there are no definitive statistics to corroborate caste breakdown among the districts of Tamil Nadu, according to the 1931 census, the entire Brahmin population was indexed at 3% or a little over seven hundred thousand. Of this, the district of Thanjavur alone housed approximately two hundred thousand Brahmins, as calculated by Gough.

This isolation appears to have imbued the community with a homogeneity or “corporate life” that is far more discernible than is the case with the other caste groups.⁴³

Land ownership by the Adi Dravida caste is significantly lacking, even though affirmative action by modern governments have sporadically allotted plots of land to the Adi Dravidas and attempted to socialize land ownership through the institution of land ceilings. Despite the flamboyant attention of the government toward the Adi Dravidas in terms of affirmative laws, grants, loans, and reservations, in practice, the Adi Dravida continues to subsist at ground- poverty levels. A case described by Gough provides some insight into why this is so. Ever since 1972, staple grains have been graded and marketed through the state controlled Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation and the central government operated Food Corporation of India. The goods are then sold through public cooperatives and government ration shops at subsidised rates. This was aimed at mitigating the absolute power of the landlord and offering some degree of independence to the laborer. The poorest Adi Dravidas, however, subsisting on some rice and cooking oil, have resorted to ‘renting’ their ration cards for a pittance of fifty paise or barely two cents a month. With poverty as pulverizing as this, exploitation in one form or another continues. To access the seeming opportunities offered by the government is not as straightforward as it may appear.

While revolutionary predictions, both Marxist and non Marxist, target this section of the population as the most likely community for raising anti status quoist movements in Tamil Nadu, this appears improbable. Wracking poverty, a value system that is inured to generational hierarchy and a physical incapacity for risk- taking has generated a community that is probably low in revolutionary zeal.⁴⁴ The Lloyds state it perceptively when they argue that :

⁴³The use of ‘cheri’ to describe the Adi Dravida’s residential space is fast being replaced by the less connotative “colony”, according to Mahadevan and Aiyappan. Regardless of linguistic transformations, the reality of segregation remains, so that each new word is gradually rendered as negatively connotative as its predecessor. A. Aiyappan and K. Mahadevan, *Population and Social Change in an Indian Village: A Quarter Century of Development in Managadu Village, Tamilnadu*, (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1988).

⁴⁴During a study of Kabistalam village in Tamil Nadu, the lowest caste villagers, each of whom had four to nine members in their family, were asked how much land they would want if they could get it. Not one of them envisaged anything more than two acres, even though the question had been purely hypothetical. See Kusum Nair, *Blossoms in the Dust: the human element in Indian development*. (London: G. Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 1961):30-31.

“Failure to act collectively may be a rational response in contexts where the margin to take political and economic risk is absent or minimal, the costs of failure seem high, and the likelihood and benefits of success seem uncertain.....As actors confronted with risks and uncertainty, the poor often find compliant adaptation more rational than collective action on their behalf..”⁴⁵

If this contention is too theoretically facile, it may be noted that over the past fifty years since associational democratic politics has been available to the population of Tamil Nadu, there has been only one major revolt by this section of the population in a contained section of Thanjavur district, one of the thirty six parliamentary constituencies that make up the Tamil state. This too was rapidly defused, a probable indication of the incapacity for sustained struggle.

Backward Non Brahmins and land ownership:

In fact, it is the Backward Non Brahmin castes that provide the most complex, and possibly the most volatile section of Tamil Nadu’s rural community. While occupationally, they represent agricultural laborers, small-acreage tenants, or displaced artisans of conventional trades, they are rarely as downtrodden or economically destitute as the Adi Dravida population. They also appear to cover a vast range of class hierarchy, so that current governments are trying to further classify the category into “Most Backward” and “Other Backward” castes. They represent the largest swathe in the Tamil population, with the Vanniars dominating the large district of South Arcot, the Padayachis prominent in Tiruvannamalai Sambuvarayar, the Kallars in Thanjavur, the Thevars in Ramnathapuram, Nellore Kattabomman, Madurai and the Nadars in Kamarajar, Kanniyakumari. As upwardly mobile groups facing resistance from entrenched Forward Non Brahmins who claim social superiority, it is this group that is the most politically active. The case of the Nadars as documented in detail by Hardgrave is indicative of aggressive Backward Non Brahmin dynamics.

⁴⁵Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoerber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): p.387.

The unity suggested by clumping this caste-class strata as 'Backward Non Brahmins' however, is tenuous. At best, it serves as a temporary handle to explain what is essentially a rise in expectations among a section of the population that is both against the hereditary control of Brahmins and Forward Non Brahmins as well as able to compete in limited yet significant ways. The group, if approached as a social category, would disintegrate in the face of countless intra caste factions that disagree over rituals, gods, hierarchy rankings, customs, festivals, et al. Yet, the strong motivation to compete with Forward Non Brahmins and the slow strength accruing from the recognition of democratic politics and their numerical strength if they stood together as a group, makes this a currently viable group with recognizable propensities. In short, rural Backward Non Brahmins, while viewing their cultural and social identity through the overwhelming demands of jati, are being coopted as a caste-class group by current economic and political dynamics.

Conclusion:

Important to this study is the observation that the aligning of caste, synoptic of social status, self perception and ritual hierarchy, with the index of class, a coda for economic power, political clout and potential for literacy as well as cosmopolitanization, generates a set of attributes that avoid caricature. They are internally consistent in that one source of power (class) is accompanied, rather than challenged, by another source (caste), so that the principles and directives of hierarchy are constantly reinforced. The attitudes and proclivities of each caste - class in Tamil Nadu, is therefore far more defined than is usual in the case of human groupings.

The hierarchies, as fleshed out in the above descriptions, are weighted by values intrinsic to each strata within the hierarchy. Large landowners, primarily from the Brahmin and Forward Non Brahmin castes, act as the economic and political power brokers of the countryside as well as function as potential links to urban Tamil Nadu by virtue of their relative wealth, affordability, and expanding needs. In this sense, they are invariably politically active; cognisant of and vulnerable to the structured polity; and aware of groups larger than their own jati. Their political leanings are usually status quoist and oriented toward

non casteist, class based political movements and parties. Sensitivity to their uniqueness as Tamils is calibrated primarily by caste differentiations. Brahmins are reared on the recognition of an all-India identity, through the use of a parallel language, Sanskrit, as well as religious and cultural totems that derive from Brahminical rather than Tamil origins.

Forward Non Brahmins, with their combination of wealth, literacy, power and need for primacy over Brahmin prestige are intensely aware of their unique identity as Tamils. Their political affiliations, however, are partially derived from economic motives similar to that of the Brahmin landowners; i.e. status quoist and class centred. The linking of caste and class as a political grouping of the Forward Non Brahmin castes saw its most climacteric moment in the early twentieth century, when Forward Non Brahmins were able to establish an anti Brahmin, wealthy Non Brahmin group called the Justice Party.⁴⁶ Since then, the dissipation of anti Brahminism and social diversification among the Forward Non Brahmins has served to water down the viability of caste as a dominant political identity. Caste, however, continues to instruct the cultural identification of the Forward Non Brahmins in terms of self perception and status.

Small landowners and peasants, primarily from the Backward Non Brahmin caste are identified with their own particular jati. This imbues both their sense of self and their potential political affiliations. Their identity as Tamils is distinct from Forward Non Brahmins in that it is invariably non conscious or an unobtrusive part of life. The association of being uniquely Tamil is not personally resonant, as is the recognition of being a disadvantaged caste, traditionally suppressed by the jatis of the Forward Non Brahmin and Brahmin castes. Whether members of this caste are small landowners, petty artisans or peasants, their dependence on the big landlord is always tangible. However, their numerical strength in most regions of Tamil Nadu, make them a politically significant group, and one that is becoming increasingly vocal in recent years. The primary identification with jati in the social sphere also dominates their equation with all the other jatis. The jatis of the Backward Non Brahmin caste are sensitized to recognizing jatis of the Forward Non Brahmin caste with whom they wish to compete, and jatis from the Adi Dravida caste, whom they

⁴⁶Details of this party are given in Chapter III.

wish to continue suppressing. This compromises the value of a larger ethnic Tamil identity, and certainly argues against the recognition of a large all-India state identity. The focus is purely on inter caste rivalry, thereby limiting the recognition of larger identities.

Adi Dravidas in the rural sector are politically inert. While providing large banks of votes to the local landlord, their intense affiliation to their own jatis is lost in the black hole of absolute poverty. Jati motivation plays little or no part in their political behavior and economic dependence dominates. In terms of future potential, however, these jatis are equipped with a strong sense of cohesion at the level of the jati. Continued isolation and suppression have left their rituals and ways of living relatively untampered, so that the sense of jati identity is very strong and very distinctive. This could work, and in fact has worked, in two ways. On the one hand, strong jati identification transforms all larger group identifications as artificial. Tamil identity and Indian identity are, in this sense, both alien. Either can be adopted, depending on the level of positive economic and social feedback. On the other hand, the possibility of jati 'promotion' as a group, to higher jati status can place the Adi Dravida group squarely within the uniquely Tamil dynamic of caste progression through the centuries. In this case, Adi Dravidas would merely follow the pattern of attempting to scale the hierarchy in slow and incremental steps, until they could claim Backward Non Brahmin status and eventually Forward Non Brahmin status, all else remaining the same. Either way, at this juncture, given their current situation, the rural Adi Dravida jatis can be neither Tamil nationalists nor Indian nationalists and must be treated as behaviorally inert in the context of this study.

Urban Tamil Nadu

The seventeen metropolitan cities, thirty four "urban agglomerations", and two hundred and eleven towns that constitute the Tamil urban sector are defined as such, primarily through statistics profiling the large demographic concentrates and the adoption of non agricultural occupations in these areas. Both these factors can be significant modifiers in the attitudes and behavior of the traditional Tamilian if it is remembered that the major-

ity of villages in Tamil Nadu are compact, isolated units numbering less than a thousand inhabitants ⁴⁷ and that these inhabitants are primarily engaged in either agriculture or agriculture related occupations, as outlined in the previous section. A more complex definition of urban Tamil Nadu, not to be found in statistical form, is the starkly different pressures, expectations and attitudes engendered by urban society and the urban system. After all, "city living" existed even in traditional Tamil Nadu. As Mattison Mines rightly points out, if urbanization were broadly defined only as a large population, with rapid growth in that population; an extensive areal size; and a non agricultural labor force, then the existence of city life in Tamil Nadu could be traced as far back as the eleventh century when the grand temple complexes flourished under royal patronage. Urban Tamil Nadu of the current type may be more meaningfully distinguished by not only demographic concentrates and occupational diversity, but also by the dramatic difference in the social and cultural life of the people, their perceptual expectations of themselves, as well as the structures that support them and the new set of mores, strictures, freedoms, and ethos that is generated by the newly redefined urban centers of Tamil Nadu.

Urban Occupations

The many and diverse occupations that mark the urban milieu are coalesced within two broad divisions. These divisions aim to encompass all urban occupations through the one variable which is relevant to this study. This is the distinction between government controlled jobs in contradistinction to independent occupations.

The factor of occupational type is primarily relevant for the differences in relative dependence and exposure to non Tamil worlds, that characterizes government, government related and government dependent jobs as opposed to independent businesses. As one of the chosen colonial city centers, consciously developed by the British ever since the early 1700's, Madras, the largest metropolis in Tamil Nadu, has long been dominated by strong and rooted bureaucratic networks. Auxiliary industries and service jobs exist, but are firmly enmeshed in the "nation building" ethos of the Indian government; i.e. legally, structurally,

⁴⁷See Joan P. Mencher, "Kerala and Madras: a comparative study of ecology and social structure," *Ethnology*, vol.5, No.2, 1966 : 147-169.

and financially they are either dependent on, or are related to a larger Indian whole. The very notion of "urban centers", is an extremely maneuvered project of recent decades, so that the central Indian government has a commanding finger in practically all the significant urban trades. Even big business, with its vulnerability to the need for large markets, extensive transport system and skilled personnel is dependent on the central government, albeit in less obvious ways than the service industries and the bureaucracy.

It is the medium and small businesses that can operate in relatively independent ways, in that, they function solely within the circumference of Tamil Nadu's borders and may have no need for non Tamil structures or incentives. For the purposes of this study, it is only in this one sense that they are being classified as "independent".

The intrusion of government in Tamil Nadu's urban sector is maximal. The dictates of government occupations are significant. Most prominently, government jobs presuppose basic levels of formal literacy as well as reward bilingualism. In addition, government jobs consciously project the individual Tamil's need, vulnerability and attraction to the structured polity. These are not necessary attributes for independent urban occupations such as petty shopkeepers, traders, home industries, private medical practitioners and itinerant workers.

Literacy and occupation are closely linked in the urban centers of Tamil Nadu. Literacy skills not only establish the prestige requirements of the individual, but presage the level of employment and wealth available to him/her. Unlike the Western world, where the urban sector is marked by a tremendous diversification in infrastructure so that literacy skills, are only one among the many skills required for gainful employment, this does not hold true within the case of Tamil Nadu. A specialized car mechanic or plumber in a land of cheaply available labor, is paid a pittance and suffers from low social prestige so that his skills remain largely unrecognised or under rewarded. A college graduate employed as a government clerk, on the other hand, may desultorily push papers all his life, but earns a satisfactory and secure income in addition to establishing his social status in the community. The literate elite, as opposed to persons falling under a loose definition of literacy, are unequivocally known by university derived educational degrees, rather than

labor specific skills.

This makes it easier to understand the 696 universities, colleges, and educational institutions that crowd mostly urban Tamil Nadu; ⁴⁸ the many thousands of applicants that attempt the few jobs available annually in the government sector and the fine tuning in types of educational literacy that calibrate individual social prestige. It is also the reason why the government sector has been singled out as a pertinent occupational category that is synoptic of distinct attitudinal profiles.

Small, independent business ventures, crucial to the working life of the urban population, such as tea stall owners, greengrocers, coffee grinders, cobblers, rickshaw drivers, temple vendors etc., uncurtailed by the need for formal education, are curtailed by the immensity in competition that necessarily prevents anything more than basic if not hand to mouth incomes. Their vulnerability is the vulnerability of market conditions of demand and supply rather than the vulnerability of government dependent employees who derive from, even as they lend support to, a defined all India governmental structure.

It is important to recognize the demands of a government job. Legislative, administrative, executive and punitive power are all represented by the bureaucracy. In effect, this controls most of what constitutes "urban occupations", either directly or indirectly. Private companies and big businesses, dependent as they are on the government for a network of licenses, tax subsidies and auxiliary requirements such as transport and material imports, represent some of the indirect recipients of government patronage. The police, railways, customs, port authorities, airlines, communication industry, transport industry and university boards are directly controlled by the government. Statistically, this represents 80% of the working urban population as shown in the table below.

⁴⁸ As of 1986-87, the breakdown of these centers was listed as 11 universities, 327 colleges, and 358 other educational institutions like polytechnics. For details, see *Statistical Hand Book of Tamil Nadu, 1987*, (Madras: Department of Statistics, 1988) : Tables 16.1, 16.2, 16.3, 16.4, and 16.8; pgs. 288-301.

Table 5: Breakdown of labor in urban Tamil Nadu:†

Government employees	1,467,200
Social Services	845,263.
Working factories	811,936 (*)
Manufacturing	557,313 (*)
Teachers	316,051
Transport & Communication	288,285
Students	273,466 (*)
Real estate	128,022
Forestry, fishing	97,369
Hotel trade	74,956 (*)
Utilities	74,837
Construction	55,366
Police	54,819
Mining	35,800
Medical	16,094
Working Convicts	13,816
Judges	811
Politicians	292
TOTAL	6,040,696

† Table compiled from *Statistical Hand Book of Tamil Nadu, 1987*, (Madras: Department of Statistics, 1988).

Of the 16 million urban population, 7.5 million are listed as “workers”. With only a little over 6 million accounted for in the above table, it appears that a full 1.5 million urban workers fall in the non formal or marginal category of urban occupations such as pavement traders, itinerant workers, et al. This category would represent the section of urban labor most divorced from the overarching structured polity, and in that sense, the most independent. The majority, however, are within ranging degrees of government control or influence. According to Lewandowski, even as early as 1900, a quarter of the population of Madras state was directly employed by the government. ⁴⁹

The categories of labor with an asterisk, constitute those areas that could be under significant indirect government control, or function in complete independence. For the most

⁴⁹Susan Lewandowski, *Migration and Ethnicity in Urban India: Kerala migrants in the city of Madras, 1870-1970*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1980): p.43.

part, however, the control of government is pervasive, which is why they are included as 'governmental occupations'. Private industry, while theoretically independent, is compromised by its needs and the government's ability to supply those needs. For example, local private industries are primarily generated by the extensive production of paddy in Tamil Nadu. Rice mills; specialized seed processing, paddy husking, and paddy drying mills; spin off industries like paddy bran oil extraction plants; and supporting services like paddy research centers, storage silos and transportation businesses are all necessary industries given the traditional emphasis on paddy cultivation all over the state. While literacy, bilingualism and the perception of interdependence with non Tamils is not a necessary factor for the majority of workforce engaged in these local industries, in actual fact, there is a heightened degree of economic dependence on unseen sources that are non Tamil; i.e. central government assistance, world organization funds, individual foreign country support, and private Indian merchant collaboration, all of which have significantly contributed in the growth of these Tamil industries and are becoming increasingly enmeshed with Tamil local industry.

In Gough's study of Thanjavur district, for example, she found that institutions like the Ford Foundation and the World Bank had loaned money for all the modern paddy and paddy related mills in the region. The first sugar refinery in one district and a rice mill were sponsored by the West German government. The paddy research center was sponsored by a branch of the Indian government, while the silo plant was contracted to private non Tamil entrepreneurs. In other words, the intrusion of a non Tamil structure, with all its accompanying requirements, is fast becoming a fact of independent urban industry in Tamil Nadu, so that its 'independence' is more in theory than in actual practice.

Socially, government jobs represent a higher category in the urban hierarchy as these jobs are relatively secure, permanent and adequately paid. The workers in independent jobs and those in government controlled ones, operate under significantly different compulsions. The need for bilingual skills, specified levels of literacy, and the acceptance of wider politics and political groupings, is far more defined in government and government related occupations than it is in private institutions where these factors are idiosyncratically interpreted.

Literacy

Urban Tamil Nadu consists of approximately sixteen million Tamils compared to thirty three million Tamils in rural Tamil Nadu. Of the sixteen million urban Tamils, a little over ten million or 63% claim literacy compared to the thirteen million or 39% in rural Tamil Nadu. While the numbers testify to the pressing need for literacy in the urban set up, they are not wholly enlightening. Literacy, as defined in the Tamil case, could cover all degrees of literate behavior, right from signing one's name to expounding an academic thesis; from speaking only Tamil to speaking other languages in addition to Tamil; from describing professionally educated citizens to home educated or self taught citizens. The census of India defines literacy as simply the "ability to read and write simple letters in any language with understanding". Given the broad spectrum inherent in this literate group, it is more conducive to flesh all statistical synopses with qualitative understanding. This understanding will be used in the following section to establish the attitudinal predispositions inherent in different types and degrees of urban illiteracy.

All fifty five million Tamilians in Tamil Nadu are speakers of Tamil. The symbolic pride accruing from that one fact is intensely significant, as suggested in the previous chapter. However, neither should the relevance of that fact be overestimated. Both the nuances of language and the complex ways they are viewed are equally pertinent.

The Tamil language fulfills its primary function of basic communication amongst all the citizens of Tamil Nadu. The use of the language, the individual pride invested in the language and relative need for the language scatters in many directions and along varying scales. These would not be important in and of themselves if they did not, in addition, parse an accompanying set of values or suggest a divergent range of perceptions.

Use of Tamil

Verbal Tamil appears to exist very much as a function of caste. Tamil Brahmins, almost all of whom are literate in the Tamil language and use it as their language of speech, adopt a version that is accused of being overly Sanskritized. In truth, hundreds of years of coexistence with Sanskrit has rendered even colloquial Tamil recognizably Sanskritic, in

that Sanskrit words constantly recur in the vocabulary. What is significant though is the perception that Tamil Brahmins are the major speakers of 'Sanskritized Tamil'. Translated into values, this is easily politicized into accusations that alien influences attempting to imperialize pure Tamil are the preserve of high caste Brahmins of Aryan heritage. In addition, Tamil spoken by Brahmins has an extra uniquely post lingual sound, "rzha", difficult to pronounce even by native speakers of the language. While such differences would not attain undue weightage in and of themselves, in the context of charged inter caste antipathy, they present further totemic "proof" of the reasons or manifestations of that antipathy.

To complicate matters, intra- caste vocabulary distinguishes not only the Brahmin from the rest, but the Iyer Brahmin from the Iyengar Brahmin as well. Each section fervently believes that their Tamil is the correct version. A further linguistic twist within the Tamil Brahmin community can be traced to their relative territorial mobility through the ages so that bilingualism in a language other than Hindi and English, both of which are educational or official languages, usually attests to the individual's "mother tongue" or original family root that is non Tamil. In other words, the use of Tamil within the jatis that form the Brahmin caste is also sifted in non homogeneous ways. This is amplified in urban Tamil Nadu where a large percentage of 'Tamil Brahmins' are conversant in their 'mother tongue' which is not Tamil but Telugu, Kannada or Malyalam, pointers to a larger-than-Tamil identity. In short, the use of Tamil amongst the Brahmins does not, in and of itself, embody a predisposition to strong Tamil identity.

The Forward Non Brahmin castes are the most articulate, if not vigorous, proponents of pure Tamil. These castes, traditionally wealthier than the Backward Non Brahmins and unfettered by the need for Sanskrit, as are the Brahmins, have concentrated on studying Tamil as more than a means of daily communication. The business of expurgating Sanskrit loan-words from the Tamil lexicon, the effort of instituting 'pure' Tamil into educational curricula and the daily lingo of the people, the scholastic excitement of discovering the roots and history of the Tamil language has usually emerged from this section of the caste hierarchy. Unlike the case of the Brahmins, the actual caste denomination has not demanded

a certain prespecified treatment of the language. Rather, historical conditions of being the wealthier class during the advent of mass literacy coupled with a growing political need to define a true Tamilian heritage has urged the Forward Non Brahmin castes to use Tamil in a unique way. Tamil, amongst the Forward Non Brahmin castes, is more than communication, it is a means for great literature and a symbol of ancient Tamil heritage. By far the most self-aware version of the language, it is also the most formal. For example, while the man on the street uses words like 'radio', 'T.V.', 'train' to describe the newer Western imported inventions, advocates of formal Tamil use "vanvalli" or sky-sound (radio); "tolai katchi" or long distance scenery (T.V.); and "pohai vandi" or smoke vehicle (train). The effort to institute these unwieldy words is not very evident, as colloquial Tamil continues to dominate everything from books and film to signposts and advertisements.

For the Backward Non Brahmins, especially those employed in urban occupations, the propagation of Tamil as a primary language is very popular, even though awareness of the language as anything more than communication, is hazy at best. Tamil, for the Backward Non Brahmin is usually the only language available to him/her. Proper names, for example, are derived from local heroes, Tamil saints and popular deities rather than from purely Sanskritic sources as are Brahmin names. The linking of language with occupation in urban Tamil Nadu, has inevitably politicized the use of Tamil.

In the rural setting, additional knowledge of a second language is not acutely required. In the urban setting, lack of knowledge of other languages, can be economically degenerative. In the world of government jobs, the most prestigious urban occupation, either English or Hindi is a definite requirement. Financial inducements are provided to urge government workers to learn basic Hindi, through organizations such as the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha (South Indian Hindi Education Center).⁵⁰ Knowledge of English amongst the more bilingual Malayali workers from the neighboring state of Kerala has led to sometimes violent agitations within the blue collar urban workers of Tamil Nadu, who

⁵⁰This organization was reportedly granted Rs. 52,500 out of a total of Rs. 1,378,078 to spread the use of Hindi in Tamil Nadu during 1951-1960. See Jyotirinda Dasgupta, *Language Conflict and National Development: group politics and national language policy in India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) : p.173.

primarily emerge from Backward non Brahmin castes.⁵¹ However, for those Backward non Brahmins who function as independent small time traders, small shop and tea stall owners, private transport personnel, etc. the need for bilingualism is incidental, shielded as they are from linguistic competitiveness in the work place. The use of Tamil by all Tamilians, despite regional and caste variations, is sufficient to ensure competent businesses at the micro level. For this section, the absence of an additional language, does not constitute a dearth.

Amongst the Adi Dravidas, for the most part, Tamil functions as a means of communication with no literary, emotional or even competitive investments attached to it. The speech of the Adi Dravidas is described as being highly “simple” and immediately recognizable to native speakers of the language, or as Beteille describes it, “.....it is not difficult even for a Brahmin to distinguish an Adi Dravida from a Non Brahmin by his speech.....”.⁵² The subsistence level occupations, mostly associated with Adi Dravidas, negates the need for additional knowledge.

Pride in Tamil

Amongst the literate Tamils, pride in the Tamil language and its literary tradition is evident. Moreover, it has been sufficiently politicized over the past four decades to have become an article of faith and a conscious affirmation of self-identity on the part of the people. Within the illiterate population, pride in the language is yet to find expression except in specific sections of the population faced with immediate competition in employment based on language skills.

As in the use of the language, the ‘pride factor’ is also tempered by, or associated with, the distinctions of caste. Amongst the Brahmins, many of whom have produced some of the

⁵¹In 1974, animosity between Malyali speakers who dominated the management of the prestigious Christian Medical College Hospital at Vellore, and Tamils who were primarily workers at the Hospital, became evident when workers went on a prolonged strike. The strike had been preceded by a circular issued by the Labor Secretary of the state government, which suggested that companies within the state should reserve 80% of all jobs for “local persons” whose mother tongue was Tamil. The intent of the circular and the rapidity with which it was followed by a major disturbance at the Hospital, attests to the potential politicization possible over the issue of linguistic identity. For details, see L.Caplan, “Morality and Polyethnic Identity in Urban South India”; in Adrian C.Mayer (ed.) *Culture and Morality: essays in honour of Christoph von Furer Haimendorf*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981).

⁵²Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power: changing patterns of stratification in a Tanjore village*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965): p.54.

finest literary works and journals in Tamil, Sanskrit jostles for power. Whereas Sanskrit is of no use in the essential life of daily communication, it continues to operate as the language of the Gods and thereby of 'God's Chosen', the Brahmins. Sanskrit is the language of ritual both in the Brahmin temples and in daily home worship as well as the life occasions of birth, marriage and death. Even the poor or illiterate Brahmin holds the language in great regard, bordering on religiosity. Knowledge of Sanskrit, a definite plus in the social system of the Brahmins, is perceived as imbuing the scholar with a far more profound sense of philosophy and metaphysics than available in any other language. This derives from the fact that Sanskritic works are distinctly metaphysical and rely on a uniquely abstruse form of argumentation, much as Talmudic learning emphasizes the skill of questioning and debate. Notwithstanding the intensive use of Tamil amongst the Brahmins, it is the knowledge of Sanskrit that assures a higher status in the community.

It is left to the Forward Non Brahmin castes to frame a conscious pride in the Tamil language and the Backward Non Brahmins to accept that logic as an explanation for their own monolinguality. Pride in the antiquity of the Tamil language and the rich literature it generated, is almost sacrosanct among Tamil literati, usually from the Forward castes. This knowledge and faith in the language has sharpened through the two decades of fervent turmoil following the attempted spread of Hindi. Pride in the language is both intense and articulate.

Among the Backward Non Brahmins, knowledge of Tamil as the symbol of an ancient and glorious culture is non-existent or muted. However, a ready acceptance of what the Forward Non Brahmins claim regarding the Tamil language is high. This is definitely linked to individual experiences with employment. Backward Non Brahmins competing with bilingual workers are far more aware of their investment in the Tamil language, than Backward Non Brahmins who do not require an additional language. While the Forward Non Brahmin has scholarly knowledge of Tamil, that feeds his pride in the language, the Backward Non Brahmins only experience the disadvantages of being an exclusively Tamil speaking worker. With the result, while Backward Non Brahmins constitute a majority of the agitationists fighting for Tamil supremacy and the monopolistic use of Tamil in all spheres (examinations,

court documents, government papers, et al), conscious pride in the language is lacking. To know Tamil is a fact of life, rather than a symbol of uniqueness or superiority. Knowledge of the Sangam era, touted by Tamil scholars as the fount of pure Tamil, is noticeably lacking amongst this section of the community. Attempts to instill this pride by offering scholarships for the study of the Tamil language and further scholarships for studying all subjects through the Tamil language medium have met with limited success. This strange dichotomy in the absence of grounded pride in the language and defensive propagation of the language within this section of the community is worth highlighting because it presages a glitch in attitudinal intensity toward the language. Behaviorally, while much ado exists over the issue of preserving Tamil as the dominant state language, opportunities to adopt other languages that may further individual life styles, are not denounced. In fact, when the opportunity presents itself, these alternate avenues are actively pursued.

As can be expected amongst a population that fights to survive on a day to day basis, pride in the language is an obscure notion for the Adi Dravidas of Tamil Nadu. This is not to suggest that it cannot or will not be an issue for future generations of well settled Adi Dravidas. It is merely not a pertinent point at this stage of their social history. The mass conversion of Adi Dravidas to Christianity and instant willingness to learn English from the missionaries is indicative of the desperate need to adopt any language if it furthers the abysmal conditions under which the Adi Dravida labors.

Need for Tamil

The need for languages, other than Tamil, appears to exist in urban Tamil Nadu, regardless of the extensive use of Tamil in daily communication and the varying levels of pride invested in the language. The need for other languages is very much of function of changing social conditions and job requirements. English is indubitably proving to be the language of ambition.⁵³ Students wishing to pursue advanced degrees in their field, professionals wishing to venture beyond the borders of Tamil Nadu and even those Tamil urbanites conscious of the needs of upper class prestige and status, are acquiring English. Shop signs in urban

⁵³The recognition of this fact is evident even in Indian fiction where Bharati Mukerjee has her protagonist say: "To want English was to want more than you had been given at birth; it was to want the world." *Jasmine*, (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989).

areas are invariably printed in both English and Tamil. The circulation of the primary English newspaper, 'The Hindu', with approximately 367,000 subscribers exceeds that of the leading Tamil newspaper, the Daily Thanthi, which claims 320,300 readers. There are, of course, eight additional major Tamil dailies with significant readership and scores of journals, weeklies, bi-weeklies that testify to an enormous Tamil literate population. However, the fact remains that English constitutes the language of higher education, relative prestige and potential job advancement. When, in 1970, Karunanidhi from the Government of Tamil Nadu tried to institute Tamil as the only medium of instruction in all colleges within the state, there was mass rioting by college students all over Tamil Nadu, even though Karunanidhi's most vociferous source of political support stemmed from the student community. Significantly, not only were the English speaking students agitating, but a full 78% of students who had studied in Tamil-medium schools were also opposed to the move. The Karunanidhi government had to finally withdraw the suggested policy.⁵⁴

The alternate language of Hindi, pushed as the link language to replace English with the exit of the British, is far too loaded with anti Tamil connotations to take firm root in Tamil soil. While state government employees and employees of large public corporations, are professionally motivated to acquire basic Hindi,⁵⁵ popular sentiment against the language and what it constitutes, is intense. Despite that, Hindi has entered both urban and rural Tamil Nadu, both for practical reasons, and more subliminally, through the medium of film. Hindi cinema is enormously popular and effectively competes with Tamil cinema, which is itself one of Tamil Nadu's largest industries. In terms of potential, however, additional knowledge of English, appears to threaten the supremacy of Tamil, far more than the need for Hindi.

The use of Tamil and pride in the language are both primarily derived from caste asso-

⁵⁴See Susan Lewandowski, *Migration and Ethnicity in Urban India*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1980): p.183. In fact, Mr.Karunanidhi himself opted to send his two sons to the English medium Madras Christian College High School. See S.H.Venkatramani, "Tongue Trouble", *India Today*, 15 October, 1986, p.17.

⁵⁵In 1985, almost fifty thousand Tamils were candidates for the all India Hindi examinations, a 20% increase since 1981, more than the rate of growth in population. As an anti Hindi agitationist of the 1965 riots concluded, it was no longer "wise for anybody in Tamil Nadu not to learn Hindi because Tamil has no currency beyond the northern frontiers of the state..". In S.H.Venkatramani, "Tongue Trouble", *India Today*, 15 October, 1986, p.17.

ciation and caste history. By contrast, the need for languages other than Tamil is derivative of urban occupation and urban location. Language in this context, “can be perceived as an instrument which determines a differentiated pattern of access to economic and political positions”.⁵⁶ The aligning of literacy with occupation is meant to present a composite prototype that can shed light on both social perceptions and political motivations within urban Tamil Nadu. The two factors, as explained above, are also linked in that government occupation almost always stands for formal literacy and bilingual ability. Independent occupations, on the other hand, while not indicative of illiteracy, certainly demand less of either formal education or bilingualism.

Since the need for literacy levels and language abilities is being dictated by the urban environment rather than caste, it becomes necessary to study caste as a separate variable of urban groupings.

Caste and class

What Alexis de Tocqueville observed about the newly emergent democratic society of the United States in contrast to traditional British feudal hierarchy is abstractly relevant to the equation between caste and class in urban Tamil Nadu:

“When it is birth alone, independent of wealth, which classes men in society, every one knows exactly what his own position is upon the social scale; he does not seek to rise, he does not fear to sink...”

“When a moneyed aristocracy succeeds to an aristocracy of birth, the case is altered....the possibility of acquiring...privileges is open to all...As the social importance of men is no longer ostensibly and permanently fixed by blood, and is infinitely varied by wealth, ranks still exist, but it is not very easy clearly to distinguish at a glance those who respectively belong to them. Secret hostilities then arise in the community; one set of men endeavor by innumerable artifices to penetrate, or to appear to penetrate, amongst those who are above them;

⁵⁶ Reuven Kahane, *Legitimation and Integration in Developing Societies: the case of India*, (Boulder, Colorado: West View Press, 1982): p.9.

another set are constantly in arms against these usurpers of their rights; or rather, the same individual does both at once, and whilst he seeks to raise himself into a higher circle, he is always on the defensive against the intrusion of those below him..” .⁵⁷

As Harold Gould's study of stratification in the city has indicated; as Hardgrave's study of the Nadar caste's diffusion in urban life has proven; as Mattison Mines' indepth research on the Kaikoolar Mudaliyar caste corroborated,⁵⁸ the social status and identity so strongly linked to caste in the village is profoundly obfuscated in the urban environment so that a "moneyed aristocracy creates ranks that are not so easy to distinguish as the aristocracy of birth" established by caste. Class differences within the caste, disrupt caste identity significantly, except perhaps in the sphere of marriage which "may be its large significant refuge" in the city. ⁵⁹ This disruption is primarily centered on upwardly mobile castes. Concrete examples of this dynamic are to be found in the well researched case of the Nadar and Kaikoolar community. As the wretchedly poor toddy tappers of Tamil Nadu two centuries ago, the Nadar caste was first associated with parochial groupings wholly dependent on the local landlord or an equivalent economic patron. Low caste and low class were synonymous at this point in their history. Due to historical circumstances and the establishing as well as availability of demand politics, the Nadar caste group was consciously integrated and projected as a cohesive, self sufficient identity group by virtue of caste status alone. The success of this projection, among other variables, led to the opportunity for economic advancement amongst members of the group so that caste and class were no longer synonymous. In fact, they became increasingly divergent. As Hardgrave points

⁵⁷Alexis de Tocqueville. Ed. by Richard D. Heffner, *Democracy in America*, (New York : Mentor, 1956): p.221-22.

⁵⁸Harold Gould, "Occupational Categories and Stratification in the Achievement of Urban Society", in Richard G. Fox (ed.), *Urban India: Society, Space and Image*, (Duke University: Monograph Number 10, 1970): p. 51 - 76 ; Robert L.Hardgrave, Jr., "Urbanization and the Structure of Caste", in *Ibid*, p.39 - 50 ; Mattison Mines, *The Warrior Merchants: Textiles, Trade, and Territory in South India*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁵⁹Robert L.Hardgrave,Jr., "Urbanization and the Structure of Caste" :p.49. As stated in the previous section, caste biases are important in the understanding of literacy in Tamil Nadu. However linguistic differences and levels of literacy do not explain caste identity and are, in fact, explained by them. Marriage, on the other hand, is the single most forceful preserver of caste in the city. It is a conscious explication of caste identity.

out, “..the Nadars of Madras...include tappers, coolie laborers, government clerks, small shopkeepers, physicians, lawyers, teachers, and wealthy businessmen..”. To associate and identify with members of low caste occupations is not socially remunerative to the upwardly mobile caste member. In this situation which is constantly being played out in Tamil Nadu’s cities, “class orientation....supersedes caste solidarity..”.⁶⁰

A similar dynamic was traced by Mattison Mines in his study of the Kaikoolars. This caste created a *naaDu* or council system, that not only extends all through Tamil Nadu, but ostensibly dates back to the 12th century, A.D.⁶¹ Despite this impressive continuity, the *naaDu* system has transformed itself so that it now functions merely as a loose, ritual based organisation that does not strive for conformity or expect political unity. The attempt to unify as a political unit called the Senguntha Mahajana Sangam, did not succeed once its initial purpose of lobbying for power vacated by the British, had been accomplished. At the moment, class-directed cooperatives are more succesful; but still come under the broad and continually flexible aegis of the *naaDu*.⁶²

Another well documented case is that of the low ranking, numerically preponderant Vanniyars, who have attempted to raise their caste status ever since 1833. The success and expansion of their caste association, the Vanniyar Kula Kshatriya Sangham, through the twentieth century, led to the formation of a political party in 1951, the Tamilnad Toilers Party. As evident in the name, the attempt was to widen the base of the organisation so that it became more than just a caste-derived, and thereby, caste-limited grouping. Since the party’s constituency was essentially localized, the attempt to widen support contributed to the creation of a breakaway faction that eventually became yet another caste-political grouping called the Commonweal Party. While both parties continued to derive primary support from Vanniyar caste members, the realization that this, by definition, limited their political control, eventually broke the caste focus. Both parties were coopted into the large Congress party in return for representation in local bodies.⁶³ However, with the political

⁶⁰Ibid, p.46.

⁶¹Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁶²Mattison Mines, *The Warrior Merchants: textiles, trade, and territory in south India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁶³See Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, “The Political Role of India’s Caste Associations”, *Pacific Affairs*,

demise of the Congress party in Tamil Nadu and the rise of political awareness among the more disadvantaged sections of the Vanniyar community, who were faced with direct competition from Adi Dravidas for reservation ratios, there was another resurgence of caste clustered politics, with the formation of the Vanniar Sangam in 1980. Over the past decade, the Sangam has been highly successful in generating large scale riots and raising the profile of the group as a caste organisation.⁶⁴ If earlier dynamics of this grouping as well as the history of other caste groupings is any indication, the Sangam too will curtail itself if it is successful in helping its members to progress. Even now, the majority of its members are drawn from the middle class rather than the elite or laboring classes.

However as Harold Gould pointed out, the urban setting in and of itself, does not automatically water down the enactment of caste rituals. The abysmally poor and recent rural migrants, are most likely to continue to “operate as peasants” with low caste status. The touted anonymity of city life is abjured as caste localities are spontaneously carved out of every urban center in Tamil Nadu. Hardgrave’s study too, finds that it was only the “well to do” who moved out from caste homogeneous communities to class based residential areas. In fact then, it is the economic differentiation available in urban settings that instructs an absolute attraction or continued adherence to the caste system.

The inference we draw from this variously supported distinction is important to the analysis of attitudes that may be expected. The urban poor, continuing to live in village like isolation, derived from caste and economic poverty, also continue to be controlled by the dictates of caste; i.e. an acceptance of hereditary hierarchy and predetermined role playing. At this stage, they are most vulnerable to caste based political groupings, because they continue to see themselves primarily as caste communities.

It is only amongst the upwardly mobile sections of the urban population, that caste is perforce negated by the dynamics of wealth. The significant inability of the Nadar caste Sangam (association), the Kaikoolar caste *naaDu* and the earlier Vanniyar Kula Kasatriya Sangham to continue their initial success as caste organizations, once their members had

Vol.XXXIII, 1960, p.5 - 22.

⁶⁴See R.Vidyasagar, “Vanniyar’s Agitation”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12 March, 1988, p.507 - 511.

fractured along highly unequal planes in occupation and economic status, is indicative of this dynamic. Differences in wealth disrupt the caste linkage in definitive ways. Caste perception is not completely rejected, but endlessly creative methods to correlate caste and class are evolving in the urban scenario. Non rejection of caste is apparent in the anxiety of parents in finding caste synonymous as well as class equivalent spouses for their children;⁶⁵ in the rigidity of marital kinship rules that continues to be upheld; as well as the emergence of marriage houses and caste cultural centers in all the Tamil cities. The relevance of caste and the part it plays in the life of the individual, however, is altered. The choice of differentiating personal roles and ignoring the more rigid tenets of caste isolation thereby “releasing the individual to form new interests and associations, cutting across the lines of caste”,⁶⁶ presupposes a variant set of attitudes from the wholly caste bound Tamilian.

The low caste urbanite continues to operate in a caste conscious environment if low caste status is linked with poverty. Poverty marks the group with all the attributes of low caste mentioned earlier — illiteracy or low levels of literacy, non recognition of Tamil culture in any conscious way, primary awareness and identification with the immediate jati/caste group rather than any larger entity, weak propensity for either political awareness or a stake in the ongoing political system, negative perceptions of the viability of Tamil Nadu as an independent nation, and finally, an acute vulnerability to any structure or individual that upholds him/her.

The low caste member with high wealth status, on the other hand, will be similiar to other wealthy Tamilians, regardless of caste, in terms of political awareness, sense of a larger whole than the immediate jati, and vulnerability to the structured polity, depending on government related or independent choice of occupation. The effect of low caste status, however, can be expected to predispose his or her views on the factors of Tamil uniqueness.

⁶⁵Even amongst migrant Tamil workers in Malaysia, who, as a minority population in a foreign land are primarily identified as “Indian Tamils”, there is a strong need to marry within the jati or caste. According to a study, ‘middle ranking Vellala castes would send their daughters back to their native villages in India, when the latter fell in love with low caste boys; just as low caste Pallars would not allow marriages with low caste Paraiyan jatis.’ See R.Rajoo, “World-View of the Indians with regard to their Social Identity and Belonging in Malaya, c.1900- 1957.” In Mohd. Taib Osman (ed.) *Malaysian World View*, (Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 1985): p.168.

⁶⁶Robert L.Hardgrave,Jr., “Urbanization and the Structure of Caste”, in Richard G.Fox (ed.), *Urban India: Society, Space and Image*, (Duke University: Monograph Number 10, 1970): p.46.

Such members do, in fact, aim for increased cosmopolitanization rather than Tamilization, so that their low caste status can coexist more comfortably with their high class status. Kamraj Nadar, originating from the low caste Nadar caste and succeeding in becoming not only Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, but also a national power broker for the all India Congress party, was a clear example of this dynamic at work. For such groups or people, restricting themselves to a strictly Tamil bound milieu would enforce a conformity to Tamil caste hierarchy, which would be personally counter productive.

It is true to say that the groups exist in seeming perpetuity. Members within the group, however, are in a constant state of flux, so that the members studied by Hardgrave in 1975 as comprising low caste, poor Nadars are no longer the poor studied by , say, L.R.Naik in 1980 while reporting to the Backward Classes Commission.⁶⁷ The category of low caste and poor, for example, remains constant even if the actual caste group of Nadar or Kaikoolar or Vellala has changed, so that it is possible for this study to use the group category as a relevant source of attitudinal predispositions.

Conclusion

Urban Tamil Nadu provides a more complex study as caste does not link as neatly with class or occupational status. At this moment of social history, the scope to link the two still exists, a reminder of the overwhelming insistence of caste dictates that biased the urban mobility (not choice) of caste groups.⁶⁸ The urban Brahmans, for example, with their tradition of learning and religious abstention from manual labor, are almost always to be found in government, clerical, and academic jobs. The urban area's small, independent businesses, especially in leather tanning and *beedi* (cigarette) making ("unclean" occupations for caste Hindus) is almost always controlled by Muslim castes who value occupations that require no subordination to anyone but Allah and consider business as a sunnath or

⁶⁷See **Report of the Backward Classes Commission**, Vols.III to VII, 1980.

⁶⁸In a survey conducted two decades ago, it was found that a majority of central government employees, were sons of professionals (89% in the Indian Foreign Service; 81% in the Administrative Services; 77% in the Police; 80% in Audits and Accounts; 79% in Customs), almost all of whom were from middle to upper castes. It is significant, however, that in the twenty odd years since independence, when a hundred percent of the professionals were upper caste members, the ratio had consistently reduced. See V.Subramaniam, **Social Background of India's Administrators**, (New Delhi: Government of India, 1971), Table 6.

Prophet's custom.⁶⁹

While historical caste bias and "a general order of preadaptability",⁷⁰ does color urban occupational choice, it is of rapidly decreasing significance. Literacy and employment skills are the defining criteria for urban attitudes. Here again, as mentioned earlier, the level of literacy is biased by traditional caste advantages. However, this too is of decreasing significance. Caste in the urban setting gains importance as an indicator, only in the context of political rather than social personas. Where caste and urban occupations coalesce, the potential for political mobilization becomes very great. When the two are unrelated, caste consciousness is whittled down to a simple cultural index that may point to certain attitudes on religion, self perception and group awareness, but not guarantee any degree of potential mobilization.

Caste identity in the urban scenario is therefore a different animal than what it is in the rural milieu. From providing a firm index of socio economic hierarchy that controls the limits of behavior and aspiration in the rural setting, caste becomes a volatile factor of urban dynamics, that ranges between a mild indicator of cultural perceptual values to a vociferous mobilizer of urban confrontational politics.

Grouping the mass urban populace of Tamil Nadu through the linked variables of caste, literacy and occupation are by definition, reductionist. In addition, they are not causally linked to every political outburst or formation in the city in direct and unilinear ways. Yet it would be no exaggeration to say that any study of Tamil Nadu's urban dynamics, be it

⁶⁹See Mattison Mines, *Muslim Merchants: The Economic Behavior of an Indian Muslim Community*, (Delhi: SRC, 1972).

⁷⁰Harold Gould, "Occupational Categories and Stratification in the Achievement of Urban Society"; in Richard G. Fox (ed.) *Urban India: Society, Space, and Image*, (Duke University, Monograph no.10, 1969). In fact, the stereotyping of caste was given strong urban definition during the rule of the British. As pointed out, it "was useful to the administrator, because it gave the illusion of knowing the people, he did not have to differentiate too much among individual Indians - a man was a Brahmin, and Brahmins had certain characteristics...". With the result, ethnographies, with descriptions were copiously produced so that it was widely publicized that the Maravan caste was "lawless", the Kallars were "skulking", Telugus were "weak, timid", and Muslims were "martial". These, as Arnold points out, gained further currency because of the legitimacy of racial theories gaining ground amongst the Western scholars of the late nineteenth century. The bias for "martial castes" led to the recruitment of 20 - 30% Muslims in the Madras constabulary of 1868 even though they comprised only 7% of the population. See David Arnold, "Recruitment in the Madras Constabulary"; in *Subaltern Studies*, Volume IV, 1985, p.7-10. Open access to education and the incessant demand for literate and specialized personnel in rapidly expanding cities, among a host of other reasons, has started eating into the legitimacy of "caste stereotypes" in occupation.

social or political, cannot avoid accessing one or all three of these variables. No explanation is complete without them.

In an environment where the chaos of multi culture is regulated only through the process of pigeonholing men into pre constructed hierarchical slots, the prevalence of the three variables is palpable even in the everyday give and take of individual meetings. Consciously or non consciously, a person's accent, use of words, caste markings, class giveaways — clothes, uniform, mode of transportation etc., are immediately sized in everyday encounters, much as they are in the rest of the world. What makes this simple human positioning relevant, is the extent to which it feeds self identity and group dynamics.

The relation of both rural and urban prototypes, to the indices for Tamil nationalism outlined in the previous chapter, provides a profile of the range of nationalist behavior that can be discerned in the Tamil nation. Each of the groups, through a unique confluence of positional factors comprising location, caste and class, are weighted towards Tamil uniqueness, group awareness, vulnerability to the structured polity and sense of viability as an independent nation. This has been synopsisized in the figures given below.

Figure 4: Positional and relational attributes of rural Tamil Nadu

Positional \ Relational	Uniqueness	Group Awareness	Structured Polity	Viability	Predisposition to Nationalist Behavior
Landowning Brahmin	0	-	--	--	Non-Nationalist
Landowning Forward non Brahmin	+	++	-	0	Ambivalent
Landowning Backward non Brahmin	+	+	+	+	Strong Nationalist
Landowning Adi Dravida	-	-	-	-	Non-Nationalist
Peasant Brahmin	+	0	+	0	Ambivalent
Peasant Forward non Brahmin	+	+	+	0	Strong
Peasant Backward non Brahmin	+	+	+	0	Strong
Peasant Adi Dravida	--	--	--	--	Non-Nationalist

Key: ++ : very strong; + : strong; 0 : ambivalent; - : weak; -- : very weak.

Figure 5: Positional and relational attributes of urban Tamil Nadu

Positional \ Relational	Uniqueness	Group Awareness	Structured Polity	Viability	Predisposition to Nationalist Behavior
High caste, literate government	--	--	--	--	Non-Nationalist
High caste, literate independent	0	++	++	+	Strong Nationalist
High caste, illiterate government	+	0	--	-	Non-Nationalist
High caste, illiterate independent	++	++	++	++	Very Strong
Low caste, literate government	-	-	--	--	Non-Nationalist
Low caste, literate independent	0	-	0	0	Ambivalent
Low caste, illiterate government	+	-	--	--	Non-Nationalist
Low caste, illiterate independent	+	--	-	-	Non-Nationalist

Key: ++ : very strong; + : strong; 0 : ambivalent; - : weak; -- : very weak.

In other words:

Figure 6: Group rankings

Very strong	Strong
1) Urban, illiterate high-caste, independent	Rural: 2) Landowning BNB 3) Peasant FNB 4) Peasant BNB Urban: 5) High-caste, literate independent
Ambivalent	Non-nationalist
Rural: 6) Landowning FNB 7) Peasant B Urban: 8) Low-caste, literate independent	Rural: 9) Landowning B 10) Landowning AD 11) Peasant AD Urban: 12) High-caste, literate government 13) High-caste, illiterate government 14) Low-caste, literate government 15) Low-caste, illiterate government 16) Low-caste, illiterate independent

Key: B= Brahmin; FNB= Forward Non Brahmin;
BNB=Backward Non Brahmin; AD= Adi Dravida

As can be expected, each of these groups are not comparable units of equal size and equal power. The Adi Dravidas comprise approximately thirty percent of the Tamil population and yet are politically subdued because of their abnormally repressed economic and social situation. The Brahmins are certainly a numerical minority, last calculated as comprising only three percent of the Tamil population, and yet continue to carry a high profile in the economic and thereby political control of Tamil Nadu. The Non Brahmins, both Backward

and Forward, are the majority population, still searching for viable political identities that can cut through a spaghetti bowl of intra-jati conflagrations.

As of current politics, this is being achieved through caste groupings in the village and class empathies in the city. The ramifications of caste and class however, overlap in both contexts, so that it is possible to coalesce differently analysed groups as being behaviorally unified. The sixteen socially defined groups are thereby herded into four behavioral groups, with a full understanding of the nature of the herding and the potential fissures that may exist within.

We have then, not merely “strong nationalists” in urban, literate, low caste members, but “strong nationalists” who’s intensity is derivative of defined factors in their cultural makeup, and who are constantly challenged by an insistent and attractive cooptive non Tamil structure. We have, too, “non nationalists” in the high caste, literate, government employee, who’s high caste counterpart in the rural sector, by virtue of being landless and all that it entails, behaves in inconsistent ways that could be construed as both strongly nationalistic as well as nationalistically indifferent, depending on the circumstances. Insight into the complexity of these groupings makes it possible not only to explain the ongoing political behavior of Tamil people, but monitor future realignments that are bound to occur. A deeper vulnerability to the structured polity, for example, would immediately compromise the intense nationalistic behavior expected from an urban, low caste, Tamil literate person; just as intense Tamil nationalism can almost never be expected from the lowest jatis of Adi Dravidas, who perceive continued suffering and unchanging suppression within an independent Tamil nation. On the other hand, Tamil Brahmins, while presented as mainly non nationalists, could behave as nationalists if they were steeped mainly in Tamil culture, spoke only the Tamil language, and were not vulnerable to the structured polity - a confluence of predispositions found mainly amongst peasant Brahmins, for reasons explicated in this chapter.

Given the four broad behavioral groupings and the scattering of social coalitions amongst them, it becomes evident that intense Tamil nationalist behavior cannot be expected at a sustainable level. There are far too many compromisational factors, that make such a

scenario, improbable. In fact, there is only one group which qualifies as “very strong nationalists”. It becomes equally evident, that non nationalistic behavior, or complete indifference to the Tamil nation, is also unrealistic.

Having issued this black and white bracket of the Tamil nation, Chapter V follows the more interesting intermediate behavior. The intermittent rise and fall and competition between the four behavioral groups, serves to whittle the complex contortions of the government during a direct threat to Tamil identity, into an understandable series of policies that, far from being “uncertain”, “contradictory” and “incoherent”⁷¹ as critics accused them of being, were resonant with the variety of compulsions being felt from the Tamil Nadu public.

⁷¹Robert W. Bradnock, *India's Foreign Policy Since 1971*, (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1990): p.72 and 77.

CHAPTER V

TAMIL BEHAVIOR AND INDIAN POLICY TOWARD SRI LANKA

Introduction:

Jawaharlal Nehru, India's preeminent architect in the building of an elite Indian Foreign Service, was of the opinion that "no country, including the Big Powers...has got anything which might be called a precise and definite foreign policy, because the world itself is in a fluid condition...(and everyone) is trying to fit in their policy from day to day to changing circumstances..."¹ It was a sanguine approach, untouched by the perception that the great, heaving masses of the Indian public would be at all invested or even able to monitor this "fluid condition" and that it was best suited to a small group of experts, headed by himself.

Less sanguine and acutely aware of public investment, Henry Kissinger theorized that foreign policy "freed from domestic considerations would be more consistent" as "fluctuating emotions (led) to excesses of both intervention and abdication."²

The exclusivism contained in both statements makes for strangely similar ideals. For both, foreign policy was essentially idealized as the preserve of Morgenthau's Great Diplomat. While such a viewpoint would have been supportable in the feudal world of Metternich,³ the current interdependencies characterizing inter state relations makes it a relatively unworkable proposition. In multi nation states like India where large portions of the population have spilled over into other territorial states, such a perception can be wholly unsupportable.⁴

¹S.Gopal (general editor), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*. Second Series, Vol. Four, (New Delhi: J N Memorial Fund, 1986): p.596 and 603.

²As quoted in Peter McGrath, "Must Our Wars Be Moral?" *Newsweek*, 26 November, 1990, p.38.

³In describing the transition of diplomacy from 'old' exclusivism to 'new' publicly-supported policy, Metternich's view is described as: "the very idea that the public should have any knowledge of, or opinion upon, foreign policy appeared both dangerous and fantastic...". Quoted in Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939): p.73. The idea that public involvement could be potentially "dangerous" has always underwritten the Indian foreign policy system.

⁴As one correspondent put it: "If India can send troops to save Tamil lives in Sri Lanka,..should it not also send troops to save Bengalis in Bangladesh, Nepalis in Nepal, or Urdu, Punjabi, and Sindhi speakers

The line between domestic policy and foreign policy is no longer the clear and sparkling thing it may once have been. Intrusion by domestic forces or the public at large is not only possible, but unavoidably compelling at points.

Tamil behavior and pressure on the Indian government was never orchestrated with an eye to introducing structural inputs or changes into the notoriously elitist Indian foreign policy system. It was simply unavoidable. The dynamic of Tamil nationalism within India, was asserted with enough stridency, so that the government was nudged into factoring it in its relations with the nation of Sri Lanka.

Relations with Sri Lanka, as chronicled in Chapter II, were marked by constant fluctuations, and seeming retractions in previously held positions. While this could have been the result of any number of factors, it is not coincidental that the vociferous section of public opinion in Tamil Nadu underwent similiarly wide fluctuations. One observer believed that the Tamil Nadu public was really controlled by the then Chief minister, Mr. M.G.Ramachandran, who in turn fuelled or quenched support for the Sri Lankan Tamils with the "full knowledge and connivance of the Indian government...".⁵ To fuel or quench a rally or even a riot seems possible in the context of Indian politics.⁶ However, for even the most beagle eyed conspiracy theorist, to control over seven years of public reaction ranging from hostile silences to passionate mass protests and even self immolations, seems improbable.

Reactions in Tamil Nadu fluctuated precisely because of the different motivational fuses inherent in the groups characterizing the Tamil nation. Very strong Tamil nationalists believed a crisis had come to pass and strong, aggressive action was necessary to contain it. Some believed that such a crisis could launch afresh old ideas of creating a separate territorial state for all Tamils, or, at minimum, legitimize the idea amongst a wider swathe of Tamil society. Others reacted with fluctuating levels of empathy, sometimes fired by

in Pakistan..?" In "IPKF in Sri Lanka: Superpower Compulsions"; *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 July, 1989, p.1574.

⁵Interview with former Indian Foreign Secretary, Eric Gonsalvez, 19 July 1989.

⁶In fact, in a curious boast made by democratic India's Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi said: "We do not get shaken or uncomfortable by street marches and conclaves and contrived campaigns and cabals...if it is a question of holding rallies, we can also hold bigger rallies any time we want, at the drop of a hat..". In *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol.XXXIV, No.26, 11 December, 1987, p.443.

stories of atrocities committed against the Tamils of Sri Lanka and sometimes indifferent and even hostile to the Sri Lankan refugees crowding their environment. Yet others were prone to view the crisis in strictly economic and social terms rather than in terms of shared identity and personal outrage. The different motivational levels added up to a lack of coherency in approach. No single position, be it of outrage or indifference could be sustained over an appreciable period of time. Groups wrestled with each other to translate their own perspectives into mass behavior. This showed itself in volatile behavior and palpable ambivalence in verbal expressions.

Media polls, with all the clarity of statistics, indexed a population, where a majority condemned Sri Lanka's "unreasonable stand"; approved of the "Indian Peace Keeping Force's operations in Sri Lanka"; and were in agreement with the "Government of India's policy in Sri Lanka...to establish peace and secure justice for all Tamils..".⁷ Tamil legislators, on the other hand, spoke and behaved in ways that defeated polls-simplicity. With a conscious or non-conscious sensitivity to differing motivations amongst the different, significant Tamil groups, legislators both condemned Sri Lankan atrocities even as they condemned the presence and activities of Sri Lankan Tamil militants within Indian borders. They were the first to urge the sending in of a Peace Keeping Force, even as the Force was denigrated for being too "high handed", "costly" and "unproductive" among other things. The Indian Prime Minister was both vilified and feted, depending on the sense of changing public perception.

Whether behavior was manifested in strong outrage directed against perceived governmental inactivity during the Sri Lankan crisis, or as indifference toward the ongoing plight of the Sri Lankan Tamils; the Indian government's actions and statements were tellingly parallel.

The question is: Do a hundred impassioned memorandums or a series of bloody riots or a few well publicized self-immolations unequivocally formulate a certain policy? Does public silence or mass ambivalence condone yet other policies? How far do policy makers absorb and reflect the vibrations felt or perceived from their constituencies?⁸ In a democratic

⁷The Hindu Poll report, 12 September, 1989.

⁸See arguments on the "boundary - setting role of the public" and "perceptual balancing" by decision makers in Richard W.Cottam, *Foreign Policy Motivation: A General Theory and a Case Study*.

system, the answer is : acutely.

This is perceived in the public as well. Mr.Kandappan, a former MP and Propoganda Secretary for the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) party had this to say : “..the Government of India, is very sensitive on the Sri Lankan issue, sensitive to the propoganda that may affect the Tamil Nadu public. So whenever our leader Karunanidhi takes a stand, they think that they too should make some amends to Karunanidhi’s stand and show the public that they too are equally conscious of the Sri Lankan problem...”.⁹ As theorized by R.Cottam, “..because of their role interests, political leaders are far more likely to mirror the psychological mood than to give direction to it. Political leaders... can operate far more securely in an atmosphere of public consensus. Should a politically vital section of the public accept a competing world view and demand that policy conform to that view, as was the case in the United States during the Vietnam conflict, the response of the political leader is likely to be adaptation. He will, and usually nonconsciously, alter his world view to a point at which a policy is possible with which that important public group can identify..”.¹⁰

The Indian Tamilian’s alternating vehemence, indifference and hostility to the Sri Lankan Tamil’s crisis was closely approximated by the Indian government’s changing and seemingly inconsistent policies with regard to the Sri Lankan nation. “Politically vital sections” of the Tamil nation wrestled for the projection and acceptance of their particular “world view”. The most organized version of these sections was represented through local political parties, described in some detail in Chapter III. A brief note on the nexus between party and demographic group has been added here.

The groups distinguished in the previous chapter have long been attracted to different political organizations. The major political parties active in Tamil Nadu are the two ‘Dravidian’ parties, the DMK and the AIADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam). Between them, they have succeeded in capturing the state government ever since 1967. A crucial supporting role is provided by the Tamil Nadu Congress(I) party which, having

(Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977).

⁹Interview, August, 1989.

¹⁰Richard W.Cottam, *Foreign Policy Motivation: A General Theory and a Case Study*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977): p.317-318.

lost its pre-1967 predominance in state politics, has nevertheless continued as an essential political actor. Conclusive victory for the DMK or AIADMK has usually depended on an electoral alliance with the Congress party. State politics is definitively dominated by these three party groupings. Secondary groups include the two communist parties, the CPI (Communist Party of India) and CPI(M), that have consistently maintained a few seats in the 234 strong Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. In addition, non-electoral yet strongly political groups like the DK (Dravida Kazhagam) play an important role in expressing radical Tamil politics. Incipient parties are also to be found in caste organisations such as the Pattali Makkal Katchi¹¹ and class organisations like the Verkattu Fisherman's Association and the three million strong Tamil Nadu Agriculturists Association.¹²

The existence of these diverse parties over the past forty years has quite naturally led to political awareness within the context expressed or imposed by these organisations. By now, the particular attraction of each party for specific socio economic and regional sections of the Tamil community has become commonplace observation.

In the vocabulary consistent with this study, the DMK attracts primarily an urban population that is Tamil-literate or illiterate, high caste and in an independent occupation; i.e. the very strong Tamil nationalist. At the other end, the Congress party, traditionally the party of "Brahmins and Adi Dravidas" (highest and lowest caste), is fundamentally associated with urban government employees and rural landowners; i.e. the Tamil non nationalist. Members of the AIADMK are less defined, deriving primary support from rural, low caste, economically poor Tamils and comprising primarily the 'mixed' nationalist, ranging from 'strong' to 'ambivalent' Tamilians.

The vitally important caste and class organisations are more comprehensive in their political motivations and usually deal with more short term or caste restricted issues. This suggests associations with any of the larger political groupings, depending on immediate feedbacks or long term payoffs. In fact, this has repeatedly proven to be the case in the past. Behaviorally, members of this group would almost certainly fall under the category of

¹¹In the 1989 state Assembly elections, for the very first time, this single caste group was able to attract almost six percent of total votes, making it eligible for recognition as a political party.

¹²For an account of agrarian class politics, see "Myths and Facts behind Agrarian Unrest", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12 December, 1981.

'mixed nationalists', as the fulcrum of their support for any cause is linked to their primary investment in a single caste or a single issue and not in the Tamil or Indian nation per se.

The verbal statements and actions of the leaders of these "politically vital sections" as well as the behavior they translated or provoked amongst Tamil society, when seen in conjunction with the Indian government's formal actions and policies with regard to Sri Lanka, is quite vivid in its parallelism.

The link becomes apparent primarily in a state of juxtaposition. With this in mind, the following chapter aims at choosing the three major policy phases enacted by the Indian government between 1983 and 1991 and contextualizing them within the matrix of Tamil behavior. As already suggested by the range of groups within the Tamil nation described in Chapter IV, a clear, intense policy fuelled by clearly intense Tamil nationalists is not a comprehensible scenario in Tamil politics. As suggested in Chapter II, the chronology of events and Indian government policy toward Sri Lanka since 1983 appears anything but "a policy". Instead, there appear to be many policies, many retracted acts and opposing official statements, so that Nehru's earlier injunction of fitting foreign policy "from day to day" seems to have been taken almost too literally.

Given the unusually peripatetic nature of Indo - Sri Lankan relations over this period, the 'other' factors that usually explain or even predict inter- state relations : economics, prestige, cultural imperialism, territorial ambitions, personal grandeur, vested interests, ideology, and defense, are less persuasive. The seeming sporadicity and dramatism of Indian "excesses in intervention and abdication" in Sri Lanka appear coherent when paralleled with the evident sporadicity and dramatism of changing Tamil behavior and action. As abstractly theorized: "If the modal views of all important public elements cluster near the prevailing view ¹³ foreign policy is likely to be stable....If the distance from the prevailing view of a modal view of a major public element is great, the expectation would be for uncertainty in foreign policy.."¹⁴

The prevailing view of Indian government foreign policy makers had consistently adhered

¹³'Prevailing view' is defined here as the view of reality most congruent with government policy.

¹⁴Richard W. Cottam, *Foreign Policy Motivation: A General Theory and a Case Study*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977): p.318.

to the reality of Sri Lanka as a close ally, towards which hostile action or intervention was unthinkable. Modal views supported this reality. This had made for over forty years of stable policy between the two governments, despite any number of issue-irritants that could conceivably have led to instability in the equation. Yet with the inflow of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees starting in 1983, the modal view of Tamils in India diverged sharply from that of the ostensibly 'stable' prevailing view guiding the Indian government. Over the next decade, the modal views of major public elements in Tamil Nadu flickered inconclusively so that Indian foreign policy toward Sri Lanka was strikingly unstable. Within the decade, the Indian government passed from being stable ally; to unwelcome mediator; to forced negotiator; to armed interventionist; to complete abdicator; followed by the resolution to revert being a stable ally. The seemingly chameleon-like policies adopted were chaotic only from a distance, or when described in one-liners like the one given above. Given the domestic milieu, dominated by conflicting and variously motivated Tamil nationalists, Indian governmental decisions were congruent policies. The continuation of these policies over five different governments elected to the Centre,¹⁵ demonstrated the perceived need for just these policies.¹⁶

Period of Mediation:1983-1987

As chronicled in Chapter II, during this phase of Indian foreign policy, low profile mediation by the Indian government, acting as a go-between the Sinhalese government and the Sri Lankan Tamil leaders, struck the key note. To have asserted the role of a "mediator", despite President Jayewardene's hostile and inflammatory remarks that it was a domestic matter, was in itself a dramatic enunciation of India's policy toward Sri Lanka. As unquestioned allies in the region, both India's unilateral decision to "help" in Sri Lankan affairs and Sri Lanka's open condemnation of Indian "interference" were startling deviations from the norm. As economic trade partners, and as political allies, the sudden show of relative assertiveness on the part of India and the open hostility aired by the Sri Lankan Presi-

¹⁵The five governments during the decade studied here were headed by Mrs. Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi of the Congress party; Mr.V.P. Singh of the National Front; Chandra Sekhar of the Janata Dal; and Mr.N.R.Rao of the Congress party.

¹⁶The change in policy directions never coincided with changes in the government.

dent, marked a dramatic new twist to a relation that had so far been known only for its non-complexity.

More in keeping with earlier policy, was the Indian government's carefully projected image of assisting rather than interfering in Sri Lankan affairs. This was one that the coterie of foreign policy makers believed to be completely viable and "in keeping" with the general policy of assuring Sri Lanka as a continued ally. Policy toward neighboring smaller nations was always underlined by the directive to allay 'Big Brother' fears harbored by smaller nations and appease them as far as possible with regard to minor matters. Relations with Sri Lanka were replete with examples of India's obvious desire to propitiate rather than agitate Sri Lankan officials. India's ignoring of Sri Lanka's support to Pakistan during the 1971 war; the handing over of disputed island Kacchatheevu with minimal publicity, despite the relevance of Kacchatheevu for Indian fishermen; the promise to delay the development of the SethuSamudram port in Tamil Nadu as requested by the Sri Lankan government, much to the chagrin of Tamils in India, provide some of the more prominent examples of appeasement. As Congress Minister, Mr. Natwar Singh stated in the *Lok Sabha* (House of the People), "Seventy million people dealing with the problem of an Island State of sixteen million requires circumspect behavior...We cannot give the impression that we are the big brother and are using the big stick..."¹⁷ Given this general policy and evident official reluctance to publicize Indian involvement in what was repeatedly stressed in the Indian Parliament as "Sri Lanka's internal affairs", the perceived need to actually interfere, albeit as "mediators", in Sri Lanka would have to derive from strongly felt pressures. Indian Tamil public pressure following the July 1983 riots in Sri Lanka, was definitely at an all time high.

World View:

In July 1983, Tamil world view showed the most congruence since the fiery language issue of the 1950's. Reality was firmly and unhesitatingly embedded in the perception of "genocide" of the Tamil nation. Legislators, educators, editors, politicians and letters to newspapers all displayed intense anger toward the Sri Lankan government, unqualified support for Tamil "brethren" and unconcealed suspicion toward the Indian government for

¹⁷Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XXVIII, No.50, 12 May 1987.

not reacting in ways more in keeping with their sense of violation and outrage.

If an outside observer were to have arrived in Tamil Nadu during the first two weeks following the Sri Lankan riots, there would have been no doubt in his/her mind that the Indian Tamils were unquestionably a nation of very strong nationalists. Riots, resignations, walk-outs and protests implicating all actors who were non-Tamil as possible conspirators, were rampant.

After thirty years of disuse, the old rallying cry of Aryan indifference to the Dravidian, was once again raised with impunity. Comments in Tamil papers questioned Mrs. Gandhi's haste in saving the Aryan 'North Indian' Bengalis in 1971 by fighting the Indo-Pakistan war and compared it to the inaction during a direct threat to the 'Dravidian' Tamils.

Legislator, E. Janarthanam, believing Indian "vagueness" to be an active conspiracy hatched between the Sri Lankan Sinhalese and the Indian governments, resigned his post. His perception of reality on the threat faced by Tamils was not a singular one, as evidenced by his subsequent success in arranging a defensive World Tamil Conference, calling on all expatriate Tamils to bond together and "save the Tamil nation". The need for Tamils to help each other was openly based on the argument that the Indian government was not to be trusted. Said a former Minister of Parliament from Tamil Nadu, "I was in Parliament for ten years. My clear perception of the Government of India's understanding of Tamils is this : it does not understand at all!" As an example of the "North Indian governments" non understanding, he said an Indian Tamil should have been sent as Ambassador to Sri Lanka right from the start, because only an Indian Tamil could "fully appreciate the difficulties ...of the sizable Tamil community there."¹⁸

In succeeding months, with the direct involvement of the Indian government in attempting to mediate between the Sri Lankan government and Sri Lankan Tamil groups openly supported by the Tamil state government in India, the heretofore unanimous expression of distrust toward the government appeared to grow more complex. Members from the ruling state party, the AIADMK, were less critical of the Indian government and in fact openly supportive of the "efforts of our Prime Minister". Support of Tamil militants was also qual-

¹⁸Interview with Mr. Kandappan, August, 1989.

ified rather than unstinted. When, for example, Tamil militants kidnapped an American couple and demanded ransom money to be paid through Chief Minister MGR, (a measure of their implicit trust in his support), MGR was visibly embarrassed and claimed Tamil Nadu “supported refugees not extremists” and that such acts only “hurt the interests of Tamils all over the world”.¹⁹ Tamil Congress party members were even more vocal in urging a “strengthening of the Prime Ministers hands at this moment”, and condemning all those who “weakened” Indian policy with their criticism.²⁰

In contrast, the members of the Opposition, the DMK party, grew increasingly explicit in their distrust of all policies initiated by the Indian government and Tamil members who supported it. The leader, Mr. Karunanidhi, claimed that Chief Minister MGR and Mrs. Gandhi were together “cheating” Tamils with continuous “pep talks” that amounted to nothing.²¹ In the Lok Sabha, a member accused the government of doing nothing more than “reading something and making some statements in the paper” and ended his statement by declaring “.you can throw me out. You can kill me even. It does not matter.. my people are dying there..the entire Tamil race will be annihilated in the name of religion..”.²² This sense of imminent “annihilation” with nobody, save the leaders of the DMK to prevent it, became a recurrent and increasingly vocal theme. Not only did prominent members of the DMK party believe in it, but it was increasingly viewed as sound oppositional political strategy to wean support away from the AIADMK party. DMK’s “pro Tamil” rallies became significantly bolder. The Indian independence day, celebrated in August, with all the ostentation and reverence of a post-colonial state, was blacklisted by the DMK as a “day of mourning” to “condemn the continued indifference of the Central government” and also the state government for “repressive measures” and the arrest of two Tamil militants responsible for an accidental bomb blast in Madras. The call to negate Independence Day was met with expected outrage by the Indian Parliament and specifically condemned by non-DMK Tamil members who were not prepared for such a “radical” view of Tamil unity or Tamil unity based on anti-India sentiment. Public response, too, was tepid and the “day of mourning”

¹⁹ *India Today*, June 15, 1984, p.64.

²⁰ See Congress(I) member, Era Anabarasu’s comments in *The Hindu*, 20 July, 1984.

²¹ *The Hindu*, 27 September, 1983.

²² See Member Mayathevar’s statements in *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol.L, No.13, 8 August, 1984, p.364-365.

attracted only one other faction, the breakaway Cong.(K) led by Mr.Nedumaran, a strong Sri Lankan Tamil supporter.

Given this, the DMK sought to tap other, less sensitive yet equally dramatic, avenues. It turned to the United Nations, submitting ten million signatures in a memorandum detailing the plight of Sri Lankan Tamils and the help they required. In addition, it urged the formation of a "World Federation of Tamils" to function as a coordinating body, "unifying the hitherto divergent forces of Tamil enthusiasm, for the fruitful culmination of the avowed goals of Tamils all over the world..".²³ The bid for internationalizing support, clearly pointed at the DMK's manifest distrust of Indian sponsored policies and verbal assurances. This was openly demonstrated in their repeated walk-outs from both houses of Parliament, every time the government issued statements on "talks with Sri Lanka".

As Indian government efforts to establish grounds for mediation between the Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan Government became more and more forced (see chapter II), especially under the new leadership of Rajiv Gandhi, the DMK party's statements grew openly challenging. In conjunction with Mr.Nedumaran, Cong(K) leader, and Mr.Veeramani, the DK leader, a new organisation was formed for the sole purpose of supporting the Sri Lankan Tamils. Indian effort to arrange a conciliatory meeting between the Sri Lankan parties in neutral Bhutan, was immediately condemned by this organisation in a series of published pamphlets that stated:

"Though he (Rajiv Gandhi)has claimed to be sympathetic towards the unfortunate Tamils of Sri Lanka, the real fact is that for political reasons he has thrown his weight behind the Sri Lankan government...". (We)"..condemn the negative attitude of the central and state governments which have betrayed the interests of the Tamil race..". (24-8-1985). (We)"..want to impress upon the Tamil people that there is a topsyturvy change-u-turn in the attitude of the Central government" and they should not "harm the interests of the Sri Lankan Tamils by throwing them to the Sri Lankan wolves..".(1-9-1985) The Indian government has "aided in the conspiratorial plans of the Sri Lankan government..".(15-9-1985).²⁴

²³18 September,1984, *The Hindu*

²⁴Tamil Eelam Supporters Organisation Resolutions.

Even in the Lok Sabha a member stated: "Do not forget that Tamil Nadu is included in the Indian map...Are we a different race in this country?...How long do you want us to wait?"²⁵ The very fact that such statements could be made without instantly producing a backlash of "non national", "anti Indian" accusations, so endemic to the notoriously thin skinned Indian parliament, argues a very strong public content that backed the statements. Far from ostracizing the members who spoke up, ruling party representatives were noticeably conciliatory - "The whole nation feels anguished and we share the emotion of our brothers and sisters in Tamil Nadu..".²⁶ The Government will do its utmost to "satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the Tamils..".²⁷

With the infructuous ending of the Bhutan negotiations (see Chapter II), followed by, what was viewed as the vengeful deportation of three prominent Sri Lankan Tamil leaders from Tamil Nadu, the DMK's suspicious world view gained sudden prominence and support. Tamils within the state were once again whipped into a temporary frenzy of empathy for Sri Lankan Tamils, who were being "forcibly sent back" to their "enemies" by their "supporters".

This frenzy was followed soon after by an intensification in Indian policy toward Sri Lanka with the Indian government no longer attempting to function as a quiet mediator, but actively involving itself as an individual negotiator.

Willingness to Sacrifice:

The publicity and consequent empathy engendered by the July 1983 riots in Sri Lanka brought on an immediate outpouring of both verbal and material support. The need to "help our brethren", was graphically plastered across newspapers, city posters and even private offices. According to a middle class teacher, "I and my co workers wanted to help. We pledged between 2 percent and 5 percent of our monthly income toward the Tamil cause..".²⁸ Support for extensive refugee camps along the coast was vociferously endorsed,

²⁵See statement of Mr. Kalanidhi in Lok Sabha Debates, 22 January, 1985, Vol.1, No.6.

²⁶Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.L, No.18, 16 August, 1984, p.292.

²⁷Indira Gandhi, 12 August, 1984, The Hindu.

²⁸Interview with Mr.Mudaliyar, 1989, Madras. Within the year, the perceived increase in militancy within Madras disillusioned these supporters of the 'Tamil cause' and the voluntary collection came to an abrupt end.

despite the express misgivings of fisherman's associations who had to bear the physical brunt of sharing already limited space and market infrastructure with the refugees. Homes within the cities were also granted to the richer or politically well placed Sri Lankan Tamils. In fact, rebel leaders were allowed to "operate out of rooms in the legislator's hostel, allotted in the names of sympathetic Members of the Legislative Assembly..".²⁹ No expression of solidarity seemed enough to express the wellspring of emotion, grief, support and guilt that was expressed in the few months following July 1983.

In an effort to politically 'capture' the mood, Chief Minister MGR called on a special cabinet meeting in August, to declare a "state of mourning" throughout Tamil Nadu for the full duration of a week. This entailed both enormous economic losses as it meant the cessation of all business activity and closure of shops as well as extensive civic disruption in the closing of schools, colleges and public institutions. That such a dramatic measure was both passed and upheld, brings to focus the emotional context within which it was drafted. The show of support and sacrifice was compulsive, magnified, intense. It was projected every which way : in the symbolic wearing of black bands; in verbal outpourings against the Sinhalese "racial bigots" and "Hitlers";³⁰ in material offerings of money, refugee rehabilitation services, and accomodation; in personal deprivations such as resignations by various members of the State Assembly and party leaders,³¹ as well as willingness to face injury or imprisonment such as that faced by mobs who stoned the United States Consulate in Madras for perceived support of the Sri Lankan government, as well as other student demonstrations; and finally even in self immolation, ostensibly aimed at forcing the government to "stop the atrocities against the Tamils..".³² The grief felt for Tamils in Sri Lanka was real, unqualified, and cut across party, regional, caste or class groupings.

The only community visibly against the reigning mood of complete empathy, was that of the poverty stricken, beleagured fishermen along the southern coast of Tamil Nadu.

²⁹India Today, 31 March, 1984, p.52.

³⁰The Hindu, 23 April, 1984.

³¹The first to resign was probably MGR's chief party whip, Era Janarthanam in 1983; followed by two representatives of the DMK in the State Assembly in 1984.

³²On 20 April, 1984, a 35 year old member of the DMK party, Mr.V.A.Govindaswamy set himself on fire while shouting slogans for the Sri Lankan Tamils and demanding immediate government action.

Significantly, they were also the first group to deal in close proximity with overwhelmingly large numbers of Sri Lankan Tamils. In addition, they were attacked by the Sri Lankan navy who were trying to stem the traffic of Tamil militants between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. They were frequently arrested and their boats confiscated.³³ Economic resentment of the over fifty thousand refugees crowding their coastal villages was intense, especially after it was announced that each refugee family would be getting Rs.1,100 per month. The fishermen families lived on barely Rs.114 per month, the average income from their daily, backbreaking work. Resentment was immediate. Religious differences heightened the antipathy as most of the initial wave of refugees were Christians. The increasingly unified Rameswaram Verkattu Fisherman's Association consistently protested directly to the Indian government in a campaign to "get rid of the foreigners" and "make our waters safe again". Dramatic plans were made to "recapture" the island of Kacchatheevu, previously disputed territory that had been ceded to Sri Lanka, and claim it as their own.³⁴ In addition, they picketed a train heading to Mandapam, one of the largest refugee camps, and threatened to hijack a ship bound for Sri Lanka.³⁵ Their sustained negation of any sharing of identity with Tamils from Sri Lanka served as a constant refrain that was picked up by others as the crisis wore on.

The rest of the people of Tamil Nadu showed their support in both organized and idiosyncratic ways, that suggested a groundswell empathy for the Sri Lankan Tamils. In April 1984, Peter Sam, an advocate in the Madras High Court, jeopardized his job by squatting in a yogic position in the middle of the Court and declaring he was "meditating to invoke the Supreme Power to save the lives of Tamils in Sri Lanka..".³⁶ In August 1984, a year after the riots, the students of Madras declared a one week closure of all schools, colleges and the university in a show of "brotherhood" with the Sri Lankan Tamils. They also faced 'lathi (stick) charges' by the Madras police, during some of their more vigorous demonstrations.

³³The Sri Lankan navy arrested over seventy seven Indian fishermen in the narrow, legally indeterminate strip of water separating the two countries, on the grounds that they could be a party to smuggling arms and provisions. One Indian Tamil fisherman was killed.

³⁴See *India Today*, 15 November, 1984, p.35.

³⁵*The Hindu*, 13 October 1984.

³⁶*The Hindu*, 25 April, 1984.

More organized efforts were represented by various party conclaves, constant memorandums and resolutions, urging the Central government to protect “the lives and property of the Tamils still in distress on the island..”,³⁷ followed by threats of resignations or walk outs. In addition, government officials were reportedly violating Indian law and risking imprisonment by “being most accomodating about visa and immigration regulations...some of them (Sri Lankan Tamils) even (going) abroad on Indian passports..”.³⁸

However, the increase in refugees at the average rate of one hundred each day,³⁹ the growing agitation by the fishermen community, and the large diversion of state funds and Centrally allotted funds to the refugee camps was also beginning to be heard in both the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly as well as in parliamentary debates.

In April 1984, the Tamil Nadu Assembly members agreed that incoming refugees could be given extended visas, but not “permanent asylum”.⁴⁰ In October 1984, the sharp decline of fish from its average five hundred thousand tonnes, was discussed with “resentment” in the Assembly.⁴¹ Questions on the number of refugees and extent of resources required for their upkeep was a constant feature of parliamentary debates, by both non Tamil as well as Tamil members. The admission that over seventy-five million rupees had been diverted for refugees over the 1983-1984 year in official spending, led a member to state that the presence of the refugees “places us in a difficult situation..”.⁴² The sense that Tamil Nadu was being “overloaded” also led the government to propose “various schemes in the four Southern States” so that Tamil Nadu would be “less burdened”.⁴³ This sense of burden was heightened in November 1984, when a major cyclone hit Madras and left sixty thousand people homeless. In the parliament, Mr.N.Rao, current Prime Minister of India, expressed “the sincere hope that a viable political solution would soon be found assuring safety and legitimate rights to the Tamils..”, thus preventing a further “flow of refugees from Sri Lanka

³⁷The Hindu, 17 April, 1984.

³⁸India Today, 31 March, 1984, p.52.

³⁹Government estimates of refugee increases are given in Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XLII, 1 December 1983, p.127. In addition, the government confessed there were “clandestine” refugees who’s numbers were “not possible to assess”. In Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XLII, No.3, 17 November, 1983.

⁴⁰The Hindu, 12 April, 1984.

⁴¹The Hindu, 11 October.

⁴²Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XLIX, No.8, 1 August, 1984, p.212-213.

⁴³Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XLIV, No.29, 3 April,1984, p.403-404.

into India..”⁴⁴

The very perception of Tamil refugees as an increasing “burden” that needed to be “resolved”, silently worked against the perception of unqualified support to Tamil “brothers” suffering at the hands of the Sinhallas. Emotional, verbal, and material support for the Sri Lankan Tamils had to slowly contend with the very real presence of Sri Lankan Tamils within the state, sharing in state resources and altering physical living conditions within the state.

The first pure blast of absolute and unrestrained endorsement of the Tamil cause that followed the 1983 riots was evidently compromised by real challenges. For indigenous Tamils, sacrifice was now demanded rather than volunteered. The effects of this were to emerge later in the fracturing of personal sacrifice so that it was no longer at an undifferentiated pitch.

Motivation:

As may be expected from the unanimity and focus of the Tamil world view in the early months of the crisis, the motivation to do something, anything, was strong. The official, governmental aim of continuing to project the Sinhalese dominated government of Sri Lanka as close allies, appeared incongruous, even outrageous to much of the Tamil public.

Even traditional centrists such as the Tamil Congress(I) party, demanded that India should “immediately send in the Indian Air Force and Navy” to protect the Tamils in Sri Lanka as the Sinhallas would “exterminate” them.⁴⁵ The AIADMK ruling party, partial to the Centre’s wishes, was equally vociferous in its threat that the party would physically “go to Sri Lanka to carry on the struggle there..”. This little act of dramatism was delivered at a large public rally by the Chief Minister, suggesting the mood of the population he was addressing.⁴⁶ The DMK party was even more explicit in its statement that “the Tamilians might be forced into the thought that without a separate Tamil Nadu, the Tamil race in Sri Lanka would be pulverized..”, thus poking broadly at old secessionist fears that continually unnerved the Centre. DMK leader, Mr.Karunanidhi, forcefully advocated the use of

⁴⁴Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XLII, No.3, 17 November, 1983, p.79.

⁴⁵See statement of Era Anbarasu, Congress(I) member of Lok Sabha in 13 April, 1984, *The Hindu*.

⁴⁶*The Hindu*, 16 April, 1984.

the Indian Army to help the Tamils. When Indian Defense Minister, Mr. Venkatraman, a Tamil, criticized the DMK's statements, Karunanidhi attempted to ostracize Venkatraman by denouncing his stand as both "shameful" and a "betrayal" to the Tamils.⁴⁷

Party postures were indicative of public motivation as well. In letters to the Hindu newspaper in Tamil Nadu, one writer believed military intervention was essential because: "India cannot allow the situation to drift any longer...India has been outplayed in the diplomatic game by the Sri Lankan leaders..", who keep Tamils as "slaves".⁴⁸ Other calls for armed intervention were more straightforward jingoistic calls to "save the Tamil race". The reference to Bangladesh was repeated, almost as if India's 1971 armed intervention in East Pakistan, marked some kind of legal precedent that dictated all future actions, in what was perceived as a 'similar' situation.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's insufficiently placatory statement that she "sensed" the "members, particularly from the South", were not satisfied by "the cautious stand of the Government",⁴⁹ resulted in open resentment, with *Rajya Sabha* (Council of States) Member, Mr. Gopalasamy walking out after declaiming that the "Government of India has become deaf" while "the Tamil race is being wiped out".⁵⁰ In a follow up move, Tamil members in the *Lok Sabha* walked out of the proceedings the next day, but not before asserting that not only should the Sri Lankan Tamils be 'saved' but that "the northern province (of Sri Lanka) should be viewed as part and parcel of India because of the ethnic ties..".⁵¹

Efforts to push the government into more aggressive action was also attempted through 'internationalizing' the crisis. In April 1984, the World Tamil Youth Federation organised a prominently publicized two day conference to enlist 'Western sympathizers' in the fight against human rights violations in Sri Lanka. In end June, representatives from all the major Tamil political parties as well as representatives from Singapore, Malaysia, North America, and Canada met in New York to publicize the ongoing crisis in Sri Lanka. The

⁴⁷The Hindu, 19 April, 1984.

⁴⁸The Hindu, 13 April, 1984.

⁴⁹The Hindu, 8 August, 1984.

⁵⁰Ibid. DMK member Gopalasamy, definitely represents one of the most vocal proponents of pan - Tamil nationalism.

⁵¹The Hindu, 9 August, 1984.

explicit aim was given as “shaming” the Indian government into action; i.e. aggressive action, rather than slow moving diplomatic maneuvers.

By 1985, with the AIADMK actively involved in helping the Central government to achieve some degree of nexus between the Sri Lankan government and the Sri Lankan militants, the calls for aggressive action were dramatically muted. Public outrage and cries for the “take over of Sri Lanka”, were also markedly low. It may be remembered that over eighteen months had expired by this time, so that public memory of the July 1983 riots was relatively muted. Moreover, a unilinear perception of the crisis was being unsettled, so that it was no longer a simple rally against “genocide”, but a long lasting crisis that spilled right into the lives and functioning of the Indian Tamils. The motivation to “intervene” was still expressed, but the context was changing. Rather than viewing the Indian government as a joint perpetrator of the crisis, it was the ‘Sri Lankan crisis’ as a whole that was being viewed with discomfort. Sri Lankan Tamils in Tamil Nadu were beginning to be included as part of the ‘problem’.

As the AIADMK party and the Tamil Nadu Congress party became less vociferous in their aim to force aggressive action, members of the DMK, DK and breakaway faction Cong(K), grew more strident. As Cong(K) leader, Nedumaran said : “We know there are Tamils like us who will cross the seas if need be to save our brothers and sisters..”⁵² With this in mind, plus the political windfall if their reading of the public mood were to be correct, the three groups formed a formal organization called the Tamil Eelam (Homeland) Supporters’ Organisation (TESO) on 13 May 1985. The stated aims of the party were to prevent further “genocide” and the “holocaust” in Sri Lanka by supporting a separate “Sovereign Eelam for the Tamils in Sri Lanka”; to “arouse and mobilize public opinion in India and abroad in favour of the Eelam Tamils”; to “secure help and sustenance for the terror stricken Tamil refugees” and to “get in touch with..like minded organisations and beliefs”.⁵³ The formally stated support of an independent state for Sri Lankan Tamils struck a resoundingly defiant note against both the Sri Lankan and Indian governments. ‘Eelam’ was a negatively loaded word to all Sinhalas, and the Indian government spent

⁵²Interview, August 1989, Madras.

⁵³TESO Resolutions, Monograph, 1985, Madras.

much of its diplomatic effort in disclaiming all support for it. It was evident that leaders of these parties were straining at raising the level of expected aggressiveness by the Indian government.

The series of resolutions that followed, confirmed this strategy as they alternately warned and instructed the Indian government on possible policies that could be adopted with greater effectiveness. While cautioning the government that any more attempts at what they perceived as divisionary diplomacy would be “considered a stab in the back of the Tamil race, the world over”,⁵⁴ TESO Resolution 4 clearly stated that the Sri Lankan Tamils should be provided with Indian “vessels and ships” to bring them “safely to India”; and more importantly, suggested the “setting up of an International Peace Keeping Force in the Tamil residential areas of Sri Lanka” as that alone would “succeed in preventing Tamil genocide”.⁵⁵ The monographs containing the resolutions had provocative maps of Sri Lanka with Tamil *eelam* areas distinguished in solid black.

The ultimate act of intervention, then, as visualized by the most intense proponents of Tamil nationhood, ranged from a militant storming of Sri Lanka as ad hoc comments by DMK members had suggested, to the creation of a preventory ‘Force’ as outlined in the TESO resolutions.

Control:

As Tamil world view in the initial phase of the crisis indicated, a perception of immense threat to the Tamil nation was very evident. The Tamil political elite as well as non Tamil leaders were able to utilize emotive symbols in consonance with this projected view. As the view of unidimensional threat began to fracture along different groups, so did the use of symbols.

In the period of mediation, however, the continued legitimacy of both the Tamil state government as well as the central Indian government, relied heavily on primarily verbal support of Tamil greatness and the protection of Tamils.

The Indian government in particular was effusive in its statements of support. Traditionally wary of strong “regional” movements, at this juncture, the government appeared

⁵⁴Resolution 5 in Monograph dated 1-9-1985.

⁵⁵TESO Resolutions Monograph,1985, Madras.

completely sympathetic to the strength of regional feeling in Tamil Nadu. Government representative Mr. Rao, made repeated declarations in the *Rajya Sabha* that Tamil Nadu should not believe it was alone in facing the crisis and that the “whole of India is behind the Tamil brethren across the border who are being subjected to untold sufferings and harrassment..”.⁵⁶ This was in direct contradiction to official foreign policy dictum that precluded the use of negative or judgemental statements on the internal affairs of Sri Lanka.

In addition, despite the ostensible use of the Foreign Office in settling the Tamil issue in Sri Lanka, a great deal of effort and publicity was given to the fact that Tamil state and political leaders were involved in every step of the mediation process. The Tamil elite from Sri Lanka too, either met with local Tamil leaders before consulting with the Indian government or briefed Tamil Nadu’s leaders after discussions with the central government. Even before the important All Parties Conference at Sri Lanka (see chapter II), the Indian special envoy was openly reported to have consulted with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MGR, both before and after the Conference. MGR in turn, would either issue statements that he was “fully satisfied” with Indian government action or appear in widely shown photographs with various central government mediators or Sri Lankan political elite. The involvement of a state’s Chief Minister in what was “foreign affairs” had little precedent in Indian foreign policy and received wide coverage in domestic media.

These acts created understandable waves of fear and distrust in Sinhala circles, where as earlier outlined, there was already a perception of an overriding and hostile Tamil population in India. The choice of the central government to dramatically continue buoying or acknowledging Tamil identity, despite compromising its equation with the Sri Lankan government, was indicative of its need to show absolute support for the “Tamil cause” at that point of time.

In an overt bid to utilize emotive Tamil symbols to justify Indian government action in Sri Lanka, the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi, made it a point to visit the state for the thousandth anniversary of the coronation of ancient Tamil king and hero, Rajaraja. After praising the ‘glories’ and ‘greatness’ of Tamil Nadu’s ‘unique’ history, she assured Tamilians

⁵⁶The Hindu, 7 May, 1984.

that the “entire nation” (India) was sympathetic to their cause, but also that “we should not say any word or speak of any action which would make the situation more difficult or dangerous for the people of Tamil origin in that country...”.⁵⁷

The Indian government in every statement, attempted to continue holding public trust in Tamil Nadu by declaring complete empathy for the Tamil cause even as they issued circuitous warnings against interference in “foreign policy decisions”, the preserve of the central government, by suggesting that this would jeopardize the position of “Tamil brethren” in Sri Lanka.

Decisional Latitude:

“If the Sri Lankan Government tried to unleash violence against Tamils again, the Tamil Nadu Government would not take it lying down and would mobilize all the resources at its command to defeat such moves.... We would not hesitate to do this even if we are to stand alone...”. Statement by Chief Minister MGR in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly.⁵⁸

While Indian central government officials labored under the perception that significant changes in their policy toward Sri Lanka had followed the 1983 riots, the Tamil population and Tamil leaders were prepared for something much more dramatic. The last time such a major wave of refugees had poured into Indian territory in 1971, the Indian government had gone to war with West Pakistan, ostensibly over the issue of refugee overflow. The precedent of armed intervention made it possible for the more intense sections of the Tamil population to almost instantly throw out suggestions, demands, and expectations for non- mediatory policies. Right from suggestions of cutting formal ties with Sri Lanka⁵⁹; and “urging the Government of India to force the Sri Lankan authorities to ensure protection” for Tamils;⁶⁰ there were repeated demands for armed intervention, and recognition of an *eelam* or separate Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka. These demands were made primarily by members of the then opposition party, the DMK, in official contexts such as parliamentary hearings,⁶¹

⁵⁷The Hindu, 17 September,1984.

⁵⁸The Hindu, 10 April, 1984.

⁵⁹See Lok Sabha Debates, particularly statements by DMK member, Mr.Gopalasamy, 16 August,1984.

⁶⁰Mr.Nedunchezian, Finance Minister in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly as reported in **The Hindu**, 30 March, 1984

⁶¹See the three hour debate proceedings in the Lok Sabha Debates of 25 August,1984

attesting to the intensity of their displeasure with what they unanimously condemned as “inaction”. The ‘inaction’ so grated on breakaway party leader, Mr.P.Nedumaran, that he threatened to march into Sri Lanka with his own ‘army’.⁶² The popularity of this gambit is suggested by the more than five thousand demonstrators who joined his march to the southern coast of Tamil Nadu. A heretofore marginal politician, Mr.Nedumaran was hastily joined by representatives from every major Tamil political party who did not want to appear divorced from such a strong show of public attitude. The gesture, while purely symbolic, effectively rejected India’s “low profile” diplomacy. The media was then able to articulate, without fear of reprisal, headlines such as “Mrs. Gandhi’s mediation being seen as an apologia for inaction”.⁶³ A major periodical reported: “With telephones, post office boxes and even color calendars proclaiming their cause.....The local Tamil politician is sympathetic to Sri Lankan Tamils and if ever the Central government decided to disown them, it would raise a hornet’s nest in the ethnically conscious state (of Tamil Nadu)...”.⁶⁴

Even the state government of Tamil Nadu, a prominent participant in Indian mediatory efforts in Sri Lanka, alternated between indirect condemnation of low profile diplomacy and support of the Indian government. Usually at non official or popular gatherings, Chief Minister MGR would deliver stirring speeches on the need for vigorous support of the Sri Lankan Tamils; “...there is a limit to our tolerance and patience...The Tamil Nadu Government might not be able to do much without the Centre’s assistance, (making it clear, thereby, that he and his party were not responsible for the slowness in mediation and resolution of the conflict) but it could not go on tolerating the increasing atrocities on the island..”.⁶⁵

At no point, however, did any party except the DMK, openly espouse or push for revolutionary politics, in this case defined as the demand for *eelam* or a separate Sri Lankan Tamil homeland. The prevailing attitude seemed to be unhappy with current low profile diplomacy, but not eager for the total involvement demanded by Sri Lankan militants.

With the election of Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister, following the assassination of

⁶²15 August 1984.

⁶³13 August, 1984 headline of *The Hindu*.

⁶⁴*India Today*, 31 March, 1984, p.52.

⁶⁵*The Hindu*, 19 September,1984.

Mrs. Gandhi in 1984, the pressure to escalate the mediatory process underwent a definite increase. Mrs. Gandhi was always trusted for being a wily politician and an equal match for Sri Lanka's equally famed Old Fox, President Jayewardene. While Mrs. Gandhi was accused of "inaction", Rajiv Gandhi was suspected of political naivete. An open loss of public trust led to calls for more defined and aggressive policies that could convince the people Jayewardene was not giving Mr. Gandhi the run-around. Mr. Gandhi's decision to project a more forceful mediatory pose by the "frogmarching" of Sri Lankan Tamil militants to peace talks in Bhutan and the subsequent deportation of three prominent Sri Lankan Tamils, was interpreted as a humiliating defeat for Indian Tamil support of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Even in parliamentary sessions, Tamil member Selvendran, claimed Indian "magnanimity" to Sri Lanka, while that of a "lion towards a small rat", was completely misplaced and needed to be replaced with something like the old "liberation war of Bangladesh".⁶⁶ The state governments ruling party, the AIADMK, also negated Rajiv Gandhi's attempts by calling for a widespread state *bandh* or closure, such as the one immediately following the 1983 riots. Given the renewed public distrust in governmental mediation, Mr. Gandhi not only made an official statement in the Lok Sabha recognizing "the gravity of the situation", and "the need to set up a Special Advisory Group" to deal with it, but also recalled the incendiary deportation orders.⁶⁷ While this was evidently a sop to counter public outrage in Tamil Nadu, it pointed to the Indian Government's fluctuating vulnerability in making unilateral decisions with regard to the Sri Lankan Tamil issue.

Power:

During the initial period of mediation, the element of power was most conclusively defined primarily in the realm of perception. Having chafed a long while over the dormant yet brooding presence of over fifty million Tamils in nearby India, popular Sinhalese world view incorporated an almost trigger-sensitive expectation of a "Tamil invasion". Rhetorical comments in Tamil Nadu on "active intervention" following the 1983 riots, did not help any. In addition, Tamil Nadu's open support of Sri Lankan Tamil militants including that

⁶⁶Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.V, No.33, 29 April, 1985.

⁶⁷Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.V, No.31, 25 April,1985.

of armed training camps in the state, the existence of which was vehemently denied by the Indian government, cemented the expectation, so that President Jayewardene was even able to fix the date of “invasion by January 14, 1985..”⁶⁸

When the expected ‘invasion’ did not come about, Sinhala opinion did not falter. Senior Minister Mr.Athulathmudali addressed the Sri Lankan Parliament stating; “I do not think anybody doubts the fact that if there were no terrorist bases in Tamil Nadu, the terrorists would not be in a position to do anything at all. It is this base that has given them succour, the support and the ability to continue with their hit and run methods..”⁶⁹

When speaking during a visit to India, Mr.Athulathmudali made the repeated point that the Sinhalese felt particularly “threatened by the speeches made by some people in Tamil Nadu” and that the perception of imminent threat from Tamil Nadu was very real: “I do’nt think it helps the situation at all to have people in Tamil Nadu saying ‘Invade Sri Lanka’..”⁷⁰ In fact, in an alleged attempt to downplay the rising fear in Sri Lanka, President Jayewardene made out a list of “hostile propoganda from Tamil Nadu”, which Mrs. Gandhi personally assured she would “take note of”.⁷¹

So not only was there a sense of possible “invasions” from Tamil Nadu, but there was a well grounded fear that Sri Lankan Tamil militants were being sheltered and encouraged by the Indian Tamil government, “without Tamil Nadu, they (the Tamil extremists) would have laid down their arms..”.⁷² This was particularly galling in the face of implacable Indian statements that India was not actively interfering in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka and was merely offering its “good offices” so that all accusations of secret training camps were merely “disturbing propoganda”. The knowledge that the Indian government was willing to wilfully ignore Tamil support of Sri Lankan militants, added perceptibly to the Sinhala sense of acute vulnerability with regard to Tamil/Indian intentions.

Thus fear of unanimous Tamil support was compounded by snap-shot images of the

⁶⁸ Reported in *The Hindu*, 29 November, 1984.

⁶⁹ Robert Kearney, “Tension and Conflict in Sri Lanka”, *Current History*, 8 March, 1986, p.109-112, 127-128. Also see “Sri Lanka in 1984: The Politics of Communal Violence”, *Asian Survey*, Vol.XXV, No.2, February 1985, p.257-263.

⁷⁰ Interview with Mr.Ram, editor of *The Hindu*, 21 September, 1984.

⁷¹ *The Hindu*, 2 July, 1984.

⁷² Statement by Mr. Athulathmudali in *The Hindu* 11 August, 1984.

functioning of India's multi nation politics as displayed in statements made by the Sri Lankan political elite. Having dealt with the pulls and pressures of 'ethnic politics' in their own country and having witnessed India's continuous struggle for both national and territorial unity within a democratic framework, Sinhalese leaders kept voicing their fears of Indian inability to harness Tamil power, or Indian government "vaccillation" in the face of domestic elections. The statements ranged from defiant cynicism, such as President Jayewardene's comment that the Sri Lankan Tamil party, the TULF, "has relevance to Tamil Nadu elections, but not here (in Sri Lanka).",⁷³ to open accusations by Minister Athulathmudali that the December 1984 elections in Tamil Nadu were directly responsible for the increase in militant activity in Sri Lanka, presumably because of the various political parties in Tamil Nadu vying to show their support for Tamil unity by extravagant one-up sponsorship of Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups.⁷⁴ Once the 1984 elections were over, President Jayewardene openly demanded an explanation for what he perceived as Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's continued weak leadership, now that "the elections are over" and "firm decisions" could be taken.⁷⁵ Even Indian analysts studying the earlier months of the crisis, held that : "the Sinhalese firmly believed that Mrs. Gandhi was acting under pressure from the Indian Tamils" and so found it hard to accept the offices of the Indian government as a true ally.⁷⁶

Instead, the perception was one of a looming power sitting ominously over Sri Lanka's tiny head, ready to unleash its force, based on the whims and electoral strength of its indigenous Tamil population. Popular Sinhala belief in just such an invasion, coupled with memories of Bangladesh, did much to fuel the perception. In this period, the projection of power, expressed as strong, motivated Tamil nationalism, scored dramatically in all dealings with the Sri Lankan Government. As current Prime Minister Premadasa stated: "We are not saying that Mrs. Gandhi or the Indian government is interested in invading Sri Lanka, but there are elements within the Indian territory who are interested in doing harm to our

⁷³The Hindu, 24 March, 1984.

⁷⁴See India Today, 15 December, 1984, p.22-23.

⁷⁵See India Today, 15 December, 1985, p.38.

⁷⁶See P.V.Rao, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: India's Role and Perception", Asian Survey, Vol.XXVIII, No.4, April 1988, p.419-436.

country..". Those 'elements' were then elaborated by another Minister as "South Indian politicians".⁷⁷

Conclusion:

The clarity in perceiving a direct threat of genocidal proportions to the Tamil nation, following the 1983 riots in Sri Lanka, was followed by a dramatic policy move on the part of the Indian government. It forcibly moved in to 'mediate' between the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalas controlling the Sri Lankan government. This was less the policy of a confirmed ally of Sri Lanka, than it was the policy of a democratic government, responding to a politically significant portion of the population, that viewed itself as a threatened community.

With the initial perception of instant crisis engendered by the riots, having given way to other perceptual demands, groups within the Indian Tamil nation began to range themselves along degrees of identification with the Sri Lankan Tamil's crisis. The world view of absolute threat to Tamils facing Sinhala 'enemies', had to incorporate Tamil militants who turned on other Tamils so that the unidimensional figure of 'enemy' and oppressed, began to blur. The willingness to sacrifice for Tamil civilians cut down by the Sinhala dominated armies of Sri Lanka was compromised by the mandatory sacrifices demanded by both a continually growing refugee population as well as increasingly intrusive militant factions within Tamil Nadu. Abstractly felt tradition and history ensured vocal support for the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Less abstract demands on the Indian Tamil population, were received differently, according to fault-lines within the community that far predated the 1983 crisis.

While parties like the DMK, DK, and Cong.(K) urged active intervention in the pursuit of a separate Tamil homeland for the Sri Lankan Tamils, political groups like the AIADMK and the Tamil Nadu Congress party alternated between advocating diplomatic and military solutions to the crisis, without actively endorsing the demand for *eelam*. Individual groups like that of the Tamil fishermen, completed the spectrum by urging total isolation from the Sri Lankan Tamil's crisis.

Given the spectrum, the Indian government was able to prolong its efforts at mediation

⁷⁷The Hindu, 24 March, 1984.

for almost two years. At the end of it, the Government stepped up its mediatory role to active negotiation, thereby deferring the need for hostile military intervention. The Indian government's open acceptance of Indian Tamil involvement with Sri Lankan Tamils as perfectly legitimate, rather than 'anti national', was important in retaining habitual control over the Tamil Nadu population during this period. However, it also necessitated close interaction and vulnerability to Tamil calls for policy and action. The acts of escalating diplomatic intervention failed to quell the demand for physical resolution of the crisis. While intense Tamil nationalists kept up a constant demand for armed intervention, they were sporadically supported by other politically important groups every time the Sinhalese government launched an offensive against the Sri Lankan militants.

This near-surface demand for military resolution of the crisis, despite the different motivations that fuelled the demand, kept up a steady level of expectation with regard to the Indian government. Diplomatic negotiations, especially crabbed negotiations that appeared to move sideways rather than forward, were categorically treated as insufficient preliminaries to the 'real' Indian policy that could effectively resolve the crisis. Sinhalese perception of Indian motivation, drawing deeply from historical fear, geographical proximity, and publicly enunciated Tamil threats, mirrored the expectation, so that some form of non diplomatic intervention seemed more a question of time than happenstance.

Period of Intervention:1987 - 1989

"The Indian Government does not pose any threat to Sri Lanka nor do we want to interfere in its affairs..".⁷⁸ In keeping with its professed policy of non interference, government representatives had constantly reiterated the need for remaining supportive yet distant from the internal affairs of Sri Lanka, despite urgent calls by Tamil leaders to intervene. Yet, between 1987 and 1989, the Government of India was sufficiently mired in the politics of Sri Lankan Tamils so that its policies, statements and actions had attained the intensity of a full blown domestic crisis; i.e. daily media coverage, involvement by the country as a whole, and a sensitized public. Not only had the Indian government threatened war against

⁷⁸Statement made by Indian Prime Minister as quoted in P.V.Rao, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: India's Role and Perception", *Asian Survey*, Vol.XXVIII, No.4, April 1988, p.420.

its relatively tiny ally, it had sent a two hundred thousand strong army into the island; organized a local militia force; and orchestrated the holding of elections in the northern districts of Sri Lanka. India could have hardly been more obtrusive even with a stated policy of interference. The dynamics of Tamil behavior, bracketed in this period were far more complex than they had been during the preceding one.

The intensity and unilinearity of Tamil emotion predominating during the period of mediation seemed to have culminated in India's act of intervention, and then been appeased by it. The degree of appeasement, however, ranged across individual Tamil groups so that the perception of a crisis and the motivation to deal with the crisis was scattered.

World View:

The "Indian invasion" expected by Sinhalese hardliners since the earliest days of the crisis did not come about till almost four years after the 1983 riots. When it did, it did not come in the form of hordes of Tamil nationalists storming into Sri Lanka, but as nineteen fishing trawlers flying the Red Cross sign and sailing into Sri Lankan waters. However, the impact was the same. The Sri Lankan military offensive against Tamil militants was abruptly halted and India and Sri Lanka became direct signatories to an agreement attempting to settle the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka.

Calls to 'intervene' had been a general expectation in 1983 and a consistent one among some groups, the largest organized group being the DMK party. In fact, as early as 1985, the DMK had urged the formation of an International Peace Keeping Force made up of members from the United Nations rather than the Indian army, to be stationed in the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka.

At the same time, distrust of the militant groups had spread through Tamil Nadu in the years 1985-1987. Internecine militant group warfare, repeated street killings, bomb explosions, the kidnappings of rich Indian Tamils for ransom, acts of violence within the borders of Tamil Nadu had left much of the population disenchanted. For a group known for its structured, orthodox ways and its relatively low levels of interpersonal violence,⁷⁹ the sudden upsurge of street shoot outs and civilian killings came as a severe shock to

⁷⁹ Amongst the large cities, Madras has one of the lowest homicide rates in the country, even though the rate of suicide is relatively high.

Indian Tamils. Public calls to recapture the “law and order situation” grew more insistent. For the first time, the Tamil government actually arrested some Sri Lankan militants and temporarily disarmed others.

Observing, what he believed to be a “servile” and “perverse” cultural lacuna, one Sri Lankan Tamil scholar commented : “There is a line of thinking here (Tamil Nadu)...that whatever the provocation, whether it is a matter of physical survival or not, whether it is self defense or otherwise, violence on the part of the (Sri Lankan) youth should not be condoned...”.⁸⁰ He was right, in that so long as the Sri Lankan Tamils were seen as helpless victims and refugees looking to Tamil Nadu for support, the support was forthcoming. The world view was relatively uncomplicated. With the reality of Sri Lankan Tamils, intensely committed to *eelam*, using Tamil Nadu and the Indian Tamils to further their cause, the views of indigenous Tamils were seriously challenged. All violence came to be regarded as the acts of “militants” and thereby open to strict retribution and curtailments, rather than the response of “Tamils suffering from genocide”.

This perspective of inexorable “genocide” was given a fillip only in early 1987, when President Jayewardene launched his “final assault” against the LTTE, (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, better known as the Tigers) in response to their move to develop a parallel government in Tamil dominated areas of the island. Whereas the departure of the Tigers from Tamil Nadu in 1986 had not created much of a stir because of public antipathy against the social disruption caused by its members, the Sinhala move to defeat them, once again incited public sympathy amongst Indian Tamil groups.

Stories of war - mass killings, rapes, random civilian violence, added to a new wave of refugees crossing the two hundred thousand mark, stirred a new sense that India was doing “nothing” to prevent or control the situation. In the Indian Parliament, a Tamil member stated: “Had any linguistic group of north India been persecuted like the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Central Government would have certainly reacted more decisively..”.⁸¹ Said a Tamil AIADMK member, a party known for its support of the Centre at the time, “I think

⁸⁰S.Sivanayagam, *The Ethnic Crisis in Sri Lanka: A Historical Perspective*. Bangalore: National Consultation on Sri Lankan Tamils' Issue, SCM House, 1986.

⁸¹Mr.N.V.N.Somu, *Lok Sabha Debates* Vol.XXVIII, No.49, 11 May,1987.

a day will come when there will be no Tamilians in Sri Lanka. I think that will be the day the Indian government will 'solve' the problem..". He further warned that the "people of Tamil Nadu are very much agitated and distressed..".⁸²

Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi's statements of warning to the Sri Lankan government were viewed as further pointless prevarication. As one former member of parliament stated, "Even from the very beginning, Rajiv Gandhi started talking of the unity and integrity of Ceylon, more vehemently than the Ceylonese themselves..".⁸³ In other words, sections of the Tamil community believed Gandhi was clearly supportive of President Jayewardene's perceived aim to suppress *eelam* and keep the "unity" of the island at the cost of Sri Lankan Tamil lives.

With unrest in Tamil Nadu, with the number of refugees constantly on the rise, and with President Jayewardene openly ignoring Indian efforts at 'mediation', the Indian government's act of aggression in dropping supplies into Sri Lanka uninvited, did not come as a major surprise. The general consensus in Tamil Nadu was that it was "about time". The signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accord was heartily approved by large sections of Tamil Nadu's politically active population. Public trust in the Indian government was almost instantly restored amongst this section. The proclivity to welcome an agreement signed by Rajiv Gandhi without any obvious Tamil input, does not suggest an intensely nationalistic world view. Instead, it indicates a need to 'solve' the situation.

With only a first reading of the draft of the Accord, AIADMK member, Mr.Kolandaivelu felt confident enough of his constituency's views to state: "...this Accord is the best one of the century..we whole-heartedly welcome and appreciate (Mr.Gandhi) for having resolved the problem in Sri Lanka...at considerable personal risk..".⁸⁴ In a later parliamentary session, his comments were even more fulsome: "What else do we want? Is it not clear that the aspirations of the Tamils have been fulfilled?...Is it not one of the best accords in the world?...When India has become the guarantor, we need not worry about the Tamils in Sri Lanka..".⁸⁵

⁸² Mr.Kolandaivelu, Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XXV, No.16, 18 March, 1987, p.596-638.

⁸³ Interview, Mr.Kandappan, August, 1989.

⁸⁴ Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XXX, No.61, 11 August, 1987, p.488-493.

⁸⁵ Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XXX, No.66, 18 August, 1987, p.482-487.

The dramatic change from condemnation of the Indian government to such overweening praise, following an abstrusely worded agreement, by members of the dominant political party in Tamil Nadu, certainly argues against single minded, intense, Tamil nationalism. The “best accord in the world” after all, had so many loopholes, prevarications and abstractions, that an intense nationalist would have immediately repulsed the draft.

This was the case with members of the DMK, Tamil nationalists, accused of being “trouble makers and disgruntled elements” by members of the AIADMK⁸⁶ for opposing the accord. The DMK stand, from the start, criticized the Accord as an “imposed... forced.. thrust.. coerced.. agreement” where the “satisfaction of the Tamils is absolutely absent..”.⁸⁷ Distrust of the Accord was given symbolic representation by the DK and Cong.(K) parties as well, when they burnt copies of the draft and sent “thousands and thousands of bags of ashes” to Delhi.⁸⁸ More vociferous than the DMK, the DK perceived the Accord as a “treacherous” ploy by the North Indian and Sinhala government to “disarm the Tamils and thereby prevent them from rising again to fight for their goal of a separate Tamil Eelam...We appeal to the people of Tamil Nadu to clearly understand all these tactics played by both the Indian and Sri Lankan Governments and come out openly to raise their voice of protest..”.⁸⁹ Clearly, the political leaders of this section of the population perceived intense threat to the Tamil nation from all sides, both the Sinhala government and the non-Tamil dominated Indian government.

DMK member and scholar, Mr.Kandappan, gave a rationale for distrusting the Indian government by arguing that North Indians were emotionally “vulnerable” to Sinhalas. President Jayewardene could therefore manipulate them by “selling the idea that the so called majority of the community which you are now hating as Sinhalese, are actually your brothers and sisters who have gone there some two or three thousand years ago from Bengal...See, he wanted to alienate the Indian masses from the Tamil minority..”.⁹⁰

The twin themes of distrust of the Indian government; and support for Tamil militants

⁸⁶Ibid, p.488

⁸⁷Ibid, p.514-517.

⁸⁸Interview, Mr.Veeramani, leader of the DK party, 6 August,1989.

⁸⁹K.Veeramani, *Other Side of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement*, (Madras:Dravidar Kazhagam,1987).

⁹⁰Interview, August,1989.

regardless of changing circumstances, was consistently followed by the leaders of the DMK and the DK party. No other party or section of the community retained such consistency since the start of the crisis.

When the initial euphoria over the Accord had died down and the Indian army was faced with direct confrontation with the Tigers, only the DK, a non electoral party, could continue its unqualified support for the Tigers. For all the other leaders, the perception of reality was clearly painful.

Member V. John of the AIADMK party voiced this in the Rajya Sabha : “..you must believe that we are Indians first and we are Indians last..But..this puts a lot of strain on our sense of belonging to the nation..My people ask me: Am I to weep for the Indian soldiers who lay down their lives without exactly knowing whose war they are fighting? Or am I to weep for LTTE men, our Tamil brothers?..kindly do not put us in this kind of precarious situation..”.⁹¹ Presenting the leader of the Tigers as a “great liberator” and “great emancipator” who used the ‘gun as a last resort’, he questioned the Accord’s insistence on disarming all militants, “..how do you from a far off Delhi, believe that you will be able to ensure the safety of the LTTE men?”⁹²

Fellow party member, Aladi Aruna condemned the Indian government for allegedly refusing to accept a ceasefire offered by the militants. “..The LTTE people..are prepared to surrender arms within 48 hours..But our government imposed another condition that they must accept the accord at gun point...we have no right to force them to accept..it is unfair..to ask a foreign country group to accept the accord..”. It is significant that at this juncture, the Tigers were being labelled as a sacrosanct “foreign country group”.⁹³ He further added that Gandhi wanted “..a good certificate from President Jayewardene..That is why you have seized the opportunity to kill the Tamils..”.⁹⁴ Chief Minister MGR immediately issued a public statement that the views of his party representative did not “reflect that of the party”,⁹⁵ indicating the internal schisms that were developing over the issue of whom to

⁹¹Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLIV, No.5, 12 Nov. 1987, p.197-198.

⁹²Ibid, p.193.

⁹³Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLIV, No.2, 9 November, 1987, p.321-322.

⁹⁴Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLV, No.18, 18 March, 1988, p.264.

⁹⁵Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLIV, No.5, 12 November, 1987, p.211.

support.

The DMK passed a resolution strongly condemning the sending in of the IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force) which was of “no help” to the Tamils; “..what justification is there for this heartrending action of the Indian Government to completely destroy the LTTE movement..”.⁹⁶ In the Parliament, DMK member Gopalasamy was far more explicit : “..thousands of Tamils have been killed during the last 48 hours by this murderous, fascist Government (Indian)..Our people, our brethren are killed..I accuse the Government..”.⁹⁷ Member M.Maran of the DMK said, “it is tragic that after four years the same genocide is being committed by the Indian Army .. it is army adventure at its worst.. Mr.Rajiv is collaborating with (Jayewardene) in killing Tamils..”.⁹⁸ DK’s Veeramani stated: “I never thought sending in the troops was a good idea..we said to go and save our Tamil people and our Tamil women who were being raped..but not by military means..”.⁹⁹

The public view that the Indian Army including major sections of the Madras regiment, had linked themselves to the Sinhala enemy in order to defeat the LTTE ‘boys’, provoked mass incomprehension and uneasiness in Tamil Nadu. In all probability, waging war against Jayewardene and the Sri Lankan army would have been more easily comprehended.

Despite the initial uneasiness and confusion, the direct confrontation, forced the taking of sides and adoption of clarified world views. By 1989, the majority of the Tamil population were working toward labelling the Tigers as “terrorists”. Only the DK, Cong(K) and DMK continued to champion the cause of the militants, albeit in subdued or secretive ways. The need for secrecy was evident in such polls as the one carried out in Madras city, traditionally an electoral stronghold of the DMK party. Over 40 percent of the respondents believed the Tigers were “terrorists” and “enemies of India”. Over 61 percent held that the Tigers had not been “reasonable in their recent actions”.¹⁰⁰ Even DMK propaganda secretary, Mr.Kandappan admitted in front of Tamil militant, Mr.Eelaventhan that he was

⁹⁶ Administrative Committee under Dr.Karunanidhi, DMK Stand on Eelam Tamils, Monograph 27/11/1987.

⁹⁷ Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLIV, No.2, 9 November, 1987, p.1-3.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p.38.

⁹⁹ Interview, 16 August, 1989.

¹⁰⁰ Public Opinion Survey, The Hindu, 29 July, 1989.

“disappointed” with the militants, and that “ninety nine percent of the people I have met who were earlier supporters of Pirabhakaran (Tiger leader), have been disillusioned..”¹⁰¹

The overall pressure to support the pride of Indian nationhood, the Indian army, was also very strong. Traditionally, the army has always been held on a pedestal as a symbol of nationalistic pride. To speak against it, is tantamount to civil blasphemy. Even the DK was relatively careful in condemning not the army, but the “Rajiv *tamasha*” (vaudeville show) in setting a “strange” and “bad precedent” by handing over the army to the jurisdiction of “an enemy President..With this, India’s prestige, national honour and respect have gone..”¹⁰²

The DMK too uncharacteristically included, not only the “genocide” of Sri Lankan Tamils by the Indian Army but the “losses of Indian Army cadres” as well. Said DMK’s most vituperative member, “I accuse the Government.. I do not accuse the Army..”¹⁰³

The Congress government repeatedly used the prestige of the Indian army to lower the aggressiveness of the opposition’s criticisms. When talk of “genocide” was raised, V.Narayanswamy immediately refuted the charge by saying “There is no sympathy for the Indian soldiers who laid down their lives for Indian dignity, Indian honesty, Indian merit, and Indian tradition.. I take strong exception..”¹⁰⁴ DMK’s Gopalasamy was questioned, “What sort of person are you? You are speaking against your own army...”.¹⁰⁵ The existing ambivalence of Indian Tamils with regard to the Sri Lankan Tamils was continually mined during this period, so that viewing the Indian Army, representative of the Government, as helpers; and all militants, representative of the Sri Lankan Tamils, as recalcitrants, became a parallel perception.

Motivation:

Given the inconsistencies in world view following a direct confrontation between the Indian army and the Tigers, very few groups within Tamil Nadu were motivationally consistent. The signing of the Accord was temporarily satisfying. It was widely perceived that

¹⁰¹ Interview with Mr.Kandappan and Mr.Eelaventhana, General Secretary, Tamil Eelam Liberation Front.

¹⁰² K.Veeramani, *Other Side of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement*, 1987.

¹⁰³ Mr.Gopalasamy, *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLIV, No.2, 9 November,1987, p.1-3.

¹⁰⁴ *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol. CXLIV, No.5, 12 November,1987, p.189.

¹⁰⁵ In M.S.S.Pandian, “Lankan Tamil’s Tragedy”; *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26 December,1987, p.2232.

the Indian government had done what it could and taken control of the situation. Calls for intervention and catcalls against an “inept” government and a “young, inexperienced” Prime Minister immediately died down. The motivation to “militarily invade” Sri Lanka became obsolete even amongst the openly aggressive DMK and DK parties. This, however, was shortlived. Within months, with the first contretemps between the Tigers and the Indian army, the course of action once again became very clear.

The situation was widely presented as “unthinkable”, “unimaginable” and “unpardonable”.¹⁰⁶ The Government simply could not wage a war it had gone to stop, against the very people it had gone to save. In the initial shock of this happening, the single action desired by presumably all sections of the Tamil community, as translated by its leaders, was that this should stop.

AIADMK, a vocal supporter of the Accord, stated that it was “ the responsibility of this House (the Rajya Sabha) and the government to protect the interests of the Tamils..” as “..The atrocity of our own Army against our own Tamil people” was unthinkable.¹⁰⁷ Another member conveyed the same disbelief that “our Indian army is fighting our kith and kin in a foreign soil..”.¹⁰⁸ The energy for action no longer encompassed the “Tamil crisis” as a whole, it condensed into a simple matter of stopping the much revered Indian army from ‘implicating’ itself by fighting “kith and kin”. Only the DMK remained consistent in its condemnation of the “un-Indian behavior” that had sent “your powerful army there to kill the Tamils..”. In the parliament, member M.Marann condemned army action as shocking “not only to the Tamils in Tamil Nadu, but also to the Tamils living all over India and Indians living all over the world..”.¹⁰⁹

For the most part, however, perception of the Indian Army as the new threat to be contained, was either outrageous or uncomfortable. Said Tamil member T.K.Ramamurthy:“..the regiment that is fighting there (in Sri Lanka) is the Madras Regiment. If you allege all kinds of nasty allegations..then you are not only darkening the face of the army there, but you

¹⁰⁶ *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLIV, No.23, 08 December,1987, p.256.

¹⁰⁷ Aladi Aruna in *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLIV, No.1, 6 November,1987.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLIV, No.1, 6 November,1987, p.244.

are darkening the face of Tamils..”¹¹⁰ He then recorded his “heartfelt condolences for the jawans (soldiers) belonging to the Army who (had) lost their lives in the great task..entrusted to them..”.¹¹¹ Some members, like Congress member Narayansamy,¹¹² were quick to label the Tigers as untrustworthy and deserving of punitive action: “After killing all the Tamils who have been fighting for the cause of the Tamils, I would ask whether such people can be believed..”¹¹³ Tamil Nadu Congress member Thangabalu also condemned the Tigers’ leader as “dictatorial”, “arrogant”, and “undemocratic”.¹¹⁴

It was clear that the confusion in world views was lending itself to distinct divergences in the focus for action. While sections of the community as represented by the DMK party urged action against the Indian army; the Tamil Congress party supported continued aggression against what was projected as a “bloodthirsty” and “misguided” minority group amongst the Sri Lankan Tamils, the Tigers. Others wavered in between, unwilling to continually condemn either the Tigers or the Indian army.

In 1988, with the continuing death of Indian soldiers, and the increasing ire among non Tamil elite that the price of saving Tamils was proving to be too high,¹¹⁵ more and more Tamils in Tamil Nadu were viewing the Tigers as the problem. The intense Tamil nationalist’s view that the Tigers were the only guardians of the Tamil race in Sri Lanka, willing to lay down their lives for a separate homeland, was held by a dwindling coterie of DMK activists. While their condemnations against the government grew explicitly vituperative, the course of action urged by their members was aimed at continuing to retain the Indian army in Sri Lanka, but without any offensives aimed at the Tigers. Mr.Gopalasamy of the DMK party stated: “Why (has) India shut the doors.. Why dont you come forward for a dialogue? Why dont you order ceasefire..I am terribly afraid...”¹¹⁶ I appeal to this Government

¹¹⁰Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLIV,No.5, 12 November,1987, p.232.

¹¹¹Ibid, p.222.

¹¹²Tamilian member from the Union Territory of Pondicherry, surrounded by the state of Tamil Nadu.

¹¹³Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLIV,No.5, 12 November,1987, p.186.

¹¹⁴Ibid, p.206-207.

¹¹⁵This widening disparity in perception provoked one parliamentary member to say: “The Sri Lankan problem is an emotional problem. How it is viewed by the people of Tamil Nadu and how it is being viewed by the people outside Tamil Nadu is different..”. G. Swaminathan in *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLV, No.18, 18 March,1988, p.280.

¹¹⁶Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLV,No.18, 18 March, 1988, p.256.

from the core of my heart: Stop this war. They (Tigers) are not your enemies..they are our natural allies..”. He also threatened that if the aggression did not stop and the Tigers’ leader was killed, “the flame of liberation will be lit in the heart of every Tamil and the sin of the Government of India will never be forgiven...”.¹¹⁷ DMK motivation, in its primary support of the Tigers and its threat-laced appeals to stop further aggression against the group while retaining a cautionary Indian force in the area, was clearly that of the intense nationalist.

AIADMK’s Aladi Aruna also expressed similiar criticisms in the parliament. “Our army personnel are making love with our Tamil girls there...the morality of our army has been degraded. What steps have been taken by this government to prevent these atrocities..to our Tamil ladies..the IPKF is more dangerous to Tamils than the Sri Lankan force..the Government of India is not..the guardian of the Tamils in Sri Lanka to dictate terms..”.¹¹⁸ Despite the vehemence of his statements, he remained unsupported by party members.

The motivation to pursue any one policy in Sri Lanka was essentially confused. While the DMK section wanted the cessation of all aggression against the Tigers, an outright condemnation of the Indian army or attacks against the army was not possible. The army continued to present the only bulwark against perceived Sinhalese threat. Sudden withdrawal, as urged by non-Tamil members of the Parliament, would ensure a resurgence of Sinhalese control in the area. While the security of the Tigers was of prime concern from their perspective, the method for achieving that security was obscure.

The Tamil Nadu Congress members pursued a much clearer agenda. The Tigers were vigorously condemned as a threat to solving the crisis, at a moment when the Indian government had almost “resolved” the situation. Labelled as “troublesome militants”, the Tamil Nadu government, under direct control of the Centre during the imposed President’s rule of 1988, harangued Tigers members within the state in ways that would not have been possible a few years earlier, when Tamil perception of their ‘brethren’ had been simple and cohesive. Mass arrests and “preventive detentions” of suspected militants were carried out. One of the prominent leaders of the Tigers, Kittu, was placed under “house arrest”

¹¹⁷Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLVII, No.20, 29 August,1988, p.358-369.

¹¹⁸Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLV, No.18, 18 March,1988, p.262-303.

and eventually deported to Sri Lanka along with one hundred and fifty six members of the group. "They should not be allowed to carry out anti-Indian propoganda on Indian soil...it was not the correct thing..". said Tamil Nadu Congress Secretary, T.Ramamurthy. "We should not believe them..", declared parliamentary Congress member, Narayansamy. ¹¹⁹

Willingness to Sacrifice:

While foreign policy motivation continued to be obscure, faced as it was by a complexly perceived situation and variously angled policy suggestions, the individual Tamil's willingness to sacrifice was distinctly on a downward trend.

In 1983, the need to sacrifice some amount of time, energy, or materiel, was felt in compulsive and discernible ways. By 1987, while the calls for "government action" and "resolution of the crisis" continued, they were largely the calls of bystanders, suffering from perceived impositions.

For one thing, the activities of the militants within Tamil Nadu were beginning to significantly corrode public sympathy, especially in big cities like Madras. When an Indian Tamil was shot by a militant, not only did the local police interrogate many militants and seize their weaponry, but the editorial of Tamil Nadu's largest paper, The Hindu, expressed public resentment : "Tamil militants functioning in India" should not be allowed to carry arms since "even Indian citizens" are forbidden to do so. ¹²⁰ The following month, a DMK agitation received wide coverage because of the DMK's possession of bombs, supplied to them by the Sri Lankan Tamil militants. This shocked local citizens who believed the militants were 'spreading their violence' to the streets of Tamil Nadu. After continued public outrage, the state government 'discovered' a secret bomb factory within the city of Madras. Said one parliamentary member, ".. militant groups started fighting with each other on the streets ..they started killing people in Tamil Nadu..This (is) the problem we are facing..". ¹²¹ A Tamil academic, sympathetic to the Sri Lankan Tamil cause, dismissed a Tamil militant's request for "continued support" on the grounds that the "Indian Tamil's support would be strong only if Sri Lankan Tamils themselves present a united front...otherwise,

¹¹⁹Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLV,No.18, 18 March,1988, p.304.

¹²⁰The Hindu, 8 November,1986.

¹²¹T.R.Ramamurthy, Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLIV,No.5, 12 November,1987, p.227-228.

how do you expect outsiders (Indian Tamils) to drum up public support and fight your battles?"¹²² The militant's regular kidnapping of rich Tamils in Madras for ransom money, led Madras Police Commissioner, Walter Dewaram to openly record that the "Sri Lankan Tamil refugees here should realise that they are our guests and have to behave themselves, to continue to enjoy our hospitality..".¹²³ Instead, the continuation of disruptive militant activity such as the sabotaging of the Ariyalur train in Tamil Nadu and the stealing of Rs.68,000 from a Madras citizen's home in May 1987, after which accused militants were allowed to go free on bail, led to media reports that "..the militants have obviously been enjoying more priveleges than the citizens of their host country..".¹²⁴

The other sticking point seemed to be the continuing support of a large number of refugees. The number of refugee camps had grown steadily since 1983 so that there were over 1,27,151 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees by July 1986. In addition, there were nearly one hundred thousand "Tamil repatriate families" (Indian Tamils without legal Sri Lankan citizenship), resettled primarily in Tamil Nadu. All educational institutions in the state were also directed to reserve a certain percentage of admissions for displaced Sri Lankan Tamil students. The expenditure on refugee rehabilitation in 1985 was declared in the Parliament to be almost twenty million rupees.¹²⁵

In the Parliament, while there were statements assuring Tamil refugees that they would not be forced to return except "in safety and dignity",¹²⁶ there were also questions on the mounting cost of keeping the refugees. "When our people are affected economically..how then are..people coming everyday from Sri Lanka to India and disturbing our economy?"¹²⁷ A Tamil Congress member asserted that "..The problem in Sri Lanka has to be settled not only in the interests of the Tamils in Sri Lanka.. but also in the interests of Tamil Nadu...We (have) the biggest number of refugees..".¹²⁸ Rajiv Gandhi, recognising the "refugee issue"

¹²²Interview with Vice Chancellor Kulanthaisamy, Anna University, and Mr.Eelaventhan, General Secretary, TELF, 1989.

¹²³India Today, 15 March,1987.

¹²⁴India Today, 15 May,1987.

¹²⁵Figure is from Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XIII, No.9, 15 March,1986.

¹²⁶Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XIII, No.9, 15 March, 1986.

¹²⁷Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XVIII, No.50, 12 May, 1987.

¹²⁸T.K.Ramamurthy in Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLIV, No.5, 12 November,1987, p.227-228.

to be a resonant justification for the Government's controversial action against the Tamil militants, was always quick to counter criticism by asserting, "We are keen to ensure an early return of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees from India..".¹²⁹ Even routine price hikes were blamed by some on "all those refugees".¹³⁰ Demands to the Centre, to increase their share of support and to distribute refugee relocation camps to other parts of the country, were made with an open and complete sense of justification. The refugees were "India's responsibility" and no longer a matter for the Tamil nation alone.

The unwillingness to sacrifice became even clearer with the launching of Indian army operations. While strongly opposing views on the role of the army were crystallizing in Tamil Nadu, the question of cost was a recurrent one, both the more profound 'cost' of lives and that of money. Said parliamentary member S.Swamy, "..the cost of the treaty..is that.. you are losing your own men fighting the Jayewardene war and paying for it too..The Indian tax-payer is paying it..".¹³¹ AIADMK's Aladi Aruna believed the whole enterprise was simply a waste of "our money, resources, and the lives of our soldiers".¹³² Tamil academician, Professor Padmanabhan believed "the Indian army should not be there at our cost, with our money..".¹³³ Former Indian Foreign Secretary, Mr.A.P.Venkateswaran, a Tamilian, also believed that given the 'costs' of the battle, "there was really no necessity for India to have involved itself militarily..".¹³⁴

With a massive drought crippling the Indian economy in the last quarter of 1987, the perception of "wasteful expenditure" in Sri Lanka was brought into even sharper focus. While various parliamentarians accused the Government of "committing the Indian nation to huge expenditure in Sri Lanka when people are dying in India",¹³⁵ DMK members claimed that "twenty Tamils from our cadres self immolated themselves for the Sri Lankan cause..".¹³⁶ Members from that party and the Cong(K) also risked arrest when they

¹²⁹ *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol. CXLIV, No.2, 9 November, 1987, p.302.

¹³⁰ Interview, Mr. Viswanathan, Madras, August, 1989.

¹³¹ *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol. CXLV, No.18, 18 March, 1988, p.264.

¹³² *Ibid*, p.264.

¹³³ Interview, Madras University, Department of Political Science, 1989.

¹³⁴ Interview, New Delhi, 8 September, 1989.

¹³⁵ See *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vols. XXVIII, No.50, 12 May, 1987 and XXXIV, No.26, 11 December, 1987.

¹³⁶ Member Gopalasamy in *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol. CXLIV, No.5, 12 November, 1987, p.209.

agitated against army operations in November 1987, by forming a human chain comprising thousands of party members. A secret DMK supporter claimed Tamils were “apathetic” and “stupid Indian patriots” who left him “ashamed” by their behavior toward the “Tamil cause”. He also praised the Tigers as he believed they “extorted money in a gentlemanly way”. For all his strongly worded beliefs, his insistence on anonymity as his views might jeopardise his position in the newspaper organisation he worked for, did not testify to any real willingness to sacrifice for the ‘cause’. The extent of his ‘support’ consisted of voting for DMK’s pro-Tiger leader, Mr.Karunanidhi, for having reportedly stated in an interview that “I have given up the idea of a Tamil state separate from India, but I will never give up the idea of an eelam in Sri Lanka..”.¹³⁷

In trying to explain the Indian Tamil’s widespread unwillingness to sacrifice or continue to empathise with the individual Sri Lankan Tamil’s plight, DK’s Veeramani said,“..When genocide is a routine affair, the same kind of intensity of feelings and reactions will not be there. That does not mean that we (Indian Tamils) are disinterested. It is just when the emotions are pushed everyday, then it becomes routine... Like the old Tamil proverb says‘when there is a great fire, the smoke and ashes cover the heart of the fire. Once the ashes are removed, the fire will once again flare up’. This is the situation in Tamil Nadu..”.
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The intensity of his beliefs however was belied by the fact that the ‘fire’ never really did ‘flare up’ again. While the DK and the DMK parties grew more marginalized, in their steadfast support of the Tigers and the Tamil *eelam* it stood for, the majority of Tamil Nadu became less and less personally empathic.

Control:

Despite the insistent strain placed on all Tamils in the direct confrontation between the Tigers and the Indian army, the political control wielded by the Indian and Tamil Nadu government, was never in serious doubt. For the majority, support of government action followed a “normative habitual” course; i.e. “a universal acceptance of customs and norms to the degree that control is manifested in the form of following the prevailing norms and

¹³⁷Interview, Mr.S of *The Hindu*.

¹³⁸Interview, 16 August,1989.

customs non - consciously".¹³⁹ The 'close collaboration' between the Tamil Nadu state government and the Indian central government, was also highlighted at every stage so that the legitimacy of actual policies, was well girded against accusations of "monopolistic North Indian" policy making.¹⁴⁰ Tamil leaders themselves stated that "..whatever services we render (to Sri Lankan Tamils), whatever help we give, whatever aid we sanction and whatever work is carried out is done with the knowledge, cooperation and concurrence of the Centre..".¹⁴¹

Evidence of "habitual control" was probably best illustrated by the procedure followed in signing the 1987 Accord. Prime Minister Gandhi was able to include the clause for military help to the Sri Lankan government without the knowledge of the Indian parliament. He presented it as a *fait accompli* one day later, in the Lok Sabha, contextualizing his act by reminding members of India's earlier 'loaning of troops' in 1971, during the Sri Lankan government's battle with right wing Sinhalese extremists. His statement was devoid of any expectation of rebuttals: "..the government of Sri Lanka made a formal request for appropriate Indian military assistance to ensure the cessation of hostilities and surrender of arms in the Jaffna peninsula..He also requested air transport to move the Sri Lankan troops...".¹⁴² In fact, he was not rebutted till almost two weeks later.

With growing signs of the Tigers' reluctance to comply with the Accord and the consequent recognition that "Indian military assistance" was tantamount to Indian battle against the Tamils, the mode of 'habitual control' was variously, though not seriously, challenged.

The report of Indian army atrocities committed in Sri Lanka, was unable to dislodge the symbolic, inherent appeal of the Indian army. The Army, long considered an object of all-India pride, remained relatively impervious to DMK calls for condemnation of its "fiendish" activities. In fact, these condemnations were manipulated to increase the government's political control, by branding all those who condemned the army as "reprehensible". Criticiz-

¹³⁹From Richard W.Cottam, "Nationalism in the Middle East". In S.A. Arjomand ed. *Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, 1984, p.32.

¹⁴⁰The peculiarly vulnerable position of the ruling Chief Minister in every Indian state vis a vis the Central government rendered 'close collaboration' somewhat of a necessity. Even the strongly pro-Tiger Tamil nationalist leader, Karunanidhi, was visibly subdued in his two years as Chief Minister.

¹⁴¹Member Aladi Aruna in *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLIV, No.2, 9 November,1987, p.205.

¹⁴²Statement by the Prime Minister, *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol.XXIX, No.54, 30 July, 1987.

ing the “spreading misinformation and lies aimed at tarnishing the image of India and our armed forces”, Prime Minister Gandhi herded the parliamentarians to commit themselves into paying “homage to the soldiers who have laid down their lives...I am sure the entire House will join me in conveying our tribute to our gallant armed forces..”¹⁴³ The Congress party’s members and government representatives took up similarly stentorian positions :“..to attribute any motives to the Indian Army which has a most marvellous record, is reprehensible and regrettable and should not have been done...They do not represent a region, a state, or any vested interest..”¹⁴⁴ Tamil Congress members further reminded the critics that “it was regularly pleaded by everyone from Tamil Nadu that it is only the Government of India..who can save the Tamils, and no one else..A military intervention was called for at that time..”¹⁴⁵ Prime Minister Gandhi also utilized deeply absorbed value preferences like “duty” and “destiny” with statements such as the following one: “..We have accepted a role which is difficult but which it is in our national interest to discharge. We shall not shirk our obligations and commitments. This is a national endeavour..”¹⁴⁶

The approach was successful to the extent that criticism of the Army grew muted. In its stead, criticism of the Prime Minister became rampant. Rajiv Gandhi “..is a young man..He has become Prime Minister by sheer luck. He should..shed his arrogance..”¹⁴⁷; “Jayewardene..is an expert in the art of duplicity. He will outwit our Prime Minister..”¹⁴⁸ “Rajiv Gandhi has become a neo-Fascist..”¹⁴⁹ In fact, by the end of 1987, a “no-confidence” motion was passed against the Prime Minister for placing “our troops by a dangerous precedent, under the command of an alien President in direct contravention and a brazen assault of the provisions of Article 53(2) of our constitution..”¹⁵⁰ Yet not only was the no-confidence motion unsuccessful in ousting the Prime Minister, but the subsequent elections marked a victory for the Congress party and, by definition, the Prime Minister.

¹⁴³ *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLIV, No.2, 9 November,1987, p. 300-301.

¹⁴⁴ Natwar Singh, *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol. CXLV, No.18, 18 March,1988, p.299.

¹⁴⁵ Member T.K.Ramamurthy, *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLIV, No.2, 9 November, 1987.

¹⁴⁶ *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLIV, No.5, 12 November,1987, p.209.

¹⁴⁷ Member Gurupadswamy, *Ibid*

¹⁴⁸ Member Murasoli Maran, *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLIV, No.2, 9 November, 1987, p.319.

¹⁴⁹ Member Gopalsamy, *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLVII, No.20, 29 August, 1988, p.414.

¹⁵⁰ Member K.P.Unnikrishnan in *Motion of No-Confidence Debates*, Vol. XXXIV, No.25, 10 December,1987, p.396, 502-503.

As proof of his current control over the situation, Rajiv Gandhi was even able to invite Sinhalese President Jayewardene, as the prestigious Chief Guest for the Indian Republic Day celebrations, barely a month after the no-confidence vote was defeated.

Decisional Latitude:

The behavioral dimensions of intense nationalism predicate the ability, and in fact, the active pressure exerted on a government to take profitable risks for the nation and avoid defeats or humiliating withdrawals at all costs. The policies enacted by the Government of India during the period of intervention in Sri Lanka, were both risky and humiliating. The clause to supply an Indian 'peacekeeping' force was a high risk option, assuring the most extreme services one country could provide to another - the provision of soldiers willing to risk their lives. The decision to actively deploy Indian soldiers in aggressive armed battle against Tamil militants rather than continue maintaining a strictly defensive 'peacekeeping force' was an even riskier option. In the perception of the Indian government, it constituted a "necessary evil" to save the rest of the Tamil nation in Sri Lanka from "misguided youth". However, the perceived switch from absolute Indian support (sending of peacekeeping force), to absolute rejection (fighting against militants), could have constituted an intensely humiliating experience for the Indian Tamil population.

In fact, it did, for a section of the community that had envisaged instead, a 'Bangladesh' operation, resulting in the creation of a separate Tamil *eelam* or homeland in Sri Lanka. Even when Indian negotiations were being conducted in 1986, DMK's member, Mr.N.V.N.Somu, had dismissed the Indian government's proclivity for "preaching only political solutions" and urged "military action"; "...there was genocide in East Pakistan, India took military action and Bangladesh was born. Now the Bangladesh President is sitting side by side with Pakistan's Prime Minister because of India's military action..".¹⁵¹ The projection of ultimate glory in "sitting side by side" as equal leaders with the Sinhalese, was enough for the member to urge the cessation of all negotiation and the ignition of a "military solution". Even when the Accord was signed in 1987, the member continued to insist that "till a separate Eelam is carved out, as it was carved out in the case of Bangladesh, the Accord

¹⁵¹ Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XXII, No.3, 20 November, 1986, p.348-350.

will be only for the purpose of record and not for reality..”¹⁵²

In the period of negotiation, members of the AIADMK had also argued against “peaceful solutions”. As one member said, “..by the time..a peaceful accord (is reached),..there will not be any Tamilians at all..”. He further warned the Government that the slow negotiations was highly disappointing to “the people of Tamil Nadu” who still believed that it was a “national (Indian) issue..a national problem” which could only be “solved” by the Indian government, i.e. through military action.¹⁵³

When the objective of a Bangladesh style *eelam* went not only unsupported but was directly negated by confrontation with the *eelam* fighters, the DMK elite was apoplectic. A sense of humiliation was evidenced from every side. The Army was “murderous”; the Prime Minister was “fascist”; the President of Sri Lanka had “tricked” the Indians; the AIADMK leaders were “lackeys” of the government. A statement reminding DMK critics of the Army, that Indian Tamils in the Madras Regiment, were one of the first combatants sent against the Tigers, was vigorously refuted by DMK members. If such thin skinned responses had been the average response of the people of Tamil Nadu, the Government of India may have found it very difficult to continue its policy of aggressive confrontation against the Tigers.

The need to intervene, however, had been vigorously supported by all factions in Tamil Nadu. Whether the Government of India was actually pushed into the Accord by the unanimous call for more aggressive and less verbal action, is moot. It can be said with certainty, however, that the Government was strongly persuaded to do so by the Tamil elite. From repeatedly stating its disinclination to “directly interfere in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka”, the Indian government signed not only a direct treaty regarding the Tamil issue, with the government of Sri Lanka, but also entrusted its armed forces to the resolution of the issue.

Statements made by government - supportive members of the AIADMK, just prior to the signing of the Accord, gives a sense of the climate and direction of decisional persuasion. Significantly, in the post Accord period, the AIADMK concern was not experienced as “humiliation” to the Tamils, but primarily as non resolution of the issue. Said AIADMK mem-

¹⁵²Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XXX, No.66, 18 August, 1987, p.517.

¹⁵³Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.XIII, No.4, 26 February, 1986, p.268-288.

ber Aladi Aruna, "If this Government does not know the art of persuasion, I will ask them to leave the matter to our Chief minister, Dr.MGR, and I can assure the House that within 48 hours he will successfully complete the negotiation..".¹⁵⁴ Another member berated the government because "..they are not able to do anything positively against Mr.Jayewardene and his Government, who have no idea of putting this Accord into practise..".¹⁵⁵ Unlike the DMK, the focus was not on the "outrage" suffered by the Tamils, but on the continuation of unresolved issues, attributable to governmental ineptitude.

The difference in focus led to differences in policy suggestions. With the safety of the Tamil nation and the goal of *eelam* still firmly in the sights of the DMK party leaders, complete withdrawal of the Indian army was not advocated, despite open repugnance directed to their activities. "We do not want you to withdraw the army.." said Mr. Gopalasamy, the same member who had accused the army of continuing "genocide". Withdrawal of the Indian army, was tantamount to abandoning all Tamils in Sri Lanka to Sinhalese authority, which the DMK was not willing to contemplate. The AIADMK, on the other hand, alternated between urging either a "cease fire" against the militants or withdrawing the "IPKF from the soil of Sri Lanka because the presence of IPKF is dangerous to the..interests of the Tamils..". The fact that the non presence of the IPKF would be even more "dangerous" was not recognized in the AIADMK's prime concern with mitigating the public discomfort of experiencing direct conflict between the Indian army and the Tamil militants.

It was also evident that any political humiliation experienced by the Indian government, did not figure in the calculations of either party. It was left to cosmopolitan Tamil member, S.Swamy to support the Army, despite being a vigorous opponent of the Congress government: "..it cannot be that we in this country could denigrate our own army.. and bring down their morale..no nationalist would like the Indian Army to come out from there as a defeated Army..". Despite having opposed government policy in Sri Lanka all through, he urged the Tigers to "give up" since they "do not have any chance against the Indian Army" and the Army could then withdraw without 'losing face'.

Representatives from the government were also vehemently opposed to following any

¹⁵⁴Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLIV, No.2, 9 November, 1987, p.322.

¹⁵⁵Valampuri John in Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLIV, No.5, 12 November, 1987, p.196.

action that might appear the acts of a defeated Army. When DMK members, with the interests of the Tigers in focus, suggested Army “withdrawals”, Foreign Minister Natwar Singh said, “The great Indian Army is not going to be directed to by the LTTE as to where it should go..”.¹⁵⁶ Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, also was firmly against a reversion to negotiating with the Tigers, explaining that with “the accord remaining unaccepted on one side and accepted on the other side, there can be no common ground, there can be no basis for any talks... we have no locus standi..”.¹⁵⁷ This stand, with its evident shift of focus from ‘Tamil security’ to ‘Indian prestige’, continued to hold force, despite the protestations of the DMK party. Populist support of this stand was suggested by a poll that showed nearly 64 percent of Tamils in Madras “supported the IPKF’s operations..against the LTTE”; and that too, at a time when the DMK party was in control of the state government.¹⁵⁸

The rechanneling of primary focus on the Tamil problem to that of the prestige of the Indian army, altered decisional focus as well. While DMK’s intense Tamil nationalists advocated policies potentially humiliating for the Indian government, but relatively beneficial for the Tamil militants, AIADMK’s members urged any policy that would not place them in a constant sense of contradictoriness, even if it resulted in a loss of prestige for the Indian army, and more importantly, a loss of basic security for the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. Congress members supported the Indian army and the continuation of its prestige, over and above the needs of the Tamil militants.

In fact, then, it was the Indian nationalists rather than Tamil nationalists, that restricted the decisional latitude of the Indian government during the period of intervention. The Indian army could not be allowed to withdraw without scoring an observable victory, for the further glory of the Indian army, rather than the crisis needs of the Tamils.

Power:

During the period of mediation, perceptual power, or the power of the Tamils as perceived by the Sinhala government, was very strong. The prospects suggested by a monolithic fifty million Tamil nation, backed by the Indian government, created a constant atmosphere

¹⁵⁶ *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLV, No.18, 18 March, 1988, p. 306.

¹⁵⁷ *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLVII, No.20, 29 August, 1988, p.429-434.

¹⁵⁸ Public Opinion Survey, “Strong Support in Madras for IPKF”, *The Hindu*, 29 July, 1989, p.9.

of tension and resentment amongst the Sinhalese public. The same prospect, supplied a sense of support to Sri Lankan Tamils. As Member V. John said, “..The (Sri Lankan) Tamils have always been thinking that India will help them, India is the homeland for them..”¹⁵⁹

Six years after the start of the crisis, and at the height of the “Indian homeland’s” skewed intervention, the sense of reliance on borrowed power,¹⁶⁰ and the greater unity of the pan Tamil nation, was definitely on the wane. Various stratas of the Sri Lankan Tamil elite were equally disillusioned and unhopeful of continued support deriving from India.

A Sri Lankan Tamil activist based in Madras, stated:“.. they say the Indians must get out of Sri Lanka, because the soldiers ask ‘for whom are we fighting..we are unnecessarily going and dying there’..”. He further added that “India really does not believe in..the creation of eelam, because they feel that the creation of eelam may break up their own country..”¹⁶¹

The militant leader of the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS) expected no support from even the state ruling party, and foremost proponent of pan Tamil nationhood, the DMK. “New Delhi is more keen on the unitary state of Sri Lanka than even Colombo..The DMK having been left out from state domination for thirteen years, is not going to lend itself to any possibility of being considered anti Indian.. so it is difficult for them to support us..”¹⁶²

Politician and ex member of the Sri Lankan parliament, Mr.Sampanathan, echoed the same distrust in continued support from the Indian Tamils,“..the government of Tamil Nadu, certainly Chief Minister Karunanidhi is not talking the same way as he did in the Opposition..”, thereby implying that DMK support had been political rather than ideological. “.. Tamil Nadu public opinion has to be utilized, but today it is not spontaneous.

¹⁵⁹ *Rajya Sabha Debates*, Vol.CXLIV, No.5, 12 November, 1987, p.199.

¹⁶⁰ The reality of “borrowed power”, as translated into actual policy, seems evident in the synchronicity with which Sri Lankan offensives against Tamil militants coincided or followed periodic Indian “crackdowns” on Tamil militants in Tamil Nadu. The five months preceding the first Indian act of open intervention against Sri Lanka, was marked by the arrest of militants in Tamil Nadu and a “fight unto death” offensive launched in Sri Lanka by President Jayewardene. The perception that India would not interfere, invalidated Tamil power, allowing the Sri Lankan President to launch such an offensive.

¹⁶¹ Mr.Chandrasahana, Chairman of the Organization for the Protection of Tamils of Eelam from Genocide (PROTEG), Interview, Madras,1989.

¹⁶² Mr.Shankar, Interview, Madras, 1989.

Today Tamils are killing Tamils¹⁶³..This tends to confuse the thinking of the people..”¹⁶⁴ It was significant that Mr.Sampanathan, one of the few remaining leaders of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front party, known for its upper caste/class pro-Indian elite, had resigned himself to the indifference and apathy of Indian Tamils toward his cause.

Sri Lankan Tamil intellectual, Mr.Sivanayagam, completely dismissed the idea of Indian Tamil support for the Sri Lankan Tamil, as being a primary motive force in resolving the crisis. His recounting of Sri Lankan history clearly indicated his reliance on violence as the prime source of power. “We never got any attention from India for thirty years when we were fighting a democratic, non-violent battle. The moment the boys (LTTE Tigers) took to guns..India began to take a very active interest in our problems..”¹⁶⁵

With the fine irony of politics, the perception of power wielded by the Tamils, as perceived by the Sinhalas was greater during the period of Indian mediation, than it was during the period of active Indian intervention. The threat of using force, it appeared, had been far more successful than the actual use of force.

The dismal perception of reduced power as portrayed by the Sri Lankan Tamils was not unfounded. ‘Real’ power, or the effectiveness of the Indian army, in terms of motivation and morale, was under serious question. The Indian army, it may be remembered, is not only a voluntary and apolitical body, but also a highly respected symbol of the Indian nation. With the 1971 victory at Bangladesh having annulled the 1961 disaster at the Chinese-Indian border, the army was expected to effect a quick and unconditional victory in Sri Lanka. Operation Pawan, the first major offensive against the Tigers stretched out for a whole ten days and resulted in no definitive victory despite the touted ‘capture’ of Jaffna city. Said DMK member Gopalasamy, the Tigers were “able to give stiff resistance to the fourth biggest army” in the world, because “Indian soldiers are not fighting for the interests of India..they are playing the role of mercenaries in the hands of another Government..”¹⁶⁶ Said another member, “you cannot send an army to war, on slogans of peace..this has

¹⁶³This was in clear reference to the recent LTTE assassination of TULF leader Amirthalingam. As Amirthalingam’s close aide, Mr. Sampanathan lived in relative secrecy and fear, within the city of Madras.

¹⁶⁴Interview, Mr. Sampanathan of the Tamil United Liberation Front, Madras, 1989.

¹⁶⁵Interview, Mr. Sivanayagam, Editor of the Tamil Nation, Madras, 1989.

¹⁶⁶Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol.CXLV, No.18, 18 March, 1988, p.260.

caused a psychological fracture in the minds of those whom you are asking to lay down their lives..”¹⁶⁷

The same sense of alarm, that the Indian army was losing morale was heard from other members as well. Said S.Swamy that due to all the “unjustified criticism¹⁶⁸..the Army themselves feel very unhappy..”¹⁶⁹ The Foreign Secretary, Mr.S.K.Singh admitted that the Army would have to be withdrawn as India would not want to create “another Afghanistan or another Vietnam”.¹⁷⁰

Senior officials in the Army also confessed they were unhappy with the nature of the conflict and were pressuring the Government to effect an “honorable withdrawal”. The sense that the “it was a politicians war”¹⁷¹ was strong amongst the Army personnell.

Sporadic threats by Indian Tamils to form alternate sources of armed power were simply that – sporadic. At one heated point during the parliamentary debates, a member of the DMK party threatened that “.. we (Indian Tamils) will be forced to take up arms against India..”,¹⁷² even as he subsequently argued that the “the Indian Army should not be withdrawn”. The AIADMK member was less explicit, but threatened some kind of parallel force when he said “..if the Government is successful in liquidating the LTTE, I am to remind this House that the cause of the Tamils will be taken up by the five crore (fifty million) Tamils of Tamil Nadu..”.

Despite these dire warnings, the only source of physical power continued to be vested in the cosmopolitan Indian army. As the inconclusive battle against the Tamil guerillas lengthened, the behavioral attributes of power - high morale and motivation, continued to dwindle even within this source. What is more, it was widely perceived as a waning force by both the militants and the Sinhala population.

Conclusion:

¹⁶⁷ **Rajya Sabha Debates**, Vol.CXLVII, No.20, 29 August,1988, p.394.

¹⁶⁸ Of this there was plenty: “Your soldiers are being killed by your own weapons”; “IPKF shoots its brethren”; “Our *jawans* (soldiers) are engaged in fighting men of their own blood”.

¹⁶⁹ **Rajya Sabha Debates**, Volume CXLVII, No.20, 29 August, 1988, p.374.

¹⁷⁰ Interview, Mr.S.K.Singh, New Delhi, 1989.

¹⁷¹ Manik de Silva, “The Lesser Evil: India Pulls Out Leaving Tamil Issue Unresolved”, **Far Eastern Economic Review**, 147, No.10-11, 5 April, 1990, p.10.

¹⁷² Member Gopalasamy in **Rajya Sabha Debates**, Vol.CXLV, No.18, 18 March, 1988, p.282.

While Indian intervention in Sri Lanka was dramatic and forceful, sustenance of the policy was as disparate and insubstantial as the Indian Tamil's support for the crisis of its "brethren" during this period. As one Indian Army General commented: "..Instead of peace keeping, we became a 'peace seeking' force because there had been no policy to start with..".¹⁷³ The 'lack of a policy' was perhaps misrepresented. More accurately, the policy was "seen as a measure for a short term crisis",¹⁷⁴ that would both defuse the Indian Tamil's concerted rally to 'do something' and presumably realign the course of Indo - Sri lankan relations. Military battle did not seem to have been a serious option. "The intelligence gathering we started was civil oriented and politically motivated. The questions we sought answers to, were of personalities and their ultimate aims. We were not at all geared for military inputs of how much armaments, what make, location, etc...".¹⁷⁵ This statement by a senior intelligence officer, was supported by the heavy casualties suffered by the army in the first few weeks of the conflict.

The Indian Army's wavering role vis a vis the Tigers was the most concrete manifestation of the indeterminate opinions festering and fracturing the Indian Tamil nation. Groups that continued to support the Tamil militants were being corralled into a defensive band of nationalists, as mainstream political parties began to view militancy as the problem rather than the cure. Subsequently, the motivation to force one clear course of action was addled and contrary. Factions headed by the DMK party clamoured for Indian army presence in Sri Lanka as a deterrent to Sinhala offensives. At the same time, the Tigers were continually presented as an "ally of the Indian Government", against whom aggressive action was heresy.

Factions headed by the AIADMK party, appeared fully satiated by India's initial act of intervention and projected no other action except a reduction in public discomfort to be effected by the withdrawal of the Indian army from Sri Lanka. Groups like the Congress, also urged withdrawal, but stressed it would have to be an "honorable" one, thereby clearly elevating the continuing prestige of the Indian nation as the new and primary focus of attention. Despite the growing differences emergent in world view and motivational direction,

¹⁷³ Interview, Major General Madhok, New Delhi, 1989.

¹⁷⁴ Interview, Former Secretary, Mr. Eric Gonsalvez, New Delhi, 1989.

¹⁷⁵ Interview, Intelligence Officer in the Research and Analysis Wing, New Delhi, 1989.

the willingness to sacrifice exhibited by the Indian Tamils following Indian intervention, was visibly reduced amongst all groups. Even the intense nationalists of the DMK party, were behaviorally muted, as the party was hobbled by electoral concerns. Having gained power as the state government's ruling party in 1989, and thereby directly responsible for the 'law and order' in Tamil Nadu, DMK leaders found it hard to openly sacrifice available resources to the militants. However, they continued to support them in less open ways. The need to be less open in response to public sentiment was evident even in the symbols used to control public action and reaction. They derived from Indian rather than purely Tamil sources during this period. At stake was the growing concern over Indian army prestige and honour rather than pan Tamil greatness and security. The growing divergences in world view and motivational focus, allowed far more latitude to the Indian government than had been possible in the preceding period. While all groups clearly enunciated what they did not want to see happen, the process for achieving peace/ status quo/ independent statehood was weakly visualized. Given this, the drive to demand specific victories and avoid specific humiliations showed none of the integrity that marked the earlier years of the crisis. This became evident in the declining power of the Indian army as a white knight of the Tamil nation. The willingness of the army to battle the Tamils it had ostensibly come to save, reduced Sinhalese perceptions of the "borrowed power" wielded by the Tamil nation. The continuing and inconclusive battle with the Tigers, a group dismissed as a rag-tag bunch of 'boys', heightened the power pretensions of the Tigers in inverse proportion to the deflating image of the "fourth largest army in the world". A continuing policy of intervention was clearly unsupportable almost from the initiation of the intervention.

Period of Abdication: 1989 - 1991

Given the palpable decline of Indian Tamil interest in the Sri Lankan Tamil crisis, the rationale for 'sacrificing' Indian soldiers in Sri Lanka was simultaneously weakened. The entire involvement was instead branded as Rajiv Gandhi's desire to be "a regional policeman".¹⁷⁶ Said one political commentator: ".it is an accepted fact that the Gandhi

¹⁷⁶M. Jain, "Friendly Overtures", India Today, 31 January, 1990, p.52.

government's interest in the Sri Lankan ethnic issue has been political, namely the votes in Tamil Nadu, and a large number of ruling partymen are beginning to realise that the best way to safeguard that interest, is to make an early exit..¹⁷⁷ It was true that the period of abdication was marked, not by a clean and acceptable resolution of the Tamil crisis, but a clean and acceptable way by which India could withdraw its troops. The behavior of Indian Tamils in this period is illuminating in understanding the process of Indian policy retractions.

World View:

“The real power for the Tamils of Sri Lanka are the Tamils here; not the government, but the people. Ultimately it is the people who count..and they have been disillusioned..”.¹⁷⁸ The ‘disillusionment’ or disinterest of Indian Tamils as a whole, stemmed primarily from the notoriety earned by Sri Lankan Tamil militants operating in Tamil Nadu. The sense that Tamil Nadu was being disrupted by an unusually powerful strain of violence was corroborated by the sudden unearthing of numerous arms caches along the state's coastline, that included explosives and rocket launchers. ¹⁷⁹

With the proposed pull out of the Indian army from Sri Lanka, there was no related reduction in the widespread apprehension that militants were holding the state of Tamil Nadu hostage to internecine warfare. In fact, the perception was heightened. The fear that the Tigers would regain control of Tamil areas in Sri Lanka once the Army had departed, fuelled a fresh exodus of refugees into Tamil Nadu, but “this time around there (was) a difference..”. Most of the refugees were rival gang members attempting to escape Tiger retribution. As reported, this was “cause for concern for locals” and there was “panic in the area..If there are so many militants here, can you imagine how many are roaming around Tamil Nadu freely..”. ¹⁸⁰

Public fear was heightened by AIADMK claims that there were at least “one thousand cadres who run military camps and arms and drug smuggling rackets” within the Tamil

¹⁷⁷ P.P.Bala Chandran, “Rajiv's Lanka Dilemma” *Gulf News*, September, 1989.

¹⁷⁸ Mr.Kandappan, Interview, Madras, 1989.

¹⁷⁹ The imposition of President's Rule in 1988, allowing direct control by the central government, following the death of Chief Minister MGR, facilitated the search for hidden arms.

¹⁸⁰ K. Shetty, “An Alarming Influx”, *India Today*, 15 March, 1990.

Nadu state. It was further asserted that the arms were being distributed to radical elements all over India, including the secessionists in the northern states of Assam and Punjab.¹⁸¹ The perception of an 'enemy' was very clearly forming around the group of Sri Lankan Tamil militants.

The heft of this perception can also be gauged by the fact that it was used to corner the pro - Tiger government of Mr. Karunanidhi. Accused of "patronizing the Sri Lankan militant groups",¹⁸² a claim that had till recently been a matter of pride and competition, Mr. Karunanidhi was forced to "give the Centre, details of an action plan he devised to deal with the Tigers". He also visited Delhi for the specific purpose of denying that "the presence of the LTTE cadres was having an effect on law and order..".¹⁸³ When eighty one Tiger activists, were in fact apprehended, the AIADMK - Congress parties dismissed the capture as an eyewash where only "students and invalids" had been arrested "while the hardcore activists were conveniently allowed to escape..".¹⁸⁴

Regardless of the accuracy of their condemnations, obviously directed with an eye to dismissing the DMK government, the very fact that the presence of Tamil militants could be projected as a "threat" to Indian Tamils marked the formal acceptance of a seachange in public perception. The "heroes" and "boys" fighting for Tamil dignity and independence were now "infiltrators" and "subversives".

Sri Lankan Tamil activists and intellectual revolutionaries furthered this view with their public criticism of the Tigers : "...there were all the externals of change: murals, Tiger courts, ribbon cutting by the Tigers. But the people had no role..They were..unable to determine the course of their struggle..".¹⁸⁵ The subsequent murder of this speaker, combined with the series of publicized killings of prominent Tamil leaders like Mr.Amirthalingam, blacklisted the militants in more justifiable ways. The brutally dramatic killing of Rajiv Gandhi by the Tigers proved conclusive in declaring the them as persona non grata.

¹⁸¹ "India: The South", *India Abroad*, 14 December, 1990, p.10.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ A. Viswanathan, "Tiger Trouble", *India Today*, 31 December, 1990, p.25.

¹⁸⁴ A. Viswanathan, "Populist Ploys", *India Today*, 15 January, 1991, p.43.

¹⁸⁵ Rajani Thiraganama, as quoted in A. Wilson, "A Political Life", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 October, 1989, p.2363.

By 'justifiable', I refer to the ability of both the average Tamilian and the leaders to outright condemn the militants. Despite public expressions of outrage and widespread fear directed against the Tigers, the relevance of the group as the "only Tamils" fighting for a Tamil homeland and sacrificing their lives for it, had served to tone down stringent criticism within Tamil Nadu. As one commentator explained it, "We Tamils have always produced scientists and mathematicians and scholars of the highest degree. We have never produced heroes. Pirabhakaran (Tiger leader) is our first..".¹⁸⁶ Evidence of this subtle tip toeing around the 'hero' can be seen in criticism like that expressed by Tamil Chief Minister Jayalalitha, a member of the AIADMK party, who in February 1991 said she was not "against the LTTE" per se, but opposed their "using the state (of Tamil Nadu) to wage war against Sri Lanka..". With the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by the Tigers, barely three months later, Jayalalitha was able to take an uncompromising stand, "The LTTE is just another terrorist group and we will deal with the menace as we would with any terrorist organisation..".¹⁸⁷ In fact, she was openly hailed as the "only one who can drive out the LTTE from the state of Tamil Nadu..".¹⁸⁸

The perception of Sri Lankan Tamils as 'enemy' was no longer inferred from random statements and ad hoc demonstrations, but recorded through legal directives that forced all 'Sri Lankan nationals' within Tamil Nadu to be registered with the local police or face punitive consequences. Not only was the distinction between militants and refugees ignored, but 'Tamil brethren' were now conspicuously referred to as 'Sri Lankan nationals': "The Tamils in Sri Lanka are Sri Lankans, however ethnically near they may be to Tamil Nadu..".¹⁸⁹

The world view of Indian Tamils had not dramatically changed; elements in that view had forged to the surface, brought on by the structure of groups and the situations they encountered. A 'change' would define the complete renunciation of earlier held views. This was not the case with the Tamils. DMK leaders like Mr.Gopalasamy continued to perceive Tamil militants as 'liberators' and 'torch bearers for Tamil nationhood', just as Congress party supporters like J.Natarajan consistently viewed them as 'terrorists'. Both views found

¹⁸⁶ Mr. Sivanayagam, Interview, 1989.

¹⁸⁷ Interview by K.Shetty, *India Today*, 15 September, 1991, p.10-11.

¹⁸⁸ Parliamentary member, Jayanthi Natarajan, *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁹ K.Nayar, "Time to Withdraw the IPKF", *Gulf News*, 25 June, 1989, p.6

varying levels of resonance within the Tamil Nadu public and were thereby manipulatable.

Motivation

Given the emerging dominance and clarity in public opinion that openly expressed fear and revulsion against Sri Lankan Tamil militancy within Tamil Nadu, the motivation to disentangle Indian Tamil commitment to all Sri Lankan Tamils was prominent in this period. Even before the gory assassination of Rajiv Gandhi focussed public fear in absolute ways, the AIADMK party had already issued a memorandum to the Prime Minister stating that “infiltrators who are practically foreigners..”,¹⁹⁰ and “extremists with international links”¹⁹¹ (i.e. the Tigers) were being allowed into Tamil Nadu “to dismember our nation”.¹⁹²

The dominance of Tamil non nationalists was evident in both public attitudes and proposed action. Rather than the Tamil nationalist party, the DMK, “having a field day ..on Tamil Nadu’s ‘betrayal’ of the Sri Lankan Tamil cause” and “whipping up popular anti-Delhi passions..on the Sri Lankan question”¹⁹³ as predicted by earlier analysts observing the politics of Tamil Nadu, the exact obverse reaction became evident. The DMK party was ousted for its “reluctance” to “deal firmly” with the “unprecedented dangerous situation” caused by Sri Lankan militants within Tamil Nadu.¹⁹⁴ “If a State government allows a militant group, with a base in a foreign country, to just infiltrate and overrun the State..blatantly gives moral and financial support..”, then the party ruling the government had to be dismissed, according to the then opposition leader, Jayalalitha.¹⁹⁵

Even though others in Tamil Nadu claimed that these were purely “idiotic” political strategies for depriving “parties of state bases before having to fight another election”, and highly “unconstitutional” in intent,¹⁹⁶ it was significant that the charges stuck. Despite intellectual furor, media cynicism, and a dramatic refusal by the Governor of Tamil Nadu to endorse the dismissal of the DMK ruled state government, the party was dismissed in January 1991 on the sole complaint that they had been unable to contain Sri Lankan

¹⁹⁰ “Calls for Government to Quit”, *India Abroad*, 4 January, 1991, p.10.

¹⁹¹ *India Abroad*, 8 February, 1991, p.6.

¹⁹² Interview with Jayalalitha by V.Jayanth, *Frontline*, 2-15 March, 1991, p.28-30.

¹⁹³ *India Today*, 15 January, 1988, p.13.

¹⁹⁴ *India Abroad*, 8 February 1991, p.6; and 4 January, 1991, p.10.

¹⁹⁵ Interview, by V.Jayanth, *Frontline*, 2-15 March, 1991, p.28-30.

¹⁹⁶ *New York Times*, 4 February, 1991, p.A5.

Tamil militancy in the state. The motivation to action was clearly directed against Sri Lankan Tamil militants in Tamil Nadu, almost in exclusion of any other fact or situational reality. Even DMK leader Karunanidhi was hustled into promising that “even though I have sympathy for the militants fighting for a Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, none of these groups including the LTTE will be allowed to convert Tamil Nadu into an arena of violence..”¹⁹⁷ He also ‘accused’ the AIADMK and Congress party leaders of having provided training camps for the militants since 1983. These accusations and counter accusations of the extent of patronage provided to Sri Lankan Tamil militants had been fiercely competitive totems of the Tamil nation’s integrity, during the first period. The public push toward negativizing such totems so that they became political skeletons instead, rattled by political leaders to scare Tamil voters away from the opposition party, attested more than anything else, to the motivational direction characterizing this period.

The killing of Mr. Gandhi in Tamil Nadu by Tiger activists provided conclusive judgement on what was already a popular stand amongst the widening majority of Tamil Nadu’s political elite. The assassination served to legitimate all acts of negation directed against the Sri Lankan Tamils as a whole. The difference between militants and refugees became indistinct in both popular view and behavioral action.

The so called ‘Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka’, or the traded plantation workers recently granted Indian citizenship, were asked to register themselves with the Tamil police, as were all other “Sri Lankan nationals”. All Sri Lankan Tamils were denied admission to Tamil colleges for a minimum of one year, marking a complete reversal from the earlier policy of admission quotas specially reserved for displaced Sri Lankan students. Intensive surveillance of possible militant activity on the coastline led to the capture of ships smuggling explosives from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka.¹⁹⁸ According to one observation, the “communication and smuggling network in Tamil Nadu (was) taken apart by the State police in the aftermath of Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination”, so that the Tigers lost “Tamil Nadu as a rear base for its activities”.¹⁹⁹ According to another, despite the vigorous and open crackdown on militants,

¹⁹⁷ Interview, by T.S.Subramanian, *Frontline*, 16 February-1 March 1991, p.122 - 124.

¹⁹⁸ V.Jayanth, “Sailing Into Trouble”, *Frontline*, 6 December, 1991, p.119-120.

¹⁹⁹ T.S.Subramanian, “LTTE Losing Out”, *Frontline*, 26 October - 8 November, 1991, p.131.

the unwieldy coastline of Tamil Nadu stretching for over one thousand kilometers, precluded any conclusive deterrent to such activity: "Every day (the militants) come in boats and go..everyone obeys their command..".²⁰⁰ What was clear, regardless of the extent of continued militant activity, was the declared hostility against Sri Lankan Tamils. Letters to the media reflected a sense of righteous indignation over the "foreigners" and the "impunity with which (they) were operating in our country". Calls to "ban the LTTE from India" and "extradite Pirabhakaran", the Tiger leader or capture him even if it "constitutes a violation of international law", bespoke the willingness to publicly tar the one time Tamil hero. Justification for this stand was inherent in one letter that argued "public sympathy for (the Tigers) in Tamil Nadu is a myth that was exploded in the recent elections..".²⁰¹ It was true that the AIADMK - Congress combine swept both the parliamentary and the state assembly elections on the promise that they would "round up all militants", "seize all arms", "rehabilitate refugees and send them home" as well as make certain that Sri Lankan Tamils "abide by the rules of Tamil Nadu" or "be sent back to Sri Lanka".²⁰²

There was a graphic sense of Tamil leaders promising to wipe their hands clean off the entire crisis. The motivation to assist Tamil 'brethren' that marked the first period; to assist without being personally implicated, that marked the second period; was clearly replaced by one of complete retraction from the problem, in the third period. The crisis of the Sri Lankan Tamil was no longer a source of public synergy. The atrocities it created in Tamil Nadu was. The motivation to action was directed solely by this.

Willingness to Sacrifice

The ability of Tamil leaders to demand sacrifices for the Tamil nation in loud, ringing tones and the proclivity of Tamilians to offer their services, possessions, or more, achieved a moment of unconditionality only in the period immediately following the July 1983 riots in Sri Lanka. Since then, the extent and form of Tamil sacrifices for the nation had skittered along different planes and amplified only within restricted groups. For the Indian Tamils as a whole, personal sacrifice not only stalled, but doubled back during this period, so that

²⁰⁰ "The Tamil Nadu Coast", *Frontline*, 22 June - 5 July 1991, p.28.

²⁰¹ Letters are from *India Today*, 31 August, 1991, p.4 and 30 November, 1991, p.6.

²⁰² Interview with AIADMK leader and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalitha, by V.Jayanth, *Frontline*, 2-15 March, 1991, p.28 - 30.

open sacrifice for the Sri Lankan Tamil people was vaguely dubious, even stigmatic.

This was most evident in the changing language and actions of Tamil leaders with regard to the support of Sri Lankan Tamils, both militants and more revealingly, destitute refugees who continued to reside in Tamil Nadu. While the DMK party issued strongly worded resolutions on the “betrayal of the interests of Sri Lankan Tamils” by the Government of India,²⁰³ it was under the aegis of the DMK party that the State government of Tamil Nadu was compelled by popular pressure, to refuse docking entry to two refugee ships with over 1200 refugees from Sri Lanka. This would have approximated an almost unthinkable act for the DMK, except that Indian Tamil public opinion was strongly dominated and motivated by anti militant (Tiger) stances. The line between refugees and militants no longer enjoyed the patience and sensitivity it once had. To the Indian Tamils, all Sri Lankan Tamils spelt trouble : unexpected shoot outs, accidental fatalities, the increasing visibility of guns. In refusing entry to the refugee ships, the state government under DMK leader Karunanidhi, did not cite economic drains on state resources, but the popular fear of a ‘gun culture’ that was corrupting the state so that “Tamil Nadu will sooner or later fashion itself after the ‘Wild West’..”.²⁰⁴ In addition, the Government was “forced to crackdown”²⁰⁵ on militants by banning the carrying of arms by Sri Lankan Tamils within the state. While non Tamil leaders expressed surprise over the “Sri Lankan Tamils who..wanted to take shelter in Tamil Nadu but..the Tamil Nadu Government did not give them shelter..”,²⁰⁶ within Tamil Nadu the move went unchallenged.

Apart from the fear that militants were recreating the ‘Wild West’ in Tamil Nadu, there was also the matter of 2,10,782 refugees of whom 1,10,787 were eligible to receive fortnightly cash doles from the Government.²⁰⁷ The knowledge of their continued existence since 1983, in combustion with changing social perceptions on the Sri Lankan crisis, forged a distinctly unsympathetic attitude toward them during this period. “The Tamils in Sri

²⁰³In Resolution passed by DMK’s National Front Party on 17 -19 June, 1988 at Madras. See A.M.Zaidi (ed.) *Annual Register of Indian Political Parties,1988*,(New Delhi: Indian Institute of Applied Political Research) 1990: p.625.

²⁰⁴N.Marthandam, “Two Tamil Refugee Ships Barred”, *India Abroad*, 16 March, 1990, p.6.

²⁰⁵A.Viswanathan, “Burning the Boats”, *India Today*, 15 July, 1990, p.14-15.

²⁰⁶Member K.Pradhani in *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol.V, No.37, 8 May, 1990, p.447.

²⁰⁷T.S.Subramanian, “Homeward Bound”, *Frontline*, 14 February, 1992, p.101-103.

Lanka are Colombo's problem, not New Delhi's...more than Rs.20 billion have gone down the drain..";²⁰⁸ the presence of a large number of refugees in Tamil Nadu has created many political, social, and financial problems..";²⁰⁹..take up this matter with the Government of Sri Lanka to bring the situation to normal so that more refugees may not come..and those who have might return as soon as possible..".²¹⁰

The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi crystallized all the vocal antipathy into more stern and clearly enunciated demands. AIADMK leader, Jayalalitha, having stated that it was really "our duty to provide them (refugees) relief..As long as the genocide continues in Sri Lanka.." was strident in her statement barely three weeks later that "I demand that the Central Government take immediate action to see that all Sri Lankan Tamils are sent back..".²¹¹ This was also the strongly expressed "demand" of the Congress party in Tamil Nadu, that all refugees be returned immediately. The deliberate voiding of the situation facing the Sri Lankan refugees if they were to be forced back, was expressive of the change in Indian Tamil attitude toward Sri Lankan Tamils. Far from giving and sacrificing for a pan Tamil cause, the Sri Lankan Tamil was reduced to leperous status, a zero sum entity to be avoided and dispelled at all costs.

The initial monetary costs, in fact, totalled about \$700,000. In early 1991, the Indian Government, while openly supporting the Sri Lankan government's military offensive against the Tigers, contributed that amount to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to "support refugee centers in the Northeast of Sri Lanka", where it presumed to transport the refugees.²¹² An Indian diplomat was careful in announcing that "the Centre is acting at the behest of Tamil Nadu" in ensuring the return of refugees,²¹³ and thereby justifying the need for large amounts of refugee rehabilitation funds. The first ship load of refugees were transported back to Sri Lanka in 1990, amidst audible rounds of self congratulations in Tamil Nadu.

²⁰⁸ "Time to Withdraw the IPKF", *Gulf News*, 25 June, 1989, p.6.

²⁰⁹ *India Abroad*, 21 December, 1990, p.6.

²¹⁰ *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol. V, no.37, 8 May, 1990, p.447.

²¹¹ In T.S.Subramanian, "Homeward Bound", *Frontline*, 14 February, 1992, p.103.

²¹² S.Senadhira, "India Supports Anti - LTTE Drive", *India Abroad*, 8 February, 1991, p.10.

²¹³ T.S.Subramanian, "Homeward Bound", *Frontline*, 14 February, 1992, p.103.

That the Indian Tamil's willingness to sacrifice had involuted, was most acutely perceived and experienced by the Sri Lankan refugees themselves. In an interview, the refugees remarked that "Our motherland is India, (but) we are all scared of them (Indian Tamils) as they resent our presence..".²¹⁴ Sri Lankan Tamil leader, Mr.S.Thondaman, also complained that Tamil Nadu was "mixing up the refugees and repatriates.. and not isolating the militants", so that all Sri Lankan Tamils were being treated with hostility and irresponsibility.²¹⁵

Given the strong action against Sri Lankan Tamils during this period, there was an opposite, if not equal, reaction amongst small sections of the Tamil population, impelled to establish their support for the Tamil cause in equally strong ways. The existence of a somewhat murky 'Tamil National Retrieval Force', began to be unearthed in 1992, a radical nationalist party, who's members were being trained to 'sacrifice their lives' for a pan Tamil nation comprising a free Sri Lankan Tamil Eelam and a free Indian Tamil Nadu. ²¹⁶ The risks in advocating such a cause in the face of, or precisely because of, popular opposition, attested to the continuing attraction of pan Tamil nationhood. In the concentrated hunt to trace Mr.Gandhi's killers, it was also found that some Indian Tamils were openly flying the *eelam* flag of the Tigers in their houses or prominently displaying photographs of Tiger leader, Prabhakaran.²¹⁷ Given the black and white perceptual mode of the times, these acts were easily equated with treasonableness, vulnerable to the risks of both official suspicion and public ire. The willingness to face both, constituted a small reminder that some degree of personal investment in the larger Tamil nation existed, despite its current lack of resonance with the bulk of the Indian Tamil population.

Control

The indifference and negativism directed to Sri Lankan Tamils was nowhere more evident than in the reassertion of total and unilateral control by the central Indian government in its policies toward Sri Lanka.

As averred by AIADMK member, Janardhanan, "...my blood boils over the killings in

²¹⁴T.S.Subramanian, "The Refugee Flow", *Frontline*, 27 April, 1991, p.104.

²¹⁵Interview with Ceylon Workers Congress President, S.Thondaman, *Frontline*, 28 September - 11 October, 1991, p.39 - 40.

²¹⁶See *Frontline*, 3 January, 1992, p.104.

²¹⁷S.Ramanarasu, "End of a Chase", *Frontline*, 6 December, 1991, p.121.

Sri Lanka (but) we are in support of foreign policy and we are always with the Central Government in the matter of the unity and integrity of the country..”²¹⁸ This ‘support of foreign policy’ toward Sri Lanka was strongly presented as “our duty”.²¹⁹ Not only was ‘duty’ to the government and the ‘integrity’ of India an oblique vote against the primacy of Tamil interests, but the very delineation of the Sri Lankan Tamil crisis as a function of abstract Indian foreign policy rather than intensely personal Tamil trauma, bespoke of the rampant impersonality with which a mainstream party was willing to associate itself.

The previous policy of assuring control over Tamil Nadu by prominently involving its leaders in all discussions with Sri Lankans, was almost completely absent during this period. In fact, when independent attempts were made by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Karunanidhi, to act as a go - between the Tigers and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the DMK claimed Mr. Gandhi had deliberately bypassed their efforts. Karunanidhi openly blamed Gandhi’s “misguided..wrong policies” for “distancing the LTTE from the Indian Government”.²²⁰ Yet, given the increasing public disassociation from the Sri Lankan Tamil tragedy, even the DMK, faced by electoral concerns, passed a “resolution on the Tamil question in Sri Lanka (that) echoed the Congress(I) position quite shamelessly..”.²²¹ In other words, the pattern of linking steps with the central government rather than pushing for policies guided primarily by the security or grandeur motivations of the Tamils as a nation, spread through all the parties, albeit in varying degrees of compliance.

The force of the Indian Tamil’s disinterest in its Sri Lankan ‘brethren’ was discernible in DMK leader, Karunanidhi’s language in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, a forum usually reserved for some of the most unrestrained and jingoistic enunciations of Tamil nationalism. Rather than condemning the increased “genocide” in Sri Lanka, following the withdrawal of the Indian army, he merely complained of the “violation of human rights..”. Rather than stirring Assembly members with fervent vows of support for the fresh inflow

²¹⁸ Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. III, No. 19, 9 April, 1990, p.541.

²¹⁹ Ibid, p.537.

²²⁰ in N.Marthandam, “Gandhi Denies His Policy Forced Tiger’s Alienation”, India Abroad, 2 February, 1990, p.18.

²²¹ M.S.S.Pandian, “DMK’s Miscalculations”, Economic and Political Weekly, 2 December, 1989, p.2628 -2629.

of refugees, he deemed it a “form of aggression..against India..”.²²² Such remarks, painfully straining against the very core of DMK philosophy, was evidently a grudging sop to public opinion in Tamil Nadu that deemed continued support of the Sri Lankan Tamil imbroglio as personally threatening rather than a nationalistic imperative.

Despite such sops, the Central government was able to finesse the DMK party, by exploiting public fear and antipathy against the Sri Lankan Tamils. Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar claimed that, “..‘Ears only’ information given to Mr. Karunanidhi has ended up in the Jaffna (Sri Lankan) headquarters of the LTTE. The Centre would be constrained to think hard as to how much it can tell the State Government (of Tamil Nadu)..”.²²³ These were indeed strong charges to be levelled against a ruling state party. The charges stuck, judging by the mass violence directed against all DMK organizations, following the assassination of Mr.Gandhi. The DMK newspaper office was attacked, posters of Karunanidhi were pulled down to be burnt, and the houses of some DMK members were robbed.²²⁴ Following that, the former powerful Home Secretary of Tamil Nadu, appointed during DMK rule, was implicated in the Gandhi assassination for having “harboured, aided.. encouraged the militants to store explosives..” in Tamil Nadu. In turn, he accused Mr. Karunanidhi himself for all the support given to the militants, “The policy direction given by the Chief Minister was not to disturb anyone coming..from Sri Lanka..”.²²⁵

In the always startling twist given to the same people doing the same thing in changing scenarios, the Tamil ‘nationalism’ characterizing DMK support for Sri Lankan Tamils, transformed into a form of high ‘treason’against India. Not only did the DMK lose its position as the State’s ruling party, as well as the elections, but its leaders were backed into a position of complete defensiveness regarding their support for Sri Lankan Tamils. The matter of the Sri Lankan Tamils was clearly relegated to ‘foreign policy’, an area in which state governments had little or no business to be straying into, except within the precincts of ‘duty’ and ‘support’.

²²² Resolution in Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. Text reported in *Tamil Nation*, 15 September, 1990, p.4.

²²³ Quoted in B.M.Reddy, “A Close Call”, *Frontline*, 2 -15 February, 1991, p.29.

²²⁴ “The Shock Wave”, *Frontline*, 8 - 21 June, 1991, p.28.

²²⁵ T.S.Subramanian, “L’affaire Nagarajan”, *Frontline*, 20 December, 1991, p.14-16.

In addition, this period also marked the outright illegitimacy of revolutionary Tamil leaders. Instead, the image of the Indian Peace Keeping Force, representative of the cosmopolitan Indian Tamil rather than the Tamil nationalist, was resuscitated. "Our nation is proud of the Indian Peace Keeping Force for the successful accomplishment in bringing peace and normalcy in the North Eastern region of Sri Lanka.."; ²²⁶for having "shouldered the onerous task of combating the ethnic and civil war..";²²⁷ for "getting the Tamil group..into the democratic process..";²²⁸ for having "ensured..that for all time to come, the Tamil homeland..shall have a Tamil government..". ²²⁹ Control over the people of Tamil Nadu was clearly no longer glaringly dependent on using Tamil symbols; allying with all Tamil leaders; and sympathizing with Tamil identity.

Decisional Latitude

Given the hostility against Sri Lankan Tamil militants; a more vocal intolerance for the large and decreaseless number of refugees; and regnant unease over the role of the Indian army in Sri Lanka; the decisional latitude allowed to the Government of India during this period was directed not by Tamil nationalists, but a fearful and irritable Indian Tamil population. Support of Tamil revolutionaries, the exhortation to take risks in ensuring the safety and dignity of Tamils in Sri Lanka, the unwillingness to accept proposals and courses of action humiliating or inimical to the interests of the Tamils - all these were conspicuous by their absence.

In its stead, the clear imperative voiced by a majority of Tamil leaders was the withdrawal of the Indian army and the resolution, even removal, of all Sri Lankan Tamils from Tamil Nadu.

In the preceding period, the involvement of the Indian army in Sri Lanka had been treated with deliberate prevarication on the part of mixed nationalist parties such as the AIADMK. Leader Jayalalitha's coy statement that the Indian army "should not have gone

²²⁶ Smt.M.Chandrasekhar of Sriperumbudur, in Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.IV, No.25, 18 April,1990, p.785 - 786.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Mr. L.Mehrotra, I.F.S., in S. Senadhira, "The IPKF's Stay: Good or Bad", India Abroad, 23 March, 1990.

²²⁹ General Kalkat, in N.Mitra, "Mixed Feelings Over The Parting", India Abroad, 30 March, 1990, p.6.

there in this way..(but) Having once stepped in, it is difficult to withdraw..”,²³⁰ was representative of this decisional shilly shallying. By 1990 however, the focus for action had crystallized so that the ‘difficulties in withdrawing’ were no longer so evident. Both the statements of leaders and popular media reflected this new non complexity in decisional focus : “..Indian soldiers are not available to solve other people’s problem”;²³¹ “the return of the Indian Peace Keeping Force was not linked with the normalisation of the situation..”;²³² “..the continued presence of Indian forces will only prolong a period of synthetic peace..”;²³³ “..we want our boys back home at the earliest..”.²³⁴ Even the cosmetic empathy registered for the plight of Sri Lankan Tamils, probably had more to do with Indian honor and prestige than Tamil insecurity. Despite vague statement that the Indian Government would coordinate army withdrawal when the “situation there normalises”²³⁵ and Tamils are ensured “reasonable guarantees of security and safety”,²³⁶ the decision to withdraw was clearly in the process of being implemented, with or without ‘reasonable guarantees’ and “regardless of whether or not the Tamils in Sri Lanka were able to live their life with dignity and respect..”.²³⁷

The only impositions on decisional latitude appeared to center on the manner and presentation of Indian army withdrawal, than on the security and identity interests of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Sri Lankan President Premadasa’s eagerness in ensuring Indian army withdrawal before his re - election bid led one Indian newspaper to state that the “The Indian Peace Keeping Force has not lost 1,500 valuable lives only in order to become hostage to the president’s whims..”.²³⁸ The Indian Prime Minister Mr.V.P.Singh, assured the “de - induction” of Indian forces “with honour and grace”.²³⁹ The spokesman for the

²³⁰Interview with Jayalalitha, in *India Today*, 31 december, 1988, p.42 - 43.

²³¹R.Menon, “Tiger’s Last Stand”, *India Today*, 15 July, 1990, p.17.

²³²*Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol.III, No. 14, 29 March, 1990, p.1 - 7.

²³³Editorial, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17 June, 1989, p.1309.

²³⁴Prime Minister V.P.Singh, *Times of India*, 5 December, 1989.

²³⁵Foreign Minister I.K.Gujral, *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol. III, No. 14, 29 March, 1990.

²³⁶Comments of the Prime Minister in Anirudha Gupta, “Living With Neighbours: Which Way?”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17 - 24 February, 1990, p.371.

²³⁷A strong critic, Mr. Lourdasamy, in “India and Sri Lankan Tamils”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 September, 1991, p.2133-2134.

²³⁸Statement in Indian newspaper as quoted in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 June, 1989, p.1365.

²³⁹Quoted in Anirudha Gupta, “Living With Neighbours: Which Way?”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17 - 24 February, 1990, p.371.

army claimed that "The very fact that by May 1989, the LTTE agreed to talk to Sri Lanka to work out a political solution, meant that the Indian Peace Keeping Force has achieved a degree of success in dealing with them".²⁴⁰ Even the DMK party, straining to establish its bona fides as a responsible ruling state party, did nothing to continue urging the stay of the Indian army as the only bulwark against Sinhalese reassertion. The only sign that it disapproved of the withdrawal was the non appearance of Chief Minister Karunanidhi, at the welcoming reception given to Indian soldiers returning to the Madras port, because the "IPKF had killed five thousand Tamil people in Sri Lanka".²⁴¹ Even this timid act of symbolism was widely criticized by other Tamil parties as a sign of the DMK's 'anti nation' (India) proclivities.

The overriding fear and hostility directed toward Sri Lankan Tamil militants, also encouraged a policy of driving out all Sri Lankans as effectively as possible. Warnings of Tamil Nadu state becoming "another battlefield if the LTTE seeks to liquidate its rivals on Indian soil" led to the arguing of a "less benevolent attitude" toward the Tigers.²⁴² The Indian Government, in fact, could opt for "total silence" when the Tigers once again called on Indian help to prevent "genocide" following the army withdrawal.²⁴³ The Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka presented Indian policy as "involvement, (but) a passive involvement" concerned primarily with the "return of refugees".²⁴⁴

Power

The relevance of Tamil power, both in terms of physical force and as perceived by the Sinhalese, was not surprisingly, at its lowest value during the period of abdication. Indian Tamil indifference was manifest. The presence of over one hundred thousand Indian troops in Sri Lanka, despite the largeness of its number, constituted a mere token presence. As a force, representative of the Indian Tamil desire to protect its Sri Lankan Tamil brethren, the Indian Peace Keeping Force was already history.

The only force still capable of generating pan Tamil fears amongst the Sinhalese were

²⁴⁰N.Mitra, "Mixed Feelings Over the Parting", *India Abroad*, 30 March, 1990, p.6.

²⁴¹Member Thambi Durai's statements in *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol. III, No. 14, 29 March, 1990, p.1 - 7.

²⁴²K.Shetty, "An Alarming Influx", *India Today*, 15 March, 1990.

²⁴³*India Today*, 15 July, 1990, p.10 - 11; and 15 September, 1990, p.87.

²⁴⁴Statement by Mr.N.N.Jha, Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka.

the Tigers and covert Indian Tamil support for them. This too was visibly weakened with the domestic situation in Tamil Nadu that demanded open rejection and expulsion of Sri Lankan Tamil militants as well as a cessation of all support for *eelam* activities. The premature termination of DMK state rule for its alleged involvement with the eelamites, sent a clear signal that the historically feared fifty million Tamils of India were not about to champion the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils in this period. Sri Lankan Defense Minister, Mr.R.Wijeratne, publicly “rejoiced” over the DMK dismissal and predicted it would lead to a “reduction in the flow of arms” to Tamil militants in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan Tamil militant leaders too admitted that because of the “uncertainty in New Delhi and Madras..there is no clear predictable line on which the LTTE can base its assessments..”.²⁴⁵ Tiger leaders complained that : “The Tigers have been used as pawns in the political chess game being played in Tamil Nadu..”,²⁴⁶ so that “the hardship of the Tamils has become a saleable commodity in the market of India’s local politics..”.²⁴⁷

The threat of physical power being used in support of the Tamil cause was negated simply by the early promise of withdrawal. The huge and hulking armed force present in Sri Lanka was no longer a tool for intimidation or capitulation but a matter of technical minutiae - when to leave, how to leave, what to leave behind. Its relevance as manifest power was thereby non existent in this period.

Even had they stayed, the power of the army as a physical fist for Tamil security, was almost wired to be ineffective. As Rajiv Gandhi had said much earlier, “Our boys are fighting with one hand tied behind their backs..”. Moreover, the ‘enemy’ was the Tamil Tiger, rather than the popular Tamil adversary, the Sinhalese. The image of Tamil power projected through the Indian armed forces could not fail to be compromised by such unusual circumstances. In addition, the morale of the Indian Peace keeping Force was stricken almost from the start, with its unexpected and unforeseen high casualty rates in the first few weeks of fighting. Even though, as pointed out by the Commanding Officer of the Force, General

²⁴⁵India Abroad, 11 January, 1991, p.10.

²⁴⁶LTTE chief, Mr. Prabhakaran in BBC interview as quoted in “Voices”, India Today, 15 October, 1991, p.7.

²⁴⁷LTTE London Representative, Mr. Kittu in Interview by T.S.Subramanian, Frontline, 16 - 29 March, 1991, p.52.

Kalkat, that “unlike Vietnam and Afghanistan..there has been in the IPKF over the last two years no incidence of drug taking, no desertion from Sri Lanka, and no disobedience of commands..”, the easy analogy to Vietnam and Afghanistan, both unpopular wars, with no winners, pitching large nation armies against small quasi civilian guerilla forces, with high casualties and little glory, was itself a telling reference to be made by the commanding general of the Peace Keeping Force. The privately expressed opinions of Sri Lankan war veterans was probably closer to the mark : “The best thing..is that it is over”; “it was a war (we) were fighting for another country against an enemy (we) could never identify..”.²⁴⁸

Conclusion

Having located the ‘enemy’ within the larger Tamil nation itself, the imperative to shake off all responsibility, became the ubiquitous theme of this period. The Indian government appropriated this theme to reassert its primary authority in foreign relations with Sri Lanka, without the need to involve or propitiate indigenous Tamil leaders and their demands. Easing out all Sri Lankan Tamils within Tamil Nadu and papering over past differences with the Sri Lankan government became twin policies over this period. Tamil nationalist behavior, evidently, had no input into either of them.

The dominance of non nationalists, was facilitated by the real threats and continued deprivations experienced by the people of Tamil Nadu as a direct result of Sri Lankan Tamils within the state. The initial perception of Tamil militants as threatening, allowed the larger, if less defensible, view that all Sri Lankan Tamils, militants or refugees, were potentially dangerous, or at minimum, preferably to be avoided. The killing of Rajiv Gandhi in Tamil Nadu by a suicidal Sri Lankan Tamil woman, ostensibly a helpless Sri Lankan Tamil refugee, justified this negative clumping, so that supporters of the larger Tamil identity were publicly tarnished.

While Tamil world view never indicated an image of Sri Lankan Tamils as outright enemies, groups within Tamil Nadu who projected continued support of Sri Lankan Tamils as an unnecessary threat and a socio economic drain on the immediate Indian Tamil community, were eminently successful during this period. Only a very small and very defensive

²⁴⁸N.Mitra, “Mixed Feelings Over the Parting”, *India Abroad*, 30 March, 1990, p.6.

group of Tamilians were able to continue viewing the crisis in pan Tamil terms.

Given the rise and hold of this view, the motivation to action was centered wholly on the need to be rid of the tensions, violence, and shortages accruing from the presence of Sri Lankan Tamils in Tamil Nadu. What had been a matter of national duty, honor, and necessity; i.e. the support of Sri Lankan refugees and aid to militants, was now seen as an inconceivable responsibility, more appropriately handled by the Government of India, than local Tamil leaders.

This clove right in with the traditional working mechanism of the Indian government, that underscored foreign policy to be a monopoly of central, rather than state, interests. The Indian government, thereby reassumed direct and overt control of policies toward Sri Lanka. This control was patent in the dismissal of the ruling government in Tamil Nadu, for direct interference in what was suddenly the security and national interests of India. As long as the threat within the state was being defused, the government was allowed complete latitude in its decisions and policies regarding the Tamil crisis. So it was that the Indian government could promise the Sri Lankan government of the withdrawal of Indian forces from Sri Lanka, much in advance of the actual deinduction and without insistence on guarantees of security for Sri Lankan Tamils following the withdrawal. So also, the Indian government could hustle the exodus of refugees being returned to Sri Lanka, despite the resurgence of armed battle between the Tigers and the Sri Lankan government and the continuing instability it generated in the areas to which the refugees returned.

An unwillingness to sacrifice for the Sri Lankan Tamils was not only palpable across the state of Tamil Nadu, but Tamilians willing to continue sacrificing for the larger Tamil cause were branded in traitorous terms. Given this alternation between indifference and hostility, made public and coherent by openly voiced attitudes and acts of deliberate isolation, the power of pan Tamil nationhood was neither perceptually viable nor physically probable. In that sense, Tamil power was a nullity during this period, as was Tamil nationalist behavior. The rampant sense of Tamil nationhood initiated during the period of mediation in 1983, was barely in evidence by 1991; neither in the views and behavior of the Tamil public nor in the actions and policies adopted by the Indian government.

The shift between periods, the one dominated by a wave of intense Tamil nationalist behavior, and the other washed away by evident revulsion against pan Tamil responsibilities, throws into focus the working impact and validity of both resonances. It is significant that both resonances were powerful in attracting the majority of the Tamil nation and thereby powerful enough to exert pressure, both positively (through active lobbying) and negatively (by declining to get involved), on the Indian Government. If either form of behavior had not drawn deeply from the root misgivings and ambitions of Tamil groups, the sustaining impact of such behavior would have been minimal, especially in the toughened experience of Indian democracy with its constant need to 'appease, channel or delegitimize' group aspirations. Neither form 'characterized' the Tamils in objective perpetuity, given the differing groups that constituted the Tamil nation. The attractions of the Tamil nationalist leaders were precisely their detractions as well. Given the different constituents, aspirations, and inhibitions of each group, the intense nationalist behavior evoked by these leaders was exact, fulfilling and compelling but held the potential to be intrusive and frightening as well. Viewed as a whole, the Tamil nation, it appeared, was vulnerable to both propensities.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the dimensions of Tamil nationalism, on the premise that nationalistic behavior affects the making of Indian foreign policy in calculable ways.

As a multination state, the modern Indian polity has been confronted with the pulls and pressures of ethno-national politics since its bloody entrance as a post-colonial, independent nation-state in 1947. The very act of independence was forged only through the painful partition of a Pakistani state that derived its legitimacy from the calls of religious homogeneity. The very real fear of continuing centrifugal disintegration has underwritten the entire institutional structure and modern ethos of the Indian state.

In the logic of unity demanded by the formation of a political state, the factor of homogeneity and common interests play an enormous assumptional role. The reality of India has, by contrast, had to recast the notion of homogeneity so that developmental interests and the “dream of unity”¹ have supplanted the easy reliance on homologicality. Given the disparities in its social-political constituents, and the relative significance acquired by the notion of common goals, areas such as “foreign relations” have naturally contracted the appurtenances of exclusivity and specialization. To talk, demand, and negotiate with ‘one voice’ when facing the world underscores the elitism of Indian foreign policy makers.

This is patent in the foreign policy decision making structure, whereby a number of major policies can be traced to definite personality sources or cliques.² Such a structure had dictated a policy toward Sri Lanka that remained unvarying in the three decades following

¹Nehru's remarks are instructive in approximating what has come to represent a nebulous, yet strongly reiterated 'Indian' notion: "It is fascinating to find how the Bengalis, the Marathas, the Gujratis, the Tamils, the Andhras, the Oriyas, the Assamese, the Canarese, the Malyalis, the Sindhis, the Punjabis, the Pathans, the Kashmiris, the Rajputs, and the great central block comprising the Hindustani-speaking people, have retained their peculiar characteristics for hundreds of years, have still more or less the same virtues and failings of which old tradition or record tells us, and yet have been throughout these ages distinctively Indian, with the same national heritage and the same set of moral and mental qualities.....Some kind of dream of unity has occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilization..". From J.Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961): p. 61-62.

²See J. Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India's Foreign Policy: Detrminants, Institutions, Processes and Personalities*, (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1970).

its enunciation by Nehru in the 1940's. From the Sri Lankan perspective too, "there seemed to be hardly any divergency between India's and Sri Lanka's interests..so that Sri Lanka's foreign policy was totally congruent with that of India..".³

The forceful induction of Indian 'mediators' into Sri Lankan affairs, in August 1983, followed a month of intense unrest in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, reacting to the July 1983 riots in Tamil-dominated areas of Sri Lanka. This alone does not 'prove' anything, but suggests a deductive validation of what this study supposed in theory. I believe there are few quests more sterile than the need to pinpoint the exact causal relation between decisional inputs and outputs in the society of man. To conclusively prove that one action resulted in another, is viable only within the austere abstraction of mathematics. Absolute truths and perfect correlations in the explanation of human interaction, I believe, are synonymous with either naivete or zealotry.

Yet the need to prove and the onus of proving, surge as strongly in the complex explanation of human societies as they do within the purity of numbers. In deference to this need, this study utilized a framework containing explicit assumptions, in accordance with which the snarl of events, motivations, and decisions were tested. I attempted to show in this study, the impact of Tamil nationalistic and non-nationalistic behavior on the emergence of three distinct gear-shifts in Indian policy toward Sri Lanka. These shifts were orgnized as periods of mediation (1983-1987), intervention (1987-1989), and abdication (198-1991).

While the study of nationalism and its impact on foreign policy decisions has yet to attract a wider body of scholarly investment,⁴ somewhat similar studies on ethnic groups

³As Kumari Jayawardena of Sri Lanka explains: "Sri Lanka had followed an economic policy that was characterized by state regulation of both local and foreign investment, emphasis on the public sector as the favored means of growth, import substitution in industry, fiscal policies directed towards an egalitarian distribution of wealth, welfare policies that sought to ensure to all citizens basic needs of food, health and education. The foreign policy was one of non-alignment, with a 'tilt' to the socialist bloc in terms of assistance for public sector industry. Sri Lanka was a strong member of the non-aligned, anti imperialist Third World....Sri Lanka's foreign policy was totally congruent with that of India..". This was evidently the broad underpinning of Indian relations to Sri Lanka as well. Kumari Jayawardena, Paper posted on an electronic bulletin board: The Sri Lanka Net.

⁴Some of the more recent exceptions are William Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity, and International Relations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); also, K.R.Khory, *Separatism in South Asia: The Politics of Ethnic Conflict and Regional Security*, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Urbana-Champaign at Illinois, 1991.

and their role as lobbyists, has been well established.⁵ This reflects the recognition, and concomitantly, a consensus, that accepts the reality of ethnic identity as a behavioral input in policy making. Most however, have studied ethnic identity through the medium of organized lobby groups and institutions, so that the focus is more on recorded movement,⁶ than on the dynamics of nationalistic identity itself.⁷

The preoccupation with ethnic organizations rather than the ethnic group, tends to provide clear, if limited, descriptions of how certain lobbying groups did or did not succeed. The period during which the organization is studied is critical to the conclusion of these studies. Because of this, observers of the Jewish lobby in the United States have arrived at prognostications that deem it to be "the most powerful lobby" in America,⁸ to one that has had only marginal and issue specific successes.⁹ These disparate inferences, in my view, derive from the treatment of ethnic identity as interest group alone. Like the study of interest groups, the group is judged or defined solely on the basis of ex post facto successes or failures in achieving some goal. The nature of the beast is secondary or not taken into consideration, thereby isolating the entire dynamics of nationalistic identity.

In this study, the role of specific Tamil interest groups and their organizational efficacy was not a concern. Instead, the entire Tamil nation was analyzed with the aim of gauging behavioral patterns expected from the nation and their possible impact on the making of foreign policy decisions.

What the study found was that while a situation, perceived strongly as a crisis situation, fired up intense manifestations of Tamil nationalism, such behavior was not consistent beyond the immediate moment of crisis - perception. Intra-group variations and suscep-

⁵This is especially true in multi ethnic states like the United States: Louis L.Gerson, *The Hyphenate in Recent American Politics and Diplomacy*, (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1964); C.W.Kegley, Jr., and E.R.Witkopf, (eds.), *American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence*, (New York: St.Martins Press, 1988); Charles McC.Mathias, Jr., "Ethnic Groups and Foreign Policy", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.59, No.5, Summer 1981, p.975 - 998.

⁶That is, ideology, structure, process, goals, and achievements of the movement.

⁷For a representative example, see the collection of studies in Abdul Aziz Said,(ed.), *Ethnicity and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (New York: Praeger, 1977).

⁸For instance, Edward Tivnan's *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

⁹For this viewpoint see David Howard Goldberg, *Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups: American and Canadian Jews Lobby for Israel*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

tibilities within the Tamils allowed for a high degree of vulnerability so that the impact of Tamil nationalism was received by the decision makers for only limited periods of time. Even during such periods, while nationalistic assertiveness placed definite restrictions and expectations on the government, the sporadicity of these assertions did not force it into the compulsive 'politics of melodrama'.

The Government of India, it is true, launched uncharacteristically aggressive policies vis a vis Sri Lanka, and the entire Sri Lankan foray was written off by a majority of critics as 'befuddled'. This study believes the Indian government behaved in ways appropriate to a multi-national state striving to accommodate and appease nationalistic restiveness. It was far from a 'befuddled' policy even if it may have appeared befuddling.

As long as pressure from Tamil Nadu was exerted in palpable ways described in Chapter V, the Indian government was not about to relinquish its role and its projected image as the saviour of the Tamil nation. The need to propitiate the Tamils is seen clearly in public speeches such as that of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on concluding the agreement with Sri Lanka:

"The whole country has stood with Tamil Nadu during these difficult years and today I would like to thank the people of Tamil Nadu on behalf of 780 million Indians for the courage and perseverance you have shown... we will be looking for your full support for the implementation of this Agreement..(which) secures justice for the Tamil minority...safeguards the Tamil identity..".¹⁰

The rising preeminence of Tamil non nationalists, was discernible in the clear calls for 'law and order' in Tamil Nadu, rather than condemnation of Tamil 'genocide'. It was made additionally explicit in the ease with which the nationalistic Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party was ousted prematurely from its position as the majority group controlling the chief ministership of Tamil Nadu. These manifestations clearly preceded the Indian reversal to a policy of complete non-interference, in what was suddenly redefined as Sri Lanka's "internal affairs".

¹⁰Rajiv Gandhi, Public meeting, Madras, 2 August, 1987; as printed in M.Rasgotra,(ed.), **Rajiv Gandhi's World View**, (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1991).

Repeated congruence in the levels of nationalistic behavior and aims observed in Tamil Nadu and the foreign policy of India toward Sri Lanka were expected in this study. The variable through which intensity of behavior could be gauged was posited and then used to monitor Tamil nationalism. This proved to be less than simple codification. The Tamil nation on close examination, presented a complex weave of groups with varying propensities for nationalistic behavior. Under the glare of acute and focused crisis perception, the Tamil nation seemed together to present a clear and unified nationalistic force, composite in its demand for the saving and further glory of the Tamil nation. The unifying force of this perception however, was constantly assaulted by both internal and long-rooted schisms within the nation, as well as the insistent calls for psychologically balancing and accommodating other identity-loyalty totems, in this case, that represented by the Indian state. This argued for the equalling power of non-nationalists and weakly motivated nationalists, overpowering the nation in the aftermath of glaring crises situations.

The study was also predicated on the assumption that the foreign policy system of a democratic state would necessarily have to incorporate nationalistic assertiveness in the making of its policies, if it were to survive as a legitimate, representative body. If the need to incorporate nationalistic behavior was not there, either the pressure on the decision-making body was not coherent or intense enough, or the body contained adequate tools for totalitarian control so that external pressures were, by definition, secondary to their continuance as the governing unit.

While the central Indian system, within which is enclosed the foreign policy makers, is endowed with a wide and sensitive variety of unilateral control measures, especially in the realm of foreign policy, it is defined primarily by its complex, multilateral linkages and compromises with the union of 'states', of which Tamil Nadu is one. The territorial unit of India is nothing more than a conglomerate of these 'states', more correctly visualized as linguistically dominant communities, ethnicities, and even nations. Yet, the unavoidable perception of the whole being more than just a sum of its parts, derives primarily from the delicate absorption and deflection of multi-national aspirations and demands, by the state apparatus. Forced repression or avoidance of ethnic-national demands by central

state power has not proven to be supportable over long periods unless the demands are internally defused, or the instruments of 'hard' power are accompanied by compromisational or consociational policies. Empirical verification of this is too numerous to discount: the Sikhistan movement, the Telengana movement, the Tamil language issue, et al.

In the one dramatic example of totalitarian control attempted by the central government, popularly referred to as The Emergency, the ruling party of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was immediately overthrown: a clear testament to a multi-national, democratically oriented state's antipathy to unified control. At a minimum, it can be said, and proved, that the Indian state is of necessity, acutely sensitized to ethnic-national demands.

Given the constant pull of demand and compromise politics, the Indian state is also preternaturally attuned to the extent of how much can be 'given away'. The defensiveness of central state institutions that are marked by the withholding of critical powers to regional governments; and the insidious moral outrage with which assertions of "regionalism" and "communalism" (i.e. ethnic national movements) are decried, provide some of the more dramatic indices of the Indian state's downplaying of sub-state identity.

In short, while the central state apparatus is highly sensitive to sub-state motivations, it is equally equipped to resist such motivations, as possible inroads into the legitimacy of the whole.

Translated into the realm of behavior, the behavioral manifestations of ethnic-national demands would have to generate a high order of intensity, salience, and sustainability to be able to withstand the central structure's in-built bias toward repulsion of such demands.

In the case studied here, the central Indian government had, for a period of nearly four decades, pursued an unchanging, indistinguishable policy with regard to the island of Sri Lanka. This was a policy of "cooperation and non-inteference". Not only was this conducive to its dealings with Sri Lanka, but it cohered with the larger, quasi-normative aims of non-alignment and *Panchshila* on which Indian foreign policy was dedicated. At times it appeared the Indian foreign office did not consider tensions with Sri Lanka as worthy of perusal. Openly aggravating acts subversive to Indian interests were either ignored or played down so that Sri Lanka continued to represent a stable ally regardless of sporadically

hostile acts on its part.

The forced intrusion of the Indian government as a mediating body between the Sri Lankan Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority was therefore, a relatively shocking act. The depth of this shock can be approximated by the dramatism of Sinhalese threat perception. While the reality of initial Indian intervention consisted merely of the appointment of a Special Envoy to help mediate, Sri Lankan leaders and the popular press warned of spectacular Indian invasions. Even Indian recognition of its high-profiling relation with Sri Lanka was marked by the hurried setting up of a special Sri Lankan 'desk' at the foreign office which heretofore had only a South Asian division, monopolized by experts on Pakistan. The impetus for central government change in policy would have to be of a non-trivial order for the government to have been willing to tolerate and execute such a change. The presumption of some factor rebooting Indian policy is therefore wholly justifiable.

This study has argued that the primary factor in reconditioning Indian relations with Sri Lanka derived from the pressures of Tamil nationalistic politics. Given the sensitivity of the central system to strongly enunciated pressures and the evident tumescence of Tamil nationalism within India, this is a logical determinant. Yet, "causes or objective determinants are not self-executing. They must be translated into subjective determinants or reasons before social action can occur".¹¹ The subjective determinant in explaining Indian action, has been the correlating of Tamil nationalist behavior with specific Indian policies regarding Sri Lanka.

As an appendix to the correlations described and argued in Chapter V of this study, another index of the reliability of my correlations may be extracted through the 'index of influence'. This index, "crude but serviceable",¹² specifically formulated for the study of ethnic lobbies in the United States,¹³ is replicated in various decision-making theories through the more familiar concept of congruence.¹⁴ Very simply put, the index studies the

¹¹Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

¹²J.M.Scolnick, Jr., *American Political Science Review*, Vol.86, No.2, June 1992, p.585.

¹³See David Howard Goldberg, *Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups: American and Canadian Jews Lobby for Israel*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

¹⁴One such study utilizing the index of congruity can be found in Mahmoud G.ElWarfally, *Imagery and Ideology in U.S. Policy Toward Libya, 1969 - 1982*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988).

extent of overlaps in the aims of the influence-wielders and the policies of the decision makers. This index has been utilized below as a visual summary of what has already been argued in the study.

Figure 7: Degree of Influence

Degree	5	4	3	2	1
Policy					
1983 Riots: Special Envoy		X			
All Parties Conference		X			
Thimphu Talks		X			
19th Dec. Talks		X			
Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement	X				
I.P.K.F.		X			
Withdrawal	X				

Key:

1=Government policy opposed to dominant Tamil opinion: nil influence.

2=Generally unsympathetic: low influence.

3=Indifferent: moderate influence.

4=Generally sympathetic: moderate to high influence.

5=Completely coordinated: high influence.

The index does not contain any indications on the salience or intensity of Tamil nationalism, but describes the nexus between Indian foreign policy decisions with regard to Sri Lanka, and dominant Tamil aims as expressed by Tamil Nadu's politicians, media and popular demonstrations. It may be noted that Indian policy toward Sri Lanka is never opposed or unsympathetic to dominant Tamil nationalistic demands. However, it is congruent with Tamil non nationalists as well. In fact, withdrawal from Sri Lanka, with its

inherent vote against pan-Tamil identity, is fully synchronized (Degree 5) with observable Indian Tamil behavior. At this juncture, what is not clear in the one-dimensional index, is that the Indian government reasserted its traditional dominance in the making of foreign policy so that the factor of Tamil nationalism no longer operated as an active 'influence'. Rather, Tamil non nationalism made passive 'allowance' for central government monopoly. It is in this capacity alone that it continued to 'influence' the formulation of policy decisions regarding Sri Lanka.

Possible Dynamics of Tamil nationalism

In this last decade of the twentieth century, the impelling drive of ethnic nations to carve out separate political states for themselves appears almost overwhelming. The journalistic impulse to instantly shout that "This is human nature; this is human society" is strong. Global ruptures and ethnic consolidations amply support such an impulse. Giving in to this impulse, what if one completely obliterated the factor of Indian dual identity? What if the Tamil nation stood as an independent state much as Georgia and Croatia stand in the wake of the collapse of multi-national states like the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia? After all, the "dangerous decades" prophesized by observers like S.Harrison, have calculated the imminent implosion of the Indian union for many decades now. The illegitimacy or inability of the Indian state to function as a centralizing power would be found to introduce immediate ramifications on the Tamil identity complex.

While the cleavages cross cutting the Tamil nation would continue to fester and clot together in unlikely coalitions, the cultural infrastructure, territorial comprehensiveness, and core group of intensely nationalistic leaders motivated enough to urge the full flowering of pan Tamil greatness, provide ample grounds to suggest the realization of a Tamil nation-state. Arguments on the intermix of Indian culture, religion, history as offered in this study, are valid arguments only in the present context in which these factors are highlighted, institutionalized, and ever present in the daily life and thought of the Tamil citizen. They acquire resonance primarily because of their deliberate refractions into Tamil self perceptions by the structured polity of the Indian state. They acquire significance primarily because of their undoubted utility in enhancing Tamil growth and coordinating Tamil

differences. Given present conditions, it is highly unlikely that Tamil nationalism would gain enough momentum to fight for independence as a separate state. The viability of such a state, as described in Chapter III, is not even perceived by past and present Tamil majorities in the Indian state. The short term intensity of Tamil nationalists in both the earlier language issue of the 1950's and the crisis evaluated in this study, are almost too-easy reminders that Tamil nationalism remains deeply compromised by its Indian duality.

Primary among these compromised groups are the urban based population whose allegiance to Tamil identity and unilateral support of that identity, is watered down by the claims of an insistent and productive Indian identity. The role of the central government is maximal among these groups. Should this government ever lose its cooptive ability, the number of groups responding to Tamil sovereignty would most certainly rise dramatically. The exceptions would be the Brahman and numerically smaller Adi Dravida jatis, who's status and possibilities would be gravely jeopardized in an independent Tamil state.

If, however, the efficacy of the central structure increases in terms of providing a sufficient infrastructure to absorb growing numbers of rural-urban migrants and newly politicized caste associations, intense Tamil nationalism can be expected only in situations that do not demand any obvious identity choice or exclusive fealties.

The reason for sketching these hypotheticalities is to reinforce the point that the need to maintain "multiple loyalties"¹⁵ provides a very determining variable in the study of Tamil nationalism. The onus of continuing to mine this multiple loyalty lies squarely on the central government and its institutions. The onus does not lie within the Tamil population, because the ability or need to accept these multiple loyalties is already well established in a majority of the population, by the dictates of shared history, culture, religion that interwinds well into the past.

The validity of multiple loyalties has been supported in some detail by social psychologists, most notably Fritz Heider, through his explication of the 'balance theory'. According to this theory, we "bring into congruence the needs..of the various identities and commu-

¹⁵Harold Guetzkow, *Multiple Loyalties: Theoretical Approach to a Problem in International Organization*, Publication No.4, (Princeton: Center for Research on World Political Institutions, 1955).

nities to which we grant loyalty".¹⁶ Guetzkow provides three additional dynamics in the behavioral manifestation of multiple loyalties: non-perception of an event; compartmentalization of loyalties; and modifying the precepts of group exclusiveness to include other groups.

The need to resort to these mechanisms argues for more complexly patterned behavior even in relatively simplifying crisis situations. In all probability, a study of the emergence of strong right-wing movements in a German *volk* faced by foreign refugees, would involve less variables with fewer contradictions than a study like this one. The acute discomfort and consequent balancing out of contradictory or opposing loyalties, emerges in levels of nationalistic behavior that rarely, if ever, gain absolute, continuous, and majoritarian intensities. As with other forms of human agglomerations, ethnic nations are neither inexorable nor invulnerable. Nationalist behavior in Tamil Nadu was not sustainable at high intensity levels for a protracted period of time, in spite of continuing threat to pan-Tamil identity. In the aftermath of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination by a Sri Lankan Tamil in Tamil Nadu, Indian Tamils have resorted clearly to Guetzkow's prediction of 'non-perception of an event'. The Sri Lankan Tamil's continuing struggles and bloodshed, evokes little or no support among Indian Tamils at this point of time. The ambivalent and non nationalistic Tamilian has taken over as the dominant voice and behavioral leader of the nation.

Since the dissipation of dual identity, with its baggage of multiple loyalty dynamics is not envisionable in the current context, for the intense nationalists to once again reassert themselves, the perception of pan Tamil aims being directly antithetical to Indian interests, would have to be negated. This can be achieved, but only in complex, incremental ways. Evidently, given the varying levels of nationalistic behavior to which the Tamil nation is predisposed, and its experiences in the past decade, the crisis variable is unlikely to rev up intensely nationalistic behavior. This is because the very definition of 'crisis' has undergone a change, due to the long riding duration of the Sri Lankan Tamil imbroglio. Instead, support for Sri Lankan Tamils would have to be perceived as a contributing factor in the achievement of India's national interests. The presentation of Sri Lankan Tamils as truer

¹⁶The theory as defined by R.W.Cottam in *Foreign Policy Motivation*, p.58.

allies than the Buddhist Sinhalese; or as effective leverages in the Sinhalese dominated Sri Lankan parliament, working for the interests of India, is one way. The rehabilitation of Tamil refugees through international organizations rather than direct Indian aid may lessen the perception of an unending drain on India's limited resources. Reduction in internal conflict within Sri Lankan Tamil militants, so that they constitute a single voice with a single set of demands, may lessen the Tamil non nationalist's infectious perception that any empathy is essentially a wasted cause. In other words, intense Tamil nationalism could not be expected to be behaviorally manifested, as long as such behavior can be construed absonant to Indian interests. Without calculating and appeasing the demands of dual identity on the Indian Tamil, the possibility and resurgence of intense Tamil nationalists in the foreseeable future, is minimal.

Generalizability

While the indices used to study the Tamil nation may be tailored to the Tamil case, the dynamics of multi-group identities attempting to balance out loyalties, and thereby affecting policy making through their uniquely driven behavior, is globally apparent. Every nation will spin its own configuration of identity variables and behavioral predispositions. To assume that Golas, Mumbalas, Basques, Sundanese, Berbers, Palestinians, Hopis, Kurds, Ibos, and the constellation of ethnicities that populate the world are all statehood-seeking nations, is to trivialize their existence. Simple observation confirms the validity of studying some groups over others at every point of time. It is these groups that the framework aims to describe, analyze, and to anticipate behavioral intensities capable of affecting policy making.

The framework allowed for an ordered study of what appeared to be chaotic interaction in the foreign relations of two allied states - India and Sri Lanka. The study of Tamil predisposition to nationalist behavior warned of fluctuating Tamil intensities so that actual behavior could be both pressuring and noncommittal. The basis for the framework was first developed and used to successfully predict the rise of religio-nationalistic demagogues in Iran almost two full decades before the emergence of the Ayatollah, in circumstances

and structures very different from that of the case studied here.¹⁷ The framework was consequently organized to study nationalist behavior in the Middle East as a whole.¹⁸ The scope for studying ethnic-national intensities and their ramifications in differing contexts is made possible by the unifying assumption of patterned behavior limning the intense nationalist in moments of crisis.

The easy predilection to study political entities as they are formally defined - currently as nation-states - has resulted in a definite undervaluation of ethnic nations. As one Central Asian specialist has remarked:

“Only a few years ago, most policymakers viewed any interest in the Soviet nationalities as an exoticism...Now the problem is serious because it involves interests critical to the U.S.”¹⁹

The point he makes is critical. The strong undertow of such nationalities is considerable. But, cloaked as they are, in the simplifying construct of a larger territorial state, the attention they receive is micrified. This gap is evidenced by the almost pained surprise with which their ‘sudden’ nationalistic behavior attracts observation. Not only is the diagnosis and monitoring of nationalities a compelling need for the government of multination states, but also for interacting governments of other states.

¹⁷See Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964).

¹⁸Richard Cottam, “Nationalism in the Middle East”, in S.A.Arjomand (ed.) *Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

¹⁹Paul A.Goble, “Forget the Soviet Union”, *Foreign Policy*, No.86, Spring 1992, p.65.

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