States, Nations, Sovereignty

SRI LANKA, INDIA AND THE TAMIL EELAM MOVEMENT

Sumantra Bose

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For my parents, **Sisir Kumar Bose** and **Krishna Bose**

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Preface

A large number of people have helped make this work possible, from its inception as an idea to its publication as a book.

First and foremost come my teachers. Professor William Taubman made this project his own, despite its topic being far removed from his own Sovietological (subsequently post-Sovietological) preoccupations. His resolute support and absolute confidence in my abilities ever since that autumn afternoon when I walked into his introductory politics class at Amherst College is deeply appreciated, more than I can possibly let him know. At a more mundane level, his keen and critical scrutiny of successive draft manuscripts came in most useful. My education has benefited immeasurably from the excellent teaching of Professor John A. Petropulos, who has set fine standards of scholarship and integrity not just for me, but for generations of some of Amherst College's best and brightest students. In particular, he is responsible for stimulating my interest in the politics and history of Eastern and Central Europe. At Columbia University, I am grateful to Professor Lisa Anderson for her consistent support of my work. Professor Kavita Khory of Mount Holyoke College offered advice and encouragement when this book was in an incipient stage.

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to locales as diverse as Delhi, Normandy and Amherst, Amrita dealt with it with her characteristic blend of firmness and sweetness, all the while almost perfectly balancing her concurrent roles of unsparing critic and devoted partisan. She brought the whole measure of her intellect to bear on this work, and it is much the better for it. I have always been somewhat disconcerted by the apparent paucity of positive role-models, people one can look up to and strive to emulate in one's own life. In her unobtrusive, unassuming way, Amrita has made an incomparable contribution, much more than her humility would permit her to admit, to my evolution not just as a political scientist, but also (and much more importantly) as a human being.

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SUMANTRA BOSE

1

Constructing an Analytical Framework: Theory, Concepts and Definitions

27 July 1987. It is 5.30 p.m. in Mannar, a provincial town in the overwhelmingly Tamil northern province of Sri Lanka. For the 200-odd soldiers, all belonging to Sri Lanka's 'majority community', the Sinhalese, garrisoning the heavily fortified army camp overlooking the town, it is the beginning of yet another tense night of waiting and watching. Waiting and watching for the next of the periodic mortar, machine-gun and rocket attacks to which guerrillas belonging to the country's insurgent Tamil minority, who effectively control the town and surrounding countryside, have subjected the camp, an isolated outpost of government presence in the district, in the past several months. The entire area will soon be subject to a dusk-to-dawn government curfew, and the few townspeople still out on the streets are hurrying to make it home before then.

5.40 p.m. The young Tamil man who supplies the camp with its daily provisions (under a tenuous 'live-and-let-live' arrangement with the guerrillas) arrives at the gates of the camp in his battered truck. After a cursory check, and a formal exchange of pleasantries with the sentries, he drives in. Everything seems as usual.

The young man parks the truck, get down, and slams the driver's door shut. But instead of proceeding, as he usually does, to the main office of the camp to hand in the list of items supplied, he starts walking, casually, in the direction of its barbed-wire perimeter. As he nears the perimeter, he suddenly breaks into a furious run. It is only then that the army sentries, posted on

two strategically located watchtowers, realise that something is seriously wrong. Both open fire simultaneously at the running figure. But the man nevertheless vaults over the fence, rolls away as fast as possible, and throws himself under a small adjoining culvert.

At that very moment, the truck explodes, enveloping much of the camp in a huge ball of fire.

Sixty-eight Sri Lankan government soldiers died at Mannar that evening. In the panic that ensued after the blast, hundreds of heavily armed Tamil guerrillas, who had been lying in wait, attacked and overwhelmed the camp. The above account was personally related to me by the young Tamil truck driver, who had activated the one-minute fuse attached to the powerful bomb hidden under basketfuls of foodstuffs and sundries, before making his own near-miraculous escape.[1] Unknown to the Sri Lankan Army, he was a member of the 'Black Tigers', an elite suicide commando unit of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE; Tamil Tigers), the radical politico-military organisation that has been waging a relentless armed campaign, over the past decade, to establish a sovereign Tamil state (Tamil Eelam[2]) in the Tamil majority north and east of Sri Lanka. He is also one of only two 'Black Tigers' to have ever survived their missions (he got away with an ugly gash on his arm, from the barbed wire, and punctured eardrums, from the explosion).

But the young man, who looks innocuous in the extreme and goes by his *nom de guerre* 'Mama' (literally, 'maternal uncle' in Tamil), did not show the slightest remorse for the bloodbath he had precipitated on that fateful evening. On the contrary, he could hardly conceal his pride at having accomplished such a dangerous mission with such finesse. His was not an act of terrorism, he claimed. It was, he said, an act of 'revolutionary violence', directed against a group of 'state terrorists' responsible for the 'forcible occupation' of his 'homeland', and for 'unspeakable atrocities' on its population, all of whom, he claimed, were his 'brothers

1 Personal interview in London, July 1991. I was subsequently able to verify the basic elements of this account from other reliable sources.

2 'Eelam' is the ancient Tamil name for the island of Ceylon, or Sri Lanka, as a whole. Radical Tamil nationalists such as the Tigers wish to liberate from Sinhalese government control only those regions of the island that have been historically populated by people of Tamil descent, i.e., the northern and eastern provinces of the presently constituted state of Sri Lanka. Hence 'Tamil Eelam'.

and sisters'. He maintained that he had done nothing that was morally wrong in attacking a 'perfectly legitimate military target', which was a symbol of the Sri Lankan state's 'oppression' of his 'nation', the Tamil people of that island country. 'If the movement so required', he said, he would again go on a similar mission—and would die happy in the knowledge that his 'sacrifice' might have brought the 'day of freedom' just a little bit nearer to his people.

This book focuses on a critical case of 'ethnic conflict' in the contemporary developing world—the bloody civil war in Sri Lanka between that country's Sinhalese majority and Sri Lankan Tamil minority. I have chosen this small country in South Asia because I believe that the conflict in Sri Lanka, which has exacted an almost unbelievably high human toll over the past decade, provides a fascinating, indeed ideal laboratory for the exploration and illumination of the crucial theme of states, nations and sovereignty, which lies at the heart of the theoretical concern of this work. My intention in undertaking this study is, therefore, not so much to demonstrate my knowledge of the empirical material as to make certain theoretical conclusions and extrapolations that will, hopefully, make this study somewhat relevant not just to the specificities of Sri Lanka or even South Asia, but also to the broader question of competing claims to sovereignty made by juridical states, on the one hand, and intra-state communities which have come to define themselves as distinct nationalities, on the other.

I will consider what it is that makes a human collectivity a 'nation', and why it comes about that some such collectivities become completely alienated from the juridical states in which they find themselves. I will argue that a collective consciousness of commonality is of the essence of a sense of nationality, and that the growth and appeal of such a consciousness can, to a very considerable extent, be explained by the juridical state's denial and repression of such an *intra-state* 'national' identity, and the demands and aspirations tied to it. I shall also discuss the potentialities of progressive social change and transformation inherent in mass nationalist movements, and conclude that while the relationship between nationalism and socialism is a complex one, such potentialities should not be underestimated. The case study of Sri Lanka provides me with an empirical context in which

to explore these theoretical themes and issues, a means to move back and forth between the general and the particular, using the one to illuminate the other.

Reflections on 'Nationhood'

According to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam:

> ...Eelam Tamils possess all the basic elements that define a concrete characterisation of a *unique nation*. We have a homeland, a historically constituted habitation with a well-defined territory embracing the Northern and Eastern provinces [of Sri Lanka], distinct language, a rich culture and tradition, a unique economic life and a lengthy history extending to over 3,000 years. As a nation, we have the inalienable right to self-determination. This right to self-determination is none other than the right to choose our own political destiny, the right to secede and form an independent state. (LTTE: *Socialist Tamil Eelam*) (emphasis added).

As is evident, the LTTE bases the Sri Lankan Tamils' 'inalienable right to self-determination' (equated, in true Leninist style, with the right to secede and form an independent state), on its claim that the Tamils constitute a 'unique nation'. Such an argument is, of course, in no way 'unique' to Tamil nationalists in Sri Lanka—it is one which is a standard weapon in the ideological arsenal of movements for 'national self-determination' worldwide. This, then, is the first theoretical issue that we shall consider—what, exactly, makes a collectivity of people a 'nation'?

The word 'nation' is derived from Latin, and, when first coined, clearly conveyed the notion of common blood ties. It had its roots in the past participle of the verb *nasci*, literally meaning 'to be born'. Hence the Latin noun *nationem*, connoting 'breed' or 'race'. The term 'ethnicity', frequently used in contemporary academic discourse, is a derivative of *ethnos*, the Greek word for 'nation' in the latter's pristine sense of a collectivity of persons characterised by common descent. Max Weber defined an 'ethnic group' in the following manner:

> We shall call 'ethnic groups' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent...this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic membership [*Gemeinsamkeit*] differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity...(1968: 389).

It will be useful to underline at this stage the 'subjective' nature of the belief in common descent. To cite an example specifically from the Sri Lankan context, the recent work of a prominent Sinhalese anthropologist on the origins of the Sinhalese and the Tamils has established that

> underlying the linguistic and religious differences...are strong cultural and racial similarities. Physically the Sinhalese and Tamils cannot be differentiated. Though the initial Sinhalese migrants were probably Indo-European language speakers who arrived over 2,500 years ago, practically all later arrivals were South Indians (mostly Tamil speakers), who were assimilated into the Sinhalese-Buddhist community (Obeyesekere 1984: 154).

Be that as it may. But, as Walker Connor remarks, in analysing the roots and evolution of 'ethnic' polarisation and violent conflict, 'what ultimately matters is not *what is* but *what people believe is* (1978: 377-400).

Thus, so long as the Tamils and the Sinhalese entertain thoroughly subjective beliefs concerning the separateness and uniqueness of the origins of their respective communities, *that* is the fact which is of relevance to our analysis.

Weber's definition would appear to equate 'ethnic group' and 'nation', and, indeed, Weber did link the two concepts. However, he also made what is for our purposes a crucial distinction between the two: 'The idea of the nation is apt to *include* the notions of common descent and of an essential though frequently indefinite homogeneity...but the sentiment of ethnic, solidarity *does not by itself* make a nation' (1968: 923) (emphases added). What, then, is the missing element? Ernest Barker points to a possible answer:

> The *self-consciousness* of nations is a product of the nineteenth century. This is a matter of the first importance. Nations were already there; they had indeed been there for centuries. But it is not the things that are simply 'there' that matter in human life. What really and finally matters is the thing which is apprehended as an idea, and, as an idea, is vested with emotion until it becomes a cause and a spring of action. In the world of action, apprehended ideas are alone electrical, and *a nation must be an idea as well as a fact before it can become a dynamic force* (1927: 173) (emphases added).

Contemporary scholars of 'ethnicity' and nationalism have schematised Barker's argument in a systematic fashion. Thus, Paul Brass, in an insightful article entitled 'Ethnicity and Nationality-Formation', has identified three critical points in the *transformative process* in course of which an 'ethnic group' becomes a 'nation'. Clearly implicit in his argument is the notion that collective identities, including 'national' identities, are fluid, plastic and malleable in nature; the degree and intensity of nationalism varies across groups, and it varies across a particular group over time. The 'nation', then, is not some static, rigid category—to the contrary, it is the outcome of historical processes in course of which patterns of group identity are often formulated and re-formulated. In Brass' words:

> At one end are people clearly distinguishable from others by obvious cultural markers, but whose members do not attach value to those marks of group difference and do not pursue social, economic or political goals based on them. Such groups of people will be characterised as 'ethnic categories'...a second critical point on the continuum is occupied by ethnic groups objectively distinct from their neighbours, subjectively self-conscious of their distinctness, and laying claim to status and recognition either as a superior group or as a group at least equal to other groups. Such a group will be called an 'ethnic community'. An ethnic community has adopted one or more of its marks of cultural distinctness and used them as symbols both to create internal cohesion and to differentiate itself from other ethnic groups...ethnic communities may enter the political

> arena in two ways...[they may] engage in interest-group politics...[however] when ethnic groups demand not merely enhanced opportunities for individuals but corporate recognition for the group as a whole with a right to...govern themselves in a federal unit within an existing state or in a separate sovereign unit, then they are engaged in the politics of nationalism...[and have become] a nationality, the third critical point on the continuum of ethnic group transformation...(1976: 225-40).

Of course, the three 'critical points' should not be taken to be watertight compartments—in any empirical context, the lines between them may well get blurred from time to time. It is also entirely possible to conceive of each point as a 'continuum' in itself—for example, 'nationalism' may well include an uncompromisingly secessionist variant, as well as a diluted federalist variant. But what is apparent is that such a distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' social formations, as the one made by Brass, corresponds closely to the 'class-in-itself' and 'class-for-itself' distinction that is often utilised in Marxist discourse. Elsewhere, Brass has also sounded a note of caution against the crude, but frequent fallacy of reducing ethnic groups to the status of interest-associations:

> ...resource competition *by itself* does not produce ethnic political cohesion. It must be associated with groups that have a common pool of [cultural and historical] symbols to draw upon and an elite or elites capable of transmitting to the group a sense of increasing attachment to these symbols as a basis for social and political mobilisation. (Brass 1985: 40) (emphasis added).

In any case, in Walker Connor's words, the crucial point to grasp here is that 'while an ethnic group *may*...be other-defined, the nation *must* be self-defined' (1978: 388). Michael Lowy, writing from a radically different Marxist perspective, concurs with this assessment:

> The experience of post-1917 history shows us that the nation is not simply a collection of abstract, external criteria. The subjective element, i.e., the consciousness of a national identity,

> a national political movement, are no less important. Obviously, these subjective factors do not come out of the blue: they are the result of certain historical conditions—persecution, oppression etc. But...it is not the doctrinaire 'expert' armed with a list of 'objective criteria' who will determine whether a community constitutes a nation or not, but *the community itself* (1976: 98).

To quote Leon Trotsky—'An abstract criterion is not decisive in this case: much more decisive are historical consciousness, feelings and emotions.' (1967: 16).

But perhaps the final and most eloquent statement on this question has been made by Rupert Emerson:

> The simplest statement that can be made about a nation is that they are a body of people who *feel* that they are a nation; and it may be that when all the fine-spun analysis is concluded this will be the ultimate statement as well. To advance beyond it, it is necessary to take the nation apart and to isolate for separate examination the forces and elements which appear to have been the most influential in bringing about the sense of common identity which lies at its roots, the sense of a singularly important national 'we' which is distinguished from all others who make up an alien 'they' (1960: 102) (emphasis added).

I attempt, in the next section of this introductory chapter, to make some preliminary remarks concerning the adoption of an analytical framework for the case study to be undertaken in the following chapters. This might facilitate the 'taking apart' of the national phenomenon, and the isolation of those 'forces and elements' that are of critical significance to understanding and explaining the development of collective 'national' identities, and particularly the origins and growth of the 'we' versus 'they' attitude that forms the psychological basis of all conflict between nationalities in the modern world. In short, the question posed will be: how can one explain the rise of the 'historical consciousness, feelings and emotions' that underlie the transformation of certain 'ethnic categories' into 'nationalities', and fuel demands for 'self-determination'?

Towards a Conceptual Framework: 'Ethnicity', Nationalisms and the Role of the Modern State

In a famous article, published in 1963, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, one of the foremost exponents of the 'primordialist' approach to 'ethnic conflict', made the following comments on the implications of the persistence of 'ethnic' identities for the political development of the (mostly 'multiethnic') states that had emerged in Asia and Africa in the wake of decolonisation:

> Though it can be moderated, this tension between primordial sentiments and civil politics probably cannot be entirely dissolved. The power of the 'givens' of place, tongue, blood, looks and way-of-life to shape an individual's notion of who, at bottom, he is, and with whom, indissolubly, he belongs, is rooted in the non-rational foundations of personality...thus, what the new states—or their leaders—must somehow contrive to do as far as primordial attachments are concerned is not, as they have so often tried to do, wish them out of existence by belittling them or even denying their reality, but domesticate them (Geertz 1963: 105-57).

Not that the 'primordialists' are the only school of theorists guilty of propagating what I believe is a static and ahistorical view of the evolution of 'ethnic' identities. In 1913, in what was to come to be regarded by many, in subsequent decades, as the authoritative Marxist treatise on the 'national question', Josef Stalin had volunteered the following definition of a 'nation':

> A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture...it must be emphasised that none of the above characteristics is by itself sufficient to define a nation. On the other hand, it is sufficient for a single one of these characteristics to be absent and the nation ceases to be a nation...it is only when all these characteristics are present that we have a nation (1942: 12-13).

With the benefit of hindsight, it appears evident that analyses such as those of Geertz and Stalin are guilty of a serious double-

fallacy. First, in treating 'objective cultural markers' as 'givens' inevitably, and invariably, leading to inter-group conflict, such approaches entirely ignore the element of the rise of 'subjective' consciousness that we have already seen to be so crucial to 'nationality formation', and, by extension, to conflict between nationalities. What is lacking from the writings cited above is any recognition of the fact that a sense of 'ethnic' or 'national' solidarity, which finds expression in demands articulated in the political sphere, is not merely an automatic function of a set of cultural 'givens', of 'stable characteristics' of a community, but is in fact a dynamic and transformative process which takes place over time, and which is influenced, even shaped, by factors and variables external to the group itself.

Thus, the Sri Lankan Tamils were even *more* territorially concentrated in the north and east of that country[3] at the time of Sri Lankan independence from the British (in 1948), than they are today: yet, there was no Tamil movement for even regional autonomy, leave alone total independence, at that time. The broad mass of Tamils unequivocally affirmed their desire for regional autonomy within a federalised Sri Lanka only in 1956, and the rise of a mass secessionist movement took place a full quarter-century later! The developments that induced the Tamils to use their territorial concentration as a basis for political mobilisation were external to the group itself, and will be analysed in detail in course of this study.

As Michael Lowy has correctly pointed out, the bland and essentially abstract criteria employed by Stalin impart to his definition of a nation 'a dogmatic, restrictive and rigid character one never finds in Lenin...nowhere in Lenin's writings do we find such an ultimatist, rigid and arbitrary definition of a nation (1976: 81-100). And, as Walker Connor, one of the most perceptive of

3 The 1981 government census found 73 per cent of all Sri Lankan Tamils to be living somewhere in the north or east of that country. The comparable figure, in 1911, 1946 and 1971, was 85 per cent, 78 per cent and 75 per cent, respectively. This regional concentration of the Sri Lankan Tamil population has supplied the territorial rationale for the advocacy of the sovereign nation-state of Tamil Eelam. While the northern province of Sri Lanka is indeed overwhelmingly Tamil, the eastern province has a significant proportion of non-Tamil inhabitants, especially Muslims. For a detailed discussion of the demographic composition of the north and east and its bearing on the Sri Lankan conflict, see Kearney and Miller (1987: 91-120).

present day scholars of 'ethnicity' and nationalism, has commented, approaches such as Stalin's 'would appear to fall into the...trap of mistaking the tangible symptoms of a nation for its essence' (1987: 196-220). In treating 'objective' criteria as 'givens', Stalin entirely ignored that critically important aspect, the *gradual, evolutionary development* of a feeling of 'nationhood', and his perspective is therefore just as bereft of explanatory power with respect to the rise of conflict between nationalities in the world of today as are the simplified theoretical constructs of the primordialist school.

Second, and no less important, Geertz's implicit assumption of a neutral state, seeking to mediate or 'domesticate' inter-group conflict within its borders, appears to have been invalidated by the actual experience of the operation of state-apparatuses in the vast majority of 'multiethnic' Asian and African countries over the past several decades. Gyanendra Pandey, writing specifically on the South Asian context, comments that

> for a long time...the claim to 'neutrality' formed a large part of the argument for the perpetuation of colonial government. It is a claim that the post-colonial regime has continued to put forward with greater vehemence, and perhaps for a while in India and Sri Lanka with somewhat greater success. Moreover...[this] naively optimistic view of the state...has long been accepted by a very considerable body of academic opinion...[and] it is only very recently that this view...has come to be seriously challenged (1990: 16).

More often than not, strategic elites at the helm of the state[4] have been the prime manipulators of 'ethnic' diversities, and the principal instigators of 'ethnic conflict', in these countries. In fact, Arjun Appadurai forcefully argues that

> ...the 'primordialist' thesis, in all of its many forms (Weber, Shils, Eisenstadt, Geertz) is of no use whatever in accounting for the 'ethnicities' of the second half of this century...the thesis rests crucially on a view of certain populations and polities as infantile [as opposed to the stable and mature democratic

4 For an authoritative elaboration of the concept of 'strategic state elite' in the context of Latin America, see Stepan (1978: 117-57).

> states of the industrialised West]...very often the creation of 'primordial' sentiments, far from being an obstacle to the 'modernizing state', is close to the centre of the project of such states. Thus, many racial, religious and cultural fundamentalisms are...fostered by various states, or by parties within them, in their efforts to suppress internal dissent, to create homogeneous 'subjects' of the state, and to maximise surveillance of diverse populations under their control. In this, the new states often draw on classificatory and disciplinary apparatuses which they inherited from colonial rulers, and which, in the post-colonial context, have enormous inflammatory effects...(1991: 1,7).

Indeed, a major theoretical plank, and inference, of this study is that the imperatives and actions of the state are of the greatest significance in understanding and explaining the genesis and evolution of the modern Sinhalese-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka. In other words, mere objective distinctions between Tamils and Sinhalese, such as admittedly existing differences in 'tongue' or 'way-of-life', lack, *in themselves*, the capacity to explain the enormous human tragedy that has befallen Sri Lanka in the past decade. The 'subjective' national consciousness (in this instance, of Sinhalese and Tamils) that Lowy, Emerson, Brass, Connor and so many others speak of, is truly not something that appears out of the blue. The objectives and policies of the British colonial state (prior to the colonial withdrawal in 1948), the post-colonial Sri Lankan state (by and large monopolised, since 1948, by Sinhalese-Buddhist political elites), and, most recently, those of the Indian state (the 'big-power' of the South Asian geostrategic region), all merit the most careful scrutiny in any attempt to explore and explain the genesis and evolution of the polarisation between 'we' and 'they' that has stoked the fires of the Sri Lankan civil war. The development of a post-colonial Sri Lankan state that has been perceived as unjust and tyrannical by its main 'ethnic' minority (the Sri Lankan Tamils) may, in particular, well be the crucial variable that enables us to make sense of the gradual and evolutionary process whereby members of what was previously a mere 'ethnic category' began to see themselves as the standard-bearers of a 'unique nation'.

Throughout South Asia, in fact, there are close and organic

linkages between the enterprise of 'state-building' and the growth of 'ethnic' sentiment. Urmila Phadnis has identified 'certain general trends' which, 'despite diverse regime-patterns...can be discerned in the state-systems of South Asia', and which tend to foster 'ethnic' mobilisation against the state: expansion of the prerogatives and functions of the central state, which increasingly arrogates more and more legislative, executive, judicial and coercive power to itself, and attempts by the state to somehow 'homogenise', through various means, the population within its domains (Phadnis 1989: 80-81). As Joseph Rothschild argues, 'politicised ethnic assertiveness is in large measure but a reflection of the contemporary state's...crisis of legitimacy', and the 'ethnic group's strategic decisions are in large part responses to the state's ...capacity to earn and project legitimacy' (1981: 19, 29). Alexander Motyl has made the same point succintly:

> Nationalism is not some atavistic, premodern phenomenon that is slated to disappear with the growing modernity of the world. Quite the contrary: the things called nationalism are likely to intensify under conditions of modernity...modernity promotes nations, states and thus nation-states. We can expect nationalism...to grow in intensity as modern states become even more modern and unmodern states embark on the road to modernity. In short, *modernity breeds nationalism* (1992a: 322-23).

Thus, it is the *historical dialectic of state and society* that needs to be probed, if one is to make sense of the rise of 'ethnic' enmity and of powerful movements advocating secession from extant territorial states. Appadurai's comments, from an anthropological perspective, are also quite germane to this question—'...['ethnic'] emotions are not raw, pre-cultural materials, that constitute a universal, trans-social substrata...'affect' is in many important ways learned...['ethnic'] 'emotion' is culturally constructed and socially situated, and 'universal' aspects of affect do not tell us anything very revealing' (1991: 7-8). And, as Skocpol has put it, there are 'many ways in which state-structures, as well as the actions of state officials, affect the timing, the goals and the forms of collective protest', and that, therefore, there is a powerful case to be made for 'bringing the state back in to the analysis of social protest' (1985: 23).

It must be stated, in this connection, that it is high time for the academia to start paying serious attention to the continuing relevance, indeed contemporary salience, of the phenomenon of nationalisms *opposed* to the authority of juridical states. For too long have scholars suffered from a 'tendency to equate nationalism with...loyalty to the *state*, rather than with loyalty to the nation ...[and] one of the most common manifestations of [this] terminological license [has been] the interutilisation of the words "state" and "nation"' (Connor 1978: 378-79). And, of course, this conflation of the terms 'state' and 'nation' has had wide-ranging theoretical and conceptual implications. In the twentieth century, 'nation-state' came to be the term most commonly employed to characterise the juridical, territorial units that divided the world among themselves. One authority, for instance, blandly proclaimed that 'a prime fact about the world is that it is largely composed of nation-states' (Halle 1952: 10). However, the empirical reality clearly indicates that the exact opposite is true: the contemporary world is *not* largely composed of nation-states. A survey of the world's 132 states in 1971, for example, found that only 12, i.e., 9 per cent, could justifiably be classified as 'nation-states', in the sense of the boundaries of the territorial-juridical entity being co-terminous or approximately co-terminous with the distribution of a particular national group (Connor 1978: 382). Thus, the term 'nation-building', in its conventional usage, is itself a malapropism, in that it has been widely used to denote attempts dedicated to building viable *states*.[5] The presumption here clearly is that 'nation-building' is the exclusive prerogative of those controlling state power, while nationalist challenges to the state are relegated to the hazy, catch-all sphere of 'ethnicity' (on which more below).

No wonder, then, that scholars were, and are, baffled by the reality in the world outside the ivory-tower of academe—repeated manifestations of an intuitive bond felt by human beings towards an informal and unstructured community, which, even if 'imagined', appears to be capable of commanding a loyalty and allegiance far more profound and potent than that most 'tangible' of entities—the territorial, juridical state. The topsy-turvy world where 'nation' has meant state, 'nationalism' has meant loyalty to the

5 A recent work by Phadnis on the contest between centralised state-apparatuses and the forces of mass nationalism in South Asia, for instance, is titled *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia* (1989).

state, and 'nation-state' has most often meant a state that contained a multiplicity of at least potential nations, has obscured the vital issue—the emergence, growth and apparent mass appeal of nationalisms that define themselves in sharp opposition to the juridical state.

I would in fact argue that one has to transcend the dominant analytical paradigm of 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic conflict' if one is seriously interested in getting to the roots of that basic conflict, the state–nation confrontation, *and*, even more critically, in conceptualising imaginative and innovative ways and means for its resolution.[6] 'Ethnicity' has become a convenient label that subsumes a wide variety of identities—'ethnic', religious, racial, social, regional, economic—under its rubric.[7] As Walker Connor has observed,

> the indiscriminate application of 'ethnic group' to numerous types of groups obscures vital distinctions between various forms of identity...such a single grouping presumes that all identities are of the same order...this presumption circumvents raising the key question as to which of a person's *several* identities is apt to win out in a test of loyalties (1978: 386-87) (emphasis added).

In this connection, it is worthwhile to recall Rupert Emerson's definition of the 'nation' as 'the largest community, which, when the chips are down, effectively commands men's loyalties, overriding the claims both of lesser communities within it and those

6 The extent of concern of most 'ethnic conflict 'specialists for nationalism is revealed by the fact that the most comprehensive work to date on the subject, Donald Horowitz's *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (1985), which is close to 700 pages in length, has *one* entry, in its index, for the word 'nation', or any of its derivatives.

7 The description of an 'international relations' course, taught at Mount Holyoke College, U.S.A., in the spring of 1992, readily illustrates what a catch-all expression 'ethnicity' has become in the dominant academic discourse. The course description identifies as the main threat to world peace today 'the savage ethnic and sectarian fighting [that] continues to plague such states as Afghanistan, Georgia, Kashmir, Mozambique, Somalia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Sudan and Yugoslavia.' In one sentence, this sweeping statement reduces to the lowest common denominator of 'ethnicity' a wide variety of totally disparate conflicts from different regions of the world! And that too in conjunction with the use of such loaded, pejorative terms as 'savage' and 'sectarian' (*Seminar on Problems of Peace and International Security*, IR 311s, Mount Holyoke College).

which cut across it and potentially enfold it within a still larger society...in this sense, the nation can be called the terminal community' (1960: 95-96).

But most importantly, the dominant understanding of 'ethnicity' has been loaded, if sometimes only implicitly, in favour of the false idea of a single, united 'nation', and the monolithic, unitary conceptions of state sovereignty that go with it. In this scheme of things, 'state' is frequently presumed as co-terminous with 'nation', and *anti*-state nationalism is derided as 'separatism', 'secessionism', 'particularism', 'parochialism', 'regionalism', 'primordialism', 'tribalism', 'subnationalism', etc., if not as 'terrorism', 'subversion,' or 'anarchism'. Assertions of nationalism defined in opposition to the state have been commonly treated as some kind of deviant behaviour, aberrations which, if not repressed outright, are to be channelled back through 'inclusionary' processes into the orbit of a state that however continues to define *itself* in monolithic, unitary terms.[8]

The major problem with the whole range of expressions cited above is that all are symptomatic of the prevalent bias towards the state as some kind of indisputable, sacrosanct organising principle of human society, and as *the* sole repository, and expression, of what is commonly defined as 'nationalism'. The usage of pejorative, judgmental terms such as 'regionalism', 'secessionism', 'parochialism', 'particularism', 'tribalism' and the like, tell us more about the scholar's ingrained emotional prejudices concerning the state-nation confrontation than they reveal how the estrangement and polarisation of state and nation comes about, and why a collectivity of people begins to view itself as a nationality, entitled to a state of its own. As such, it suggests that dispassionate, detached analyses of the state-nation contest are not likely to follow. The 'ethnicist' typically has had a tendency to exalt, whether explicitly or implicitly, the supremacy and inviolability of the (frequently unresponsive, repressive and overly centralised) state. He also tends to overlook and ignore, partially or wholly, the historical dialectic of state and civil society, of domination

8 Donald Horowitz's insistence on the efficacy of 'constitutional engineering' as a 'cure' for 'ethnic conflict' is a good example of the latter situation. A Sri Lankan Tamil might well ask: is asserting one's national identity against a repressive state that seeks to deny its existence symptomatic of some kind of 'disease' that needs to be 'cured'?

and resistance, of denial and rebellion, that is critically important to the *process* of the creation and consolidation of 'national' identities defined in opposition to the power of the juridical state. In this regard, then, events in the 'real world' appear to have outstripped and overtaken the capabilities and contributions of academia. The savants of 'ethnic conflict' need to wake up to the fact that it is the very *legitimacy* of the extant territorial state as *the* unit of political organisation (which they so often simply take for granted) which is being challenged here.

If the 'state' is indeed so central to our analysis, it is essential to clarify what precisely we mean by the term. According to Alfred Stepan:

> The state must be considered as more than the 'government'. It is the continuous administrative, legal, bureaucratic and coercive systems that attempt not only to structure relationships between civil society and public authority in a polity, but also to structure many crucial relationships within civil society itself (1978: Introduction).

This modified Weberian definition will, generally speaking, be adequate for the purposes of this study, but it will also be useful to incorporate Eric Nordlinger's definition, and in particular his criticism of the Weberian approach, into our own working conceptualisation of the state. Nordlinger defines the state as

> all those individuals who occupy offices that authorize them, and them alone, to make and apply decisions that are binding upon any and all parts of a territorially-circumscribed population. The state is made up of, and limited to, those individuals who are endowed with society-wide decision-making powers (1987: 353-90).

Nordlinger points out that a definition which focuses on 'administrative, legal, bureaucratic and coercive systems' alone might neglect to consider that

> even where such officials do constitute the centre-piece of the state, they are not consistently the only ones involved in the making of public policy. Where does such a definition leave

> influential, independent and occasionally dominant legislatures? Surely they are not part of civil society...since we are concerned with all authoritative actions, we cannot leave out the officials of the municipal sewer commission, if they do, in fact, play a significant policy-making role (1987: 364).

Indeed, Nordlinger's point will, as we shall see, turn out to be remarkably pertinent to our discussion of post-colonial Sri Lanka, where the grafting of a Westminster-style legislative and party-political system, itself a legacy of British colonial rule, onto the post-colonial political order, had a crucial impact on the exacerbation of conflict between the two major nationalities. For the purposes of this study, the more extended and encompassing the conceptualisation of the state, the better. And to be realistic, any such conceptualisation must explicitly recognise that the modern state is, above all, an instrument or mechanism of organised domination and institutionalised coercion, rather than merely a benevolent provider of goods and services or the executor of 'lawful' governance.

This is an opportune moment to add a *caveat* to what has been said so far. Bringing in the state as a central analytical focus of this study does *not* imply that I am arguing for the adoption of some kind of dogmatic 'statist' paradigm, to the exclusion of other factors and variables. The emphasis on the state is meant, perhaps more than anything else, as a *corrective* to the *society-centred determinism* that has characterised the vast bulk of the scholarship on 'ethnicity' and nationalism (Geertz and Stalin being two prime examples).[9] As one review of the recent proliferation of 'state theory' literature has pointed out, not only has the revival of interest in the state occurred 'primarily in the [empirical] context of western Europe and north America', but while 'the role of the state has figured prominently in scholarly research on economic and political development for some time, it has only recently begun to be treated as a central factor in the study of social movements and ethnicity'. Only very recently has the realisation dawned that 'internal ethnic and social dynamics could not be fully understood without analysing external factors on their own account, especially the role of the state'. As a result, the literature

9 For a good example of the society-centred reductionism that still dominates the scholarly literature on nationalism, see Smith (1986b: 228-63).

on the state, social movements and mass nationalisms still has 'far to go', and 'the field still needs research on state-society interaction' (Barkey and Parikh: 1991). This book represents a modest attempt to compensate for precisely this gap in the scholarly output. To quote from the work of one noted scholar of the modern state:

> Bringing the state back in to a central place in analyses of policy-making and social change does require a break with some of the most encompassing social-determinist assumptions of pluralism, structure-functionalist developmentalism, and the various neo-Marxisms. But it does not mean that old theoretical emphases should simply be turned on their heads: studies of the state alone are not to be substituted for concerns with classes and groups, nor are purely state-determinist arguments to be fashioned in place of society-centred explanations. *The need [is] to analyse states in relation to socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts*...(Skocpol 1985: 20) (emphasis added).

This need attains particular urgency in view of the fact that 'the implementation of state policies often leads to unintended as well as intended consequences, both when states attempt tasks they cannot complete and when the means they use produce unforeseen structural changes and socio-political reactions', and that, therefore, 'answers lie not only in features of states themselves, but also in the balances of states' resources and situational advantages compared with those of non-state actors' (Skocpol 1985: 16,19). This is, of course, just another way of bringing in the concepts of *state autonomy* and *state capacity*, and of pointing to the frequent asymmetry between the two in practice. Thus, even when a particular state has 'autonomy', i.e., it is able to *formulate* interests of its own independent of or against the will of divergent societal interests, it may still be lacking in 'capacity', which is the ability to *implement* formulated strategies to achieve its goals vis-a-vis society. The analytical perspective adopted in the case study, will, consequently, be explicitly *relational*, in that it will assume that the comprehensive analysis 'requires examination of the organisation and interests of the state, specification of the organisation and interests of socio-economic groups, and inquiries into the complementary as well as the conflicting relationships

of the state and societal actors' (Skocpol 1985: 20). Thus, I will avoid untenable patterns of argumentation, such as that states are either totally 'autonomous' of civil society, or mere 'creatures' of certain classes and 'ethnic groups', and greater attention will be paid to the 'more usual reality [at least in 'multiethnic' developing countries, including the Sri Lankan situation], which is one of alliance between the state and particular sub-groups [especially elites] *within* a class or ethnic group' (Brass 1985: 23) (emphasis added). It is not so much the state *in itself*, but the *dialectical interaction* of state and civil society, that will command the attention of this study.

A View on 'National Self-Determination' and its Relation to Social Revolution

Michael Lowy writes of Lenin's theory of the right of nations to self-determination that

> from the methodological point of view, Lenin's principal superiority over most of his contemporaries was his capacity to put 'politics in command', i.e., his obstinate, inflexible, constant and unflinching tendency to grasp and highlight the *political* aspect of every problem and every contradiction...it is this methodological aspect that explains, among other things, the striking *actuality* of Lenin's ideas in the twentieth century, an age of imperialism, which has seen the political level become increasingly dominant...(1976: 97).

Insofar as the paramountcy of the *political* element is concerned, my approach to the question of national self-determination is thoroughly Leninist. Of course, Lenin's radical assertion that 'we must *inevitably* reach the conclusion that the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state' (emphasis added) (1970: 47), is a debatable proposition. However, Lenin was absolutely correct in pointing out that nationalism and the question of self-determination could *not*, under *any* circumstances, be relegated to a hazy and amorphous 'cultural' sphere (as Rosa Luxemburg and Otto Bauer, to name

two figures who worked within an explicitly Marxist discourse, tried, in their different ways, to do). Nor could it be regarded as a purely administrative-legal problem (as implied in the Austrian Marxist Karl Renner's work on the status of nationalities within the Habsburg Empire). This is because twentieth-century nationalisms, however much they may seek to appropriate and exploit pre-modern cultural and historical symbols of the community concerned, are in reality entirely modern *political* phenomena, and any proposed solutions to problems of secession, and such, must take this fundamental fact into account. An approach that regards nationalism as a 'cultural' rather than a political phenomenon merely scratches at the tip of the iceberg, fails to account for the historicity of the *causal process* whereby that critically important *consciousness* of national identity comes about, and is dangerously susceptible to determinist theorising—such as the many variants of the 'primordialist' thesis. As Donald Horowitz so rightly says, 'a bloody phenomenon cannot be explained by a bloodless theory' (1985: 140).

But the aspect of Lenin's theory of national self-determination that is of the greatest immediacy and relevance to this study is the centrality he accords to the theme of *oppression*. Lenin clearly recognised that the quest for national self-determination, far from being rooted in 'cultural' givens and objective similarities and differences, arises, above all, as a societal response to state oppression. He commented that 'from their daily experience the masses know perfectly well the value of geographical and economic ties and the advantages of a big market and big state. They will, therefore, opt for secession only when national oppression and national friction make joint life absolutely intolerable...' (1970: 73).

This observation ties in very well, as we shall see, with the evolutionary development of the Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka—both in terms of the switch of the basic demand, from autonomy to independence, and the change from constitutional, non-violent forms of protest to organising armed resistance to state power. As the Tamil Tigers have said, 'the struggle for national freedom, having failed in its democratic popular agitations, having exhausted its moral power to mobilise the masses for peaceful campaigns, gave rise to armed resistance in Tamil Eelam' (LTTE: *Tamils Fight for National Freedom*). Lenin, in fact, held that 'recognition of the right to secession *reduces* the danger of disintegration of

the state' (emphasis Lenin's), and dismissed 'bourgeois' denunciations of national liberation movements as 'secessionism', 'separatism' etc., as facile and hypocritical:

> Just as in bourgeois society, the defenders of privilege and corruption, on which bourgeois marriage rests, oppose freedom of divorce, so in the capitalist state, repudiation of the right to self-determination, i.e., the right of nations to secede, means nothing more than defence of the privileges of the dominant nation and of police methods of administration, as opposed to democratic methods (Lenin 1970: 71-72).

There are at least two important insights that are implicit here. The first insight, of course, is that the struggle for national self-determination is, in its fundamentals, a struggle against state oppression. Second, state oppression is most often couched in terms of *majoritarian nationalism*. This is an insight which is strikingly pertinent to the situation in Sri Lanka, where the post-colonial state elite has legitimised its role by portraying itself as the protector and upholder of Sinhalese-Buddhist interest and identity. Thus, in sharp contrast to Stalin, who happily equated and condemned Black Hundreds pogroms and the nationalism of the Jewish working-class in the same breath (1942: 17), Lenin characterised 'the division of nations into oppressor and oppressed as basic, significant and inevitable...' (1970: 114), while simultaneously decrying the exclusivist tendencies of even 'oppressed nations', such as the bigoted attitude of the nationalist Polish bourgeoisie towards the Polish Jews (1970: 62). Of course, what is not be found in the writings of the father of Bolshevism is any indication that 'national oppression' is not the prerogative of the 'capitalist state' alone. In the twentieth century, such oppression was to become an even more salient feature of states that consciously defined themselves as 'socialist'.

Benedict Anderson has pointed out that 'since the Second World War, every successful revolution has defined itself in *national* terms—the People's Republic of China, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and so forth (1983: 12). Thus, we find Chairman Mao, in 1938, describing the Chinese Communist Party as 'part of the great Chinese nation...flesh of its flesh and blood of its blood', and declaring that 'our great Chinese nation, with its long history,

is unconquerable' (Zedong 1975: 209). To some, this is a depressing, even frightening development. Thus, Tom Nairn, a Marxist, can write that 'nationalism is the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as neurosis in the individual, with...a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia...and largely incurable' (1977: 359).

Perhaps what is most infuriating about nationalism is that it is a truly Janus-faced phenomenon. It carries within it the seeds of both significant revolutionary potential, as well as a possibility of degeneration into the crassest chauvinism. From a historical perspective, this is hardly surprising, for nationalism's 'legators include not only San Martin and Garibaldi, but Uvarov and Macaulay' (Anderson 1983: 144-45).[10] Interestingly enough, Lenin had grasped the peculiar duality inherent in the national idea. Those concerned with prospects of radical social change, and therefore in the complex dialectical relationship between nationalist movements and struggles, on the one hand,and possibilities of far-reaching social transformation, on the other, would do well to heed Lenin's advice on this issue:

> To imagine that social revolution is *conceivable* without revolts by small nations...without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty-bourgeoisie *with all its prejudices*...against national oppression—to imagine...this is to *repudiate social revolution* ...only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic view could vilify the Irish Rebellion [Easter 1916] by calling it a 'putsch'. Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will *never* live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without

10 Garibaldi was, of course, the legendary nineteenth-century Italian patriot, while San Martin was, along with Simon Bolivar, the liberator of the Americas. In 1821, he decreed that 'in future the aborigines will not be called Indians or natives; they are children *and citizens* of Peru and they shall be known as Peruvians'. Thomas Babington Macaulay was an English racist and imperialist who put himself to work 'anglicising' the educational system of subjugated India in 1834, with the intention of producing 'a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, morals and intellect'. Among his many noteworthy utterances—'A single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia'. Count Sergei Uvarov was an early 'Russifier', who proposed, in an official report in 1832, that the Tsarist state be based on a trinity of principles—Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nationality (the predecessor of what Lenin was to assail decades later as 'Great-Russian chauvinism').

> understanding what revolution is (1970: 159) (all emphases Lenin's).

As we shall see, these words have direct relevance to the case study of Sri Lanka. The rise of the Tamil Tiger Movement among the younger generation of Sri Lankan Tamils (the topic of discussion in the third chapter) has heralded wide-ranging changes in traditional power-relations within the Tamil social formation. The movement has had a liberating impact on certain traditionally oppressed and marginalised segments of Tamil society, such as women and 'low-caste' Hindu Tamils, and involves the active participation of peasants, fisherfolk and rural artisan classes on a scale that is quite unprecedented in the history of Tamil nationalist activism, which has historically suffered from an urban, petty-bourgeois bias, and was dominated till about a decade ago by a Western-educated, English-speaking, affluent Tamil elite based predominantly in the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo. At the same time, the movement represented by the LTTE continues to suffer from certain tendencies that Lenin would surely have assailed as 'petty-bourgeois prejudices'. These include a strong element of reverse-chauvinism in world-view, a continuing preponderance of lower middle-class urban youth in the leadership cadre, and, above all, an obsessive attachment to the notion that a separate state constitutes the ultimate panacea to all the Tamils' problems and dilemmas.

This last point is especially ironical, for the Tamil Tigers base their theoretical claim to Tamil sovereignty almost exclusively on Lenin's theory of national self-determination (see Balasingham 1983). But, as Michael Lowy correctly points out, Lenin's work on this question is paradoxical in that it 'makes absolutely no concession to nationalism...[and] is totally indifferent to whether this or that nation has an independent state'. The reason Lenin advocated the right to secession is that 'he understood that only the freedom to secede makes possible free and voluntary union, association, cooperation, and, in the long-term, fusion among nations'. Moreover, he realised that 'only the recognition by the workers' movement in the oppressor nation of the right of the oppressed nation to self-determination can help eliminate the hostility and suspicion of the oppressed nation, and unite the proletariat of both nations in an united struggle against the

bourgeoisie' (Lowy 1976: 96-98). It is in this context that Lenin called upon socialists to 'combat nationalism *of every kind*, and above all, Great-Russian nationalism' (1970: 74, 103-104) (emphasis added). Thus, the end-point of his thesis on national self-determination is the fusion and integration of the working people of the oppressor and oppressed nations, in the interests of the proletarian revolution and of the common struggle against the bourgeoisie of the oppressor nation, which seeks to keep the proletarians of both nations in chains.

Lenin was therefore a true internationalist in his approach to the national question. The same can hardly be said of fiercely nationalistic movements such as the Tamil Tigers', even though they do quote selectively from Lenin in order to provide a 'progressive' justification and rationale for their own uncompromising stand on 'Tamil Eelam'. The only real goal of LTTE's politics is undoubtedly the creation of a sovereign Republic of Tamil Eelam, and everything else is merely incidental to that ultimate aim. The Tigers' social programme is, in the end, quite subordinate and secondary to the central and overarching goal of 'national liberation'. If the Tiger Movement has proved to be a vehicle for progressive social change within the Tamil community, this is really valuable to the Tiger leadership only insofar as it augments the unity, cohesion and solidarity of the 'Tamil nation', and, by extension, aids the viability of the struggle for Eelam. Thus, while for Lenin, social revolution was the end, and national liberation the means, precisely the reverse is true of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Looking Ahead: The Case Study in Outline

The general organisation of the study is as follows. The next chapter traces the historical origins and development of the present Sinhalese-Tamil conflict. Stressing that the conflict was in no way 'pre-ordained', nor rooted in 'objective' factors, I underline the decisive role that the actions and policies of the Sri Lankan state played in creating two nations within the confines of the island country, and in bringing about the current confrontation between the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples.

The focus of the third chapter is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Eelam, the strongly nationalist and violently anti-systemic youth movement that spearheads the Sri Lankan Tamils' quest for sovereign statehood. In this chapter, I devote special attention to the role of the state's insensitivity and repression in progressively radicalising the Tamil agitation for greater autonomy from the central state, a process that culminated in the emergence of the uncompromisingly secessionist Liberation Tigers as the 'sole spokesman' of Tamil aspirations. In addition, I consider the complex and intricate connections between the nationalist struggle for 'Eelam' and the internal dynamics of Tamil society—in particular, the egalitarianising and democratising impact of the Tiger Movement on the highly conservative and hierarchical Tamil social formation. My argument here is that the Tigers' commitment to social equality and justice, and their aggressive mobilisation of traditionally degraded and peripheral Tamil social groups, has the capacity to explain much of the movement's popularity, and resilience in the face of extreme state repression. I also consider the centrality of revolutionary violence and martyrdom to the rebel movement's quest to forge an enduring Tamil national identity through the shared suffering and sacrifice of the members of the community. In discussing both of the above, I point out how these facets of LTTE ideology and strategy confirm and reinforce the validity of my earlier observations concerning the flexible, shifting, historically-evolved and 'subjective' nature of patterns of collective identity such as national loyalties—above all, that a *collective consciousness*, which is *not* a 'cultural' given, is of the essence of a sense of national identity.

The fourth chapter is concerned with delineating the role played by the Indian state, the South Asian superpower, in exacerbating the armed conflict within Sri Lanka, and, through its clumsy and contradictory policies, in eventually strengthening the Tamil resolve to achieve sovereign statehood, no matter what the cost. I do not intend, therefore, to restrict my analysis purely to the *domestic* context of the state. I wish to emphasise, rather, that a critical analysis of the role played by the Indian state in the Sri Lankan conflict is of decisive importance to the overall argument of this book, for, in the words of Theda Skocpol, 'states necessarily stand at the intersections between domestic sociopolitical orders and the transnational relations within which they must manoeuvre for survival and advantage in relation to other

states. The modern state as we know it...has always been...part of a system of competing and mutually involved states' (1985:8). Indeed, as this chapter will seek to demonstrate, the supra-state, regional context is something that *has* to be considered if one is to obtain a comprehensive picture of the evolution of Sri Lanka's 'internal' conflict. If the emergence and growth of separatist Tamil nationalism in the first place can largely be attributed to the actions and policies of an unresponsive, repressive Sri Lankan state, the violence and insensitivity of the Indian state, during the Indian army's military occupation of the Tamil region in northeastern Sri Lanka between 1987 and 1990, contributed significantly to the *consolidation* of a Tamil national identity. The dialectic of the *Indian* state and Tamil society is therefore of crucial relevance to the overall argument of this work.

Throughout the case study, my emphasis remains the *dialectical relationship* of state and civil society, of domination and resistance, of denial and rebellion, that lies at the heart of the present Sinhalese-Tamil polarisation and the growth and consolidation of a Tamil national consciousness defined in sharp and binary opposition to the power and authority of the juridical state, whether Indian or Sri Lankan.

State-Building and the Birth of Two Nations: The Genesis and Evolution of the Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict

My considered view is that Ceylon has already split into two entities. At present this is a state of mind; for it to become a territorial reality is a matter of time. Patchwork compromises, even if underwritten by New Delhi, are passing phenomena. The fact of the matter is that under various guises the Sinhalese elites have refused to share power with the principal ethnic minority, the Tamils...the war may take several years for a final decision. The longer it takes, the more likely it is that a separate [Tamil] state will emerge...compromise agreements will, as history has repeatedly shown, not be honoured on a permanent basis. The war will be resumed. The partition of Sri Lanka is already a fact of history.

—Alfred Jeyaratnam Wilson (1988 : Preface, 224)[1]

Two different nations, from a very ancient period, have divided between them the possession of the island. First, the Cingalese, inhabiting the

1 Professor Wilson is one of Sri Lanka's most respected and well-published academics. Holder of the founding chair in Political Science at the University of Sri Lanka (Colombo), he has for the past several years been Professor of Political Science at the University of British Columbia, New Brunswick, Canada. He is the son-in-law of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, the Tamil nationalist politician who dominated Sri Lankan Tamil politics for two decades between 1956 and his death in 1977. Wilson played the crucial role of an intermediary between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), in a last-ditch (and unsuccessful) attempt to salvage a negotiated political settlement to the exploding 'ethnic crisis' during the early eighties.

interior of the country in its southern and western parts, from the river Wallouve to that of Chilow, and secondly the Malabars [i.e., Tamils], who possess the northern and eastern districts. These two nations differ entirely in their religion, language and manners.

—From the *Cleghorn Minute*, prepared in 1799 by Hugh Cleghorn, the first (British) Colonial Secretary of Ceylon, and reproduced under the title 'Administration of Justice and of Revenue on the Island of Ceylon under the Dutch Government' in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch)*, 3, 1954, pp. 125-52.

There is no case to be made for the futility of democracy or the inevitability of uncontrolled conflict. Even in the most severely divided society, ties of blood do not lead ineluctably to rivers of blood.

—Donald Horowitz (1985: Afterword, 684).

If protection rackets represent organized crime at its smoothest, then war-making and state-making—quintessential protection rackets with the advantage of legitimacy—qualify as our largest examples of organized crime. Without branding all generals or statesmen as murderers or thieves, I want to encourage the value of that analogy...a portrait of war-makers and state-makers as coercive and self-seeking entrepreneurs bears a far greater resemblance to the facts than do its chief alternatives; the idea of a social contract, the idea of an open market in which operators of armies and states offer services to willing consumers, [or] the idea of a society whose shared norms and expectations call forth a certain kind of government...apologists for particular governments...call people who complain about the price of protection 'anarchists', 'subversives', or both at once. But...to the extent that the threats against which a given government protects its citizens are imaginary, or are consequences of its own activities, the government has organized a protection racket. Since governments themselves simulate, stimulate or even fabricate threats of external war, and since the repressive and extractive activities of governments often constitute the largest current threats to...their own citizens, many governments operate in essentially the same way as racketeers. There is, of course, a difference: racketeers, by conventional definition, operate without the sanctity of governments.

—Charles Tilly (1985: 169, 171).

Opening Remarks

It is readily apparent that Hugh Cleghorn's talk of 'two...nations', who 'differ entirely in their religion, language and manners', is an analysis framed in terms of what Paul Brass, Walker Connor, and numerous other late twentieth-century scholars of 'ethnicity' and nationalism have defined as the 'objective cultural markers' of communities. We have also argued that such markers are, *in themselves*, an utterly insufficient explanation of the rise of violent conflict between 'ethnic groups'. In fact, the entities that Cleghorn regards as the territorially-differentiated 'Cingalese' and 'Malabar' nations would, in Paul Brass' schematic framework, qualify as no more than 'ethnic categories', the lowest of the three critical points on the continuum of identity transformation and nationality formation.

Further, one must point out that the Sinhalese and the Tamils of Sri Lanka are by no means homogeneous collectivities of people; a vast degree of internal differentiation is to be found among both groups.[2] Cleavages on the basis of gender, class and the rural-urban divide are also common to both Sinhalese and Tamils. Thus, according to a report prepared in 1984, for the island as

2 Thus, among the Sinhalese (74 per cent of the population, according to the last available census, of 1981), one finds culturally and geographically distinct Kandyan (up-country) and low-country Sinhalese; Buddhists and Roman Catholics; as well as high-caste (Goigama) and lower-caste (Salagama, Karava, Durawa etc.) Buddhists. The Kandyan – low country and Buddhist – Christian break-up of the Sinhalese population is approximately 40 – 60 and 90 – 10, respectively. Among the Tamils of Sri Lanka (18 per cent of the population in 1981), there is the basic dichotomy between the 'Sri Lankan' Tamils (13 per cent), who have lived in the northern and eastern parts of the island for millennia, and among whom the agitation for 'Eelam' is confined, and the 'Indian' Tamils (5 per cent), who are the descendants of plantation workers brought by the British from southern India to serve as quasi-slave labour on the colonial plantation economy during the mid through late nineteenth century, and who are still mainly ghettoised in abysmal living conditions on the tea plantations of south-central Sri Lanka. Among the Sri Lankan Tamils, there are the Jaffna (northern) and Batticaloa (eastern) Tamils, distinguished from one another by differences in social organisation, economic activity and cultural practices. There are also Hindu Tamils (some 80 per cent of the Sri Lankan Tamil population), and Christian Tamils, primarily converts to Roman Catholicism (the remaining 20 per cent). Among the Hindu Tamils, there have historically been tense and unequal relations between the numerically preponderant upper castes, the 'Vellalars', who have traditionally been economic and political dominants, and the minority lower castes ('Karaiyar', 'Mukkuvar' etc.)

a whole, the income of the highest 10 per cent of the population was 32 times that of the lowest 10 per cent.[3] There is also the extremely significant fact that 'although the major identity-components of the Sinhalese are their Sinhalese language and Buddhist religion, and of the Tamils their Tamil language and Hindu religion, both these populations share many parallel features of traditional caste, kinship, popular religious cults, customs and so on' (Tambiah 1986: 5).

Nor are the Sinhalese and Tamil languages mutually exclusive categories. In 1918, in a lecture delivered to the Buddhist-denominational Ananda College in Colombo, a renowned Sinhalese linguist, W.F. Gunawardhana, stated that 'in grammatical structure Sinhalese was Dravidian [i.e., south Indian], though its vocabulary was mainly Aryan [i.e., north Indian] (cited in Gunawardena 1990: 75). Finally, it has been conclusively established by recent scholarship that the notion that the Sinhalese are of 'Aryan' racial stock, and therefore somehow superior to the 'Dravidian' Tamils, is a racist myth that made its first appearance during the second half of the nineteenth century. First, as the famous German Indologist Max Mueller himself pointed out, the term 'Aryan, in scientific language, is utterly inapplicable to race...it means language and nothing but language', and that, therefore, 'an ethnologist who speaks of Aryan race, Aryan blood, Aryan hair, and Aryan eyes, is as great a sinner as a linguist who speaks of a dolichocephalic dictionary or a brachycephalic grammar' (Gunawardena 1990: 71). In *The Early History of Ceylon* (1932), G.C. Mendis reiterated that Aryan and Dravidian were not racial categories but merely 'large groups of people who speak languages that have a common origin' (cited in Gunawardena 1990: 75). Second, as the distinguished Sinhalese anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere has noted:

> The racial connotations of 'Aryan' were introduced in the late 19th century by Sri Lankan Sinhalese nationalists to differentiate

3 Committee for Rational Development, 'Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict: Myths and Realities', reproduced as Appendix Three in Tambiah (1986: 147-65). The same document states that in 1979, the average annual income of a resident of urban Colombo was Rs. 1,137, compared to Rs. 746 for the Tamil region in the north-east, Rs. 631 for the overwhelmingly Sinhalese southwestern part of the country around Colombo, and RS. 512 for south-central Sri Lanka (predominantly Sinhalese, but including the 'Indian Tamil' plantation proletariat).

> themselves from the Tamils. They were aided by 19th century European Indologists, who spoke of the Aryan subjugation of dark-skinned peoples (the aboriginal Dravidians)—a hypothesis no longer acceptable to serious historians. In reality, there is little difference in the ethnic backgrounds of Sinhalese and Tamils. The first colonisers of Sri Lanka were probably north Indians. But according to the chronicles of the Sinhalese, even the first king and his followers married women from south India [the ancient kingdom of Madurai, which exists even today as a major Tamil provincial town]. Thereafter, the patterns of royal marriage and mass immigration were wholly from southern India, initially from the Tamil country and later (since the 13th century) from Kerala (in a letter to the *New York Times*, 24 April 1984).

Thus, when the prophet of the turn-of-the-century Sinhalese-Buddhist revival, a rabid itinerant preacher named Anagarika Dharmapala[4] wrote of 'the sweet, tender, gentle Aryan children of an ancient historic race' (i.e., the Sinhalese), and of 'the glorious inheritance of Aryan ancestors, uncontaminated by Semitic and savage ideas' (Guruge 1965: 484; also see Gunawardena 1990: 77), he was on very tenuous ground indeed, though, as it turned out, such absurdities were to come to form a central and staple ingredient in the legitimating ideology of the Sinhalese-Buddhist state in the post-colonial period.

The Argument in Outline

In view of what has been said so far, it is indeed surprising that such an apparent polarisation between the overarching identifications of 'Sinhalese' and 'Tamil' has come about in late twentieth-century Sri Lanka. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the origins and development of this, a classic illustration of Rupert Emerson's 'we' versus 'they' antagonism, that, over the past decade,

4 Anagarika Dharmapala (literally meaning in Sinhalese, 'the wandering guardian of the law') was born Don David Hewaviratne, and lived between 1864 and 1933. He enjoyed a relationship of some ambiguity with the founder of India's Theosophical Society, a European woman by the name of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.

has engulfed the island in a bloodbath which has few parallels even in the violent annals of the contemporary developing world. My analysis will tend to support Stanley Tambiah's broad conclusion that 'Sinhalese-Tamil tensions and conflicts in the form known to us today are of relatively recent manufacture—a truly twentieth-century phenomenon', though, of course, 'the post-independence phase in Sri Lanka is necessarily a continuation and transformation of processes set in motion during the critical period of the British Raj' (Tambiah 1986: 7,9).

A few observations about the nature and course of political development in the ex-colonies of the 'Third World' in general, and in Sri Lanka in particular, are in order. Prior to the incursions of Western colonialism, much of the 'Third World' consisted of a rich mosaic of local and regional sovereignties. Thus, as Lisa Anderson has written, 'the political and social structures of the premodern Middle East were not confined to the central government...kinship groups—lineages and tribes—enjoyed a political autonomy and economic vitality quite unknown in Europe, sprawling...across the Middle Eastern map...' (1987: 4). In a similar vein, Ali Mazrui has called premodern Africa 'a miracle of diversity' (1986: 107). This was very true of the South Asian subcontinent as well. In Sri Lanka, for example, there existed, till the seventeenth century, at least three regional sovereignties, one of which was an independent Tamil kingdom centred around Jaffna, in the north of the country. These medieval states often had diffuse boundaries, marked by zones of intermittent influence. All that had become history by the nineteenth century. The logic of colonial rule entailed administrative expansion and unification—and soon, the colonial state, backed by formidable coercive power, had extended its regulatory apparatus to even the most outlying regions of the territory under its control. Competing regional and local sovereignties were replaced (in the case of Sri Lanka, for the first time in over 2,500 years of its recorded history), by a single monolithic, impersonal, indivisible and alien sovereignty.

In time, there erupted, in most of these countries, a spate of anti-colonial uprisings: during the nineteenth century in Latin America, during the twentieth in Africa and Asia. However, it appeared that the practice of the new 'nationalist' politics could only be carried out effectively within the territorial framework

established by the colonial state, if such political activity were to lead to the creation of a broad-based mass movement that could successfully challenge and overcome the colonial Leviathan. Gradually, the anti-colonial leadership inherited the state, more or less intact, from the departing imperial power—Britain, in the case of Sri Lanka. Thus, in Sri Lanka, though there had historically existed multiple sovereignties and at least two main cultures (Sinhalese and Tamil), the island as a whole defined the territorial parameters of the newly-independent state. As the triumphant 'nationalist' elite consolidated its authority, there began the effort to transform the historically arbitrary and artificial territorial domain bequeathed by colonialism into a 'nation'. The irony of the occurrence has been admirably expressed by Crawford Young:

> The state now itself became the main vehicle in the hands of the nationalist elite for the fulfillment of its mission...in struggle, the nationalist movement was the nation in formation: the state was an alien apparatus, owned and operated by a foreign ruler. Yet even as the anti-thesis to nationalism, the colonial state necessarily defined the spatial framework of the embryonic nation. In triumph, the nationalist elite acquired title to the state—and in turn was absorbed by it. Nationalism as anti-colonial struggle had laid the basis for the nation; now the state had to complete the task. That state must be nation is indisputable: rare indeed is the political elite whose statecraft is not informed by this premise (1976: 71).

In its essence, the dominant 'nationalist' discourse became an indigenised variant of the world-view that had underpinned colonial rule—it typically projected notions, certainly in the Sri Lankan context, of monolithic, unitary and indivisible sovereignty as the *raison d'etre* of its 'nation-building' enterprise. Fundamental to this enterprise was the seemingly axiomatic proposition that state must be nation. A quest for homogeneity was but the natural corollary of this 'nationalist' discourse and practice. Essential to this quest, in turn, was an apparently inexorable trend towards the centralisation of political and economic power, as well as of the resources of coercion and repression. This development has prompted Young to comment that 'in the preponderance of instances [in the ex-colonies], diverse variations on the authoritarian

theme have enhanced the role of the nation-state as an authoritative arena' (1976: 79). In the process, the territorial heirs to colonial administrative demarcations congealed into apparently cast-iron grids. So complete was the transformation of 'nationalism' into statism that the Organization of African Unity, legatee to the tradition of Pan-Africanism, became a coalition of territorial states, an ironical benediction of the imperial partition. As Charles Tilly has put it, 'state-certifying organisations such as the...United Nations simply extended the European-based process [of modern state formation] to the world as a whole. Whether forced or voluntary, bloody or peaceful, decolonisation simply completed that process by which existing states leagued to create new ones' (1985: 185).

However, Sri Lanka (or rather, Ceylon) differed, in a couple of quite crucial ways, from the corresponding situation in, say, India. Unlike the vast majority of colonies, Ceylon had almost totally lacked a mass movement against colonial subjugation. The mass movement against the British Raj, spearheaded, in neighbouring India, by the Indian National Congress, *did* instill among a broad cross-section of the Indian peoples a sense of an Indian national identity, forged in course of a common struggle against a brutal alien power, and cemented by a shared suffering and sacrifice. This was simply absent in the case of Ceylon. When the British transferred power in 1948, they did so to a political and administrative elite (mainly Sinhalese, but also including Tamils) who were creatures of the colonial state—individuals who had loyally functioned as stooges of imperialism. When the nationalist backlash against this bastion of inherited privilege came, in the year 1956, it was in the form of an aggressive assertion of Sinhalese majoritarianism.

The assumption of state power by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the champion of the new Sinhalese nationalism, did not however significantly alter the defeated, elitist United National Party's (UNP) conception of an unitary, monolithic state sovereignty, conceived and fashioned in the colonial mould—except to impart to it an increasingly xenophobic and chauvinistic Sinhalese-nationalist component. Under the new dispensation, pioneered by the SLFP, Sri Lankan Tamils, who did not even share historical memories of a joint struggle waged with their Sinhalese counterparts against a common enemy, were being asked

to live in a unitary, centralised, territorial *state* of Sri Lanka that was conceived as the collateral of a *nation* defined explicitly in terms of a Sinhalese identity. In other words, the post-colonial Sri Lankan state advanced the idea of a monolithic, unitary sovereignty, but without a corresponding development of equal citizenship over the exclusive rights of the 'majority community' (see Giddens 1987 for a theoretical treatment). Therein lie the roots of the Sri Lankan tragedy. Those who went about the task of building the Sri Lankan 'nation' succeeded beyond belief, from one angle—they ended up creating not one, but *two* nations.

For all that, the Sri Lankan Tamils have been 'reluctant secessionists' (Horowitz 1985: 243-49). As the Sinhalese historian K.M. De Silva testifies, 'the striking feature of the emergence of Tamil separatism in Sri Lanka...is its late development. The transition from expressions of separatist sentiment to a full-fledged separatist movement took over 25 years, and...separatist agitation went through several phases' (1990: 32). Indeed, as we shall see in this chapter, it was to take the cumulative provocation of reams of Sinhalese-supremacist and discriminatory legislation (in the fields of language, education, state employment and religion); recurrent anti-Tamil pogroms; the dishonouring by the state of successive compacts promising the Tamils regional autonomy; the degeneration of a formally democratic electoral system into a farcical arena for the 'competitive (Sinhalese) chauvinism' of the island's two main (Sinhalese) political parties; and finally, severe military repression—in all of which the post-colonial Sri Lankan state played an infamous role—before the broad mass of Sri Lankan Tamils were to become convinced that there was no prospect of living with dignity and security within an united Sri Lanka, and would commit themselves to the bifurcation of the island as the only decisive solution to their predicament. It was *only* from the mid-1970s onwards that Sri Lankan Tamils began to consciously define themselves as a nation *entitled to an independent state*, and their political organisations actively sought a clean break from the Sri Lankan state only from the 1980s on.

I argue, therefore, that the *process* whereby an 'ethnic group' attains the consciousness of a distinct, historically-constituted nation is a gradual, evolutionary and open-ended one; and that the motives, imperatives, policies and actions of those at the helm of the state-building enterprise are of fundamental and decisive

importance to understanding and explaining the unfolding of that process. Sinhalese-Tamil polarisation, far from being the continuation of an ancient conflict rooted in 'primordial' ties, is in actuality a development peculiar to the second half of the twentieth century—earlier patterns of conflict followed different social boundaries (Rogers 1987: 583-602). In Ceylon, historically speaking, *numerous* identities have been available to serve as bases for political mobilisation. It therefore becomes necessary to explain why *one* particular identity (such as 'Tamil') is chosen, in preference to several possible alternatives, as the basis for popular mobilisation and struggle at a certain point in time. This chapter, as indeed the book as a whole, has posited the *state* as a central explanatory variable in accounting for identity-formulation and nationality-formation, and analysed the rise of mass Tamil nationalism as a process occurring within a complex historical dialectic of the Sinhalese-Buddhist state and Tamil society—a dialectic which is, equally, one of domination and resistance.

Colonialism and the Origins of the Unitary State

When the first of the Western colonialists, the Portuguese, arrived on the shores of Ceylon in 1505, three regional sovereignties existed in that country. One of these was the independent Tamil kingdom centred around Jaffna, the main city of the northern peninsula of the same name. The two other kingdoms were ruled by Sinhalese monarchs. One of these had as its capital the city of Kandy, in south-central Ceylon. The other was based in Kotte, which roughly corresponds to the Greater Colombo region of today, and is located on the western coast to the south of Kandy. The northern Tamil kingdom had been in existence since the early thirteenth century, but had enjoyed its heyday during the mid-fourteenth century, when, in addition to the Jaffna peninsula and other northern areas, it had, according to K.M. De Silva, 'effective control of the north-west coast up to Puttalam', of the east coast up to Trincomalee, and 'seemed poised for the establishment of Tamil supremacy over Sri Lanka' (De Silva 1981: 85).

The only period during the medieval epoch when the whole island was, more or less, under a single sovereign authority was during the reign of the Sinhalese ruler Parakramabahu VI (1412-

57), who took advantage of a period of relative decline of the Jaffna kingdom to subjugate it. However, this was a temporary phase, for the Tamil kingdom soon regained its sovereignty, and, far from generating murderous conflict, this particular 'occupation' seems to have 'marked the high point in the development of cultural contact between the Sinhala and Tamil linguistic communities' (Gunawardena 1990: 66). The end of Tamil sovereignty came in 1619, when the Portuguese defeated the last Tamil king in battle and formally annexed the Jaffna kingdom.

However, the Portuguese, and the Dutch who followed them, were mercantile capitalists who were interested primarily in trade, and concentrated their resources on maintaining secure control of strategic maritime points on the coastline of Ceylon. The task of bringing the island under a single centralised administration was to be left to the British, who displaced the Dutch in the last years of the eighteenth century. Initially, the British, like their predecessors, had little direct interest in the island itself. They appear to have regarded the eastern port of Trincomalee, one of the world's finest natural harbours, to be of strategic value for the defence of their vast possessions on the Indian mainland. However, with the rapid transition from mercantile to industrial capitalism in Britain during the early nineteenth century, the British developed a direct economic stake in Sri Lanka. In particular, they now required plantation products in large quantities, both as raw materials and as consumer goods. However, the establishment of a classic colonial plantation economy (initially in coffee, and later, in tea, rubber and coconut), could not be achieved without the liquidation of the Kandyan kingdom, which had been resolutely holding out against colonial penetration for the previous three centuries, and within whose domain the vast bulk of the highland areas suitable for plantation cultivation were located. This was duly accomplished, in a series of military campaigns lasting from 1815 to 1818.

Then, in 1833, the recommendations of the Colebrook–Cameron Report of 1831, which had advised the administrative unification of the entire island, and the vesting of sovereign authority in the person of the British Governor, were put into effect. The origins of the highly centralised, unitary state, that was to create vast political problems in the second half of the twentieth century,

are, therefore, to be sought in the imperatives of British colonial administration in the first half of the nineteenth century.[5]

Administrative unification meant, for the first time in the country's recorded history, the disproportionate growth in importance of a single urban centre, Colombo, which had been selected as the administrative capital of the unitary colonial state. In time, it also led to the emergence of an indigenous client-bourgeoisie, though this happened in rather different ways among the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The Sinhalese scholar Newton Gunasinghe writes that

> the first generation of Sinhalese entrepreneurs accumulated their capital through the country-liquor trade as early as the mid-19th century, and later invested their capital in graphite mining and coconut plantations. Similar avenues of accumulation were not present in the north and the east where liquor sales were rather low, due to the widespread consumption of home-made palmyrah toddy. Further, the absence of plantations in these areas prevented the emergence of a group of indigenous entrepreneurs who could earn profits by servicing the plantations (Gunasinghe 1984: 205).

Donald Horowitz takes up the story at this stage:

> In the early 19th century, soon after the British had conquered Ceylon, Christian missionaries entered the island. Like the colonial administration, the British missionaries established themselves in the south of Ceylon...the American Missionary Society, when it arrived, was relegated to the arid Jaffna Peninsula...in the far North...the Americans proved unusually adept at setting up English-medium schools all over Jaffna. Later, as clerical jobs opened up in the colonial government...Ceylon Tamils, more often literate in English, moved south to take up a disproportionate number of them. They had every incentive to do so. Jaffna was an inhospitable land...consequently,

5 Furthermore, by bringing in thousands of poor Tamils from southern India to serve as bonded labour on the plantations, the colonial authorities were responsible for the creation of yet another political dilemma that was to have serious repercussions in the post-colonial period.

> the Ceylon Tamils came to play a large role in the...administration of Ceylon (Horowitz 1985: 155-156).

As a Sri Lankan Tamil economist, V. Nithiyanandan, has observed, the Jaffna Tamil under British rule

> chose the facile option of securing government employment, thus fulfilling the expectations of the colonial government...this led not only to under-utilisation of resources in Jaffna district, but, more importantly, reinforced the idea that state-sector employment was the ultimate goal of education and that, without it, the economic survival of the Tamils would be doomed (Nithiyanandan 1987:113).

As the twentieth century dawned, increasingly assertive Sinhalese and Tamil elites, which had flourished and multiplied under colonial tutelage, and whose activities were centred almost exclusively around Colombo, came to adopt, at least at the outset, a policy of close, if uneasy collaboration in their strategy of wresting, albeit through totally peaceful and constitutional means, the maximum possible concessions from the colonial power.[6] However, as the grant of full independence approached, the jockeying for prestige and influence among Sinhalese and Tamil politicians became more and more overt and acute, and the ambiguous elite consensus began to fragment and disintegrate along 'ethnic' lines.[7]

Of crucial importance to the 'transfer of power' in Ceylon was the role of two constitutional commissions appointed by the British government to oversee and supervise the process. These were the 'Donoughmore Commission', which framed the Constitution which was in effect between 1931 and the British withdrawal in 1948, and the Soulbury Commission, which devised the Constitution which lasted from 1947 to 1972. Both commissions came

6 Thus, the founder of the first full-fledged 'nationalist' political party, the Ceylon National Congress (CNC), in 1919, was Ponnambalam Arunachalam, a Tamil who was the first 'native' Ceylonese to pass the Ceylon Civil Service in 1875, and who retired as Registrar-General of the 'Crown Colony of Ceylon' in 1913. Arunachalam and his brother, Ponnambalam Ramanathan, who retired as Solicitor-General of the 'Crown Colony of Ceylon', were the first Sri Lankan Tamil political leaders of the twentieth century.

7 Arunachalam quit the CNC in 1921, condemning it as an organisation 'representing mainly a section of the Sinhalese'. See Vythilingam (1977: 538).

to be named after the British peers who headed them. The principal achievement of the Donoughmore Commission was the grant of universal adult franchise to the people of Ceylon. But, while conceding both universal franchise and territorial representation, the Donoughmore Commissioners remarked that 'the primitive character of the provincial government, as against the advanced system of central government, is very noteworthy...the great gulf between the rural worker and the educated and Westernised classes of Colombo forms a dramatic contrast' (*The Donoughmore Report*, Colombo, 1928: 105, cited in Wilson 1988: 14-15).

In order to mitigate the excessively centralised nature of the island's polity, the Commission proposed two significant measures. The first was the establishment of a network of Provincial Councils, 'to which certain administrative functions of the Central Government could be delegated'. The Commission recommended that such councils be granted wide-ranging powers on subjects such as 'public works and communications, irrigation and agriculture, medical and sanitary services, education and finance, and general administration'. It further advised that while the central government should provide finances to the provincial councils from its general revenue, the councils should also be given the power to raise 'a substantial part of [their own] revenue through direct taxation' (Wilson 1988:14-15).

The second measure proposed was that sessions of the central legislature should be held not just in Colombo, but periodically also in Kandy and Jaffna. In retrospect, it is a great misfortune of history that these two federalising proposals were never seriously implemented. That they were proposed at all is probably due to the fact that strong pressure for the creation of a quasi-federal order in Sri Lanka was exerted on the Donoughmore Commissioners by the political leaders of the Kandyan Sinhalese, who pressed for the creation of three autonomous regions within the framework of a federal polity—the first comprising the Ceylon Tamil-dominated North and East, the second consisting of the Kandyan Sinhalese highlands and adjacent areas, and the third the low-country Sinhalese areas of the West and deep South. As the Kandyan Sinhalese leaders correctly noted in a memorandum submitted to the Donoughmore Commission: 'The fundamental error of British statesmanship has been to treat the subject of political advancement of the people of Ceylon as one

of a homogeneous Ceylonese race' (Kandyan National Assembly, 1927: 37, cited in Wilson 1988: 98).

The dire predictions of Tamil politicians that elections based on territorial representation would lead to Sinhalese political hegemony proved all too accurate. The Board of Ministers (a sort of pre-independence shadow cabinet) formed after the 1936 elections was all-Sinhalese, an early indication of what the composition of post-independence governments would turn out to be. The Tamil reaction was not slow to come. In 1944, the first exclusively Tamil political party of Sri Lanka, the All-Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) was formed under the leadership of G.G. Ponnambalam, a consummate orator, and began immediately to agitate for equal representation for the Sinhalese and the minorities in the legislature of post-independence Sri Lanka. The formula proposed by the ACTC, which envisaged that one-half of the seats would go to Sinhalese members and the other half to representatives of the various minority communities combined (i.e., the Ceylon Tamils, the 'Indian' Tamils of the plantation areas, the Muslims, etc.), soon came to be known in popular parlance as 'fifty-fifty'. It was also decisively rejected by the Soulbury Commission, which came up instead with a scheme of weighted representation intended to safeguard minority rights. In Sri Lanka, the British had already decided to transfer power, in due time, to the politician of their choice, a Sinhalese and loyal collaborator named Don Stephen Senanayake,[8] and the fulminations of G.G. Ponnambalam seemed to them to be little more than a nuisance, an unnecessary obstruction to their smooth, speedy and orderly withdrawal from their colony.

Nonetheless, the Soulbury Commissioners were not entirely insensitive to the Tamil campaign for balanced representation. They worked out a complex scheme of weighted representation for the minorities, whereby, they claimed, 'of the 95 elected seats [in the post-independence Parliament], 58 would go to Sinhalese candidates, Ceylon Tamils 15, Indian Tamils 14, Muslims 8, making with the 6 nominated seats a minority representation of 43 in a House of 101' (*Soulbury Report*, London, 1945: Para 270, cited

8 In 1947, just preceding the formal transfer of power, Senanayake signed a 'Defence Agreement' with Britain which allowed the British military to retain control, even after independence, over their major naval base at Trincomalee, on the east coast, and air base at Katunayake, near Colombo.

in Wilson 1988: 19). They also incorporated an important safeguard for the minorities in Section 29(2) of the Constitution, which stipulated that Parliament could not enact discriminatory legislation against a particular ethnic or religious group to which all other groups were also not simultaneously subjected. They further expressed optimism that the Sinhalese Prime Minister would choose to appoint persons from among the non-Sinhalese groups to the nominated seats in Parliament, and would offer ministerial portfolios to them, if need be. They were also hopeful that the rise of leftist and socialist parties would mitigate the growth of any significant inter-community tensions.

As the post-colonial development of Sri Lanka's polity progressed, the calculations of the Soulbury Commissioners on all of the above counts were fated to go completely awry. Upon assuming power, the Senanayake government almost immediately enacted, and successfully passed in Parliament, two pieces of legislation—the Citizenship Act (1948), and the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act (1949). Taken in conjunction, the two disenfranchised and rendered stateless the entire 'Indian Tamil' population of the plantations, who were estimated to number in excess of one million at that time.[9]

What, precisely, motivated this outrage? It was probably, at least in part, an expression of the virulent prejudice of elements of the ruling Sinhalese elite towards the plantation workers, long perceived to be alien intruders on Sri Lankan soil. However, it is equally probable that certain pragmatic political calculations were involved as well. First, the decision, and its successful passage through Parliament, served to cut the troublesome Tamils down to size, by depriving almost half their number of both citizenship and franchise. Second, it served the purpose of emasculating a strong electoral challenge from left-wing parties. In the first general elections, held in 1947, 10 of the 14 'Indian Tamil' seats had returned candidates of the Trotskyite Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), while the remaining four had elected (pro-Moscow) Communist

9 The government managed to circumvent Section 29 (2) of the Soulbury Constitution by successfully arguing in court that the text of these legislations did not specifically name the 'Indian' Tamils, and that, therefore, they could not be construed as discriminatory legislation aimed at one particular community to the exclusion of others. This reasoning was patently specious: the wording of the Acts left absolutely no doubt as to what end they were designed to achieve. For the full text of the Citizenship Act of 1948, see Appendix Two in Kadian (1990: 159).

Party nominees. Third, the seats vacated as a result of the disenfranchisement of the Indian Tamils were used to accommodate additional representatives of the Kandyan Sinhalese. Consequently, in every Parliament from 1952 onwards, the Kandyan Sinhalese came to be represented disproportionately relative to their share of the population. Successive Sinhalese governments, whether formed by the United National Party (UNP), or its arch-rival, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), took great care to ensure that Kandyan Sinhalese MPs received more than an adequate share of ministerial portfolios, including important Cabinet posts. Nothing more about federalism was ever heard again from the Kandyan Sinhalese. Needless to state, this co-optation had an immensely positive impact on the consolidation of a pan-Sinhalese identity. As Tambiah notes, 'low-country and Kandyan Sinhalese are inextricably mixed-up today' (Tambiah 1986:124). Moreover, the disenfranchisement of the plantation proletariat enabled the Sinhalese, in general, to increase their share of elected seats in Parliament to close to 80 per cent of the total. From 1952 onwards, the Sri Lankan Parliament would be more like an assembly of Sinhalese notables than anything else.

The Sri Lankan Tamil response was swift and straightforward. Their established political party, the ACTC, surprisingly did not make any fuss over this flagrant violation of the fundamental rights of their fellow-Tamils on the plantations, for Senanayake, known for his acumen at intrigue, had managed to co-opt its leader, G.G. Ponnambalam, into his Cabinet. But one of Ponnambalam's chief lieutenants, a Christian Tamil from the Jaffna peninsula by the name of Samuel James Velupillai Chelvanayakam, was not prepared to take things lying down. In a public statement that was to prove eerily prophetic, he said: 'Today justice is being denied to the Indian Tamils. Some day in the future...the same will befall the Ceylon Tamils' (quoted in Ram 1989: 37).

Disgusted at what he perceived to be his leader's betrayal of the Tamil cause, Chelvanayakam quit the ACTC and, in December 1949, launched his own party, the *Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi* (ITAK, literally, 'Ceylon Tamil State Party', but better-known simply as the Tamil Federal Party, or FP for short). For the next three decades, Chelvanayakam and the FP would set the agenda for Sri Lankan Tamil politics, and would constitute practically the sole challenge to the legitimacy of the unitary state. At their first convention,

held in 1951 at Trincomalee, the Federalists declared 'the Tamil people's unchallengeable title to nationhood and...their right to political autonomy and desire for federal union with the Sinhalese' (cited in Wilson 1988: 24).

Significantly, the centre of gravity of the Sri Lankan Tamil programme, as manifested in the Federal Party's declaration, had moved away from a concern with an equitable share of power at the central level, and towards an as yet somewhat hazy and inarticulate goal of 'federalism' and 'autonomy'. However, given the demographic concentration of the Sri Lankan Tamil population in the north and east, it was obviously merely a matter of time before such a demand for autonomy would come to be framed explicitly in regional terms. The battle lines for the future had been drawn. The dialectic of the unitary Sri Lankan state and Tamil society had resulted in the formulation of a Tamil political charter that, for the first time, claimed the attribute of *nationhood* for the Sri Lankan Tamils, and advanced a demand for 'autonomy' and a 'federal union' on the basis of that self-definition of a collective Tamil identity. However, these were but the beginnings of the historical process that was to culminate in total Sinhalese-Tamil polarisation, and the rise of a powerful armed struggle to achieve a sovereign *state* of Tamil Eelam, some three decades later.

The Consolidation of the Unitary State and the Tamil Nationalist Response

In the first phase after independence (1948-56), writes Newton Gunasinghe:

> Sri Lanka was governed by a social stratum representing landed and commercial interests. This elite was economically and socially a product of British colonialism...it was a segmented elite, divided into diverse ethnic and religious groups and castes. Although competition...and rivalry took place within the ruling elite on the basis of these parochial loyalties, the political pressure from the people kept them sufficiently united...the working-class movement under left leadership was still a powerful force to be reckoned with (1989: 243).

Indeed, 1953 witnessed a massive general strike by the urban working-class, cutting across ethnic lines, in protest against a proposed reduction in an important state-sponsored welfare subsidy, the free rice ration for the poor.

However, the fragile equilibrium that Gunasinghe speaks of was to break down completely in 1956, a truly landmark year for all the peoples of Sri Lanka. The immediate catalyst to this was a leadership tussle within the United National Party (UNP), the party in government between 1947 and 1956. Solomon Bandaranaike, an Oxford-educated senior UNP politician and Minister of Local Government between 1936 and 1951, had hoped to succeed to the Prime Ministership once the aging Don Stephen Senanayake had passed away. The latter, however, was intent on promoting his own son, Dudley, for the post. Disillusioned, Bandaranaike quit the UNP and floated his own party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), in 1951. The SLFP, however, failed to make much headway in the 1952 general elections, when it won only nine seats in Parliament, compared to the UNP's 54. For that matter, the showing of Chelvanayakam's FP was not too encouraging either. The FP won only two seats, compared to four for its arch-rival, G.G. Ponnambalam's ACTC. Clearly, the Sri Lankan Tamils, though divided, still, by-and-large, favoured the ACTC's programme of 'responsive cooperation' with the Sinhalese parties at the Centre over the federalist agenda espoused by the FP.

However, the UNP regime was founded on what was essentially a very narrow social base of support. Between 1952 and the next parliamentary elections of 1956, Bandaranaike, a fiery orator and skilled political tactician, let loose a populist campaign *par excellence*, that swept all before him. As Gunasinghe observes, the SLFP appealed to and successfully mobilised 'a much more heterogeneous [and far vaster] bloc of vested interests' than the UNP had ever imagined doing. In particular, the new-look SLFP

> represented the Sinhalese urban entrepreneurs, who, having accumulated some capital through trade or manufacturing, were bent on establishing local industries. It represented the rising rural petty-bourgeoisie of the south—the Sinhalese school teachers, ayurvedic physicians, notaries, village monks: who gave expression to their economic demands through cultural

slogans. It represented the Sinhala-educated vernacular intelligentsia (Gunasinghe 1989:244).

Obviously, the SLFP required a coherent and easily understandable political slogan which would serve to unify such a disparate constituency, if its overall electoral strategy was to pay dividends. With his characteristic blend of brilliance and opportunism, Bandaranaike seized on the issue of language to achieve this end. The SLFP fought the 1956 elections on what was effectively a one-point political platform, neatly encapsulated in two words—'Sinhala Only'. This meant that SLFP promised (and within 24 hours of coming to power, no less!) to make Sinhalese the sole official language of Sri Lanka.

There was, however, much more to the language issue than a simple assertion of cultural identity. In his public speeches, Bandaranaike railed against the neo-colonial system that allegedly reserved over 90 per cent of government employment for a privileged English-speaking minority of less than 10 per cent. The implication clearly was that the adoption of Sinhalese as the official language would lead to a drastic equalisation of economic opportunities, especially with regard to state-sector employment, perhaps the most lucrative and coveted job sector in Sri Lanka.

Nithiyanandan has rightly commented that the conflict that manifested itself in the run-up to the 1956 polls was 'not so much between ethnic communities [such as Tamils and Sinhalese], as between *two classes* of society' (1987: 111) (emphasis added). The over-privileged, pseudo-Westernised, English-speaking *comprador* class, almost exclusively concentrated in Colombo, contained within its ranks *both* Tamils and Sinhalese.

Ironically, however, the language issue fostered, instead, a polarisation of sorts between large sections of the Sinhalese, on the one hand, and Sri Lankan Tamils, on the other. This was not without reason. Since the nineteenth century, large numbers of Jaffna Tamils had come to attach inordinate importance to English-medium education and state-sector employment, where they were still to be found (especially in the higher echelons) somewhat disproportionately relative to their share of the population. These people also tended to be among the most politically aware and organised elements of the Tamil population. As Nithiyanandan notes, 'among the Sinhalese, only the very wealthy

aspired to an education in English. But among the Jaffna Tamils, even those of moderate means tried to give their children an English education', and, therefore, 'the class distinction between the English-educated and the vernacular-educated which was evidently clear among the Sinhalese was not as easily visible at this stage among Tamils'. 'Anti-English, therefore, quickly turned into anti-Tamil' among Sinhalese, helped by the fact that almost the only opposition to 'Sinhala Only' came from Sri Lankan Tamil politicians, especially those belonging to the FP (Nithiyanandan 1987:112, 114).

The 1956 elections also saw the inauguration of the thoroughly destructive phenomenon (in terms of its impact on inter-ethnic relations) of what has been alternatively called the 'competitive chauvinism' or 'intra-ethnic outbidding' of Sinhalese party politics. This phenomenon, in an entrenched and magnified form, would recur with a monotonous, if deadly, regularity in the years and decades to come, and would simultaneously contribute to an exacerbation of the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict and constitute the single most formidable obstacle to its negotiated resolution. The SLFP officially adopted the 'Sinhala Only' policy in December 1955. Earlier that year, John Kotelawala, the UNP Prime Minister, visited Jaffna and publicly re-affirmed his party's commitment to 'parity of status' between the Sinhalese and Tamil languages. However, as the elections approached, the UNP became increasingly apprehensive that this policy was losing its Sinhalese voters, and the UNP switched to 'Sinhala Only' in February 1956. The *volte face*, however, came too late to reverse the tide of electoral fortunes—the SLFP swept the polls.

But why did Bandaranaike press *only* for Sinhalese, and not Sinhalese *and* Tamil, to replace English? A noted Sri Lankan Tamil scholar has remarked that 'if ever, since independence, there was a Sinhalese leader with foresight, it was the Oxford-educated Bandaranaike. He was able to understand the problems of Ceylon's multi-ethnic society' (Wilson 1988: 94). The new Prime Minister was obviously no simple-minded Sinhalese bigot. While Minister of Local Government in 1944, he had publicly stated that he did 'not see any harm at all in recognising the Tamil language also as an official language', for such a move would be of immense utility in bringing about 'that amity, that confidence between the various communities' (Wilson 1988: 40). I believe that two

considerations are relevant in accounting for this apparent hiatus between precept and practice. First, there is the matter of electoral calculation. As Wilson rightly points out, the Westminster-style legislative and party-political system that Ceylon inherited from the British 'depends, in the final instance, on the counting of numbers. The Sinhalese constitute the numerical majority' (1988: 32). Second, and perhaps no less significant in terms of its implications for the future, the success of the SLFP campaign in 1956 was due to a considerable extent, at the grassroots level, to the support whipped up for 'Sinhala Only' by organised groups among the Buddhist clergy. As Kumari Jayawardena comments:

> The most articulate and militant spokesmen of the Sinhalese petty-bourgeoisie on the language issue were the *bhikkus* or Buddhist monks...who had formed the Eksath Bhikku Peramuna [EBP, literally, United Monks' Front], to mobilise [support] to defeat the UNP at the elections...they aimed at restoration of Buddhism through state recognition and patronage...the monks felt keenly on this question. They were educated in the Sinhalese language and its classics...and were accepted by the Buddhists as protectors of Sinhalese culture. But they had neither recognition nor influence in the areas dominated by the English-speaking elite, viz., administration, higher education and politics (1985: 111-12).

This intrusion of organised religion into the political sphere, though rewarding for the SLFP in electoral terms, represented an unhealthy development in the body politic of Sri Lanka. From 1956 onwards, the new Sinhalese nationalism took on an increasingly strident religious note, with influential and completely obscurantist sections of the clergy, in their self-proclaimed role of defenders, against assorted imaginary threats, of the holy trinity of 'the Land (Sri Lanka), the Race (Sinhalese), and the Faith (Buddhism)', stubbornly opposing any concession to or compromise with the Tamils on any issue whatsoever. Paramount among these, of course, was the issue of language. Statements such as the following became increasingly commonplace in what purported to be academic discourse:

> The history of Sri Lanka is the history of the Sinhalese race...Buddhism is the golden thread running through the history of the Race and the Land...In 1956 will occur the unique three-fold event—the completion of 2,500 years of Ceylon's history, of the life of the Sinhalese, and of Buddhism (Wijewardena 1953: 3, cited in Wilson 1988: 52).

On the Tamil side, the 1956 election witnessed a closing of ranks behind the FP. Sri Lankan Tamils felt betrayed by both the UNP and the SLFP, and those like the ACTC who had advocated 'responsive cooperation' with the Sinhalese political parties were permanently discredited. The FP won 10 parliamentary seats, as opposed to one for the ACTC. 1956 also saw the first serious bout of ethnic rioting in post-colonial Sri Lanka. Over 150 Tamils were killed in the Tamil-dominated eastern province by mobs of Sinhalese, most of whom had been brought in from the deep south and settled, under the auspices of a state-sponsored scheme, in the traditionally Tamil and Muslim district of Amparai.[10]

Upon assuming power, however, Bandaranaike, true to his cosmopolitan background, attempted to reach a compromise with increasingly alienated and hostile Tamil opinion. The great step in this direction was a historic agreement, concluded on 26 July 1957, between him and FP leader Chelvanayakam, and known as the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam (B-C) Pact. The pact envisaged wide-ranging decentralisation of administration and devolution of powers to the Tamil areas of the North and East. It was proposed that the overwhelmingly Tamil northern province would constitute a single regional authority, while the predominantly Tamil but demographically more complex eastern province would be divided into two or more such units. However, all these units would be free to amalgamate, if they so desired. It was agreed that Parliament would devolve all powers to the regional bodies on the following subjects—agriculture, cooperatives, lands and land development, 'colonisation', education, health, industries, fisheries, housing and social services, electricity, irrigation schemes and roads. The regional councils were to be given full

10 The scheme in question was Gal Oya, the first of many such strongly denounced by Tamil parties as part of a state-instigated plot designed to erode and eventually destroy the demographic and economic predominance of Tamils in the eastern province and in the non-peninsular areas of the North.

powers of taxation and borrowing to fund projects in their fields of responsibility, and, in addition, the central government was charged with providing certain minimum finances from the state's general revenue. It is clearly evident from this account that the B-C Pact represented a very comprehensive federal solution to burgeoning Sinhalese-Tamil tensions (for a full text of the Pact, see Ponnambalam 1983: 256-57).

The Pact further stipulated that Tamil should be used as the official language for all administrative work in the northern and eastern provinces. Bandaranaike was particularly defensive and conciliatory on this issue in a speech to Parliament:

> Although the circumstances of the situation were such that Sinhalese *had to be* declared the official language, there was no intention in fact to cause any undue hardship or injustice to those whose language is other than Sinhalese...reasonable use of Tamil too will be given...we cannot decide these issues on grounds of extremism...we have to take a rational, reasonable attitude on these matters...naturally, Tamils will have the right to go up to the very summit of education in that medium...the Tamil medium should also be used in examinations...for the public service...(Ponnambalam 1983: 254-55) (emphasis added).

Chelvanayakam even managed to obtain an assurance from the government that the question of re-enfranchising the Tamil plantation workers would receive 'early consideration'.

Tragically, considering the subsequent fate of Sri Lanka, the B-C Pact was unilaterally abrogated by Bandaranaike in April 1958. This was not the result of any intentional bad faith on his part. On the contrary, according to the testimony of a reliable eye-witness, the 'Prime Minister was in tears' that he had been compelled to break his word (cited in Wilson 1988: 119). What *had* happened was that the pact had fallen prey to the very forces that Bandaranaike had himself unleashed and exploited in order to capture state power. The dynamics of 'competitive chauvinism' in Sinhalese party politics had swung into action—the UNP saw the Pact as a golden opportunity to retrieve some of its lost popularity with the Sinhalese. A senior UNP politician, Junius Richard Jayewardene (fated to be Sri Lanka's President between 1977 and 1988, the period during which the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict

escalated to all-out civil war), led a self-styled 'Long March' through the Sinhalese heartland, mobilising mass opinion along the way against Bandaranaike's 'capitulation' to the Tamils. The Prime Minister's erstwhile patrons, the Buddhist clergy, were outraged at their protege's doings. Several hundred of them besieged his house in the heart of Colombo till he signed the official order abrogating the Pact. The well-intentioned Bandaranaike had been reduced to the status of a captive of the fall-out of his own politics. The rules of competition for the spoils of state power dictated that he could not settle the issues hampering amicable relations between the Sinhalese and the Tamils once and for all. Instead, he paid with his life for his folly. In 1959, a fanatical Buddhist monk murdered him for attempting to sell out 'the glory of his Aryan ancestors' to the Tamils.

The FP, for its part, reacted to the abrogation with a series of massive *satyagraha* (non-violent civil disobedience on the Gandhian model) campaigns in the north and east. This provoked a violent backlash against Tamils from the Sinhalese state and people alike. In May-June 1958, there was a major anti-Tamil pogrom throughout the island, but it was especially severe in the Sinhalese-majority areas. Hundreds of Tamils died. Over 12,000 were made homeless.[11] As the FP's civil disobedience campaign continued unabated, the entire north and east was brought under emergency regulations, and the army was sent in to assist the police in restoring 'law and order' in the Jaffna peninsula in 1961.

Much the same fate was to befall another attempt, in 1965, by the Sinhalese political elite to come to an honourable settlement with the Tamils through their most representative political party, the FP. This pact, concluded between Chelvanayakam and the UNP Prime Minister, Dudley Senanayake, proposed a moderate degree of devolution of power through the mechanism of 'district councils' in the Tamil areas. It also sought to come to grips with the increasingly contentious issue of growing numbers of Sinhalese settled in traditionally Tamil areas under the aegis of state-sponsored 'colonisation' schemes, by stipulating the following:

> In the granting of land under colonisation schemes, the following priorities are to be observed in the northern and eastern

11 For a moving and comprehensive eyewitness account of the pogrom of 1958, see Vittachi (1958).

> provinces: a) Land in the two provinces to be granted in the first instance to landless persons in the district concerned; b) Secondly, to Tamil-speaking persons resident in the northern and eastern provinces; and c) thirdly, to other citizens of Ceylon, preference being given to Tamil residents in the rest of the island (Ponnambalam 1983: 257-58).

This formula represented a significant compromise, with reference to an issue on which both sides had previously refused to budge an inch. The state had claimed that it was merely trying to give landless Sinhalese from the south plots of land in sparsely populated zones in the north and east, while the FP had consistently maintained that this was but a pretext to overwhelm large tracts of the two provinces with waves of Sinhalese settlers, with the intention of ultimately reducing the Sri Lankan Tamils to a minority in areas where they had historically constituted the majority of the population. Sadly, the Chelvanayakam-Senanayake Pact also failed to see the light of day. The reason why it had been drawn up in the first place was that the UNP had failed to win an outright parliamentary majority in the elections of 1965, and depended on the support of 14 Federal Party MPs, all elected from the north and east, for the stability of its government. Donald Horowitz has cogently outlined the reasons behind the breakdown of the agreement:

> Most important were UNP electoral concerns. Following the 1965 elections, the SLFP had moved back to an anti-Tamil line, portraying the UNP as a party manipulated by the Federalists. The district councils issue provided a focus for such attacks, spurred by Buddhist monks. Some UNP backbenchers, fearful of the consequences—for the government would have to go to the polls by 1970—were on the verge of revolt. In the end, the UNP leadership withdrew the bill, for, as a very close observer noted, the party had not yet faced an election with the Federal Party millstone around its neck and did not know how much it weighed (1985: 390).

The imperatives of electoral politics, and especially its essential component, the 'competitive chauvinism' of the two major Sinhalese parties, had thwarted yet another attempt at Sinhalese-

Tamil reconciliation. As Horowitz observes, 'there is no escaping the fact that two-party competition for the Sinhalese vote made Sri Lanka's moderately serious ethnic conflict far more severe than it would otherwise have been' (1985: 393).

It would be instructive to examine in somewhat greater detail the nature and workings of this 'two-party competition for the Sinhalese vote'. What made it as insurmountable a barrier to 'ethnic reconciliation' as it repeatedly turned out to be? Two factors were of critical importance in this respect—the small numbers and territorial concentration of the Sri Lankan Tamil minority, and the 'first-past-the-post' principle in the country's electoral system, itself a copy of the British Westminster model, which repeatedly yielded massive majorities in terms of *seats* for parties with only relatively slender pluralities of the total *vote*.

In Sri Lanka, in 1976, the main 'ethnic' minority, the Sri Lankan Tamils, accounted for a plurality of the registered voters in only 11 per cent of parliamentary constituencies (all in the north or east), and in all but one of these (where they comprised 49.8 per cent of the voters), they constituted a majority, and usually an overwhelming majority of over 90 per cent. In only another 1 per cent of constituencies did they comprise between 30 per cent and 50 per cent of the electorate, and in just another 8 per cent did they account for between 10 per cent and 30 per cent. In the remaining 81 per cent of seats, they were fewer than 10 per cent, and generally far fewer. What difference did the regional concentration make? Horowitz explains:

> Under first-past-the-post elections, if Sinhalese comprise 70-95 per cent of the voters, as they did in a large number of constituencies, and the two main Sinhalese parties compete for these votes, there is hardly any restraint on anti-Tamil positions that can be taken. The 1-2 per cent of Tamil voters in such constituencies can offer nothing to the party that is more moderate on ethnic issues. The same is true at the party-level nationwide...there are many more Sinhalese votes to be had by being extreme than there are Tamil votes to be had by being moderate. Likewise, no Sinhalese party had very much to offer Tamil candidates to help them win marginal seats. For the Tamils, there were no such marginal seats—Tamil

candidates either won overwhelmingly, or they did not win at all (Horowitz 1989: 18-35).[12]

In this way, demographic characteristics ensured that whichever Sinhalese party won out in the deadly game of 'competitive chauvinism' also won handsomely at the polls. This tendency was grossly exacerbated by the 'first-past-the-post' principle, which magnified small pluralities in terms of votes into huge majorities in terms of seats for the winning party. In no parliamentary election, except 1977, in post-colonial Sri Lanka has the victorious (Sinhalese) party ever won a majority of votes cast—it was more usual for that party to obtain between 30 and 40 per cent. However, in every election between 1947 and 1977, except 1965, the winning party always obtained a landslide in terms of *seats* because of the 'first-past-the-post' system. To cite a couple of examples—in 1970, the UNP won only 17 of the total of 150 seats with 38 per cent of the total vote, while the SLFP and allied parties won 115 seats with a combined share of 49 per cent of the vote. Similarly, in 1977, the UNP won 139 of the 168 seats with 51 per cent of the vote cast, while the SLFP, reduced to a pathetic eight seats, nevertheless managed to win a full 30 per cent of the vote. With relatively small shifts in voting patterns producing such massive swings in seats obtained, obviously the need to 'outbid' one another in appeals to the worst anti-minority sentiments among the Sinhalese majority became that much more urgent for the UNP and the SLFP (for relevant statistics, see Ponnambalam 1983: 154,193). Naturally, this had ominous implications for prospects of inter-community harmony.

Despite the fact that the B-C and Senanayake-Chelvanayakam pacts had been dishonoured, the Federal Party continued to be

12 This article presents an interesting comparison of the relationship between electoral patterns and 'ethnic conflict' in Sri Lanka and Malaysia. According to Horowitz, electoral politics facilitated inter-ethnic cooperation and dialogue in Malaysia, in contrast to Sri Lanka, primarily because of demographic factors: the Chinese, the main minority in Malaysia, were far more numerous than the Sri Lankan Tamils, comprising close to 40 per cent of the population, and they were also much more dispersed throughout the country compared to the Tamils in Sri Lanka. They were consequently a far more major factor in the electoral equation of Malaysia than were the Tamils in Sri Lanka. As a result, the main Malay political party, the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), had to reach out to Chinese parties in order to build a winning coalition at the polls. This, in turn, helped promote inter-ethnic understanding and negotiated settlement of disputes.

committed to a political solution to the ethnic problem within the framework of an united Sri Lanka. In its manifesto for the 1965 general election, it had stated that 'the only way to regain our right to decide for ourselves our own destiny, without jeopardising the unity of Ceylon, is the federal form of government'. In its 1970 manifesto, it reiterated that

> it is our firm conviction that the division of the country in any form would be beneficial neither to the country, nor to the Tamil-speaking people. Hence we appeal to the Tamil-speaking people not to lend their support to any political movement that advocates the bifurcation of the country (cited in Wilson 1988: 85-86).

However, the Federalist attitude underwent a sea-change during the decade of the seventies. In 1975, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, by now in the twilight of his life and political career, declared that

> it is a regrettable fact that successive Sinhalese governments have used the power that flows from independence to deny us our fundamental rights and reduce us to the position of a subject people...I wish to announce to my people and to the country that I consider that...the *Tamil Eelam nation* should exercise the sovereignty already vested in the Tamil people and become free (Wilson 1988: 88) (emphasis added).

Less than a year later, in May 1976, and months before he died, Chelvanayakam presided over the first convention, held in the town of Pannakam in the northern Jaffna peninsula, of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), an umbrella-grouping consisting of the FP, the ACTC and the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC, representing the plantation Tamils), which solemnly resolved that 'the restoration and reconstitution of the Free, Sovereign, Secular, Socialist State of Tamil Eelam based on the right of self-determination inherent in every nation has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil nation in this country' (cited in Wilson 1988: 89).[13]

13 The CWC, however, tactfully dissociated itself from this demand, for the vast majority of its constituency, the plantation workers, lived outside the north and east, the territory of the proposed Tamil state.

What accounted for such a drastic change of heart among the Sri Lankan Tamil political leadership?

Admittedly, the provocations had been many and grave. In 1970, the SLFP, allied with two ostensibly 'leftist' parties, the LSSP and the CP,[14] had been returned to power with a thumping majority (the FP had swept the Tamil constituencies, as usual). In 1972, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, SLFP Premier and widow of Solomon Bandaranaike, dumbfounded Tamils by steamrolling a new 'Republican Constitution' through Parliament. This constitution, which replaced the Soulbury Constitution which had been in operation since 1947, practically amounted to a charter of Sinhalese-

14 With respect to the national question, the record of both the traditional and the non-traditional Sinhalese Left has been one of sorry self-debasement. During the 1940s and 1950s, the two major traditional leftist parties, the LSSP (founded 1935) and the CP (formed in 1943) had, to their credit, resolutely opposed the discriminatory legislation enacted against the plantation Tamils, and courageously supported 'parity of status' for the Sinhalese and Tamil languages. However, this situation changed from the end-1950s onwards. The LSSP and CP were electorally oriented parliamentary parties, and their base lay in the Sinhalese areas. By the late 1950s, they were losing cadres and voters because of their progressive policy on the national question. Unable to withstand this pressure, they succumbed to the 'competitive chauvinism' of Sinhalese party politics, till, by the mid-1960s, their attitude towards the Tamil minorities could scarcely be differentiated from the strident bigotry of the SLFP. In 1972, the Minister in Sirimavo Bandaranaike's cabinet who drafted the 'Republican Constitution' was a veteran LSSP socialist and former vocal champion of Tamil rights.

The non-traditional Sinhalese left was represented by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, literally, 'People's Liberation Front'), an extra-parliamentary youth movement which led two failed insurrections against the Colombo government, the first in 1971 and the second between 1987 and 1990. Both uprisings precipitated vicious intra-Sinhalese civil wars, but were eventually put down with great loss of life—some 10,000 young pro-JVP Sinhalese may have been killed in 1971, and at least several times that number (including the entire top leadership) probably perished between 1987 and 1990. The JVP, for its part, gained a rather unsavoury reputation for both political opportunism and indiscriminate brutality in course of its attempts to seize power. The movement came into being in the late 1960s as a breakaway splinter of the traditional left. The party's 'ideology' consisted primarily of an exceptionally virulent and xenophobic Sinhalese chauvinism, which its leaders combined with a totally garbled and incoherent 'Marxism' into a particularly sour cocktail. In hindsight, this is not particularly surprising—almost all top JVP organisers, as well as the majority of its cadres, came from small-town backgrounds, were products of Buddhist schools in the strongly Sinhala-nationalist deep South, and grew up in a political environment of mindless anti-Tamil hostility during the 1960s and 1970s.

Buddhist supremacy.[15] It granted recognition to Buddhism as the *de facto* state religion, and re-affirmed the pre-eminence of the Sinhalese language in all aspects of public life. Worse, the new Constitution did away with even the formal safeguards for minorities that had been incorporated into the Soulbury Constitution. The other major assault by the state on minority rights took place in the closely related spheres of higher education and state employment. This was a much more complicated story, and merits careful explanation.

After 1956, the proportion of Tamils in administrative and clerical jobs in the state sector suffered a continuous decline.[16] However, in certain *professional* fields like medicine, engineering and accountancy, the proportion of Tamils in the service of the state had either remained more or less static or had actually *increased* in the decade or so following 1956.[17] The reason for this was that Sri Lankan Tamils, long academic overachievers, had now begun to concentrate heavily on obtaining higher education in the sciences, especially medicine and engineering. In this effort, they were assisted by the relatively advanced facilities for teaching science at the high-school level that existed in the Jaffna peninsula. As Nithiyanandan comments:

> When administrative posts in the public sector became increasingly difficult to obtain, the Tamils began to rely heavily on professional jobs. Acquiring any type of education was no longer sufficient. *It had to be profession-oriented*...with entry into universities still purely on merit, this tendency was reflected in a soaring proportion of Tamils entering the universities for

15 The 1972 Constitution also formally changed the name of the country from 'Ceylon' to 'Sri Lanka'. As with other provisions of the constitution, this was done without even a semblance of consultation with the political representatives of the Tamils.

16 For instance, according to an estimate made by a trade union of Tamil government employees, Tamil representation in the Ceylon Clerical Service and Ceylon Administrative Service fell from 50 per cent to 30 per cent and from 30 per cent to 20 per cent respectively of the total in the decade between 1956 and 1965. Cited in Nithiyanandan (1987: 118-19).

17 According to statistics compiled by Abeysekera, for instance, the proportion of Tamil doctors in the government medical service rose from 35 per cent in 1955 to 41 per cent in 1963, while the proportion of Tamil engineers and accountants in the employ of the government fell only marginally, from 48 to 44 per cent and 60 to 56 per cent, respectively. Ibid.

> professional courses of study...this trend continued till 1970, when Tamils made up 35 per cent of all admissions to science-based courses at the university level, obtaining 41 per cent of the places in both engineering and medicine (Nithiyanandan 1987: 120-21) (emphasis added).

Although university education had expanded greatly in Sri Lanka since independence, the expansion had been greatest in humanities disciplines, and facilities for teaching science at the high-school level had remained under-developed in Sinhalese rural areas. By 1970, in the words of C.R. De Silva:

> it was becoming evident that in science education students from Sinhalese rural areas could not compete on equal terms with students from urban areas, especially those from Jaffna. As long as university admissions remained based on merit alone, the chances of a sufficient number of Sinhalese entering university science courses looked slim (De Silva 1984: 125-46).

This situation, with its implications for continuing Tamil predominance in crucial sectors of government employment, was obviously not to the liking of the Sinhalese-Buddhist state, given its general ideological orientation. Thus, between 1970 and 1973, university admissions to science-based courses were 'standardised' in three stages. A system was devised whereby the average Tamil student would have to score substantially higher marks than the average Sinhalese student in qualifying entrance examinations in order to gain admission to university medicine and engineering courses.

When this measure failed to substantially reduce the proportion of Tamils gaining admission to such courses, an even more drastic scheme was introduced, whereby the number of students admitted to these courses was tied to the proportion of their district's share of the total population of the country. This time, the effect on Sri Lankan Tamils was severe and immediate. Between 1970 and 1975, the proportion of Tamils among university-level medicine and engineering students more than halved, from 40 per cent to 19 per cent, while Sinhalese representation rose from 58 per cent to 78 per cent (Nithiyanandan 1987: 127).

Jaffna district was worst-affected. In 1974, 398 young Tamils from Jaffna qualified, on the basis of merit alone, to enter university

medical courses, and 575 for engineering courses. On the basis of district quotas, only 34 and 37 places, respectively, were open to these candidates (Horowitz 1985: 663-64). In Nithiyanandan's words, this development 'wiped out the last resort of many Tamils, i.e., professional employment. This could be termed the climax of a rapidly growing unemployment problem among Tamils' (1987: 128). As Walter Schwarz wrote in 1975, 'nothing arouses deeper despair among the Tamils than the feeling that they are being systematically squeezed out of higher education' (1975: 12).

However, in my opinion, the importance of this apparent discrimination against qualified Tamil candidates should not be exaggerated, as it often has. The numbers involved were relatively small (the Jaffna peninsula had close to 750,000 inhabitants in the mid-seventies), and, in any case, admissions to university science courses were an issue only with the Tamil urban petty-bourgeoisie, a numerical minority within Jaffna district and certainly even more so for the North and East taken as a whole. In fact, the university admissions issue 'aroused very little interest in other Tamil areas', apart from Jaffna (Nithiyanandan 1987: 137). It is significant that during approximately the same time-period that 'standardisation' went into effect, the small-holding Jaffna peasantry, who comprised a clear majority of the population of Jaffna district, reaped unprecedented profits from an also newly-introduced protectionist state policy with regard to the agricultural commodities they produced, primarily subsidiary foodstuffs such as onions, chillies and potatoes. With a complete state ban on import of these items, the Jaffna peasants were able to sell the large surplus quantities they produced at inflated prices on the domestic market, leading to significant improvement during these years in the economic prosperity of the small-holding Tamil agricultural class in the far north.

However, the policy of admissions standardisation, and an unprovoked attack by the Sinhalese police on a prestigious international Tamil cultural conference being held in Jaffna city in January 1974, convinced large sections of the Jaffna Tamil urban petty-bourgeoisie, especially the youth, that the Sinhalese state was out to 'get them'. And these also happened to be the most politically active and articulate elements among the Jaffna Tamils. In particular, they had traditionally formed the backbone of parties such as the FP, which was 'essentially...middle class in character

...and mainly motivated by problems facing [either the national or] the petty-bourgeoisie', for 'the conventional leadership of the Tamils had never been able to play a dynamic role, especially in organising the Jaffna peasantry' (Nithiyanandan 1987: 136, 141).

It is quite probable that the radical shift in the TULF's political agenda, from federalism to secession, was more a response to the pressure of its traditional petty-bourgeois constituents than anything else. This is not to imply, however, that the FP or the TULF were *exclusively* petty-bourgeois parties; the TULF won 79 per cent of the popular vote in Jaffna district in the 1977 parliamentary elections, an impossible feat if its programme did not enjoy massive support among all classes of society, and in the rural as well as the urban areas.

More ominously for Colombo, elements among the urban petty-bourgeois Tamil youth, whose prospects of higher education and employment had all but evaporated as a result of 'standardisation', began to gravitate towards organising armed resistance to symbols of state authority in the Jaffna peninsula. The first violence came in mid-1975, when the SLFP organiser for Jaffna, a Tamil, was assassinated.[18] In fact, there is much reason to believe that the nucleus of the armed youth insurrection, which was to assume mammoth proportions in the Jaffna area and the rest of the north and east during the eighties, was formed by this initial hard core of embittered Jaffna Tamil petty-bourgeois youth. As the pioneers of this unfolding phenomenon of 'youth power', the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), described it, 'the Government's discriminatory programme of "standardisation" ...practically closed the doors to higher education and employment. Despair, disillusionment and a bleak future confronted the educated young Tamils' (LTTE: *Socialist Tamil Eelam*, 7). C.R. De Silva has commented that the standardisation policy 'was an object lesson in how inept policy measures and insensitivity to minority interests can exacerbate ethnic tensions' (De Silva 1984: 133-34).[19]

18 The young Tamil who carried out this assassination was a 20-year old from the far north of the Jaffna peninsula named Velupillai Prabhakaran. Prabhakaran was to attain the status of a living legend in the 1980s as supreme commander of the principal Tamil national liberation movement, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). He continues to hold this position till the present day.

19 Even the government soon discovered that its brainchild was not just counterproductive, but unproductive as well. A government commission appointed to probe the consequences of the policy reported that 'it would have been

The UNP, which displaced Mrs. Bandaranaike's SLFP from power in 1977, rolled back this policy to some extent, but the Jaffna Tamils never again regained their pre-1970 share of university admissions in medicine and engineering. In any case, the damage had already been done in terms of the radicalisation of Tamil youth, with all its implications for the future of Sinhalese-Tamil relations.

The activities of the state in the educational sphere also seem to have exercised a destructive impact on prospects of inter-community harmony in an even more fundamental and dangerous manner. In a study published in 1983, entitled *National Unity or Communalism: The Textbooks Our Children Read*, Reggie Siriwardene, a noted Sinhalese academic, observed that

> while the [state-produced] Tamil readers do seek to create an understanding of and respect for the way of life and cultures of non-Tamil and non-Hindu linguistic and religious groups, and do attempt to project a sense of a common national identity, the Sinhala books are exclusively mono-cultural in their content—the way of life they present is not only solely Sinhala but also solely Sinhala-Buddhist...the Tamils are identified throughout as the 'traditional adversary'...in one of these books...the independence won in 1948 is described as having been gained and to be enjoyed solely by the Sinhalese! (cited in Wilson 1988: 44).

A. Sivanandan remarked in 1984 that 'whatever the thinking behind this...policy—the readers, published under the last government, continue to be reprinted under this one—it should certainly help produce a generation of small-minded, insular Sinhala Nazis' (1990: 232).

It was in this context that the TULF appealed to the Tamil people of the north and east to give their candidates a resounding mandate for 'Eelam' at the 1977 general elections. The TULF manifesto stated that

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fairer to base quotas on student population in twelfth grade rather than on total population of the district; the educationally backward districts appear to have benefited only marginally; and the main beneficiaries appear to have been students from more affluent families, who received their primary education in less-developed districts and were thus allowed to claim places for those districts'.

> the Tamil United Liberation Front seeks in the general election the mandate of the Tamil Nation to establish an independent, sovereign, secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam that includes all geographically contiguous areas that have been the traditional homelands of the Tamil-speaking people of the country...the only way to announce this decision to the Sinhalese state and to the world is to vote for the Tamil United Liberation Front.

The manifesto further declared that

> the Tamil-speaking representatives who get elected through these votes, while being members of the Parliament of Ceylon, will also form themselves into a 'National Assembly of Tamil Eelam', which will draft a Constitution for the state of Tamil Eelam and will establish the independence of Tamil Eelam by bringing that constitution into operation *either by peaceful means or through direct action and struggle* (cited in Balasingham 1983: 27-28) (emphasis added).

The popular response was, on the whole, impressive. It was overwhelming in the northern province, where the TULF captured every single one of the 14 parliamentary seats. The picture in the demographically mixed eastern province was more ambiguous—here, the TULF contested 8 of the total of 10 seats and won four of them.

Wilson has observed that though it was the actions of Mrs. Bandaranaike that served as 'the catalyst of the concept of a separate Tamil state', 'the move was reinforced by the actions of the Jayewardene government after 1977'. During the first six years of the Jayewardene regime, there were four serious outbreaks of ethnic rioting (in 1977, 1979, 1981 and 1983)[20] directed against Tamils. The worst of the pogroms was the one in July 1983, when, ostensibly in reprisal for an LTTE ambush near Jaffna in which 13 Sinhalese soldiers were killed, up to 3,000 Tamils were murdered by mobs in Sinhalese-majority areas, the economic base

20 The 1977 riots were also very severe, and led to a large influx of Tamil refugees from the Sinhalese-majority areas into Jaffna and other parts of the north and east. During the 1981 riots, Tamil opinion was particularly appalled when Sinhalese policemen stationed in the north went on rampage in Jaffna city and totally destroyed the Jaffna Public Library, a repository of many priceless manuscripts and artefacts.

of the Tamils in Colombo was all but destroyed, and some 150,000 Tamils were made homeless. Tens of thousands of Tamil refugees fled to India's southern province of Tamil Nadu, and many more to the West, thereby 'internationalising' the Tamil issue.[21]

It was also only *after* July 1983 that Tamil youth began joining the LTTE and similar radical groups in really significant numbers, and that the armed insurgency spread from the peninsula to other areas of the North and East. Military repression intensified in the north in the late 1970s as small groups of 'Tigers' stepped up their attacks on symbols of state authority, such as police stations, army camps, banks and administrative offices. In 1978, the government enacted a law which proscribed the LTTE and 'other similar organisations'.

In July 1979, this was replaced by a draconian ordinance called the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which gave the police and armed forces blanket powers and effectively brought the whole of the north under martial law. A Sri Lankan army brigadier was dispatched to Jaffna, with a mandate to 'stamp out terrorism within six months'. A noted American jurist, Virginia Leary, who visited Sri Lanka in 1981, wrote of the PTA that

> a number of the objectionable features of the PTA are similar to the provisions of the widely-criticised South African Terrorism Act of 1967...the South African act has been called 'a piece of legislation that must shock the conscience of a lawyer'. Many of the provisions of the Sri Lankan act are equally contrary to accepted principles of the Rule of Law (Leary 1983).

Indeed, the PTA, together with an even more infamous amendment known as Regulation 15(A), passed in 1983, effectively legalised the following: 'terrorist' suspects could be held for upto 18 months without trial; any premises could be searched at any time without a warrant; confessions obtained during 'interrogation' (an euphemism, in Sri Lanka, for torture) would be admissible as legal evidence; and 'security forces' were empowered to dispose

21 Thugs belonging to the UNP's trade-union organisation, the Jathika Sevaya Sangamaya (JSS), are said to have orchestrated the anti-Tamil violence in Colombo and elsewhere in July 1983. An interesting political economy explanation for the intensity of the July 1983 violence in Colombo has been presented by Gunasinghe (1984: 197-214).

of any corpse in their possession without an autopsy, inquest or other form of enquiry into the cause of death. Not entirely unpredictably, the net effect of the PTA was that 'at the end of the six months, the spectre of terrorism that...the President had sent the troops to "wipe out" had been made flesh by the army' (Sivanandan 1990: 240). As a memorandum of the Ceylon Institute of National and Tamil Affairs (CINTA), presented to President Jayewardene in September 1982, observed:

> Since 1977 there has been a reign of terror in the north unleashed by the armed forces. Instead of curbing violence, it has escalated the incidence of violence, as can be seen from the increasing number of killings of army personnel. We need hardly state that the terrorism of the armed forces has been counterproductive...the reason is that the grievances of the people are far too deep-seated to be smothered by batons and bullets (cited in Ponnambalam 1983: 204-205).

Nithiyanandan notes that 'a direct correlation could be observed between the growth of Tamil militancy and police and military excesses' (1987: 150) and Tambiah warned in 1986 that 'what the Sri Lankan government is achieving by its persistent military action and terrorising of all Tamils is to drive the latter...toward the imagined haven of Eelam and a blanket ethnic solidarity' (1986: 124). The situation was made much worse by the fact that the Sri Lankan army was (and is) composed almost entirely of Sinhalese, mainly from small-propertied rural backgrounds, and an intensely Sinhala-Buddhist ethos pervaded both the officer corps and the rank-and-file.[22]

However, Jayewardene did attempt, even if feebly, to include the carrot with the stick. First, there was some constitutional engineering, aimed at eliminating the worst tendencies towards 'competitive chauvinism' in Sinhalese party politics. A modified form of proportional representation was introduced, which, if applied, would tend to bring about a moderate degree of equalisation

22 For an illuminating discussion of the evolution of the all-Sinhalese army, see Gunasinghe (1989: 243-49). This polarising aspect of the Sri Lankan military situation sharply differentiates it from, say, the insurgency in India's north-western Punjab province, where hundreds of thousands of Sikhs employed in the police, paramilitary and army of the Indian state have been ranged against thousands of their militantly secessionist brethren.

between the proportion of the popular vote obtained by a political party and the proportion of seats secured by it. The idea behind this was to make impossible massive seat majorities on the basis of slender voting pluralities, and compel the Sinhalese party that emerged as the front-runner to look for support to the party or parties representing the Tamils, in order to be able to form a stable government. The other major innovation was the introduction of a strong presidential executive, modelled on the (Gaullist) French Fifth Republic, which would, presumably, be above the pettiness of legislative politics, and hence, act as a stabilising influence and impartial arbiter. The intention behind both of these reforms, which technically went into effect in 1978, was sound enough. However, they failed entirely to fulfil their central purpose of exercising a mitigating effect on the mushrooming Sinhalese-Tamil polarisation and violence.

First, President Jayewardene proved utterly incapable of measuring up to the role of a neutral arbiter. On the contrary, his figure came to be identified, in the Tamil mind, with the worst of the violence of the military and the mobs. His tactless public pronouncements did not help matters. His speech to the 'nation' (*sic*) in the aftermath of the July 1983 pogrom did not contain a single word of condemnation of the rioters or sympathy for the victims—on the contrary, he indirectly blamed the Tamils for 'provoking' the violence. As a distinguished British jurist, Paul Sieghart (1984) remarked, 'that was a misjudgment of monumental proportions; I am yet to meet a single Tamil at any level in Sri Lanka who does not remind me of this glaring omission at the first opportunity'. On 11 July, the President had informed an interviewer from a British newspaper, 'I am not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna people...now we can't think of them. Not about their lives or of their opinion of us'.[23]

Second, the first parliamentary election to be held in Sri Lanka after that of 1977 was more than *eleven* years later, in February 1989, for the UNP government managed, by conducting a 'referendum' of highly dubious constitutional validity, to obtain public assent for prolonging the Parliament whose term was to have expired in 1982 for a further six years. The conduct of this 'referendum' was severely marred by allegations of widespread malpractice and fraud (Samarakone 1984: 84-117).

23 *Daily Telegraph*, London, 11 July 1983.

By 1989, however, the 'rivers of blood' had become simply too vast for tricks of constitutional engineering to retain much efficacy. In any case, it is extremely doubtful whether such utterly superficial measures as proportional representation in parliamentary elections constituted any part of the answer to the core problem. The centre of gravity of the Tamil political agenda had moved to regional autonomy more than twenty years earlier (electing more Tamil MPs to the central Parliament was, at best, a marginal concern), and the Sri Lankan Tamils were simply too small a proportion of the population for proportional representation to alleviate their plight to any substantive degree. While the possibility that tricks of 'constitutional engineering', if adopted much earlier, might just have exercised a mitigating effect on the conflict cannot be entirely precluded, it certainly represented a perfect example of 'far too little, much too late' in the Sri Lanka of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

President Jayewardene's other ploy was to initiate talks with the TULF leadership, albeit indirectly. In this, he enlisted the services of a respected Tamil academic, Alfred Jeyaratnam Wilson, who served as the intermediary. The agenda consisted of a revival of the old and hackneyed proposal of 'district development councils', with very limited autonomy—no substantive devolution of power, apparently, was on the cards. Nothing much came of even this pathetically inadequate proposal, primarily because of various forms of foot-dragging and obstructionist tactics resorted to by Jayewardene and senior members of his party and government (see Wilson 1988: 134-74). The President appeared to have made the fatal miscalculation of thinking that he could successfully on the one hand go on 'talking' indefinitely to the TULF leadership, while simultaneously crushing the Tamil youth insurgents through military force. This strategy misfired badly, to say the very least.

And what of the fate of the tradition-bound, conservative, and elitist upper and upper middle class TULF leadership? Their clarion-call for the creation of a separate state had almost certainly been motivated by a desire to use this demand, and the popular sentiment coalescing around it, as Reggie Siriwardene has put it, as a bargaining-counter with the government.[24] Their attitude

24 Interview in a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) programme on the strife in the eastern province of Sri Lanka, televised on BBC's second channel in London

can perhaps best be characterised as 'reach-for-the-sky-and-you-might-just-hit-the-ceiling'. However, the problem with *this* strategy was that large segments of the Tamil youth appeared to have taken the TULF's fiery declarations at face value. Consequently, the credibility of the TULF leadership suffered a fatal blow among their own people, but particularly amongst the radicalised youth, when it became apparent that they had no intention whatsoever of translating their secessionist programme into practice. Indeed, as Siriwardene has pointed out, realistically speaking, the only way an ideal such as Eelam could possibly be achieved was through armed struggle,[25] but the upper middle class professionals and 'intellectuals' of the TULF, comfortably ensconced in Colombo's posh clubs and well-appointed drawing rooms, were unfortunately not cut out for waging any form of radical struggle, and especially one that involved killing and being killed. As the Tamil scholar Karthigesu Sivathamby writes:

> In political terms, youth militancy arose as a reaction to what was seen as the all-too-conciliatory parliamentarism of the TULF, which in 1976 demanded a separate state but, when it came to political negotiations, was always discussing 'district councils'...youth militancy demanded of the Tamil politician to mean what he said (1989: 249-55).

But he did not, and faded rapidly into political oblivion (the TULF is defunct today). Indeed, the total impotence and bankruptcy of the TULF approach to politics is amply demonstrated by the recent writings of one of its leading lights during the late 1970s and early 1980s. He admits that

> the electoral process reinforced, sanctioned and stabilised Sinhala-Buddhist predominance in the political and socio-economic spheres. The legislative forums, instead of becoming arenas for accommodation, often served to assert the dominance of the majority...to what extent was agitation possible outside this framework? In 1956-58 and 1961, *satyagraha* campaigns were instituted for non-violent agitation in favour of linguistic equality. The mob violence inflicted on peaceful protestors in

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in May 1991.

25 Ibid.

> Colombo and the repressive measures the state directed against the campaign elsewhere clearly indicated that this form of protest and dissent would not be tolerated (Thiruchelvam 1984: 185-95).

The logical culmination of this line of analysis, one might reasonably expect, would be that the rise of some more radical form of struggle is inevitable. However, the same writer then proceeds to 'unequivocally dissociate' himself, and his colleagues, from 'acts of violence...in the north', and self-righteously proclaims that non-violence is a 'central article of their [the TULF's] political faith, and that violence as an instrument of political pressure and bargaining is morally unacceptable' (Thiruchelvam 1984: 193).

Fair enough. Recall, though, that this very same leadership had pledged, in 1977, to establish the independent state of Eelam '*either* by peaceful means *or* by direct action and struggle'. One can scarcely imagine a more blatant (and sanctimonious) hypocrisy. Little wonder, then, that the social forces unleashed in the north and east by the youth upsurge had no patience for what they contemptuously dismissed as 'TULF-style nationalism'.

From now on, the TULF leadership, regarded as cowardly traitors, were to be *persona non grata* on the soil of the very 'homeland' whose independence they had promised to achieve![26] Admittedly, the fault was not entirely the TULF's—its MPs had lost their seats in Parliament because of an amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution (known as the Sixth Amendment), passed in August 1983, which deprived, among others, MPs who refused to take an oath against secession, of their right to sit in Parliament. This move represented an egregious blunder on the part of the Jayewardene regime. As it was, not a *single* elected Tamil representative from the northern province had ever held a ministerial portfolio in the central government since 1956. By throwing out the TULF parliamentarians, the state had handed the leadership of the Tamil movement for national self-determination on a platter to those it condemned as 'terrorists'.

26 The final *denouement* was to come in July 1989, when A. Amirthalingam, leader of TULF since Chelvanayakam's death in 1977, was assassinated by young Tamils, reportedly gunmen from the LTTE, in his house in Colombo. The assassins were also killed, before they could escape, by Amirthalingam's Sri Lanka Army bodyguards.

As Jonathan Spencer has written:

> It is possible to view Tamil political history as a kind of doomed and unconscious acting out of the most paranoid fantasies of the majority community. In the 1950s, any suggestion of minor administrative devolution to the Tamil areas was greeted with the response from Sinhalese chauvinists that this was just the thin end of the separatist wedge. By the 1970s, when 20 years of political frustration had finally led to popular support for separatism, these same chauvinists were able to say that they had been right all along (1984: 191-92).

In the jaundiced perspective of these 'chauvinists', of course, the rise of the movement for Tamil Eelam is a 'natural', 'inevitable' corollary of what they consider to be the inherent secessionist tendencies, and latent violent inclinations, of the Sri Lankan Tamils. This line of argument is, needless to say, not acceptable to serious scholars. Such a view entirely ignores what my interpretation holds to be the central causal factor that contributed to the growth of the modern Sinhalese–Tamil conflict—the consolidation of a Tamil identity, and the *gradual* rise of a demand for total severance from the extant juridical state, as a *societal response* to the policies and actions of a central state that tried to undermine, if not totally deny, that identity.

This, then, is the irony of the dialectical relationship of the Sinhalese-Buddhist state and Tamil civil society: the state elite's strenuous efforts to homogenise the population within its domains led, ultimately, only to division, discord and confrontation. The process of 'nation-building', as attempted by those at the apex of the Sri Lankan state, actually facilitated the emergence of a Tamil national consciousness, and eventually precipitated a crisis of the state defined in terms of a solidary, exclusivist Sinhalese-Buddhist interest and identity.

Conclusion

Excluded from access to the resources and opportunities that participant control of the Sri Lankan state would have given them, and repeatedly subjected to egregious assaults on their personal

safety and security, as well as on their dignity as a community, the Tamils, and particularly their younger generation, had become convinced, by the 1980s, that their collective salvation lay only in the creation of a sovereign territorial nation state—Tamil Eelam—to be carved out of the Tamil-majority north and east of the country. Joseph Rothschild, in a work devoted to delineating a theoretical framework for the comparative analysis of 'ethnic conflict' situations, has unwittingly provided a remarkably accurate description of the specific case of the modern Sinhalese-Tamil conflict, as it unfolded in Sri Lanka:

> In sum, the state has become the decisive political vehicle and political arena for ethnic groups—dominant and subordinate...in the present historical era, this means, in effect, that they must bid for exclusive or participant political control over and/or in a state. Without some such political leverage through a state-apparatus, even their cultural and socio-economic, let alone their political, interests are jeopardised. And, if an ethnic group's bid for an adequate share of political power and control within an extant multiethnic state proves unproductive, is repudiated as non-negotiable, or the like, it may then well make a secessionist bid for a state of its own—driven by interest, as well as emotion...this secessionist option is available, of course, only to regionally concentrated, autochthonous ethnic groups (1981: 232-33).

The Sinhalese-Buddhist elite went for a monopoly of power over the state apparatus, and sought to deny the Tamils even a participant share of control. The hegemonic framework they created in the process slowly but steadily destroyed Sri Lanka as an unified entity. Thus, it is the *historical dialectic* of the Sinhalese-Buddhist state and Tamil society that provides the key to understanding and explaining the genesis and evolution of the modern conflict in Sri Lanka.

But there was still one crucial element missing from the equation as Sri Lanka entered the 1980s, and this was succintly summarised in an early political tract of militant Tamil nationalism:

> Caught up in a revolutionary situation generated by...national oppression and constantly victimised by police brutality, the

> Tamil youth were compelled to abandon the Gandhian doctrine of *ahimsa* [non-violence], which they realised was irreconciliable with revolutionary political practice...the youth realised that the redemption to their plight lay in revolutionary politics...but the political structure of the TULF, founded on a conservative, bourgeois ideology, could not provide the basis for the articulation of revolutionary politics...these nationalist leaders, though they had fiercely championed the cause of the Tamils, had failed to formulate any concrete political programme of action to liberate the oppressed nation...confronted with this political vacuum and caught up in a revolutionary situation created by the concrete conditions of intolerable national oppression, the Tamil youth sought desperately to create a revolutionary political organisation to advance the task of national liberation (Balasingham 1983: 23, 25).

The remarkable story of this organisation, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, forms the subject of the next chapter. The Tigers were to emerge as the authoritative inheritors of the mantle of Tamil nationalism in course of the 1980s. Today, the LTTE is, for all practical purposes, the 'sole spokesman' of the Tamil national movement in Sri Lanka. But, in several substantive ways, the LTTE phase of Tamil nationalist politics is also quite distinct from the days of the FP or the TULF. First, and perhaps most important, is the drastic disjunction in the *method* of struggle—the leaders of the FP and the TULF, despite their frequent recourse to rabble-rousing rhetoric, were essentially conservative, constitutional politicians. Not so the fiery revolutionaries of the LTTE, to whom commitment to the armed struggle is an article of faith.

Second, the nationalists of LTTE are, unlike their predecessors, *genuinely* committed to the notion that Tamil self-determination can ultimately be achieved only through the creation of a separate national state.

Third, the social origins of the pioneer activists of the Tiger Movement are different from those of the Colombo-based elite that traditionally articulated Tamil nationalist aspirations—most top Tiger leaders are high-school dropouts from lower middle class families based in the Jaffna peninsula, with few links, if any, to Colombo.

Fourth, a comprehensive *generational turnover* in the composi-

tion of the Tamil political leadership accompanied the rise of the Tiger Movement—by the mid-1980s, young men in their twenties had replaced established politicians in their fifties and sixties as the popular representatives of the Tamil struggle.

Fifth, the movement led by the LTTE is significantly more broad-based, in terms of mass participation, than earlier organisational incarnations of Tamil nationalism. In particular, it was with the rise of the Tigers that a concern for progressive social change *within* the Tamil national formation first explicitly entered into the discourse and practice of Tamil nationalism.

There is an element of double irony in the relationship of the Tiger Movement to the Sri Lankan state, given that each seems irrevocably committed to the total destruction of the other. First, the Tigers can be regarded, from one angle, as being the *products* (unintentional, of course!) of state policy—in that the rise of the movement can, to a very considerable extent, be attributed to the progressive radicalisation of Tamil opinion over four decades, a process in which the state played a most central and crucial role, and which culminated in a serious crisis of alienation of almost the entire Tamil minority from a ruling apparatus widely perceived as unjust and oppressive, a mechanism of domination, coercion and control rather than of peaceful, legitimate governance. In a sense, the dialectic of the Sinhalese-Buddhist state and Tamil society had reached a critical climax with the emergence and consolidation of the Tigers. But perhaps the crowning irony was that the solution which the fervently radical young men and women of the LTTE proposed to the problem of state oppression was nothing but *another* state—albeit one which the Tamil nation could truly call its own.

3

Against the State: The Liberation Tigers and the Quest for a Tamil National Identity

We wish to state clearly and emphatically that we are not a group of amateur armed adventurists roaming in the jungles with romantic illusions, nor are we a band of terrorists or vandals who kill and destroy at random for anarchic reasons...on the contrary, we are revolutionaries committed to revolutionary political practice... we are the armed vanguard of the struggling masses, the freedom fighters of the oppressed. We are not in any way isolated and alienated from the popular masses but immersed in and integrated with the popular will, the collective soul of our nation... in the deluded eyes of your government, our movement appears to be a spectre of terrorism and anarchy. In reality, who are the terrorists? We assert, and we hold that we are right in our assertion, that it is the State... and those who poison the minds of the innocent Sinhala masses with racial fanaticism and chauvinism who are the real terrorists...we are fighting for a noble cause, the freedom of the oppressed nation. The revolutionary process towards national liberation and socialism will be long and arduous. Yet, we are convinced that no force on earth, however repressive it may be, can stop the revolutionary struggle we are committed to. Long Live Tamil Eelam!

—Open Letter from Velupillai Prabhakaran, Supreme Commander and Chairman, Central Committee, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, to Ranasinghe Premadasa, then Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, on the occasion of the enactment of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and dated 20 July 1979.[1]

1 For the full text of Prabhakaran's letter, see Ponnambalam (1983: 264-66).

We have no aspirations to dominate the Sinhalese. At the same time, we are not prepared to be dominated by them or any other power. For me, our struggle is a struggle for human dignity, for our self-respect as Tamils. That is what we want, our dignity. It is worth dying for it. We are willing to live in one country with the Sinhalese, but only as equals. I am willing to be a Lankan, but only on that basis. What is freedom, after all? Freedom is the recognition of other people's right to exist. All we want them to do is to recognise our right to exist.

—An elderly Tamil peasant woman, whose language 'flowed like poetry', Jaffna, June 1989, in Shanmugaratnam 1989: 1-16.

Only after the Sinhalese accept that we have a right to stay here as a nation, as a people, not just as individuals, can we accept a settlement. But frankly, I would be very sad if the boys were to settle for anything less than Eelam. After all this suffering, we would be back to square one.

—Fr. Nathan, a young Roman Catholic priest in Jaffna, September 1991, quoted by McDonald 1991: 24-28.

Introductory

'Insurrection, by means of guerrilla bands', wrote Giuseppe Mazzini, some 150 years ago, 'is the true method of warfare for all nations desirous of emancipating themselves from a foreign yoke' (cited in Connor 1987: 216). In recent times, few of the many movements pursuing a strategy that aims concurrently at state destruction and state creation have acted as methodically, painstakingly and successfully on Mazzini's precept as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The LTTE has been variously and colourfully described as 'one of the world's most highly disciplined and effective guerrilla movements', as 'way and ahead the most developed, resourceful and powerful of South Asian extremist organisations', or simply as 'the most fearsome terrorist group the world has seen since Sheikh Hassan bin Sabbah founded the sect of assassins' (Dalrymple 1991; Ram 1991; Joshi 1991: 23). As early as 1983, the Tigers, proclaiming themselves 'the armed vanguard of the national struggle', declared that 'we have chosen guerrilla warfare as the most effective mode of armed struggle after a careful and cautious appraisal of the specificities of our

national situation', and that 'our revolutionary project aims at the extension and transformation of protracted guerrilla warfare into a people's popular war of national liberation' (LTTE 1983: 42; LTTE: *Tamils Fight for National Freedom*).

The Tigers' 'project', and the state's response to it, has, in the last decade, enveloped Sri Lanka in general, but the north and east in particular, in a tidal wave of death and devastation. According to Eric Hobsbawm, more people, calculated in proportion to the total population, have, in the past decade, been killed as a result of political violence in Sri Lanka than in any other country of the world, except El Salvador.[2] Sri Lanka enjoys the equally dubious distinction of being the country with the single largest number of 'disappeared' persons—over 12,000 political disappearances have been formally recorded between 1983 and 1991.[3] The gravity of the situation was attested to by the United Nations Working Group on Disappearances, which stated in 1992 that 'the cases of disappearances alleged to have occurred in Sri Lanka rank as the best-documented...among those from the 40-odd countries appearing in the Group's annual reports...*the number of cases is by far the highest number ever recorded by the Working Group for any single country*' (*Amnesty*, June 1992: 2) (emphasis added).

The fall-out in the north-east, the principal battleground of the civil war, has been simply catastrophic. According to the Jaffna Citizens' Rehabilitation Committee, in the last six months of 1990 *alone*, 'more than 70,000 buildings in the north and east have been destroyed, more than 6,000 people (almost all Tamils, and counting only the non-combatants among them) have been killed or are "missing", and more than 1.2 million (civilians, and almost all Tamils) are now displaced' (West 1991). A recent Sri Lankan government report revealed that an estimated 487,000 children in the north-east had been 'affected' by the conflict—'exposed to the trauma of killing, displacement and deprivation', these unfortunates included 'orphaned and abandoned children,

2 Lecture on contemporary nationalism, delivered at the London School of Economics, 1 March 1991.

3 Of course, the actual total of disappeared is likely to be at least several times this number. This conservative figure was mentioned in the 1992 Report of the United Nations Working Group on Disappearances to the UN Commission on Human Rights. Cited in *Amnesty*, campaign journal of Amnesty International (British Section), June 1992, p. 2.

children with one parent, those suffering from malnutrition...disabled children and victims of emotional and psychological problems'.[4]

Perhaps the scale of the human tragedy will be even easier to comprehend if one recalls that all this has had to be endured by a 'nation' which, in 1981, numbered a total of 1,872,000 persons.[5] The extent of human misery, and the disruption and brutalisation of civil society, can be gauged from the fact that in the last six months of 1990, more than 3,000 Tamils (of both sexes, and all ages), were either killed or 'disappeared' in the wake of army operations in *one* district, Amparai, in the eastern province, while the same fate befell another 2,009 Tamils in the neighbouring Batticaloa district, according to individual case histories meticulously compiled and documented by human rights organisations (for example, Amnesty International 1991a).

Yet the Tigers' project appears to have thrived, after a fashion, in the midst of calamity (or perhaps because of it). A top leader of the movement confided to me that in July 1983, the LTTE military wing in Jaffna district had a total membership of 30 individuals.[6] By July 1987, when the Indian state, the regional superpower, made a massive, and unsuccessful, military intervention in an effort to quell the Tamil uprising, that figure had grown to some 4,000 (despite extremely stringent and selective recruiting standards, as well as high casualty rates). By the time the 100,000-strong Indian military force withdrew from north-eastern Sri Lanka, in March 1990, after having experienced its own version of Vietnam, the Tigers' core armed strength was estimated at well over 10,000, and they were well into the process of converting their irregular guerrilla formations into a conventional standing army.

On the political plane, the Tiger Movement has emerged as the 'sole spokesman' of the Tamil quest for sovereign statehood. The TULF, of dubious 'moderate' credentials, had long ceased to be a relevant factor in the political equation.[7] And while a

4 See the *Statesman* (Calcutta), 24 August 1992: report titled '487,000 Children Hit by Lankan Conflict'.

5 Official Census of the Government of Sri Lanka, 1981.

6 Personal interviews with Sathashivam Krishnakumar, alias 'Kittu', member of LTTE Central Committee, London, June-July 1991.

7 In course of my field research, I unearthed evidence which would appear to indicate that the ostensibly 'moderate' and 'peace-loving' TULF leadership was, in

multiplicity of radical guerrilla groups sprouted in the aftermath of July 1983, all, except the Tigers, have eventually debased themselves in the eyes of the Tamil populace either through criminal behaviour and/or 'collaboration' with the entities seen as the mortal enemies of the Tamil struggle, i.e., the Sri Lankan, and subsequently the Indian, states and their armed forces. This has enabled the Tigers, who were in any case always by far the largest, best organised, most disciplined and generally dominant among the Tamil fighting groups, to cruelly and ruthlessly liquidate most of the leadership and rank-and-file of these other elements without any apparent negative political repercussions among the Tamil population at large.[8]

What explains the amazing resilience and growth of the Tamil Tiger Movement? As N. Ram, a well-known Indian journalist, has commented, 'the belief that the Tigers' hegemony is purely a function of the movement's military prowess is a false construct. It will simply not do to ignore the politics behind the militant's AK-47' (Ram 1991). Newton Gunasinghe clarifies the point further: 'The overwhelming majority of the Tamil people in the North and East perceive the armed militants as liberation fighters, who use the classic guerrilla strategy of disappearing among the people after combat' (1989: 248). As another observer has pointed out, the ruthless discipline that the LTTE leadership demands of its

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1983-84, desperately trying to create its own paramilitary force, in order to counteract the growing influence of the radical youth groups, particularly the LTTE, among the Tamil population. But to no avail.

8 The more significant of the non-Tiger militant groups were the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and, later, the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF). Of these, only the EROS has survived the Tigers' deliberate and sinister policy of getting rid of all potential and actual competitors for Tamil popular support. The most celebrated of the Tamil 'inter-group' clashes was in May 1986, when the Tigers virtually wiped out TELO's political leadership and fighting cadre. It is noteworthy, however, that such internecine conflict has been endemic to most 'national liberation' movements, especially those that use violent means to achieve their ends. Such rivalry typically produces one of two outcomes—either some kind of uneasy alliance, as reflected in an umbrella coalition (such as the PLO), or the undisputed supremacy of one group, and the marginalisation of others (as in the case of the LTTE, or Robert Mugabe's ZANU in Zimbabwe). Recall that even Algeria's FLN emerged as the champion of that country's anti-colonial movement only after physically eliminating rivals for the nationalist mantle.

following does not, on the whole, appear to be regarded as oppressive because 'the Tigers' cause, in the minds of the typically poor and middle-class young Tamils they recruit, is just' (Desmond 1991a). To quote N. Ram once again:

> As a political force among the Tamils of the north and east the LTTE cannot be bypassed because it is the 'boys', as they are still called, sometimes affectionately, at times chidingly, who are seen as the spearhead of the Tamil struggle for equality, security and justice—for all the brutalities that the Tigers have inflicted on their political opponents, on innocent people and on civil society...the LTTE is unsinkable, at least for the foreseeable future (Ram 1991).

Indeed, even certain individuals affiliated to rival Tamil groups which have suffered grievously at the Tigers' hands have conceded, albeit grudgingly, that not only is the LTTE not an 'artificial' superimposition on Tamil society, but it is the 'concentrated expression of Jaffna society', a phenomenon 'organic' to the Tamil social formation.[9]

The central purpose of this chapter is to study the dialectic of state oppression and nationalist resistance that underlies the meteoric growth and continuing dynamism of the Tiger Movement. In addition to the available secondary literature in the field, this chapter has made extensive use of primary source materials; most particularly, the publications and documents of the movement itself. As Walker Connor has remarked:

> A potentially fruitful source, and area of research, in probing the nature of ethnonationalism consists of the speeches of national leaders and the pamphlets, programs and other documentation of ethnonationalist organisations. Too often have these speeches and documents been passed over as useless propaganda in which their authors do not really believe. But nationalism is a mass phenomenon, and the degree to which its leaders are true believers or not does not affect its reality.

9 Dayan Jayatilleke, interviewed in *Suicide Killers*, a BBC documentary made by Stephen Lambert on the LTTE and first shown on 23 October 1991. Jayatilleke is known to have had close connections with the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), an anti-LTTE Tamil guerrilla group.

> The question, really, is not the sincerity of the propagandist, but the nature of the mass instinct to which the propagandist appeals (1987: 207).

I have also repeatedly drawn upon the insights gained from my personal interviews and conversations with activists of the LTTE, ranging from one of the highest-ranking leaders in the movement's hierarchy to a rank-and-file suicide-bomber. Particularly useful were my long hours of dialogue with one of the ablest and most impressive of the many talented military commanders and political leaders the movement has yet produced. This was Mr. Sathashivam Krishnakumar (universally known by his nickname, 'Kittu'), formerly the deputy leader of the LTTE, and, till his reported death in January 1993, a key member of the movement's Supreme Command.[10]

I have also liberally used other material gathered in course of my field research in India and Sri Lanka; most notably, personal interviews with a host of political figures, media persons and foreign policy officials.

The Argument in Outline

We have already seen, in the preceding chapter, how the policies of the Sri Lankan state contributed to the progressive radicalisation of the Tamil movement for national self-determination. A central

10 Kittu, one of the earliest recruits to the movement (he joined in 1978, at the age of 18), was the Tigers' military commander for the northern Jaffna region between 1983 and 1987, during which time the Tigers 'liberated' the peninsula of government control, and effected their own crucial transition from a hit-and-run group to a mass-based armed insurgency. He had also, at different times, been the unofficial LTTE envoy to India, and central coordinator of the movement's worldwide fund-raising and propaganda operations, headquartered in London. He was, in addition, a senior member of the LTTE's top policy-making body, the 10-member Central Committee.

In January 1993, Kittu was reported to have unexpectedly lost his life in circumstances that can only be described as extremely suspicious and murky. He was purportedly killed, along with several other Tigers, when a ship in which he was travelling in the Indian Ocean was first intercepted (allegedly in international waters) and subsequently attacked from sea and air by crack units of the Indian navy and air force. However, his body is not known to have been recovered, and the exact manner of his death is yet to be conclusively established.

argument of this chapter is that state policy, and especially the military terror and repression directed during the 1980s against the Tamil population in general, played, if anything, an even more vital catalytic role in Sri Lanka's 'ethnic conflict' going beyond the 'point of no return', and contributed greatly to the ascendancy of the Tigers in Tamil politics. Some of the concrete historical factors that contributed to this ascendancy (such as the bankruptcy of both the traditional Left and the constitutional-nationalist TULF), have been indicated in the previous chapter. However, I am equally convinced that we need to avoid overly simplistic and unsubstantiated generalisations about the Tigers' 'hegemony' in Tamil politics being *solely* a monocausal function of the coercion of the state, and the consequent alienation of the Tamils. I believe that the LTTE would not have been able to develop and consolidate, leave alone sustain (and that too in conditions of extreme suffering, privation and adversity), its mass base among the Tamil population, had it not also been for certain special facets of the movement's guiding ideology and the viability in the Tamil situation of the long-term strategy and short-term tactics employed by its leaders: in short, the organisation's successful wedding of the 'objective' conditions of 'intolerable national oppression' with the 'subjective' reality of a massive armed insurrection spearheaded by the 'revolutionary youth'.

In particular, it is imperative to recognise that Tamil youth militancy operates in two separate, if organically interconnected spheres. First, and most visibly, with regard to the 'national question', but also as a manifestation of 'social radicalism' and revolt, which is calling into question some of the assumptions of the foundations of Sri Lankan Tamil society' (Sivathamby 1989: 250). Even those hostile to Tamil nationalism in general, and its revolutionary variety in particular, have been compelled to admit that

> [radical] Tamil nationalism has had a positive impact on Sri Lankan Tamil society; with its rise, for the first time, Tamil politics is actively speaking out against distinctions of class, caste and gender. Sri Lankan Tamil society, which was conservative and hierarchical, is finally being challenged from within...Tamil political awareness, as reflected in the writings

> of those committed to this nationalism, has within it the seeds of social liberation (Coomaraswamy 1987: 75).

It is only when one addresses this dialectic between the 'national' and the 'social' that one can begin to understand the resilience and enduring mass appeal of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. In Hegelian terminology, the 'national question' and the 'social radicalism/revolt' of the younger generation are but parts that make up the totality, the composite whole. This is not to disregard, in any way, the pivotal role that state coercion and repression has played in the rise and consolidation of the Tiger Movement. My thesis, rather, is that in order to make sense of the apparent strength and persistence of the current Tamil nationalist response to the Sinhalese-Buddhist state, one has to emphasise the *complementarity* of the contributions made by state repression, on the one hand, and LTTE strategies of social mobilisation, on the other. I contend that it is the *dialectical interaction*, the *historical conjunction*, the *cumulative effect* of these two sets of causal variables (the Sinhalese-Buddhist state and Tamil society), that has culminated today in the creation of a cohesive and determined Tamil nationalist movement under Liberation Tiger leadership.

This chapter focuses, in particular, on two salient aspects of LTTE strategy—the aggressive mobilisation in the nationalist struggle of traditionally degraded and peripheral social groups *within* the Tamil formation (such as women, 'low-castes', peasants, fisherfolk and artisans); and the movement's conscious promotion of a highly emotive cult of revolutionary violence and martyrdom as an instrument with which to forge and cement the bonds of Tamil solidarity. Of course, the very *existence*, leave alone the success, of either of these strategies of social mobilisation would have been unimaginable in the absence of orchestrated state oppression. A political climate of state-initiated brutality and violence has been truly indispensable to the expansion of the Tiger Movement.

State Repression and the Consolidation of a Tamil National Identity: The Rise of The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

It could indeed be asserted...[that] no nation, in the true sense of the word, could be born without war; that no self-conscious community

could establish itself as a new and independent actor...without an armed conflict or the threat of one.

—Michael Howard (1979: 102)

As Karthigesu Sivathamby has noted, 'Sri Lankan Tamil youth, especially those from the northern part of the country, have a tradition of non-conformist, idealist struggle' (1989: 253). In the early 1930s, the Jaffna Youth Congress had initiated a civil disobedience campaign in favour of immediate and complete independence, as opposed to the fractional autonomy proposed by the Donoughmore Commissioners. However, the almost incessantly conflictual relationship between the Tamils and the Sri Lankan state in the post-colonial period has much greater relevance to the growth of a spirit of militant resistance among the generation of young Tamils who founded the Tiger Movement. In the words of T.D.S.A. Dissanayake: 'The youth in Jaffna district [the cradle of the insurrection] were raised in an environment of continuous conflict with the government. Since 1956, boycotting schools, picketing government offices, hoisting black flags and performing *satyagraha* had been a way of life for them' (1983: 29).

It was in this context that the Tamil New Tigers (TNT), the precursor to the LTTE and at its inception a group of 15 young men, was formed by a 17-year old high-school student named Velupillai Prabhakaran in 1972.[11] It is hardly possible to stress too strongly, therefore, that the birth of the Tiger Movement was the result of a dialectical historical process of domination and resistance. As the Tigers themselves have observed: 'The struggle for self-determination of the Eelam Tamils has an *evolutionary history* extending to over 40 years...the armed struggle is a *historical product* of intolerable national oppression; it is an *extension, continuation and advancement* of the political struggle of our oppressed people' (LTTE: *Socialist Tamil Eelam; Tamils Fight For National Freedom*) (emphases added).

My conversations with pioneer LTTE activists have confirmed that the TULF's endorsement of 'Eelam' in May 1976, and their going to the 1977 polls on a one-point plank of secession, was a source of great encouragement to the then incipient Tiger

11 The TNT was renamed LTTE in May 1976. At the outset, the young radicals seem to have preferred to operate through the Tamil Students' Federation (TSF), the student wing of the TULF. However, from the late 1970s onwards, they began to actively distance themselves from the TULF leadership.

Movement. The Tigers decided to step up armed activity in the post-1977 period in response to two developments. First, the riots of 1977 sent a wave of Tamil refugees from the Sinhalese-majority areas of the country into the north and east. Kittu was one of those idealistic young men who worked to rehabilitate these traumatised and displaced people, and he recalled to me how their horror stories of atrocities cemented his conviction that there was no safety, leave alone any future, for Tamils within a unitary, Sinhalese-dominated state of Sri Lanka.

The second factor, and one that assumed increasing centrality, with time, in radical youth politics, was the realisation that the TULF leadership had no intention of acting on the 'mandate' for Eelam that they had received at the 1977 polls. Since, or so the LTTE's line of reasoning goes, the traditional leadership had 'betrayed' the mandate for secession (the Tigers look upon the 1977 election in the Tamil areas as a referendum on Eelam), it was left to a new, younger generation of activists to carry the sacred and unfinished task forward to its logical conclusion. The TULF leadership, in this view, through its 'betrayal', had forfeited the right to speak in the name of the Tamil people. Kittu, in his conversations with me, repeatedly drew a sharp distinction between two categories of activists—'politicians', who have no integrity, and 'revolutionaries', who are uncompromising in their idealism.

David Selbourne, a scholar based at Oxford and the first Westerner to establish contact with the Tigers, in the late 1970s, has drawn a vivid picture of the movement in its early stages. Even then, two of the most abiding characteristics of the struggle were clearly in evidence. First, its reliance on a popular base of support, and second, the deep idealism of many of its members. But perhaps the most salient feature of his account is the instrumentality of state-inspired repression (in the form of both military and police terror, and orchestrated anti-Tamil pogroms) in motivating increasingly large numbers of Tamil youth to embrace the Tiger cause. In Selbourne's words:

> The term 'Tiger' is a misnomer. They are not running wild in the jungle, but moving about in Jaffna [city] and its district...clean-cut young men...they do not need to camouflage themselves to pass undetected among the passers-by—no

> wonder the Tamils refer to them as 'our boys'. That is precisely what they are...the turning-point for most was the 1977 anti-Tamil riots; the discovery, as one Tiger put it to me, that *ahimsa* was not sufficient...the Tigers seem better-disciplined and less-frightened than their police and military opponents. *The trouble is that the police and army are up against an enemy that is being shielded by the community*...the Tigers...seem confident. They tell you that their membership is increasing daily and that the detentions and brutality are 'making us strong, increasing our momentum'. *'We think very deeply into the question of violence', a Tiger told me. 'Our targets for assassination are the armed agents of the state, and we select them only after a careful study and full enquiry* (Selbourne 1982) (emphases added).

Indeed, as Janet Coleman has put it, '[for the state] to engage in a series of acts and counter-acts based on revenge is precisely to play the terrorists' game. The state is revealed to be as oppressive explicitly as its opponents said it always was implicitly' (1990: 201). Richard Rubenstein has elaborated on this point:

> Since the state cannot surgically single out its enemy, it comes down with a hard fist on all the inhabitants of the community...if there is already in existence a mass movement, for example a nationalist movement, then by provoking the state to attack the community, a mass movement can be galvanised into action. Since nationalist sentiment was already there to begin with, the terrorists can take advantage of it. Mass movements, then are not *created* by terrorist violence. But an already existent movement can be *strengthened* through terrorist violence (quoted in Coleman 1990: 201-202).

It is hardly necessary to emphasise the pertinence of this scenario to the unfolding of the process of 'ethnic conflict' in Sri Lanka. Perhaps the most impassioned and eloquent description of this process has been provided by Frantz Fanon: 'The repressions, far from calling a halt to the forward rush of national consciousness, urge it on. Mass slaughter...increases that consciousness, for the hecatombs are an indication that between oppressors and oppressed, everything can be settled by force' (1963: 72). Indeed, the mass slaughter of some 3,000 defenceless

Tamils in the pogrom of July 1983 (which can be regarded as the Tamils' equivalent of the Setif massacre of 1945, the incident that gave birth to the Algerian national liberation movement), was of crucial significance in exacerbating Sinhalese–Tamil polarisation, and in driving thousands of previously uncommitted young Tamils to armed struggle. As William McGowan comments in a recent book on the evolution of the Tamil struggle:

> After the riots of 1983, the...Tamil rebel groups launched intensive recruitment drives in the refugee camps of southern India and in Tamil areas under [Sinhalese military] occupation in the north and east. Issues such as national self-determination, university admissions and equity in land settlement paled before the basic desire for vengeance and the quest for safety in an independent Tamil state. Thousands joined the movement (1992: 182).

The contribution of state repression to the consolidation of a composite Tamil national identity can be readily illustrated by alluding to two minority groups within the Tamil formation—the Christian (predominantly Roman Catholic) Tamils, and those 'Indian' Tamil plantation labourers who had migrated northwards (primarily to Vavuniya and Mullaithivu districts, in the non-peninsular areas of the northern province), and worked mostly as agricultural labourers on the land. As a study of the Roman Catholic church in Sri Lanka has concluded:

> By...1977, most Tamil Catholic priests and, probably, most Tamil Catholics, were, to a greater or lesser extent, supporters of the separatist movement. By this stage their identity as...members of the 'Tamil nation' had forced them into this position, and the spread of 'Liberation Theology' among the younger priests made armed struggle a legitimate possibility. In the riots of 1977 and the pacification that followed the riots, the Sinhalese security forces made no distinction between Tamils on the basis of religion—all Tamils were potential enemies. As repression spread, both laymen and priests found themselves taking up more and more extreme positions. Some young laymen became involved in the Tiger Movement, and at least

> a few of the priests supported 'the boys', seeing in them a last defence against the army (Stirrat 1984: 203).

As for the ex-plantation labourers, eking out a meagre livelihood in their new settlements in Vavuniya, their plight has been well-chronicled by Selbourne (1982):

> The police and the army—as many as a thousand at a time have invaded, some landing in helicopters, others driving their armoured cars across the new crops...[they] harass the settlements, searching for Tigers and beating up suspects...the former plantation coolie...was tied, struck in the face with fists, and hung upside down from the roof-beams, face bleeding, for hours. He crosses his thin arms on his chest to show how they tied him....

But the reaction of these unfortunates was hardly one that was conducive to the security of the Sri Lankan state:

> 'We have started moving towards liberation', said a squatter-village headman, formerly a tea-plantation worker, 20 miles from Vavuniya. *'Here everybody is for Eelam'*. On the upcountry estates, they ask—'What good will Eelam do us? Will it provide jobs for a million plantation workers?' But here, they say—'We are fighting for the next generation.' Free from the suffocation of the line-rooms and the shackles of their serfdom, this is a new political language, and a new defiance. Vavuniya, not Jaffna, is the frontline of the Tamil struggle, and on this battlefield, they are not likely to be defeated (Selbourne 1982) (emphasis added).[12]

As Sivathamby observes, 'in 1984 and after, when the State forces were deployed against the militants in the north and east, every single [male] Tamil youth, whether he was a member of a militant group or not, was in [extreme] physical danger. This brought the Tamil youth together irrespective of both educational

12 Incidentally, Vavuniya is today known as the 'border town'. It is the last point in the north that is under Sri Lankan government control. Just outside Vavuniya town, one comes across the first Tiger checkpoint, which, according to the testimony of recent visitors, is organised like an 'international border crossing'.

levels and social differences' (1989: 254-55). A Tamil mother who had lost her teenaged son to state terror expressed her anguish in a language almost biblical:

> Blessed are those who are barren, for to have a son is to lose him. It was a joy to see my child grow up. Now, that joy has turned to grief. I ask God why he gave me this son. I would have been a happier woman today, had I not had a child at all (Shanmugaratnam 1989: 7).

In fact, the LTTE has itself gratefully acknowledged the Sri Lankan state's contribution to the sense of a shared peril and destiny that might otherwise have eluded the Tamils: 'Sinhala chauvinism and its violent manifestations have helped the coming together of the *heterogeneous masses* of the oppressed Tamil nation...and towards a determined revolutionary struggle for political independence' (LTTE 1983) (emphasis added). Mark Whitaker, an anthropologist, has recorded just such a closing of ranks among the Tamils in the eastern province with their northern brothers and sisters:

> In Mandur [a complex of villages in Amparai district, inhabited by poor Tamil paddy-cultivators, most of them either landless or marginal farmers], as in much of the east coast, despite a formal loyalty to parties such as the FP and the TULF, separatist Tamil nationalism was often seen with a jaundiced eye—as something perhaps more in the interest of the Jaffna Tamils than their own. This changed in 1983, when the virulence of anti-Tamil rioting sent a flood of refugees into the eastern province, and, with them, the sense that nationalism was going to be the only course, whether dominated by Jaffna or not (Whitaker 1990: 150).

Of course, this could not have happened had there not pre-existed, among the Tamils, 'an overriding urge for unity and solidarity that brings them all together as a nationality' (Sivathamby 1984: 125). As Whitaker found, even the conservative, well-to-do landowning classes among the Tamils of the eastern province, who clearly had at least an *economic* vested interest in the maintenance of the *status quo*, were 'convinced of the inherent and ancient unity of the Sri Lankan Tamils', as evidenced by the 'ancientness

of the Tamil language, Tamil residence on the east coast in 'times before memory', the writings of famous poets such as [Subramaniam] Bharathi, and the activities of [religious] organisations such as the Rama Krishna Mission...' (Whitaker 1990: 151).

More recently, the imposition of a blanket economic blockade on the Tiger-held northern province, and indiscriminate aerial bombing of the same region, has served to complete the alienation of the Jaffna Tamils from the government in Colombo. There is much evidence in this regard: Yogaratnam Yogi, formerly the Tigers' top political commissar, was recently asked whether the dramatic increase in the number of Tiger recruits could be attributed to 'brainwashing' tactics employed by his organisation. Yogi denied this flatly. Such measures as 'brainwashing' were totally unnecessary, he said. Such was the antipathy among Tamils in general and Tamil youth in particular towards Colombo that there was no dearth of volunteers, for 'everyone wants to do something against the government'.[13] Shankar, a senior Tiger frontline commander in Mullaithivu district in the north, has similarly been quite candid about the source of the exceptionally high motivation of his cadres. Most of them have lost close family members to the depredations of the Sri Lankan or, in some cases, the Indian armed forces.[14] And Varadan, a 16-year old guerrilla, was brutally frank about what had induced him to join the Tigers—'It is better to die fighting than wait in the village to be picked up and tortured to death' (quoted in Desmond 1991b: 21).

As a noted Swedish scholar informed the Sri Lankan President after visiting the embattled north in December 1991:

> The support for LTTE is...very strong among civilians. The politics of economic boycott and terror bombing of the north...has not turned the population against the LTTE. It is only too evident who the culprit is...the people know exactly from where the bullets come, and even those who do not share the views of the LTTE are making it their refuge against the attacks of the army. The whole world knows that the war

13 Interview in BBC telefilm *Suicide Killers* (October 1991).

14 Ibid. Of course, this phenomenon, while yielding a rich haul of recruits for the Tigers, is fraught with very negative implications for the movement as well. As a result, the LTTE rank-and-file (and parts of the leadership as well, especially at the middle and lower levels) have largely become more a collection of individuals out for personal vengeance, rather than a force of politically motivated fighters.

> against the 'terrorists' is directed also at the Tamil people...the economic embargo makes all the Tamil people in the north suffer, not the LTTE alone.[15]

Julian West, a British journalist, has recently written in the same vein:

> The pressures of war are acute. There is no cash economy, fishing has stopped, and essential drugs are not available...there is no electricity...food shipments to the north have been diverted or delayed...people are on the brink of starvation...large numbers are opting for the promise of liberation offered by the Tigers. The bombing of civilian targets, in particular refugee camps, schools and hospitals, has convinced Jaffna's inhabitants that the Sinhalese majority in Sri Lanka is trying to commit genocide. 'This is a war to kill all Tamils', said...the head of the Velvettithurai Citizens' Rehabilitation Committee (West 1991).

Of course, the dialectical process of state oppression and the growth of a solidary 'national' identity has been observed to occur in the case of numerous liberation struggles, both historical and contemporary, around the globe. Blanket repression by the state usually *helps* popularise the cause of the armed resistance. As a guerrilla of Algeria's National Liberation Front (FLN) was quoted as saying in the immediate aftermath of a brutal French atrocity against Algerian civilians: '*Voila*, we've won another battle. They hate the French a little more now. The stupid bastards are winning the war for us' (cited in Horne 1987: 174). The organic connection between savage repression and the increasing strength and popularity of the Communist-led Partisan resistance in wartime Yugoslavia is yet another instance of this phenomenon. In the words of Bogdan Denitch:

> For the Communists...the extreme social dislocation [caused by the war]...proved to be an asset. The very brutality of the occupying forces acted as recruiting agents in some areas. When villages were destroyed, their younger and more energetic inhabitants readily joined the Partisan guerrilla bands...the raising

15 Professor Peter Schalk of Uppsala University, Sweden, in a letter to Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa, dated Christmas, 1991.

> of the ante on violence destroyed the moderates and traditional notables as a political force in the field, leaving as contenders only those who were able to cope with the violence in an organised way, without paying much attention to the local effects of that violence on particular villages or areas (1976: 49).

The resemblance this scenario bears to the rise of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in late twentieth-century Sri Lanka is too striking—haunting, even—to be missed.

Mobilising the Nation: The Liberation Tigers and the Tamil Population

Jozo Tomasevich, a Yugoslav historian, has written about the Partisan resistance to the Nazi occupation of Yugoslavia during the Second World War that

> ...it was one thing to respond to these compelling factors [of a brutal foreign occupation], and something different to achieve an organisation of armed resistance with an abiding faith in the justice of its cause, and to develop a successful leadership, both political and military, such that the resistance could survive the greatest blows that the enemy was able to inflict on it and repeatedly come back with ever greater numbers and a stronger will to persevere and win (1969: 81).

These words are today at least as applicable to a Sri Lanka torn apart by civil conflict. State repression, however heinous, cannot *in itself* fully account for the rise and endurance of a mass nationalist movement among the Tamils of Sri Lanka. In fact, I believe that a persuasive explanation of the remarkable appeal and staying-power of the movement spearheaded by the Liberation Tigers requires an account that is quite a bit more nuanced and complex. This is especially the case because a feeling of national identity is not a static 'given'. On the contrary:

> Nationalism is an ideological formulation of identity...it invests the nation with transcendent moral sanction and authority...it is a profoundly political theory...though postulating a given

> aggregate of human beings as a natural collectivity, *it must necessarily seek to make them so; there is thus a compulsive duty of mobilisation, of extending awareness horizontally and vertically to the farthest periphery and the lowest strata* (Young 1976: 71) (emphasis added).

It is to this aspect of nationalist mobilisation against the state authority, undertaken with great zeal in the Sri Lankan context, over the past decade, by the Tamil Tiger Movement, that we now turn. Our focus, in this section, is again the dialectic of the Sri Lankan state and Tamil civil society—the nation-building exercise among the Sri Lankan Tamils, pioneered and led by the LTTE, that arose as a reaction to, and has subsequently confounded, the attempts of the powers-that-be in Colombo to impose a monolithic, unitary state on its minority population.

Nikolai Bukharin, probably the most brilliant and creative thinker of the Bolshevik school (apart from Lenin), argued, in 1918, in favour of the adoption of a strategy of 'arming the masses' in the following terms: 'If our power is really of this type, the imperialists will have to yank it by the roots from every factory, from every plant, from every rural hamlet and village. If our power is such a power, it will not perish with the surrender of Petrograd or Moscow...' (quoted in Cohen 1973: 68).

Much the same line of thinking can be said to have informed the politico-military strategy of the Tamil Tigers since the inception of the movement. Even after the LTTE lost its principal urban stronghold, Jaffna city, to superior Indian firepower in end-1987, it was able to continue waging a deadly guerrilla war in the countryside in Jaffna district and elsewhere in the north-east, and return in triumph to Jaffna city once the humiliated and bloodied Indians had withdrawn in early 1990. What is often overlooked is that the power of the Tigers stems, in the final analysis, not so much from their sophisticated arsenal of weapons, as from a comprehensive strategy of social mobilisation that the movement has consciously and deliberately pursued in the past decade—a strategy whose success, one might add, has been practically ensured by the violence of the state against the Tamil population, and its refusal to seriously consider an acceptable negotiated settlement with its estranged minority. As the Tigers themselves put it:

> Our movement firmly believes that its commitment to armed struggle is not an alternative to mass movement. The revolutionary armed resistance must be sustained and supported by the mobilised masses. The invincible power of the organised masses, we believe, must be activated as the motor-force of popular resistance...the Tiger Movement, from its earliest stages, has engaged in developing and building political and military bases among the popular masses (LTTE 1983).

In this effort, the Tigers were, of course, doing nothing more than follow the teachings of the man who was responsible for synthesising a wide array of concepts of irregular warfare into a systematic operational doctrine ('People's War'), subordinated to a comprehensive political philosophy. Decades earlier, Chairman Mao had advised that

> the mobilisation of the common people...will create conditions that will make up for our inferiority in arms and other things ...guerrilla warfare must fail...if its political objectives do not coincide with the aspirations of the people and if their sympathy, cooperation and assistance cannot be gained (1966: 228).

Within Sri Lanka, only one commentator, writing under the pseudonym *Chintaka* in an independent paper, the *Lanka Guardian*, in 1979, appears to have correctly sensed that the actions of the Tamil youth militants were not randomly anarchic or terrorist in nature, but, rather, 'typical of an early stage of a protracted people's war of national liberation' (cited in Nithiyanandan 1987: 148). It is instructive that around this time, the fledgling Tiger Movement was engaged in a systematic violent campaign designed to paralyse the civil administration in the Tamil areas. A similar process, it may be recalled, occurred in southern Vietnam in the early 1960s, when the orchestrated assassination of between 10,000 and 12,000 village headmen and local notables by the underground resistance served as the prelude to a full-scale uprising against the American occupation and their collaborators.

In particular, the Tigers appear to have employed, and with considerable success, a policy of 'strategic targeting' of certain social groups within the Tamil population, especially those that have traditionally been considered insignificant and peripheral

to the power structure of the Tamil social formation. Their main constituency is, of course, the youth, but *among* the youth, they have especially concentrated on mobilising the lower castes among the Hindu Tamils, the women, and those from rural backgrounds, especially peasant families. Let us consider these categories one by one.

Sivathamby feels that 'the major social achievement of Tamil youth militancy is that it has been able to break the rigidities of the caste-system' (1989: 254). This is no minor feat, given that Sri Lankan Tamil (Hindu) society has been organised, for many centuries, on rigidly stratified, hierarchical caste lines.[16] But there is actually much more to caste than immediately meets the eye. The *Vellalars*, the numerically preponderant upper castes, have traditionally also been political, social and economic dominants. Indeed, it was the *Vellalars*, among the Tamils, who practically monopolised the educational and state-sector employment opportunities that opened up under the colonial administration. *All* the front-ranking Tamil nationalist political leaders, in the FP-TULF period, were *Vellalars*. In addition, both S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and G.G. Ponnambalam were owners of tea estates that employed 'Indian' Tamil plantation labour.

Sivathamby opines that a close examination of the social organisation of the Sri Lankan Tamils 'unambiguously reveals the *class-basis* of the caste-organisation' (1984: 140) (emphasis added). Thus, being anti-caste, in the context of Sri Lankan Tamil society, almost inevitably means being against the existing *class* configurations of Tamil society as well. As V. Suryanarayan explains, 'the current phase of the struggle has been in many ways a leveller of Tamil society, shown by the fact that Prabhakaran, belonging to the [low-caste] fisherman-merchant community of *Karaiyar*, has become the undisputed leader of the Tamil nationalist movement' (1991: 95-98).

Indeed, the 'levelling' process is today an especially noticeable one in Tamil society. As a recent eyewitness account of the ground situation in the Jaffna peninsula observed, 'adversity has been a great leveller of Jaffna's stratified, hierarchical society. Everyone, from the upper-class government servant down to the humblest labourer, stands in the same queue for kerosene and cooking

16 For an account of the principles of caste organisation in Tamil society, see Pfaffenberger (1982); and Banks (1960: 61-77).

oil. Everyone, from the Government Agent [district administrator] downwards, travels by bicycle'.[17]

An ethos of egalitarianism pervades the LTTE organisation; a Tiger suicide commando I spoke to mentioned *sama-dharma* (social equality) of all Tamils as his dream.[18] Kittu, during his tenure as LTTE's Jaffna commander, made it a point to appoint promising youths from traditionally disadvantaged caste/class backgrounds to positions of responsibility in the organisational hierarchy. Indeed, N. Ram sarcastically describes the LTTE as an 'equal-opportunity [and, one might add, affirmative-action] employer'![19] One eyewitness, in 1989, described a typical LTTE camp as follows:

> Tobacco and alcohol were taboo. Life was spartan and highly egalitarian, with all from Prabhakaran downwards eating the same food and enjoying the same facilities or lack thereof. They ate well when food was available in plenty; when food was in short supply, which was quite often, the entire camp managed with a single meal of rice and dal each day, for months (in Sunil 1989).

In this context, it might be instructive to quote from the LTTE's political programme, which unambiguously declares that

> the nature and structure of economic organisation underlying our social system is oppressive and based on social injustice...the LTTE is committed to the abolition of all forms of social oppression...the caste-system is another social evil that perpetuates inequality and inhumanity. It is an oppressive system inextricably linked to class-structure and based on exploitative economic practice...the LTTE is committed to the total eradication of the caste-system. The institution of an equalitarian socialist economy and the introduction of a revolutionary system of education will pave the way for the elimination of casteism (LTTE: *Socialist Tamil Eelam*: 11-12).

Of course, the egalitarian, equalising tendency is not something

17 'On the Long Road to Despair', in *The Hindu*, 21 April 1991.

18 Personal interview in London, July 1991.

19 Personal interview in Madras, August 1991.

that is unique to the Tamil nationalist movement in Sri Lanka. It will be recalled that during Indian nationalist mobilisation against British colonial power, Gandhi repeatedly stressed that *all* Indians, regardless of position or status, were equally entitled to participate in the struggle against imperialist domination. In this context, he took a very strong stand against the caste divisions of Hindu society, and particularly spoke of the need to alleviate the suffering of the 'untouchables', the outcastes of Hindu society, and to involve them, as equals, in the anti-colonial struggle. That said, it must be emphasised that it is precisely this promise of a more just, equitable and egalitarian social order to come that seems to infuse mass nationalist movements with much of their strength and vitality. And, just as it was instrumental in giving the Indian freedom struggle a popular following, it has been a critical ingredient in the efforts of the LTTE to build a broad-based, unified Tamil national movement that can weather the coercive capacity of the state. In the context of the Indian freedom struggle, it became

> ...the duty of the patriot to eliminate all feuds and inequalities within Indian society that impede[d] the unification of the country for the freedom struggle. The separation and inequality of caste, the slavery of women, the tradition of elitist rule, popular ignorance and illiteracy, and regional and religious rivalries—these were elements that had to be eliminated from the hearts and minds of every Indian (Ludden 1973: 283).

In other words, the 'oppression within' had to be squarely confronted before the struggle against the 'oppression without' could gain any significant credibility, force and momentum.

Many observers with first-hand experience of the ground realities in north-eastern Sri Lanka have spoken of the Tigers' extraordinary popularity in the countryside, especially among the peasant population of Jaffna district. The Tigers' initial mobilisation of the 'peasant masses' was dictated by at least two pressing practical compulsions. First, in the early phase of the movement (and even today, in the eastern province), the rural areas, many of which are heavily forested and quite remote, offered the best possible sanctuary from the police and military of the Sri Lankan state.

Second, the Tigers, from the outset, nursed ambitions of one day 'growing into a mass national movement of the Tamil people' (LTTE 1983: 42). Now, given the middle class character and moorings of constitutional Tamil nationalism, and the origins of the Tiger Movement itself amongst the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, the only way this goal could possibly be fulfilled was by reaching out to and building links with the peasants and other sectors of the rural population. And this is precisely what the LTTE did. A tenant farmer and part-time agricultural labourer in rural Jaffna described his identification with the cause of Eelam in the following manner:

> We and our boys have suffered untold hardships for many years, and we continue to suffer. Those Tamils who had the means to escape, to run away to Europe, may be waiting to come back to rule us when the war is over. They are the worst type of Tamils. We cannot allow them to enjoy the fruits of our sweat and blood (Shanmugaratnam 1989: 8).

The Tigers' mobilisation of the peasantry was aided by yet another, and possibly fortuitous, development. The UNP government that assumed power in Colombo in 1977 professed a 'free-market' economic ideology, and wished Sri Lanka to follow the Southeast Asian Newly-Industrialising Country (NIC) model of dependent capitalist development.[20] Upon coming to power, they relaxed import controls on, among other items, agricultural products. The domestic market was soon flooded with imported chillies, onions and potatoes selling at extremely cheap prices, and, in Gunasinghe's words, 'ruined the Jaffna middle peasantry, one of the most productive [and hitherto prosperous] sections of the Lankan agricultural population' (1987: 70). And, according to several accounts, many smallholding Jaffna peasants saw this policy as a plot hatched by Colombo to destroy them (for example, see Shanmugaratnam 1989: 5).

Yet another severely affected segment of the Tamil population, and among whom Tigers soon proliferated as well, were the fisherfolk—some 200,000 Tamils in the north and east depended on deep-sea fishing for their livelihood in the mid-1980s. After 1983,

20 Indeed, the economic programme of the Jayewardene regime explicitly sought to emulate Singapore in this regard.

the Sri Lankan government, citing movement of Tamil arms and fighting personnel between the Sri Lankan and Indian coasts,[21] banned fishing along vast stretches of the coastline, and Tamil fisherfolk who disregarded the ban were sometimes attacked and killed by the Sri Lankan Navy. At one stroke, thousands of Tamil families had been deprived of their livelihood. Thus, we see once again that state policy actually *aided* (albeit unintentionally!) the process of Tamil nationalist mobilisation against the state, and helped foster the growth of a Tamil national consciousness, the notion of a collective interest and identity, that is so essential to the viability of a demand for sovereign statehood.

In recent years, much attention has been drawn to the enthusiastic participation of young Tamil women in the ranks of the Tiger Movement. While many broadly similar movements have utilised women in auxiliary capacities such as nursing the wounded, acting as couriers etc., the Tiger Movement has become well-known for the thousands of women fighters on active combat duty in its military organisation. According to Adele Balasingham, Australian wife of LTTE's British-educated ideologue Anton Balasingham and a principal organiser of the Tigers' women's movement,[22] there were about 3,000 women fighters in the Tiger army (i.e., approximately 15-20 per cent of the core combat strength) by late 1990.[23] No mission is considered too dangerous by the Tiger women; indeed, large numbers are members of the elite LTTE suicide commando teams, known as the 'Black Tigers'.[24] The Liberation Tigresses have repeatedly distinguished themselves in combat against both the Sri Lankan and the Indian armies, and they wear two capsules of potassium cyanide around their necks (as opposed to one for the Tiger men), to symbolise their dual commitment to national liberation and women's emancipation. The saga of the Tiger women is replete with astounding acts of courage, heroism and self-sacrifice. Three of the LTTE's

21 The distance between the Indian and Sri Lankan coastlines, at the narrowest point of the Palk Strait, is only 22 nautical miles.

22 Mr. and Mrs. Balasingham met as students in London, where, in the end-1970s, they were both involved in anti-racist activism.

23 See the feature article entitled 'Burning Bright: In the Jungle with the Women of the Tamil Tigers', in *Weekend Guardian* (London), 1-2 June 1991.

24 A Sri Lankan Tamil woman, suspected to be an LTTE suicide commando, assassinated former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.

ten-member Central Committee, the movement's top decision-making body, are women.

The mobilisation of women on a large scale is a relatively recent feature of the Tiger Movement. For long, the thinking of the Movement's leadership has been characterised by a certain puritanical streak, and this attitude initially prevented the recruitment of women cadres. The Tigers themselves acknowledge this, though they have attempted to pin the blame for their belated recognition of women's potential and capabilities on the conservatism inherent in Tamil society:

> It is not without significance that though the armed resistance campaign of the Liberation Tigers has a history extending to 19 years, the women's wing traces its origins to around 8 years ago. The conservative nature of our social formation, its oppressive structures in relation to women...the pernicious dowry system, pervasive gender discrimination...often legitimised by so-called 'cultural traditions' and...tales from mythology—all contributed to the delayed development of Tamil Eelam women's participatory role in our struggle (LTTE 1992a).

However, the situation changed from about the middle of the decade of the eighties. It is difficult to tell precisely what motivated the change, but one can conjecture that it was again, at least partly, a matter of practical necessity. With the population of young males increasingly decimated by constant fighting, as well as the exodus of refugees, the movement naturally turned to young women as a promising pool of potential recruits. By then, Tamil nationalism, in its radical form, had been transformed into a mass phenomenon, thanks, in no small measure, to the Sinhalese-Buddhist state, and women of the younger generation of Tamils were as alienated from the state, and as inspired by the vision of a liberated Eelam, as their male counterparts.

Another factor that might well have accelerated this trend was the fact that the period of the Indian military presence in north-eastern Sri Lanka (1987-1990) was marked by hundreds of rapes and assaults on women by Indian soldiers, yet another instance of the violence of the state abetting oppositional strategies of social mobilisation. According to the LTTE, 'the trauma created by the barbarous practices of Indian troops against Tamil women

gave a new impetus to the development of women's political consciousness and, with it, the adherence of more and more Tamil women to the guerrilla movement and its auxiliary organisations' (LTTE 1992a). A young Tiger woman guerrilla in the eastern district of Batticaloa however spoke of her motives in joining the movement in more philosophical terms:

> In our society, women are the numerical majority. We have also historically been the single most oppressed segment of Tamil society. If we do not come out of our homes and take up arms in the struggle for liberation, there can be no progress either for the nation or for us women.[25]

Whatever the case, given the extreme conservatism that has historically been the hallmark of Sri Lankan Tamil society (and in no instance more so than for women), it is difficult to disagree with the LTTE's assessment that the mass participation, in a variety of roles, of women constitutes 'the most remarkable feature of our national struggle'. As the LTTE's programme for women's liberation puts it:

> Tamil women...are subject to dual modes of oppression, national and social. Tamil women bore the brunt of national oppression and have suffered immensely at the hands of the State terrorists...at the same time, Tamil women are also victims of oppression emanating from their own social structure. The notorious dowry system and other forms of male-chauvinist domination that degrade women and deprive them of human dignity are typical features of our repressive social system...the LTTE assures that the dowry system will be legally proscribed, and that equality of status and opportunity for women will be constitutionally guaranteed...education will be made compulsory for all girls, and the practice of sexual division of labour will be abolished. Our organisation will encourage the formation of a radical women's movement to organise women on a national level and agitate for improvements in their condition (LTTE: *Socialist Tamil Eelam*).

25 Interview in a BBC TV film on the strife in the eastern province, telecast in the Greater London area in May 1991.

There is little doubt that the LTTE women, like the men, are primarily motivated by nationalist fervour. It is also likely that some of them have, again, like the men, been drawn to the movement by personal or family suffering at the hands of 'State terrorists', or by the aura of romance surrounding the social image of the 'freedom fighter'. Nonetheless, the rigours and dangers of being a Tamil Tiger or Tigress are very great indeed. It is probable that many women have joined the movement at least partly because they see their participation as a means of breaking taboos, and, in particular, destroying the stultifying straitjacket of conformity and subservience traditionally imposed upon them by a rigidly and self-righteously patriarchal society.

Conversely, the high-profile participation of women has served to impart to the Tiger Movement a general, popular character that might otherwise have been absent from it. Again, this is not something unique to the Tiger Movement. The Yugoslav Partisans, for instance, also consciously promoted women's participation at all levels of their struggle during the war years. To quote Tomasevich, this 'tremendously widened the manpower [*sic*] base for military and especially economic operations during the war, and contributed greatly to giving the movement a general, popular character' (1969: 97). As Denitch attests, 'The needs of civil war, combined with war against the foreign occupier, dictated a type of resistance that utilised all available human power and could not permit itself to be restricted by traditional ascriptions of roles to women' (1976: 45). An uncannily similar situation was observed during the anti-colonial struggle in Algeria:

> It was at that tight-bound, highly conservative and sacrosanct unit of Muslim life, the family, that the revolution had perhaps struck hardest...by the beginning of the war...women's rights remained deplorably medieval...Mouloud Feraoun [an Algerian 'moderate'] writes angrily of the women of his native Kabylia carrying the cross of villages emptied of men...rape [by French forces]...assumed appalling proportions and left permanent psychological scars among the female population. All in all, the FLN seemed to have far more to offer Muslim womanhood by way of escape...Fanon speaks of the 'intense drama' of the sudden coming to maturity of the Algerian woman when drafted into the revolt...'for months on end', writes Fanon, 'parents

> would be without news of a young girl of eighteen who was sleeping in forests and caves, roaming the *djebel*...a gun in her hands'. Here, for the first time, she met and co-existed with unmarried men on equal terms, and with equal rights. She adapted herself to guerrilla activities with remarkable speed and effectiveness. It was a heady experience. 'The woman ceased to be a mere complement for a man...' writes Fanon...the female recruits for the ALN [National Liberation Army; regular troops of FLN]...came from many walks of life...on the whole, the FLN woman was treated with a respect never experienced before—either from her own menfolk or even from the most liberal French 'emancipators'...*for the women, perhaps even more than for the FLN men, revolution and the pursuit of independence—with the promise of personal liberation at the end of the road—became a...way of life* (Horne 1987: 400-403) (emphasis added).

The liberating impact of the Tiger struggle on the lives of young Tamil women thus should not be underestimated, especially if one remembers that this is a society where women have historically been totally excluded from the public arena. The confidence and poise of leading Tiger women is impressive indeed. As 'Sunthari', assistant general secretary of LTTE's women's wing, informed a somewhat bemused Indian journalist: 'We have a dual objective: to fight for national liberation and the social emancipation of women'. To which 'Malini', chief of the Jaffna district women's wing, added: 'Our women have proved better fighters than the men. Ask the Indian army' (see Padmanabhan 1990: 41-42).

However, it is probably more than prudent, especially in light of historical experience, to sound a note of caution as well, lest one get too carried away. As Horne writes of post-independence Algeria: 'Alas, the promissory notes issued then, in the heat of battle, have yet to be fully honoured' (1987: 403). Denitch's remarks, made in the context of wartime Yugoslavia, are also strikingly relevant here:

> As...society normalised...the traditional patterns [of male dominance] tended to reassert themselves...a former Partisan colonel, a woman, pointed out...that when it was most difficult to serve in the armed forces, namely, during the...war, women were considered capable of doing so, but in the peacetime forces,

> the tendency has been to retire women officers as soon as possible' (1976: 45).

Denitch has further drawn what is probably the best generalisation that *can* be made on this issue, '...in traditional societies, the social upheavals created by civil wars may do more to advance women's equality than formal reforms; however, subsequent normalisation and stabilisation will roll back at least some of the gains' (1976: 45).

Mark Whitaker, in his microcosmic ethnographic study of Mandur, has neatly captured the sense of the yearning for social change that, in addition to nationalist sentiment, lies at the heart of the Tamil youth insurrection. This feeling, he notes, was particularly prevalent among the *maccan*, the young unmarried males, who were the segment of Tamil society that 'showed the most admiration for the "boys", the radical separatist guerrilla fighters'. The main articulators of this sentiment at the grassroots level were the *paticca akkal*, the younger village intellectuals, who differentiated themselves from both the traditional village intelligentsia (the astrologers, ayurvedic physicians, classical poets and local historians), as well as from Western-trained 'trousered' academics. 'Their hope, expressed with a degree of sophistication that runs from the barely coherent to the highly reasoned', writes Whitaker,

> is to use the desire for change that has surfaced around the separatist movement to effect a more radical transformation of east-coast Tamil society, which they see as trapped at once by traditional forms of oppression, such as the caste-system, as well as by TULF-style nationalism, even as it is threatened from the outside by Sinhala nationalism.

As a young Tamil activist told Whitaker:

> His own desire was to re-direct nationalist discourse towards a more radically transformative end; a goal he felt he could attain by actively participating in the separatist struggle, smuggling into it a combination of neo-Marxist and Tamil nationalist

> discourse, and eventually creating, thereby, a counter-practice, deconstructive of Sri Lankan society as a whole.

Whitaker further notes that the technical language quoted here is not his: 'the writings of Marx, Althusser, Foucault and Derrida circulate among the English-reading *paticca akkal*, who then lecture to the others'. He adds that while the above-mentioned young man's views 'are somewhat extreme, they nevertheless evoke a dream of radical transformation that many young local intellectuals share, and that many more *maccan* harken to' (Whitaker 1990: 152-53).

Perhaps the real genius of the Tiger Movement was to tap this reservoir of social-radical sentiment of the youth, and harness it to its own goal of national liberation. Of all Tamil nationalist organisations, it was the Tigers who showed themselves most capable of appreciating with constructive intelligence, and of exploiting with considerable vigour, the practical possibilities inherent (paradoxically enough!), in the sharp cleavages within the Tamil national formation—with the explicit intent, of course, of realising a most concrete political objective: a sovereign republic of Tamil Eelam. In the process, the Tigers successfully consolidated their position as a phenomenon deeply 'organic' to Tamil society. As Velupillai Balakumar, formerly leader of the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) and now a senior LTTE official in charge of rehabilitation and reconstruction in war-ravaged areas, has perceptively described it:

> The Tigers are today acutely conscious of their social responsibilities. They realise that if they want to be successful in their goals, they have to carry the people with them. Over the last decade, the people of Jaffna, generally meek and peace-loving, have seen much bloodshed. They have been exposed to brutal repression by the Sri Lankan armed forces, the Indian army, and rival militant factions. They are *no longer terrified of guns, and they can no longer be ruled at gunpoint.* The LTTE has realised the importance of working with the people...*that is the only way they can ensure the support and cooperation of the people* (emphases added).[26]

26 Quoted in an eyewitness report in the *Sunday Observer* (Delhi), 29 March-4 April 1992.

It is therefore not simply a matter of rhetorical posturing that the LTTE programme proclaims that

> national liberation and social revolution constitute the two basic political objectives of the LTTE. By national liberation, we mean the total liberation of our homeland, and the establishment of an independent State of Tamil Eelam. By social revolution, we mean the socialist transformation of our social formation and the creation of a radical new society free from all structures and forms of oppression and exploitation (LTTE: *Socialist Tamil Eelam,* 11).

The processes of upheaval within Tamil society are however not at all something that are unique to the Tamil nationalist movement. In fact, very similar, parallel phenomena have been observed in course of other contemporary liberation struggles around the globe. This is how Marwan Darweish, a Palestinian author, characterises the *intifada*:

> The *intifada* is a multi-faceted phenomenon. It is a political uprising against the occupation, but it is also a social and psychological phenomenon internal to Palestinian society; an awakening, a self-cleansing, a breaking-away from the Palestinians' own past and inherited social structure (1989: 47).

Darweish's work clearly shows that the *intifada* has given rise to social changes within Palestinian society that are structurally similar to those resulting from the Tamil insurrection—a greatly heightened sense of unity and solidarity within and among different sections of the broader community, the marginalisation of traditional leaderships and of economic and socio-political elites and the mass participation of hitherto excluded or degraded groups of the community, the coming to the fore of an assertive younger generation of leaders and activists, and major shifts in the position and role of women within society.

However, the changes within the Tamil social formation may not necessarily have been consciously *intended* by the leaders of the LTTE, though they have definitely been the concrete *result* of specific strategies of mass mobilisation pursued by these same leaders. My conversations with LTTE activists have

left me with the distinct impression that their vision is not just limited but almost myopic; all they really do care about is the independent state of Eelam, and whatever happens to the pre-existing Tamil social order is incidental to that ultimate goal. However, they do welcome these changes wholeheartedly; if only because they fully well realise that the unified national movement that is a must, if the struggle for Eelam is to have any viability at all, necessarily involves these social changes. Also, they are painfully aware that the movement represented by the LTTE is itself precisely a product of such social turbulence, and that it derives much of its appeal among social categories such as the lower castes, the women, and the peasantry and fisherfolk, from its commitment to social justice and equality. Opposing the transformation of Tamil society means opposing the LTTE, i.e., opposing themselves; a nonsensical stand. Thus, the nationalist agenda remains paramount, but social progress within the national formation is welcome and encouraged, so long as that process flows parallel to the national cause.

Finally, it must be noted that intellectuals of a traditional 'left' persuasion, especially in the West, have often failed to recognise the potential for social transformation inherent in nationalist movements. But the historical record, especially with respect to the anti-colonial struggles in Africa and Asia, clearly shows that though these movements aimed primarily at national independence, they usually *had* to incorporate some kind of socialistic content into their ideology and programme in order to ensure popular acceptance and appeal for their cause. There is no reason to believe that 'post-colonial' liberation movements, such as the Sri Lankan Tamils', are any exception. It would seem, then, that just as those who hope for a 'pure' social revolution, are, as Lenin said, destined to wait forever, the notion, also advanced by Lenin, that national freedom was to be won first, and socialism would follow afterwards, is equally grounded in unreality. Nationalism and socialism are not only often partners in the same cause, but in most such instances, they necessarily *have* to be partners. As A. Sivanandan tells us: 'There is no socialism after [national] liberation; socialism is the process through which liberation is won' (1990: 248).

Forging Nationhood Through Struggle, Suffering and Sacrifice: Revolutionary Violence and Martyrdom in LTTE Ideology and Strategy

Question: *Mr. Prabhakaran, it has been reported that all your fighters carry cyanide capsules strung around their necks. Is this an exaggeration?*

Answer: *Yes, we have adopted this measure from the start. As a consequence, many comrades have sacrificed themselves. You won't find people from our movement in jail, at least, not many more than you can count on your fingers, perhaps two or three persons, and even those are people not involved in the inner circle of activity. Our fighters, through laying down their lives, protect our sympathizers and contacts, the people who give us support and assistance. Otherwise, the great mass of people who support us, and their families, would be herded into jail. But that is not the only reason for this practice. It is this cyanide that has helped us develop our movement very rapidly. Carrying cyanide on our person is a symbolic expression of our determination, our commitment, our courage. It gives our fighters an extra measure of belief in our cause, a special edge; the cyanide has instilled in us a determination to sacrifice our lives and our everything for our cause.*

—in an interview to *The Hindu*, Madras, 5 September 1986.

From their earliest days, they were incapable of justifying what they nevertheless found necessary, and conceived the idea of offering themselves as a justification and of replying by personal sacrifice to the question they asked themselves. For them as for all rebels before them, murder is identified with suicide...therefore they do not value any idea above human life, though they kill for the sake of ideas. To be precise, they live on the plane of their idea. They justify it, finally, by incarnating it to the point of death...They will then put an abstract idea above human life, even if they call it history, to which they themselves have submitted in advance, and to which they will decide, quite arbitrarily, to submit everyone else...The greater the value the estimator places in this final realisation, the less the value of human life. At the ultimate limit, it is no longer worth anything at all.

—Albert Camus, *The Rebel*

'We are the cyanide-capsule guerrillas. As long as we wear these around our necks, we fear no power in this world', Kittu, then Jaffna commander of LTTE, had informed a Western journalist in 1986 (Jeyaraj 1991: 30-31). Upon being inducted into the movement, each Tiger cadre is presented with a capsule containing potassium cyanide, which she/he is expected to constantly wear around the neck. To date, some 15 per cent of LTTE battle fatalities (i.e., approximately 600 out of over 4,000) have resulted from fighters biting their capsules rather than risk capture, torture and execution. Moreover, cyanide-suicide, in LTTE lexicon, is apparently no respector of rank or gender—the dead include both top commanders and commissars, as well as teenaged foot-soldiers, men as well as women. Particularly prone to this form of death are the LTTE commandos, again, both men and women, who specialise in suicide missions, and who are known in the movement as *karum-puligal*, or 'Black Tigers'.

From Prabhakaran's words, it is evident that this unusual practice has a dual purpose. The first is the element of pragmatic necessity, the need to protect movement secrets from the enemy. But it is the second purpose, the mystical power attributed to the deadly four-inch vial, that is the more interesting, and merits closer examination. In the words of D.B.S. Jeyaraj, a leading Sri Lankan Tamil journalist and commentator:

> From the Tiger perspective it is this readiness to die for the cause that elevates the LTTE member from his surroundings. It is the cyanide capsule that symbolises the Tiger's superiority to others and signifies the dedicated mission in life...a curious blend of rational obscurantism, absolute nihilism and revolutionary commitment has succeeded in making a fetish of the cyanide-capsule principle and a cult of suicide-killing missions (1991: 30).

It is indeed very true that the suicide commando is regarded, in LTTE ranks, as some kind of higher human being, and that much prestige is attached to martyrdom. The two preferred means of attaining martyrdom are biting the capsule and going on suicide bombing missions against enemy targets. Of course, the principle of self-immolation at the altar of a 'higher', collective cause is

common to both. This aspect of the LTTE has also attracted ever-increasing publicity in recent years. A book dealing with the military evolution of the Tamil insurrection is titled *The Cyanide War: Tamil Insurrection in Sri Lanka, 1973-88* (Edgar O'Ballance, Brassey's, Oxford, 1989), while a BBC film on the LTTE, shown on British television in October 1991, was titled *Suicide-Killers.*

For years, the LTTE has been consciously promoting a 'martyr cult' in the north and east of Sri Lanka. As Jeyaraj observes, 'wherever possible the funerals of fallen LTTE cadres are observed with pomp and paegantry. Posters and funeral decorations are displayed, and processions organised. The terms *veera vanakkam* [homage to the heroes] and *veera maranam* [martyrdom] are frequently mentioned' (1991: 31). Indeed, an entire week, at the end of November each year, is observed with much fanfare by the Tigers as 'Martyrs' Week'.

The first LTTE member to swallow cyanide was a fighter named Bhageer, alias Selvam, who died in 1984. The Tiger who pioneered the suicide bomber phenomenon in South Asia was a teenager codenamed 'Miller', who blasted a Sri Lankan army camp, killing 112 soldiers, on 5 July 1987. Further, that small minority of Tigers who do not kill themselves when faced with capture, or are reluctant to go suicide bombing, are regarded as having somehow 'let down' the movement. They either are demoted in rank, or quietly dismissed. One of the LTTE activists I spoke to at length was the Black Tiger 'Mama'. Mama cited a two-fold motivation for undertaking such a dangerous mission. First, he wanted to set a personal example of self-sacrifice, and apparently regarded it as a singular honour to have been the one selected to carry out such an important mission. Second, he had calculated before setting out that even if he was shot before he could escape, his comrades from Mannar would have got rid of a very large number of enemy soldiers in exchange for just one life—his own.[27]

What significance does all this have for *our* central focus, which, in this chapter, is the creation and consolidation of a Tamil national identity in opposition to the Sinhalese-Buddhist state? I strongly believe that the cult of the cyanide capsule and the suicide bomber cannot be dismissed out of hand as some kind of bizarre, fanatical quirk of a nationalist movement that has gone out of control. On the contrary, the cult of violence and martyrdom is of *absolutely*

27 Personal interview in London, July 1991.

central significance to the forging of a solidary Tamil national identity. Hence its apparently inordinate importance to the nation-building project of the LTTE.

Some of the reasons for the extraordinary centrality of violence and martyrdom to revolutionary Tamil nationalism are fairly evident. There is the aspect of reaffirming the moral sanctity of the cause by incarnating it to the point of death, as Albert Camus brings out in such poignant and beautiful prose. Total indifference to death, and the readiness to lay down one's life at any time, is also the one factor that distinguishes the committed LTTE militant from the Tamil population in general—and, by extension, 'confers' upon that organisation (at least in Tiger thinking) the 'right' to lead the national struggle, to act as its 'vanguard', the revolutionary elite. D.B.S. Jeyaraj has elaborated upon this aspect of LTTE politics.

But violence and martyrdom is even more directly, and fundamentally, relevant to the construction of a collective sense of Tamil nationhood. First, the movement's emphasis on an especially elaborate commemoration of its martyrs would seem to suggest that such ceremonies serve, above all, a mobilising and recruiting purpose. This is a tactic which is deliberately and systematically employed to whip up mass sentiment in favour of the right to self-determination, and attract new cadres by surrounding the movement with an aura of romance. An LTTE woman leader thus lectured the assembled gathering at a recent, and typically ornate, funeral of three fallen fighters in the following terms: 'Many of you will pick up the weapons left by these martyrs...thousands and thousands of Tigers will be created as a result of their supreme sacrifice'.[28] Or recall Prabhakaran's statement: 'It is this cyanide that has helped us develop our movement very rapidly'. The LTTE supremo has in fact dwelt on this theme very frequently, and explicitly, since 1986:

> Our history of liberation has been written in the blood of these *Maha Veerar* [great heroes]. Their passing away are not losses without meaning. *Their deaths have become the power that move forward our history—[they are] the life-breath of our struggle.* They are the artisans of freedom...they will be worshipped in the temple of our hearts throughout the ages[29] (emphasis added).

28 In the BBC telefilm *Suicide Killers*.

29 Quoted in *Tamil Nation* (London), November 1992, p. 9.

As Peter Schalk writes, 'the many tokens of commemoration of great heroes in many road junctions in Jaffna concern not only the past but also the *future* of armed resistance'[30] (emphasis added).

Second, the martyr cult is linked to the egalitarian strand of LTTE ideology, and to the 'levelling' process in Tamil society that has been noticed in course of the struggle being waged under its leadership. The fact that *all* LTTE members, irrespective of social origin, caste, class, religion, gender, rank and seniority are dying for the cause, and in similar ways (in combat, by consuming cyanide, while carrying out suicide bombing raids) constitutes *in itself* a most powerful egalitarian statement, as well as a simultaneous affirmation of the paramountcy of the 'national' identity above all others—all Tamils, regardless of any other 'subordinate' affiliation, are sacrificing themselves for the same cause, that of national liberation, which they share in common. In the words of Yogaratnam Yogi, formerly LTTE's top political commissar: 'The struggle is uniting everybody. All the old barriers are fast disappearing'.[31]

Third, the blood of fallen martyrs acts as the cement that holds the national movement together, and assures the continuing loyalty, allegiance and dedicated service of its members. 'Shankar', a senior Tiger frontline commander, was recently asked by a British interviewer what motivated him to daily walk the tightrope separating life and death. His reply was most instructive: 'When the friends you live with, eat with, sleep with, die every day in front of your eyes, you don't give up the cause.[32] As Frantz Fanon once wrote, in his celebrated discussion of the role of violence in revolutionary nationalist strategy:

> The mobilisation of the masses, when it arises out of a war of liberation, introduces into each man's consciousness the ideas of a *common cause*, of a *national destiny*, of a *collective history...the building-up of the nation is helped by the existence of this cement, which has been mixed with blood* and *anger* (1963: 93) (emphases added).

30 Professor Peter Schalk's letter to President Ranasinghe Premadasa, dated Christmas, 1991.

31 Quoted in the radical newspaper *Tamil Nation* (London), January 1992, p. 9.

32 Interviewed in the BBC telefilm *Suicide Killers*.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, in their ideology and strategy, have consistently displayed an acute appreciation of this facet of nation-building. But what is perhaps of even greater significance to the overall thrust of this book lies in what the discussion above illustrates about the nature of nationalism in general, and, more specifically, about the construction of national identities. What seems to emerge clearly is the *fluidity* and *malleability* of the concept of nationhood. Not only is the sense of belonging to an essentially common collectivity, called a 'nation', *not* a 'primordial' identification, rooted in objective factors, but any such sense of solidarity has to be carefully and painstakingly nurtured over time, if it is to form the emotional basis of a mass movement for 'national liberation'. This is where violence, and especially, the blood of the 'martyr' to the national cause, has the potential to be of great utility. What brings the Tamils together as a 'nation' is *not only* the fact that they have constantly been *victims* of the violence of the state. The cement that solidifies the national bond is also derived from the violence that Tamils themselves *perpetrate*, and the death they encounter, and the 'martyrdom' they achieve, while doing so. This is, of course, not to suggest that a Tamil national identity is conjured out of thin air, or that it represents a form of manipulated 'false consciousness'. Far from it. Tamil nationalism in modern Sri Lanka may be an invention, but it is hardly a fabrication. What makes this kind of nationalist mobilisation *at all possible*, in the first place, is that Sri Lankan Tamils *do* share certain 'objective' bases for the formulation of a common identity—a shared language, history and territory, to mention but a few. But that, *in itself*, is simply not sufficient to give rise to the kind of 'national consciousness' that imparts to the Tiger Movement its stamina and resilience.

Nor are the Tigers the first nationalist revolutionaries to have realised the *emotive power* that death and martyrdom can exercise over the collective imagination, the 'hearts and minds' of the masses. Or, more precisely, how it can act as the critical catalyst in spreading the fires of nationalism 'horizontally and vertically to the farthest periphery and the lowest strata'. Aurobindo Ghosh, an early twentieth-century Indian nationalist leader, had clearly grasped that struggle and martyrdom could be a most potent instrument in igniting the nationalist imagination:

> ...in martyrdom, there is an incalculable spiritual magnetism that works miracles. *A whole nation catches the fire that burned in a few hearts;* the soil which has drunk the blood of the martyr imbibes it with a sort of divine madness which it breathes into the heart of all its children, *until there is but one overmastering idea* [the craving for national freedom], one imperishable resolution in the minds of all, *beside which all other hopes and interests fade into insignificance...*[33] (emphases added).

It is difficult to imagine a more eloquent exposition of the centrality of revolutionary violence to the mission of forging the nation. And it is hardly surprising that the quotation cited above appears, in boxed form, in a recent issue of a pro-LTTE Tamil nationalist paper. Ghosh's views are also significant in that they served as a principal inspiration to young middle class Bengalis who took up arms against British colonialism during the 1920s and 1930s. And some of these Bengali youth are the only instance in history known to me of radical activists killing themselves with potassium cyanide rather than be taken alive by their enemies.

But Ghosh was hardly the only nationalist ideologue who believed in the capacity of individual self-sacrifice to spark the collective, national resurgence. Ali Sharia'ti, the noted Shi'i thinker and activist of Iran, whose writings supplied much of the ideological wherewithal for the Islamic Revolution of 1979 (though he was a socialist, opposed to Khomeini-type traditionalism, and died prematurely in 1977), has this to say on the martyr as the locomotive of history and of revolution:

> A *shahid* [martyr] is the heart of history. The heart gives blood and life to the otherwise dead blood-vessels of the body. Like the heart, a *shahid* sends his own blood into the half-dead body of the dying society, whose children have lost faith in themselves, which is slowly approaching death, which has accepted submission, which has forgotten its responsibility, which is alienated from humanity, and in which there is no life, movement and creativity. The greatest miracle of *shahadat* [martyrdom] is giving to a generation a renewed faith in itself. A

33 Aurobindo Ghosh, *Bande Mataram: Early Political Writings*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, cited in *Tamil Nation*, January 1992, p. 14.

shahid is ever-present and ever-lasting (in Abedi and Legenhausen 1986: 248).

Sharia'ti is worth special mention in light of the fact that he belongs to a school of thought, broadly defined, which supplied the ideological force behind the Shi'i revival, not just in Iran but also in such locations as southern Lebanon. It is telling, therefore, that the Shi'ite Muslims of southern Lebanon were the original pioneers of the phenomenon of the suicide bomber, in course of their resistance to Israeli aggression, before this was taken up with a vengeance by the Tamil Tigers in the South Asian context.[34] And the 'human waves' of Iranian soldiers that stopped Saddam Hussein's Iraq in its tracks during the Iran-Iraq war were replicated, in a much more minor but nonetheless interesting South Asian variant from the late 1980s onwards, when the LTTE used similar 'human waves' of fighters in its (often successful) assaults on the remaining Sri Lankan army camps and military installations in the northern province.

One might also mention that one of the most legendary of Indian nationalist leaders (whom, incidentally but perhaps not quite accidentally, Tiger supremo Prabhakaran venerates), once wrote:

> What greater solace can there be than the feeling that one has lived and died for a principle? What greater satisfaction can a man possess than the knowledge that his spirit will beget kindred spirits to carry on his unfinished task?...What greater consummation can life attain than peaceful self-immolation at the altar of one's cause?...Hence it is evident that nobody can lose through suffering and sacrifice. If he does lose anything of the earth earthy, he will gain much more in return by becoming the heir to a life immortal...this is the technique of the soul. *The individual must die, so that the nation may live...* remember the eternal law—you must give life, if you want to get it (Subhas Chandra Bose, in Bose and Sinha 1979: 1) (emphasis added).

The striking parallels and similarities in this formulation of

34 An early group of Tiger recruits are also rumoured to have received their military training from the PLO in Lebanon, in the late seventies and early eighties.

nationalist ideology, whether in the context of British India, revolutionary Iran, or Tamil Ceylon, are only too evident. What seems to emerge from all this is an accent on revolutionary *practice*, the *act* of violence (or self-immolation). No wonder, then, that the LTTE is strongly oriented towards 'action'. Almost none of the top Tigers are much concerned with revolutionary theory. They have established their present positions through distinguished service in the field of battle. In the words of Anton Balasingham, the only theorist in the highest echelons of LTTE leadership: 'Our army commanders move forward and set an example, unlike generals in traditional armies...we are unique in our fighting capability'.[35]

This is not to imply that the Tigers are a group of isolated, 'blood-and guts' fanatics—the content of the previous section of this chapter attempts to decisively demonstrate that this is *not* the case.

However, even though the organisational structure of the movement is formally divided into a M.O. (Military Office) and P.O. (Political Office), the distinction between the two is often reduced to a mere technicality—for most 'political cadres' are also usually highly trained military personnel. Tiger publications unequivocally state that 'our movement, from its inception, did not separate the military from the political. Instead, both were integrated into a politico-military project'; while simultaneously clarifying that 'the LTTE gives primacy to politics and upholds the dictum that politics guides the gun...[and that] our fighters are armed political militants, political agents with a mission of liberating our people from all modes of exploitation and oppression' (LTTE 1983: 42; *Socialist Tamil Eelam:* 9). This declaration only seems to confirm that the practice of violence and the pantheon of martyrs are indeed indispensable to mass mobilisation and the forging of a Tamil national identity.

An important question, however, is yet to be resolved. How is it possible for an organisation like LTTE to consistently *motivate* thousands of Tamil youth to sacrifice their lives, and hundreds of thousands of Tamil citizens to undergo years of privation and suffering, all in the name of what is after all an abstract idealism? I believe that a probable answer to this question can help shed further light on the nature of nationalism and nationhood.

35 Interview in 'Jaffna: Inside a Nightmare', *India Today*, 15 October 1991.

Benedict Anderson reminds us that 'nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love' (1983: 129). But why? Donald Horowitz has pointed to a certain resemblance that the identification with one's nation sometimes bears to the identification with one's family (1985: 55-94), and Anderson seems to agree. According to him, just as 'the family has traditionally been conceived as a domain of disinterested love and solidarity', so also 'the whole point of the nation is that it is interestless' (1983: 131). Thus, giving one's life for the nation becomes invested with a certain 'moral grandeur, which dying for the Labour Party, the American Medical Association or perhaps even Amnesty International cannot rival, for these are all bodies that one can join or leave at will' (1983: 132). Walker Connor concurs with Anderson's logic: 'an intuitive sense of kindredness or extended family would explain why nations are endowed with a very special psychological dimension—an emotional dimension—not enjoyed by essentially functional or juridical groupings, such as socio-economic classes or states' (1987: 204). It is noteworthy that nationalist thinkers like Ghosh and Sharia'ti had anticipated this argument, at least implicitly—the quotations cited above from the writings of both contain references to the *children* who comprise the national community.

It would appear that 'an intuitive sense of kindredness or extended family' is very much a defining characteristic of the Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka. It is a characteristic that can help explain the strength, resilience, and the extent of popular support for the Liberation Tigers, the leaders of this struggle. Consider what Kingsley Swamipillai, the Roman Catholic bishop of the eastern Tamil town of Batticaloa, told William McGowan in end-1987:

> In my opinion they [the Indian army, then trying to suppress the Tigers] do not understand terrorism properly. *You can never put them [the Tigers] down.* When you are able to crush some, there are always many others in the wings, waiting to jump in. Before, the Tigers trained their cadres in camps. Now they are training them in homes, in the villages. You don't need to go to the jungle for training—to lay land mines or throw grenades. Anyone can do it. Seven and eight-year old boys can do it...and girls, too. It is catching on in every home. Everyone is part of the effort now. At home, the man is normal.

> Then he goes out and throws a grenade, but he goes home again and is normal once more. True, there are those in the towns who want the war to end, so they can get along with their lives. But those in the villages...can be easily led into this. *And the Tigers are their own flesh and blood. Do not ever forget that. That is the key factor: the emotional identification* (1992: 236) (emphases added).

Or recall the views on this issue, as told to McGowan, of the head of Jaffna Mothers' Front, an organisation of Tamil women:

> ...many Tamils surely disdained the intimidation and violence of the LTTE, but...*when all was said and done, the Tigers were family. 'We are mothers brought up in the old school', explained the head of the Jaffna Mothers' Front. 'And as mothers we often do not approve [of the Tigers' misdeeds]. But they are our children. If a son does something wrong, we will forgive him, even if we have to do so a hundred times'* (1992: 325) (emphases added).

And, of course, the description here of the Tigers as 'our children' is as much figurative as literal.

One can further draw out this line of argument, by pointing out that the LTTE organisation (which, incidentally, is famous for its unity, cohesion and solidarity) *itself* bears an uncanny resemblance to an extended family. Thus, the movement nickname for Velupillai Prabhakaran, 39, the much-adulated founder-leader, is *Thambi*, an affectionate dimiunitive, in Tamil, for 'younger brother'. New recruits swear loyalty, upon induction into the movement, to 'our brother Prabhakaran'. Of course, all 'brothers' and 'sisters' are hardly equal in importance, but the resemblance to a kinship group is nonetheless extremely strong. Further, the LTTE holds that once a new cadre joins up, 'the movement becomes the family' (McDonald 1991: 26). In this regard, then, the Tiger Movement seems to be a microcosmic version of the 'Tamil nation' taken as a whole. It is possible to conceive of the two entities as overlapping concentric circles, with passionate, indeed fanatical, identification with the group being the common denominator. Once we can visualise this aspect of nationalist mobilisation, it becomes much easier to account for the astounding selflessness, and

unswerving allegiance, that the 'national family' can engender in its members.

Conclusion

Lawrence Thilagar, a member of LTTE's Central Committee and the movement's official representative in Paris, has commented thus on the conflict in Sri Lanka:

> You may ask: why do our people struggle? The short answer is that they struggle to end their suffering—a suffering caused by the oppression perpetrated by successive Sri Lankan governments and by chauvinist forces within the Sinhalese nation for the past several decades. It was an oppression that was intended to erase the Tamil national identity. Instead, it has served to consolidate the growth of the Tamil nation. The actions of successive Sri Lankan governments, over the last 40 years, which were intended to destroy the Tamil national entity, have in reality solidified it. The discrimination in relation to employment, education, language, the colonisation of the Tamil homeland, and physical attacks amounting to genocide have made the Tamils resist...Sinhala rule as one people—as one nation. We are today a people with a deep-rooted political consciousness of our national identity.[36]

Several points are implicit in Thilagar's analysis—themes that are also of crucial importance to the theoretical thrust of this study. First, the LTTE leader correctly highlights the role of the state in creating two nations within the territorial boundaries of Sri Lanka. It is also quite clear from the tone of his statement that he believes, as I do, that a sense of (Tamil) nationality has been the historical outcome of an evolutionary process that took place over time. The Tamils are 'today' a collectivity who regard themselves as a nation, the culmination of a process of identity formation that was 'consolidated' and 'solidified' over a period of 40 years. As Walker Connor has argued (1990: 92-103), perhaps

36 Address at a seminar on 'A War Fratricidal', organised by the International Association for Friendship Among Peoples, Palermo, Italy, 14 December 1991; reprinted in *Tamil Nation*, January 1992, pp. 1-2.

the central theoretical issue at stake is not 'what is a nation?' but rather, '*when* is a nation'—at what point in the development of an 'ethnic group' does a nation come into being? In other words, there was nothing 'inevitable', or pre-ordained, about the current conflict between nationalities in Sri Lanka.

Equally importantly, it is implicit in Thilagar's commentary that is a shared *consciousness* that is of the essence of a nation. The LTTE has elsewhere been even more categorical on this point:

> A nation is not a mere intellectual concept. It is an idea that reaches out deep into the emotions of humans...today, the Tamil nation is more real than the courts and armies ranged against it, because it exists in the hearts and minds of hundreds of thousands of Tamils, young and old, living in many lands and across distant seas.[37]

But, as I have tried to bring out in this chapter, even the 'reality' of a national consciousness is not something static and unchanging. It cannot be taken for granted, even in the presence of overwhelming state repression of the national identity. It is necessary to keep applying cement to the bond that has come about because of popular alienation from the state. In order to build a broad-based, unified national movement that can effectively challenge the power of the state, it thus becomes necessary to emphasise the need for social justice and equality *within* the Tamil nation, and to stress the shared suffering, adversity and will to independence by carefully constructing and appealing to emotionally powerful, unifying symbols such as the cult of heroism and martyrdom. Only then can the level of solidarity which is a prerequisite for staking a claim to sovereignty be attained. In the final analysis, then, the rise and persistent motive force of mass nationalism can only be understood in terms of the dialectic of state and society, which is also one of domination and resistance.

37 'The Thimphu Declaration: Joint Statement Made by the Tamil Delegation on the Concluding Day of Phase One of the Thimphu Talks', in Satyendra (1989a: 142-43).

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State Power and Nationalist Resistance: India and the Ceylon Tamils, 1987-90

The historical dialectic of state repression and nationalist consolidation among the Sri Lankan Tamils reached a climactic stage between 1987 and 1990. During those years, the Indian state, the regional superpower, intervened directly and aggressively in its small neighbour's internal conflict. The ostensible purpose of the intervention was to put an end to the 'ethnic strife' plaguing the island country. But, in a momentous turn of events, which this chapter will analyse in some detail, the Indian military force sent to 'keep the peace' between Sinhalese and Tamil, and enforce the conditions of the Indian-brokered peace settlement, ended up fighting a bitter war, over a period of two and one-half years, with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. It was, in many ways, a classic showdown between the overwhelming coercive resources and capabilities of a front-ranking military power, on the one hand, and the forces of indigenous mass nationalism, on the other. At stake was the prestige of a regional superpower, *and* the future of the Tamil national movement in Sri Lanka. The war was ruthlessly fought, but, in the end, nationalist resistance appeared to have triumphed over state power. This outcome was particularly surprising, in that the contest between the Indian state and the Tamils was, with respect to most formal criteria, a very unequal one, with the odds stacked heavily in favour of the former. And the Indo-Tamil war had far-reaching implications for the struggle of the Sri Lankan Tamils to assert their national identity. The most important consequence of the Indian state's action was well-expressed by *Tamil Nation*, a staunchly nationalist Tamil

newspaper, in January 1992, almost two years after the withdrawal of Indian troops from the Tamil homeland:

> ...the so-called Indo-Sri Lanka accord [the Indian-brokered peace settlement] was [seen by the Tamils as] an act of treachery which has remained etched in the memory of the Tamil people, and *which has served to consolidate their determination to continue their struggle for freedom*[1] (emphasis added).

Introduction

On 29 July 1987, in Colombo, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India and President Junius Jayewardene of Sri Lanka signed the 'Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement to Establish Peace and Normalcy in Sri Lanka'.[2] The following day, air-borne units of the Indian Army's 54th Infantry Division, designated as the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), began to arrive from their base in southern India in the island's north and east to help enforce the provisions of the accord. In particular, the IPKF was charged with the responsibilities of supervising a ceasefire between Sri Lankan troops and LTTE guerrillas, accepting a complete surrender of weapons by the latter (in exchange for which they were to be granted a general amnesty by Colombo), and policing the north-east while a Tamil interim administration was set up in the region pending elections to a permanent North-Eastern Provincial Council (NEPC), the mechanism through which power was to be devolved by the Sinhalese state to its insurgent Tamil minority.

To begin with, the accord seemed to have much going for it. It was widely acclaimed, both in India and abroad, as a major foreign policy triumph for Prime Minister Gandhi's government, a diplomatic coup that had at one stroke simultaneously resolved Sri Lanka's vexed 'ethnic conflict' and powerfully reaffirmed India's position as the dominant power in the South Asian region. At the outset, there was near unanimous support for the agreement,

1 'Mass Meeting in Jaffna Commemorates Fourth Anniversary of Death of 12 LTTE Leaders', in *Tamil Nation*, January 1992, p. 10.

2 For the full text of the Agreement (including the Annexure and the Exchange of Letters between the two heads of government), see Appendix One in Ram (1989: 140-46).

and the military intervention, across the vast breadth of India's political spectrum. Approval for the Indian role was widespread on the international scene as well. President Reagan, for instance, publicly acknowledged 'the statesmanship and courage demonstrated by Prime Minister Gandhi and the President of Sri Lanka in their efforts to end the ethnic strife in that troubled island'.[3] An American Congressman, known on Capitol Hill as a lobbyist for the Indian and Israeli regimes, went even further. In a fit of ecstasy, he proposed that Rajiv and Jayewardene should be jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize![4]

With the benefit of hindsight, however, it seems painfully apparent that the Indo-Sri Lanka accord and its attendant military intervention utterly failed to achieve its dual objective of asserting India's hegemonic position in the South Asian region and of defusing the violence within Sri Lanka itself. Of course, the north-east continues to be devastated by civil war. Barely a couple of months after its arrival in north-eastern Sri Lanka, the IPKF became involved in a fierce and protracted military conflict with the Tigers in the Jaffna peninsula, the Tamil heartland, and hostilities soon spread throughout the north-east. The Indo-Tamil war dragged on for nearly two and one-half years after its first eruption in October 1987, and claimed, in total, the lives of 1,155 Indian soldiers, 711 LTTE fighters (official fatality figures for both sides), and an estimated several thousand Tamil civilians, mostly victims of massacres and torture perpetrated by the Indian forces and allied Tamil death-squads.

When the IPKF was finally 'de-inducted' (New Delhi, it appeared, could not bring itself to utter the word 'withdrawal') in March 1990, a leading Indian English-language daily, the *Indian Express*, ruefully observed that the prestige of the 'peace-keepers' had sunk so low among the population they had originally come to protect that 'no loyal citizen from among the Sri Lankan Tamils has willingly come forward to bid a fond farewell to the departing Indian soldiers'.[5] *Time* magazine, in a piece titled 'Goodbye—and Good Riddance', reported from Trincomalee that 'if the locals

3 In a speech in honour of Prime Minister Gandhi during the latter's visit to the United States in October 1987; quoted in *Frontline* (Madras), 31 Oct.–13 Nov. 1987, p.29.

4 Representative Stephen Solarz, Democrat from New York. He has since lost his seat in the U.S. Congress.

5 P.S. Suryanarayana, in *Indian Express* (Delhi), 25 March 1990.

had anything at all to say to the "peace-keepers", whose presence brought not peace but one of the bloodiest chapters in Sri Lanka's already violent history, it was more like good riddance'.[6] A. Sivalingam, a retired government official in Trincomalee, probably spoke for most Sri Lankan Tamils: 'We don't know what the future will bring, but we are glad the Indians have gone.'[7]

Indeed, by 1990, the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement lay in tatters, the Sinhalese and the Tamils were (for once!) united in their hatred of the alien 'army of occupation', and mounting criticism of the involvement, within India and abroad, had openly begun to characterise the IPKF experience as the Indian state's equivalent of Vietnam. This realisation was slowly dawning even on the Indian military establishment, the fourth most powerful of its kind in the world. In March 1990, an Indian general was quoted, anonymously, as admitting that 'it was none of our business to send in our army, and when we did, we were so ignorant of the realities on the ground'. Pointing to a copy of the historian Barbara Tuchman's book, *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam*, he added, morosely: 'We can add Sri Lanka to that'.[8] To add insult to injury, the Tigers emerged from their underground hideouts as soon as the IPKF had been 'de-inducted', decimated rival militias created by the Indians in a matter of days, and effectively took over the administration of the whole of the north and east.

The central purpose of this chapter is to study how the actions and policies of the Indian state, the regional superpower, impacted upon the course of the Sri Lankan civil war. I believe that the impact was essentially negative, destructive and destabilising. In particular, as we shall see, Indian state policy vis-a-vis Sri Lanka in the period 1983-87 had the net effect of exacerbating the violent conflict on that island, while the clumsy and self-serving bid to impose peace by force in the post-1987 phase (as exemplified in the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement and the military intervention), was a non-starter from the very beginning, and ended up earning India the hostility and hatred of *both* Sinhalese and Tamils.

But most significantly, the experience with Indian power

6 Anita Pratap, in *Time*, 2 April 1990.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

between 1987 and 1990 had the effect of greatly aggravating the defensive, siege mentality of the broad mass of Sri Lankan Tamils, and of convincing them that a safe and dignified existence was possible only within the secure confines of a sovereign Tamil state. The attempt by the Indian state to quell the Tamil uprising thus had the paradoxical result of *actually reinforcing* the Tamils' commitment to a nationalism that held that the ultimate self-expression of national identity was possible only when the nation had a state it could call its own. The Indian intervention also confirmed the position of the LTTE as the undisputed champion of the mantle of Tamil nationalism. This, too, was more than a little ironic—for the Indian strategy had been explicitly intended to achieve precisely the opposite.

It would be ahistorical, however, to analyse the IPKF intervention as a single, isolated instance of Indian involvement in Sri Lanka's internal developments. Ever since the anti-Tamil pogrom of July 1983 had sent thousands of refugees fleeing into India's southern province of Tamil Nadu, thereby 'internationalising' the Tamil question and inflaming passions in Tamil Nadu (home to some 50 million Indian citizens of Tamil 'ethnicity') over the plight of their cousins across the Palk Strait, New Delhi had become increasingly deeply involved in the unfolding quagmire of Sri Lanka's civil war. Before the direct military intervention of July 1987, Indian involvement had taken two major forms—efforts at diplomatic mediation between the warring parties, and covert operations. To put the Indian state's role, and especially the military intervention, in proper historical perspective, therefore, it becomes necessary to first cast one's glance back by a few years and trace the basic contours of the evolutionary process that culminated in the failed intervention of 1987-90.

The Background to Intervention: Indian Diplomatic and Covert Involvement in Sri Lanka

The interest of Indian regional policy-makers in Sri Lanka first became acute, in recent memory, following the riots of July 1983. Even as the violence continued on the island, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi despatched her Foreign Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao (later India's Prime Minister), to Colombo, without even

waiting for an official invitation to be issued to him by the Sri Lankan authorities. However, at the same time, Mrs. Gandhi unequivocally rejected calls for a Bangladesh-style intervention in north-eastern Sri Lanka in a statement to Indian Parliament in August 1983:

> India stands for the independence, unity and integrity of Sri Lanka. India does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. However, because of the historical, cultural and other such close ties between the peoples of the two countries, especially between the Tamil community of Sri Lanka and us, India cannot remain unaffected by events there (cited in Wilson 1988: 203).

The same basic theme was to be repeated by her son and successor, Rajiv Gandhi, some four years later, when he categorically stated that 'India wants a settlement across the table which has to be within the constitutional framework of Sri Lanka. *We will not support the Eelam concept*'[9] (emphasis added). However, what this apparent continuity of perception obscured was that between 1983 and 1987, the Indian state had embarked on a policy vis-a-vis the Sri Lankan imbroglio that was not just inept and indecisive, but also deeply flawed and fundamentally contradictory, a fact that 'the Indian Peace-Keeping Force discovered at great cost' (Ram 1991).

At one level, the Indians attempted to act as mediators between the Sri Lankan state and Tamil rebel organisations. Between 1983 and 1987, Indian diplomats and politicians floated a series of schemes, at the inter-governmental level, all of which postulated a negotiated settlement to the 'ethnic problem' on the basis of varying degrees of limited regional autonomy for the Sri Lankan Tamils.[10] Nothing very much ever came of these proposals, for a combination of reasons.

Obstructionist tactics constantly employed by the Jayewardene regime were undoubtedly instrumental in this outcome. The

9 In an interview to *India Today* (Delhi), 30 June 1987.

10 The more significant of these schemes were the autonomy proposals prepared at Mrs. Gandhi's behest by G. Parthasarathy, a seasoned Indian diplomat, and known as 'Annexure C' (November 1983); and those drawn up by P. Chidambaram and K. Natwar Singh (both Indian government ministers) during the tenure of the Rajiv Gandhi administration, in December 1986.

Sinhalese government, it appeared, was still fantasising about imposing a 'military solution' to the national question.[11] Second, until 1985, the only Tamil organisation that was explicitly involved by the Indians in their mediation efforts was the TULF. This was nothing surprising—the TULF was the continuation of the long-standing representative party of the Sri Lankan Tamils, the FP, and its leaders were established politicians who commanded instant recognition among observers of the island's public life. But the involvement of only the TULF, a party increasingly marginal to Tamil politics, naturally robbed the early Indian bids at mediation of much of their relevance and credibility. Following the July 1983 pogrom, the TULF leaders had departed to India, where they confined their political activities to periodically issuing didactic press statements. As the civil war intensified on the ground in north-eastern Sri Lanka, the initiative in Tamil politics inexorably passed to the young people who had had the courage to stay behind and fight, and more specifically, to the largest, best-organised and most disciplined of the youth organisations, the Liberation Tigers. As an Indian observer, writing on the causes of LTTE's seemingly boundless popularity among the Tamil population, commented in November 1987: '...the Tigers are still seen in northern Sri Lanka as the only people who gave their lives to protect the Tamils from the Sri Lankan security forces, when ...groups like the TULF were safely ensconced in Colombo and Tamil Nadu' (Bobb 1987b).

However, it would be an overstatement to say that these efforts at mediation had no significance whatsover, though the kind of significance they eventually did come to possess was perhaps very far removed from the original intentions of the mediators. In July-August 1985, for example, the then Indian Foreign Secretary

11 Wilson (1988: 178), for one, feels that even the occasional lip-service of the Jayewardene regime to a negotiated solution 'was a delaying device to enable the government to impose a military solution—the much-needed breather was for the arrival of military advisers, military hardware and crack combat mercenaries'. By 1984, in fact, the government *had* managed to elicit promises of military assistance from a curious assortment of countries—Pakistan, China, South Africa, Israel—as well as from a shadowy firm of ex-mercenaries based in Britain's Channel Islands. For a most engrossing account of the intimate links between the Mossad and the highest echelons of Sri Lanka's government (including the immediate family of President Jayewardene!), see the ex-Mossad agent Ostrovsky's book (with Claire Hoy), 1990.

Romesh Bhandari organised, on Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's instructions, two rounds of face-to-face negotiations between the Tamils and the Sri Lankan government. The discussions were intended to de-escalate the exploding ethnic confrontation in several phases, thus paving the way for an eventual peaceful settlement. The site chosen for these talks was a neutral one—Thimphu, the capital city (population: 20,000) of the small and remote South Asian Himalayan state of Bhutan. Nothing at all came of this conference in terms of evolving a plan for a peaceful solution of the Sri Lankan crisis. But there was something else that made the Thimphu talks a truly landmark event in the political history of Sri Lanka, and particularly of the Tamils. At this meeting, for the very first time, the various Tamil fighting groups (the Tigers foremost among them) were invited, at the behest of the Indian organisers, to send their representatives to participate in the deliberations, thus according them *de facto* recognition as political parties with a right to speak for the Tamils that was at least on par with the traditional leadership of the TULF. It is clear that the radical youth did not expect anything very much to come of the negotiations, for all, without exception, sent second-string leaders to participate on their behalf. However, they did seize the opportunity to legitimise their own role in the conflict, and proclaim their existence and programme to the world, in the glare of publicity emanating from Thimphu. In a rare show of unity, four of the groups (LTTE, EROS, EPRLF and TELO) temporarily came together under an umbrella forum they called the Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF). Indeed, some of the most clear-cut, important and valuable ideological declarations and policy statements of radical Tamil nationalism are to be found in the ENLF documents issued at the Thimphu conference, and the young firebrands completely stole the limelight from the tired and insipid politicians of the TULF as the talks limped on over several weeks (for a useful anthology, see Satyendra 1989: 133-63). In particular, the 'boys' stressed that

> our presence here today...and our participation at these talks...is a legitimation of the armed struggle of the Tamil people. We are concerned here to talk about the way in which the ethnic conflict can be resolved, in a lasting way...we

> do not seek political horsedeals...over the years, we, as a people, have had a rich experience of horsedeals that have not worked. We have found that every such pact or agreement has not been honoured (Satyendra 1989: 140, 146).

The Tigers and their (short-lived) alliance partners also took this opportunity to enunciate in categorical terms what they regarded to be the four 'cardinal principles' of the struggle for Tamil self-determination:

1. That the Sri Lankan Tamils be recognised as a distinct *nationality;*
2. That the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka be recognised as the historical and traditional *homeland* of the Sri Lankan Tamil people;
3. That the right of the Sri Lankan Tamils to *'self-determination'* (left deliberately undefined) be acknowledged;
4. That the plantation Tamils, though outside the Eelam formation, be restored full rights of citizenship and franchise.

The young Tamils looked upon this charter as non-negotiable, and its unconditional acceptance, in principle, by the Sri Lankan state as a pre-requisite for any truly meaningful and substantive peace talks. However, the four principles were decisively rejected by the government delegation, which reiterated its commitment to the unitary constitution of Sri Lanka. The talks were soon deadlocked. The Indians were furious at the collapse of their pet scheme. Apparently, officialdom in New Delhi regarded the ENLF participants as the principal wreckers, if only through their having been a bit too vocal, articulate and assertive! Indian officials publicly lambasted the Tamil negotiators, and, in a rather childish display of pique, New Delhi ordered the expulsion of LTTE's official representative in India.

This fiasco more or less typified the fate of India's attempts to broker a solution to Sri Lanka's 'ethnic conflict', which generated nothing but anger and frustration in New Delhi. As Kadian puts it: 'The entire saga of Indian-inspired negotiations was bizarre. Right from the beginning, the Indians produced a devolution package that satisfied neither Sinhalas nor Tamils. Successive

negotiators rehashed an essentially similar plan which had already been rejected by both sides in the past' (Kadian 1990: 97).[12]

Immediately before the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement was concluded, an Indian writer commented that New Delhi's 'handling of the [Sri Lankan] problem has been marked by indecision, ad hocism, and the involvement of too many cooks in the ethnic broth. The result is that India has lost influence with both Colombo and the Tamil militants...any further intervention...will be a diplomatic disaster' (Bobb 1987a).

The history of India's covert involvement in the Sri Lankan civil war, leading up to July 1987, constitutes a most intriguing tale. Most importantly, it appears to have been a form of involvement whose effects were entirely at cross-purposes, indeed, directly at odds, with the diplomatic mediation prong of Indian strategy. The July 1983 riots, and the sharp intensification of the civil war that followed in its wake, sent a massive influx of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees into Tamil Nadu. With them came the 'freedom fighters'. By 1984, Tamil Nadu's capital, Madras, one of India's four largest cities, was abuzz with energetic propaganda activity being carried out by information offices either affiliated to, or supportive of, the various Tamil guerrilla groups. Leading Tamil Nadu politicians, belonging to all political persuasions, vied with each other to publicly declare and canvass support for the rebel cause in Sri Lanka, and deplore the 'genocide' of Tamils being attempted by the government of that island. Tamil Nadu's most popular politician and head of the provincial government, a former film star named M.G. Ramachandran, was known to a personal friend and admirer of Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.

More ominously, after July 1983, scores of training camps for Tamil guerrillas sprang up along the vast and semi-deserted stretches of the Tamil Nadu coastline overlooking the Palk Strait, the shallow strip of water that separates India from northern Sri Lanka.[13] The Indian central government, as well as its provincial

12 Kadian's book, which is one of very few that have been written, to date, on the subject, provides an excellent overview of both Indian diplomatic and covert involvement in Sri Lanka during the years 1983-87, as well as a detailed and invaluable account of the failure of the military intervention and the breakdown of the accord between 1987 and 1990.

13 The distance between the Indian and Sri Lankan coastlines is only 22 nautical miles, or two hours in a fast motorboat, at the narrowest point of the Palk Strait.

counterpart in Tamil Nadu, turned a blind eye as the coastal districts of the province were converted into a logistical and supply area, a safe haven, *and* a staging base for offensive armed operations for the Tamil insurrection in Sri Lanka.[14] The Indian Navy and Coast Guard, it appeared, could not care less. This naturally generated a great deal of ill-will towards India among the Sinhalese population of the island, and led to a precipitous deterioration in bilateral relations between the governments of the two countries. But militant Tamil activists from Sri Lanka continued to operate freely from Tamil Nadu right up to the time of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord.[15]

And it was not simply a matter of turning a blind eye. Although the details are still somewhat murky, it is generally accepted, even in India, that the Indian state actively trained, supplied and otherwise sustained and supported Tamil guerrilla fighters on Indian soil, who subsequently went back to northern and eastern Sri Lanka to join the struggle to establish a sovereign Tamil Eelam. The Indian army was complicit in this, and the entire training effort was overseen and coordinated by India's external intelligence agency, known as Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).

Significantly, however, recent evidence would appear to indicate that the principal beneficiaries of Indian training were not the Tigers, but a much smaller guerrilla movement, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), whose leadership and rank-and-file in Jaffna were practically wiped out by the Tigers in May 1986. It appears that while New Delhi very much wanted

14 Local smugglers colluded with the guerrillas in transporting vast quantities of arms, ammunition and communications equipment (such as walkie-talkies and transmitters), as well as food, fuel and medicines, from Tamil Nadu to northern Sri Lanka. The LTTE was known to maintain a flotilla of superfast speedboats for precisely this purpose. Only in the past few years, after the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, is a concerted effort being made to root out the highly organised and well-entrenched Tiger network of supply routes, safe houses and sympathisers in Tamil Nadu. Tamil guerrilla activity on Indian soil was already being extensively reported upon by 1984. For a revealing account, see Gupta (1984: 52-57).

15 Indeed, LTTE supremo Prabhakaran directed his movement's operations inside Sri Lanka from the safety and comfort of Madras between 1984 and 1986: Kittu was the Tigers' commanding officer on the ground in the Jaffna peninsula during this time. Prabhakaran returned to Jaffna only in January 1987, when the Indian government's attitude towards him cooled perceptibly in response to what New Delhi perceived as LTTE's intransigent 'Eelam-or-nothing' stand.

to have a finger in the pie of the Sri Lankan 'ethnic conflict', it also desired that the bulk of Indian covert assistance should go not to the fiercely self-willed and independent-minded Tigers, but to some more pliable entity, which could then be used to undermine Tiger dominance of the Tamil armed struggle, and prevent the LTTE from getting too big for its boots. And, according to the anonymous testimony of an Indian diplomat deeply involved in formulating the government's Sri Lanka policy between 1983 and 1987, 'it was no accident that RAW chose TELO which was politically unsophisticated and had a large criminal element. TELO, with no goals and no ideology, was the perfect private army for RAW' (quoted in *Time*, 3 April 1989).

As Wilson relates, 'RAW...agents set Tamil groups against one another so as to create a balance and prevent any one group from obtaining dominance...RAW succeeded at first, but finally failed to prevent the LTTE from gaining the upper hand' (1988: 204).[16]

However, there is little doubt that the Tigers also benefited, and probably quite substantially, from Indian military instruction. As Kadian writes:

> ...the guerrillas were sent to major training institutions in different parts of India. For example, selected militants were sent to Chakrata in the Himalayan foothills of Uttar Pradesh. Here, Establishment 22, a tough, hush-hush organisation meant for subversion in [Chinese-controlled] Tibet, was used because it is secluded, well-guarded and far from the public eye...similarly, the academies of the para-military forces in central India were used to provide basic infantryman's training...In general, the quality of training was high and consisted of fieldcraft, tactics, map-reading, and jungle and guerrilla warfare. They were taught to handle weapons-systems like light and medium machine-guns, automatic rifles, pistols, and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. The AK-47 assault rifle...had to be specially procured for this purpose. Regular Indian Army personnel

16 Indeed, the RAW strategy geared to ensuring that the Tamil armed struggle remained firmly under Indian control was almost completely destroyed during 1985-86, when the LTTE, the group with the greatest autonomy of action vis-a-vis the Indian state, physically liquidated most of the cadres of rival Tamil organisations, including TELO, and drove the remnants into exile in India.

> were seconded to provide instruction in the use of bombs, laying of mines, and the establishment of telecommunications. In general, the militants excelled in fieldcraft, marksmanship, use of explosives and handling of telecommunications equipment, as the Indian Army was to discover...(1990: 105).

Kadian (1990) goes on to comment that

> after such instruction, the average Tamil guerrilla was as well-trained as any other in the world. However, motivation, dedication and leadership were the other ingredients that training alone could not impart. Some of the groups were patently lacking in these attributes...

It was precisely in the domain of 'motivation, dedication and leadership' that the LTTE scored over its rivals. The organisation made a determined effort to safeguard its independence and prevent its future course of action from being mortgaged to the Indians, even while it eagerly accepted Indian assistance to the extent that it was useful in building up its own military machine.[17] And, while Prabhakaran privately told an Indian journalist that he did value Tamil Nadu as a base and sanctuary from where to wage his struggle (Suryanarayana 1988: 17), he also made it equally clear, *on the record*, that he did not regard the use of Indian territory as *indispensable* to his war-effort, as early as June 1986:

> Our struggle is taking place in Eelam. We are conducting the war there. And when necessity arises we will go there. We

17 By 1985-86, the movement was in near-total control of the Jaffna peninsula. This enabled the Tigers to set up indigenous ordinance factories on 'liberated' soil, and a vast network of semi-secret and secret camps gradually came into existence throughout the north-east, with Jaffna as the centre of operations. It was in these camps, *inside* the Tamil region of Sri Lanka, and *not* India or anywhere else, that the overwhelming majority of Tiger fighters went through their rigorous training schedules. In this way, the Tigers evolved their own training infrastructure, tailored to their specific requirements. Much the same applied to their formidable arsenal. At the time of the accord, 'the Tigers possessed an estimated 3,000 weapons [probably an underestimation], of at least two dozen different types and vintage': almost certainly a sign of reluctance to be overly dependent on any single source of supply. The Tigers appear to have practically limitless funds, and they made good use of their financial clout to buy huge quantities of sophisticated weaponry off the world arms market (Kadian 1990: 23).

> have no desire to fight from here [i.e., Tamil Nadu]. We are here to carry on an international political campaign and not to launch a military struggle...we are representing the political aspirations of our people...India's support is important to us. But we also have a right to self-determination. We don't think Rajiv [Gandhi] will ask us to pack our bags. But then, if we are asked to go we will have to go. Our homeland is always waiting for us with open arms.[18]

Nonetheless, in concluding this section, it must be stated unambiguously that India's covert assistance to the Tamil guerrilla organisations in the pre-July 1987 period was a clear instance of one country (in this case, the neighbourhood superpower) actively aiding and abetting a nationalist/separatist insurgency in a neighbouring state. That the LTTE was both able to retain its own independence of action vis-a-vis the Indian state and emerge as the undisputed leader of the Tamil armed struggle despite Indian efforts to the contrary, is a separate issue altogether, though it certainly helps explain why the Tamil national movement, under LTTE leadership, was able to successfully resist the military onslaught of the Indian state in the post-July 1987 phase. It was in this context that the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement was concluded, within two months of which the Indian state was at war with the Tamils of Sri Lanka. The following section of this chapter is devoted to an analysis of how and why this remarkable *volte face* and reversal of roles came to be.

Tamil Nationalism Imperilled: The 'Indo-Sri Lanka Accord'

A liberation movement can only be strong if it grows out of a nation's own forces, and if it corresponds to the direct interests and demands of the broad body of its own people. But the moment the leadership of such a movement is placed at the service of a foreign hegemonistic policy...it cannot but become separated from its own people, thus undermining its own strength.

—Edvard Kardelj, Tito's deputy in the leadership of both the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) and the Partisan Movement

18 'Profile of a Tiger', interview in *India Today*, 30 June 1986, pp. 72-74.

(during World War II), on the famous Yugoslav-Soviet break of 1948.[19]

To seek peace without securing justice is but to chase an ever-receding mirage.

—LTTE on the failure of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord to bring lasting peace to Sri Lanka.[20]

The first aspect of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement that strikes one as being unusual is that the signatories to the document are the governments of Sri Lanka and *India*, and not the government of Sri Lanka and any individuals and/or organisations representative of the Sri Lankan Tamils. It would be reasonable to expect an agreement intended 'to establish peace and normalcy in Sri Lanka' to be concluded between the parties directly involved in the Sri Lankan dispute; i.e., between the Sinhalese-Buddhist state and the most authentic representative(s) of Tamil aspirations. India, as the region's dominant power with an interest in seeing the conflict resolved, might perhaps have appropriately played the role of guaranteeing or underwriting such a compact, together with any other governments and/or international agencies deemed suitable for this purpose. However, the Indian function was that of *signatory*, not guarantor, and this immediately raises certain questions about the Indian state's switching of roles, from mediation and arbitration to direct participation and intervention.

In a speech in New Delhi in March 1989, J.N. Dixit, Indian envoy to Sri Lanka at the time of the accord, dwelt at some length on Indian regional imperatives vis-a-vis Sri Lanka at the time of the conclusion of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement. Dixit played a major inside role in the secret diplomacy that culminated in the July 29th accord. According to his testimony:

> By 1978, the politically aware Sri Lankan Tamils had come to the conclusion that their future lay only in the creation of a separate state, to be carved out of Sri Lanka...we went through the trauma of the same doctrine being applied to our country

19 From a speech to the Yugoslav Parliament in December 1949, cited in Vukmanovic (1985: 8).

20 In *The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lanka Constitution*, LTTE UK Branch, Blackrose Press, London, undated, probably 1988.

> in 1945-46, as a result of which we were partitioned. Since then, our effort and experiment has been to build a society that rejected the theory that the territorial nation-state does always have to depend on language and religion...so the first reason we went into Sri Lanka was to preserve our own unity; to ensure the success of a very difficult experiment we have been carrying out ourselves...the second reason we went in was that the Sinhalese government started looking to external support to counter Tamil insurgency, which had security implications for us...the third reason...was an important domestic factor...we had to respect the sentiments of the 50 million Tamil citizens of India. We felt that if we did not rise in support of the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka, we were not standing by our own Tamils...it was a compulsion that could not be avoided by any elected government in this country...(cited in Kadian 1990: 85).

Let us critically evaluate these 'reasons' for the Sri Lanka intervention one by one. The second and the third do not stand up to scrutiny. However disturbing or unwelcome the presence in Sri Lanka of small numbers of British mercenaries, Israeli intelligence operatives, or Pakistani military instructors, as well as of limited American broadcasting facilities (for the VOA), might have been to Indian foreign policy officials, that by itself can hardly be regarded as constituting a sufficient reason for the commitment of thousands of troops in an area torn apart by civil war in a neighbouring country. Similarly, while sympathy for the Sri Lankan Tamil rebels was undoubtedly widespread in Tamil Nadu, very few even in that province, in 1987, would go to the extent of calling for India to intervene militarily on a large scale in order to settle the conflict on the neighbouring island once and for all.[21]

However, the first reason given by Dixit is one that goes to the heart of the logic of the Indian establishment's regional policy perspective. Except, in my view, the argument which is couched by Dixit in terms of a noble resolve to preserve, at all costs, the

21 Since the early 1980s, the people of Tamil Nadu had been intermittently treated to unwelcome manifestations of the 'gun culture' imported from Sri Lanka. These included accidental bomb explosions and deliberate shootings that had taken the lives of Indian civilians, as well as general criminality such as kidnapping, robbery and extortion by armed Sri Lankan Tamil militants. The smaller Tamil groups, and not the highly disciplined Tigers, had been responsible for almost every one of these incidents, but the respectability of the cause as a whole had suffered in consequence.

'secular' foundations of the Indian state and polity, actually has more to do with a pre-occupation with safe-guarding the *status quo* in the South Asian region, defined as the Indian state's territorial unity and integrity, and by extension, its position as the dominant power, the central pivot, so to speak, of the South Asian regional order. The last thing that those at the helm of the Indian state, confronted with multiple secessionist challenges and an ever-increasing crisis of legitimacy of their power as presently constituted, would want, in 1987 as in 1994, would be the partition of Sri Lanka and the creation of a radical Tamil state led by militant Tamil nationalists with a history of armed struggle and revolutionary war behind them. The Indian state had *no* stake in the break-up of the island; the imperative to dismember the strongest regional competitor (that existed in the case of Pakistan in 1971) is completely inapplicable to small and generally insignificant Sri Lanka.

On the contrary, India had much to lose, at least as seen through the paranoid lenses of those at the helm of an increasingly beleaguered and crisis-ridden unitary state apparatus in New Delhi, from a successful Tamil secession. As Donald Horowitz argues, 'fear of contagion and domino effects [within its own territorial boundaries] is widespread' even among those states that show a marked propensity to meddle in the separatist problems of other, usually neighbouring, countries (1985: 274). And not all of Indian official ideologues are as tactful in their manner of speech as Dixit was. Consider what K. Subrahmanyam, a strategic studies specialist, has to say on this issue:

> The crux of the accord is the Indian commitment to the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka and support to the democratic [*sic*] government there. India has no interest in the creation of a sovereign Tamil Eelam... Such fragmentation has a demonstration-effect and leads to ethnic groups in composite states demanding sovereignty for themselves. In India, there was such a demand in Jammu and Kashmir, Tamil Nadu and Nagaland in the 1950s, and subsequently in Mizoram and Sikkim [as well as raging separatist uprisings in Kashmir, Punjab and Assam at the present time]...given this background, India would not favour the creation of a small sovereign state with two-million population at its doorstep...What happened in Sri

> Lanka should send the central message that *India is committed to preserving and sustaining the integrity of the South Asian state-system as it exists today* (1987a: 23-24; 1987b) (emphasis added).

It is also possible that a consideration of the interests of the Congress-I regime, which was in power in New Delhi at the time, may go some way towards explaining why the accord was concluded at such breakneck speed, in such secrecy, and subsequently held up to the world as the panacea to all Sri Lanka's problems. Observers of the Indian political scene would recall that it was in mid-1987 that the crisis which culminated in the Rajiv Gandhi government's ouster from office in the parliamentary elections of November 1989 made its first appearance. News of the Bofors arms scandal, which plagued the government till its demise, had been broken by Swedish Radio in April 1987.[22] In mid-June, the Congress-I had suffered electoral disaster in its traditional stronghold, the Hindi-speaking belt of northern India, when the party was almost wiped out by the opposition in a crucial election, viewed practically as a mid-term referendum on Rajiv's record, to the legislature of the province of Haryana, near Delhi. In mid-July, the long-festering internal troubles of the Congress-I had reached flashpoint with the expulsion of Vishwanath Pratap Singh and several other key dissidents from the party. It is in this scenario that an observation once made by Samuel Huntington assumes pertinence:

> ...domestic problems thus become intractable...the public develops expectations impossible for the government to meet...the success of the government in achieving its goals

22 Bofors, which has today entered the Indian political idiom as a synonym for corruption in high places, is actually the name of a well-known Swedish armaments manufacturer, from whom the Indian government had ordered a large number of 155 mm. field artillery guns for its army sometime in the mid-1980s. Allegations surfaced in 1987 that the Swedish firm had paid huge bribes to persons in the highest echelons of the Indian government in order to obtain the lucrative contract. The Bofors scandal was, from then on, to become the favourite weapon of the political opposition in its efforts to topple the increasingly discredited and authoritarian government of Prime Minister Gandhi from power. The slogan of corruption was taken up with particular effectiveness by one of Gandhi's former political associates, V.P. Singh, who had suffered a fall from grace in early 1987. Singh eventually replaced Gandhi as Prime Minister, at the head of a fragile coalition government, when the Congress-I lost parliamentary elections held in November 1989.

> seems dubious. In a democracy, however, political leaders in power need to score successes if they are going to stay in power. The natural result is to produce a gravitation to foreign policy, where successes, or seeming successes, are much more easily arranged than in domestic policy. Trips abroad, summit meetings, declarations and treaties, rhetorical aggression, all produce the illusion of activity and achievement. The weaker a leader at home, the more likely he is to be travelling abroad (in Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki 1975: 104).

As an editorial in an August 1987 issue of the respected left-wing Indian journal, *Economic and Political Weekly*, commented:

> What the Agreement purports to achieve and what it may actually be intended to achieve may be two rather different things...The Indian prime minister did have a strong need to produce a diversion from inconvenient domestic developments, and the Sri Lankan situation was poised just at the point where it could, with Jayewardene's cooperation, be packaged appropriately.[23]

Indeed, New Delhi appears to have been in such a tearing hurry for an 'instant fix' to the Sri Lankan crisis which could then be paraded before the domestic and international audience, that *no* Sri Lankan Tamils, Tiger or otherwise, seem to have been involved, even in a purely consultative capacity, in the drafting of a treaty whose ostensible purpose was to secure justice for the Tamil people of Sri Lanka! A few days before the accord was signed by Rajiv and Jayewardene in Colombo, Velupillai Prabhakaran and a few of his top aides were flown from Jaffna to Delhi by the Indian Air Force, and kept in virtual detention in a five star hotel in that city. As he told the press at that time:

> If we had been shown this agreement in Jaffna, we wouldn't have come to India at all. It is only when we came here that we found that India and Sri Lanka had already come to an agreement, which I am now supposed to endorse. *It was a*

23 'Beyond the Tamil Issue', in *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), 1 August 1987, p. 1261.

> *calculated plan to persuade me to come so as to give the impression that I am a party to it!*[24] (emphasis added).

The Indians' failure to involve Tamil activists, especially the Tigers, in the run-up to the accord was certainly a fatal shortcoming, and one which undermined the viability of the agreement from the very beginning. As 'A.M.' queried in *Economic and Political Weekly*:

> Does New Delhi have any *locus standi* to sign an agreement that concerns Sri Lanka's internal affairs? Our Prime Minister has presumed to append his signature on behalf of the island's Tamil population...he seems to regard it as his prerogative to take decisions on their behalf and pin them down to these decisions. If they would not be pinned down, he would shoot them.[25]

Indeed, if the Tamils had not been a conscious and willing party to the agreement, they could only be compelled to accept its provisions in the post-accord phase through persuasion, or coercion, or some combination of the two. And now, the responsibility for ensuring that the Tamils cooperated, and ceased their armed struggle in return for the limited autonomy the agreement promised to give them, and of taking measures to disarm them, if they did not, lay solely, as per the relevant clause of the accord, with the Government of India, and, by extension, with its instrument, the IPKF.

If the Indian state's newfound determination to intervene directly and aggressively in Sri Lanka's internal conflict was rather surprising, President Jayewardene's apparent willingness to seriously consider *any* kind of political solution to his Tamil problem, especially one brokered by India, was no less so. His hostility to any form of Indian involvement in Sri Lanka's internal affairs was well-known. Commenting on the possibility of an Indian attempt to impose a Cyprus-like partition in Sri Lanka, he had said ominously in April 1984: 'If India does invade us, that is the end for the Tamils in this country. Now we have only a guerrilla war in the north. Are the Indians going to stop the

24 'We Reviewed Our Stand'; interview in *India Today*, 15 August 1987.

25 'Calcutta Diary', in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31 October 1987, p. 1843.

slaughter of the Tamils in Colombo?' (cited in Ram 1989: 89). Asked in August 1987 what had previously prevented him from signing a similar agreement that would have put an end to the bloodshed, he was fumbling and evasive: 'I don't myself have a reason for this. But the only explanation I can possibly think of is that it is the first time that India is willing to tackle this [Tamil] terrorist problem as an active partner with me...earlier, they were training the terrorists'. Pressed on what he viewed as Sri Lanka's principal gain from the accord, he replied: 'The major gain is that [Tamil] terrorism is over'.[26] It appears that Jayewardene, presiding over the Sri Lankan catastrophe since 1977, had become convinced by mid-1987 that it was beyond the capacity of the Sri Lankan state to defeat the Tamil armed resistance by military means, and that any negotiated settlement would necessarily have to involve India, not only because it was the dominant regional power, but also because it was the only country with some sort of leverage with the Tamil radicals.

In the first half of 1987, Colombo had launched a massive land-sea-air offensive, widely billed as the 'final offensive' of the war and optimistically codenamed 'Operation Liberation', against the Tiger-held northern province. Despite some limited gains, however, Operation Liberation had failed to inflict anything resembling a decisive defeat on the Tigers. On the other hand, the thousands of Tamil civilian casualties from the offensive had enraged the population in Tamil Nadu, and brought forth stern and pointed warnings from New Delhi to desist from committing 'genocide'. In fact, relations between the two governments had entered a phase of serious crisis in early June of 1987.[27] All this appears to have got the message to Jayewardene that

26 'I Have Never Mistrusted India'; interview in *India Today*, 31 August 1987.

27 In the first week of June, a flotilla of Red Cross ships, carrying a small amount of relief materials for the beleaguered Jaffna Tamils from the Indian government, had been turned back in the Palk Strait by a Sri Lankan gunboat. New Delhi had reacted to this 'humiliation' with a show of raw military muscle. Five giant Soviet-built transport planes, escorted by four ultra-modern Mirage-2000 fighter-bombers of the Indian Air Force (with orders to put down any resistance), had violated Sri Lankan airspace to drop a small quantity of foodstuffs and other essentials over parts of the Jaffna peninsula. The gesture was largely symbolic; as an Indian newsmagazine pointed out, 'the quantity of food dropped—25 tonnes—was hardly enough to feed the 830,000 Tamils of the Jaffna peninsula for even a day'. See Bobb 1987a: 13.

> the political dangers to him from a creeping Indian intervention, which would have been inevitable had the hostilities in the north continued, were greater than those for a one-stroke agreement that at least kept up the appearance of Indian intervention and assistance being at the request of the Sri Lankan government.[28]

Furthermore, Jayewardene had wangled the best possible bargain from the Indians. Under the terms of the accord, the Indians now had sole responsibility for eradicating all militant tendencies in the north and east! As an *Economic and Political Weekly* editorial observed immediately after the outbreak of hostilities between the Indian army and the LTTE in October 1987:

> What has Jayewardene's government gained from all this? Most obviously, of course, the accord has gone a long way towards ending, if not permanently for some time to come, any hope of realising Tamil aspirations to a homeland. Especially with the decimation of the militants, the forging of a class alliance with the TULF might become more possible.[29]

And the price that Jayewardene had had to pay in order to procure this godsend was that he 'finally...had to accept India as the major regional power with whom he had to come to terms' (Subrahmanyam 1987b).

Unfortunately, it appeared that Jayewardene's pragmatic rebirth was not shared by Sinhalese public opinion in general. The masses of the Sinhalese people, fed for decades by successive Sinhalese regimes in Colombo on a healthy diet of scare-stories concerning Indian expansionism's designs on their island, reacted, by and large, hysterically to the accord, which they perceived as a sell-out to the expansionists and their diabolical agents, the Tamil terrorists. It turned out that even the Cabinet was divided on this question. Jayewardene's Prime Minister, Ranasinghe Premadasa, who was soon to succeed him as President, publicly condemned the agreement. When Rajiv Gandhi arrived in Colombo on 29 July, the entire city had been placed under blanket curfew to forestall mass Sinhalese demonstrations against the accord. The

28 'Beyond the Tamil Issue', in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1 August 1987, p. 1261.

29 'Changed Roles', in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17- 24 October 1987, p. 1773.

depths of Sinhalese resentment were to become even more apparent in the next few days. On 30 July, a Sinhalese naval rating attempted to assault Prime Minister Gandhi with his rifle butt while the latter was inspecting a combined guard of honour of the Sri Lankan armed forces prior to his departure for Delhi. Weeks later, President Jayewardene narrowly escaped with *his* life when a grenade was lobbed into a room where the Sri Lankan cabinet was in session. As a leader of the ever-influential Buddhist clergy put it: 'The public feel that the President has trampled upon Sinhala interests and pushed through the accord without prior intimation'.[30]

In the months to come, this climate was to be fully capitalised upon by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the virulently nationalistic Sinhalese youth group, and would enable that organisation to launch its second bid to capture state power by force in the space of two decades. Paradoxically, then, an agreement intended 'to establish peace and normalcy in Sri Lanka' had the unfortunate side-effect of catapulting the hitherto relatively tranquil Sinhalese-dominated areas of the island into an orgy of violence, as, over the next couple of years, the state and the JVP fought out an intra-Sinhalese civil war that, for sheer savagery, surpassed even the conflict in the north-east.

Despite the rabid hostility in the south, the first contingents of the IPKF arrived in the north to a delirious welcome from the war-weary local Tamil population. This, in itself, was nothing surprising, for many Tamils had for years been eagerly anticipating an Indian military intervention on their behalf, and they thought the moment had finally come! Moreover, it was well-known that the 'boys' regarded India as their natural ally and friend, and at Thimphu in 1985, the ENLF had stated its position on the role it saw for India in the Sri Lankan dispute in unambiguous terms:

> The Tamil national struggle is not taking place in some Himalayan stratosphere—it is taking place on the ground and in the context of power balances in the Indian region. We, for our part, are mindful of this reality and we welcome India's role...we often say, amongst ourselves, that we are not only Tamils, but that we are also Indians...we find strength in the

30 Quoted in *India Today*, 15 September 1987.

statement of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi that a fair and lasting solution must be found to the Tamil question (in Seevaratnam 1989: 138).

It is, therefore, a moot question as to why things went so drastically wrong between the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Indian state. Why did the Tamil Tigers choose to chart the perilous course of becoming involved in a protracted armed confrontation with the forces of the world's fourth-strongest military power, rather than meekly accept the Indo-Sri Lanka accord and abandon their struggle for Tamil sovereignty? It is important to answer this question, for the unremitting hostility of the Tigers effectively doomed any realistic prospects of the agreement's implementation at the very outset, and set the stage for the unfolding morass in which the proponents of *Pax Indica* were soon to find themselves hopelessly bogged down.

Prabhakaran's objections to the accord can, for purposes of analytical clarity, be classified into two broad categories. First, the LTTE supremo was greatly incensed at the hush-hush manner in which the accord was drawn up, and then sought to be foisted on the Tamils as a virtual *fait accompli*. On this point he stated:

> This agreement was totally unacceptable to us...it was drafted without consulting the Tamil representatives...I think that India has realised that without the LTTE the accord won't work—that's why they took the decision to consult us, albeit at the eleventh hour....Earlier, Indian officials came and read out an agreement asking us to sign it. That was unacceptable.[31]

In other words, the Tigers were not prepared to sign on the dotted line. The second major category of Tiger reservations comprised detailed and substantive criticisms of the content of devolution postulated by the agreement, and of the Indian state's motivation in projecting it as the definitive redressal of Tamil grievances. Above all, Prabhakaran was convinced of the following, which he related to a mammoth public rally organised in Jaffna city by the Tigers to welcome him back from his ordeal in India, on 4 August 1987:

> This Agreement...is primarily concerned with Indo-Sri Lankan

31 'We Reviewed our Stand', in *India Today*, 15 August 1987.

> relations. It also contains within itself the principles; the requirements, for making Sri Lanka accede to India's big-power orbit [it had been agreed between Rajiv and Jayewardene that Sri Lanka would not allow foreign military and intelligence personnel inimical to Indian interests, such as, presumably, the Pakistanis, Chinese, Americans and Israelis, to be stationed on Sri Lankan soil; would not make Trincomalee harbour available for military use by any country in a manner that might be prejudicial to Indian interests, but would develop it in conjunction with India; and would ensure that foreign broadcasting facilities on Sri Lankan territory were not used for spying purposes]....That is why the Indian government showed such an extraordinary keenness in concluding this Agreement. However, at the same time, it happens to also be an Agreement that determines the political future and fate of the people of Tamil Eelam...there is no point in our objecting to this. When a great power has decided to determine our destiny in a manner that is essentially beyond our control, what are we to do? (Ram 1989: 147-49).

An editorial in the *Economic and Political Weekly* supported Prabhakaran's viewpoint: 'The scope of the Rajiv-Jayewardene agreement extends well beyond working out a solution to the Tamils' problems. It...can be more accurately described as a *security treaty* between the two countries'[32] (emphasis added). Thus, while the Tigers had not been a party to the accord, and were entirely reluctant to accept it, they were powerless and resigned to its implementation in the face of the seemingly implacable determination of the regional giant, India, for, in Prabhakaran's words, 'were we not to hand over our weapons, we would be placed in the calamitous circumstance of clashing with the Indian Army. We do not want that. We love India. We love the people of India'.[33] Despite such affected sentimentalities, the extent of the Tigers' dissatisfaction with the accord and their disillusionment with the Indian role can be gauged by looking at a representative sample of Prabhakaran's public statements during August 1987:

> As they [the Indians] took into consideration their own interests

32 'Beyond the Tamil Issue', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1 August 1987, p. 1261.

33 See Ram (1989: 147-49).

> and hurriedly arrived at the agreement, they have not looked after the grievances of the people who have been affected for so long...having fought so much, having sacrificed so many lives and having lost 20,000 people—all this has been subordinated to India's strategic interests. Not only that, we, the representatives of such martyrs, have not been properly respected....India has not given us our due....*It is better to fight and die than surrender the weapons in an insecure environment and die on a mass scale*[34] (emphasis added).

The Tigers also hotly disputed the Indian claim that the accord conferred really meaningful autonomy on the Tamils of the north-east. Prime Minister Gandhi contended that the agreement, 'for the first time, looked at almost every single problem of the Tamils, found answers to these problems, and guarantees for those answers' (quoted in Seevaratnam 1989: 168). However, it would appear that the autonomy envisaged was in actuality more form than content. In particular, though the accord did provide for the merger of the northern and eastern provinces into a single administrative unit, the merger was temporary and contingent on the results of a referendum to be conducted in the eastern province. If a simple majority in the east voted against the merger, it would be annulled. As a consequence of state-aided Sinhalese 'colonisation' of the east, the Tamils no longer constituted even a simple majority of the population there, thus automatically placing them at a disadvantage in any referendum. This referendum clause was unacceptable to Tamil opinion. As Prabhakaran growled: 'It is not a question of merger of the North and East. It is our homeland. There is no question of any negotiation on this.'[35]

Moreover, powers in almost all major spheres (including the two most crucial ones—land settlement and law and order) remained vested in the central government, making a mockery of the devolution process. Worse still, Colombo retained control over the allocation of finances to the Provincial Council, and the PC itself had no powers of taxation or borrowing. And even the few limited subjects on which the Board of Ministers of the PC was empowered to legislate were subject to the overriding veto of the Provincial Governor, who was to be an appointee

34 In an interview to *Frontline*, 22 August-4 September, 1987, pp. 113-15.

35 Ibid.

of the President of Sri Lanka! In a cogent critique of the autonomy provisions of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord, Nadesan Satyendra, one of Britain's most prominent constitutional lawyers and a Sri Lankan Tamil, argued that

> the Provincial Council will be no more than a glorified local government authority, with power to enact statutes in respect of a few innocuous matters, such as probation and childcare services, market fairs, cooperatives, animal husbandry and pawnbroking, and that, too, subject at all times to the overriding control of the central government. And, even in relation to these subjects, the PC may not pass statutes involving finance except on the recommendation of the Governor (in LTTE 1988).

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the accord, Alfred Jeyaratnam Wilson commented:

> The scheme for the devolution of powers is yet to be clarified. In its present form, it is far from satisfactory since the government in Colombo would have ultimate supervision and control. A system such as the dyarchy that operated [in British India] under the Government of India Act of 1919, but containing some improvements, is envisaged (1988: 229).

Prabhakaran, for his part, pointed out that the accord did not fulfil a single one of the four 'cardinal principles' laid down at Thimphu. It did not explicitly recognise the Tamils as a nationality (but only as an 'ethnic group', neither here nor there), failed to concede that the north and east constituted the traditional homeland of the Tamils alone, among all the peoples of Sri Lanka, and did not grant the Tamils the theoretical right to 'self-determination'.

But the Tigers were clear on what they considered to be *the* critical flaw in the accord. 'The crucial point on which we are rejecting this Agreement is the point about giving up our arms', said Prabhakaran. The LTTE argued that it constituted 'the only deterrent force [to state-sponsored 'genocide']... if this deterrent force is removed, our people become defenceless'. Prabhakaran raised a further important concern. He pointed out that no arrangements had been made for the long-term security of the

Tamils, once the Tigers had disarmed and the IPKF had withdrawn. This issue was indeed critical, for though the accord temporarily confined Sri Lankan troops to their barracks in the north and east, it contained no clause pertaining to an even partial dismantling of the huge Sri Lankan security structure (some 200 army camps and police stations) in the Tamil region. Prabhakaran stated that 'a working arrangement [has to be] made on the ground that would ensure the safety and security of the Tamils. *Unless that working arrangement is established, the question of [LTTE's] disarming doesn't arise'* (emphasis added). Ironically, Prabhakaran seemed to agree with Jayewardene that the principal achievement of the accord was that it effectively terminated the Tamil armed struggle: 'The objective of this accord is to put an end to Tamil resistance. We can't say at this point whether the objective will be achieved. We will have to wait and see....[But] I don't think the accord will bring lasting peace'.[36]

Of course, what seemed a godsend to Jayewardene appeared to Prabhakaran as an unmitigated curse. Thus, while the LTTE leader made it clear that the Tigers had no alternative but to comply with New Delhi's wishes, he was equally categorical that they had to do so under duress, and that he himself retained his unrelenting defiance of authority, and commitment to full independence for the Tamils:

> What is taking place now is this. Sri Lanka and India have concluded an agreement. The Indian Army is here and is asking for our weapons. If we don't give them up, we will have to fight the Indian Army. To avert that, we accepted these arrangements, but *we have not abandoned our political objective....The forms of struggle may change, but the objective or goal of our struggle is not going to change...let me make it clear to you here, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that I shall continue to fight for the objective of attaining Tamil Eelam*[37] (emphasis added).

In the event, the Tigers eventually handed over only a fraction of their weapons to the IPKF. The Tigers claimed that they had

36 For all of the above citations, see Prabhakaran's interview in *India Today*, 15 August 1987.

37 Interview to *Frontline*, 22 August-4 September 1987, and public speech at Suthumalai (Jaffna) on 4 August 1987, reproduced in Ram 1989: pp. 147-49.

surrendered 85 per cent of their arsenal. Kadian believes that 'in reality, perhaps 15 per cent of the weapons were handed in' (1990: 27). During August and September, there were repeated armed clashes between the Tigers and remnants of EPRLF, PLOTE and TELO (who had formed themselves into an anti-Tiger coalition called the 'Three Stars'), who, the Tigers alleged, were being brought back to northern and eastern Sri Lanka in Indian transport aircraft, re-armed by the Indian army, and let loose on them. There were also attacks on Sinhalese 'settlers' in the eastern province ('colonisation' had continued unabated, despite the accord), for which the Tigers were generally considered responsible.

The LTTE, Delhi and Colombo also continued to haggle over the modalities of establishing the interim administration in the north-east. The Tigers wanted a clear majority share of the representation for their nominees, and demanded that both the 'Three Stars' and the TULF be totally excluded—both of which India and Sri Lanka were reluctant to concede. In response, the Tigers initiated a major civil disobedience movement throughout the north-east, reminiscent of the FP's massive *satyagraha* campaigns of 1958-61, in order to press their demands and generally make life difficult for the newly-arrived Indian soldiers. In the second half of September, tension mounted dangerously, and Tamil public opinion began to turn decisively against the Indian presence, when Amirthalingam Thileepan, 22 year-old LTTE political commissar for Jaffna, went on indefinite hungerstrike and fasted to death demanding the immediate implementation of a five-point charter:

1. release of all Tamil detenus held under anti-terrorist laws;
2. An end to Sinhalese 'colonisation' of the eastern province;
3. Disbanding of all government paramilitaries and death-squads;
4. Permanent closure of all army and police installations in the north-east;
5. Immediate establishment of the promised interim administration (on the LTTE's terms).[38]

Three days after Thileepan's death, on 28 September, the LTTE's

38 This episode seems to indicate that the Tigers were once again using the emotive symbol of the 'martyr' to consolidate national solidarity in an hour of crisis. Except this time, of course, the 'enemy' of the nation was the Indian state.

terms on the constitution of the interim administration were finally conceded, but events were already out of control.

The proverbial spark that ignited the simmering cauldron came on 3 October. On that day, 17 Tamil Tiger military officers, including two top-ranking field commanders, Kumarappa of Jaffna and Phulendran of Trincomalee, were picked up by the Sri Lankan Navy while travelling in two speedboats along the northern coast, and transported to a government airbase in the north, pending deportation to Colombo for interrogation. The Tigers argued that this act constituted a flagrant violation of the letter and spirit of the accord, which had stipulated an unconditional amnesty to all their cadres, and Prabhakaran himself repeatedly appealed to the Indian government and the IPKF authorities to intercede with the Sri Lankans and have the captives released.

However, this was not done, and Kittu, on behalf of LTTE, was to claim later that the Indians had actually attempted to use the prisoners as a bargaining chip in order to compel the Tigers to accept the accord without any qualifications whatsoever. On 5, October, as the prisoners were being loaded on to a Sri Lankan Air Force plane for their onward flight to Colombo, all seventeen swallowed their cyanide capsules. Twelve, including Kumarappa and Phulendran, died immediately (only two eventually survived). The following day, Prabhakaran repudiated the cease-fire, and the Tigers executed eight Sri Lankan prisoners-of-war in their custody and launched further bloody attacks against unarmed Sinhalese in the eastern districts. Some 200 'settlers' were massacred in these attacks, mainly in Batticaloa and Trincomalee. In response, on 10 October, thousands of Indian soldiers, backed by tanks, artillery and helicopter gunships, launched a massive offensive, codenamed 'Operation Pawan' (Wind) against the LTTE in the Jaffna peninsula. The peace-keepers had been transformed into combatants. 'A.M.' wrote, prophetically as it turned out, in the *Economic and Political Weekly*:

> What is now happening in Sri Lanka is known in the language of commerce as sub-contracting. The Sri Lankan President has sub-contracted the job of restoring law and order in his country to our Prime Minister. The Indian fire-power, once it has succeeded in killing off a few thousand Tamil activists, may be able to enforce the silence of the graveyard in the island. The

discontent will smoulder inside though, and peace and amity will remain distant. Hatred towards the Indian state will be the only common point binding the Sri Lanka Sinhalese and the Sri Lanka Tamils.[39]

'No Surrender': The Tamil Nation Confronts the Indian State

But, miraculous as it seemed, the Indian fire power did not succeed in killing off the 'few thousand Tamil activists'. This was certainly not for want of trying. The Indians far outnumbered and outgunned the Tigers, whose core armed force on the peninsula was estimated at between 2,500 and 3,000 (by the end of October, there were 35,000 Indian troops in Jaffna district alone). But the Tigers, under the command of Prabhakaran and his deputy Mahattaya, proved brilliant in combat, employing with great dexterity and effectiveness a mixture of conventional and guerrilla tactics against their vastly superior foe.[40]

The five-pronged Indian advance on Jaffna city had been effectively checked by ferocious resistance by 16 October, and a serious military embarrassment, apart from anything else, appeared to be in the offing for New Delhi.[41] Admittedly, the fault was not entirely the army's; it had never encountered quite this species of opponent before, and had little idea of how to deal with the situation, as a bemused Indian private testified: 'It was impossible to say who was a Tiger and who was not. Everyone, male and female, above the age of 10, could be armed and dangerous. We saw little girls producing guns from under their frocks and shooting at us. How do you fight them?' (Bobb 1987b: 17).

After substantial reinforcements had been inducted, the second phase of the offensive was launched on 21 October, and the first Indian units entered Jaffna city on 26 October (the Tigers had started evacuating it the night before), after sustaining very heavy casualties. The last fortified LTTE urban stronghold on the peninsula held out till 6 November.

39 'Calcutta Diary', in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31 October 1987, p. 1843.

40 For a searing account of the defence of Jaffna, see the Indian photojournalist Shyam Tekwani's eyewitness report, 'In the Tigers' Den', *India Today*, 15 November 1987.

41 For a detailed and comprehensive account of Operation Pawan, see Kadian, 1990: 35-52. Also Ram 1989: 68-70.

But this dubious Indian military 'victory' proved pyrrhic, in two ways. First, the bulk of the Tigers simply melted, in classic guerrilla fashion, into the civilian population (especially in the rural areas), and the guerrillas dispersed, in an orderly manner, all over the north and east, with instructions to each unit or formation to re-group at specific pre-designated locations. Not a single high-ranking Tiger leader had been killed or captured in course of the offensive. Indeed, the sophistication and tenacity of the LTTE's resistance surprised the world, and, as one Indian writer put it, 'though militarily it was a success for the Indian army, the entire exercise will be remembered more for the resistance the guerrillas put up' (Ram 1989: 69).

This view is corroborated in accounts of journalists on the scene; the *Sunday Times*, a British conservative paper, reported on 25 October that

> even while senior Indian officers were talking of encircling and trapping the guerrillas [Indian commanders had been openly boasting that it would at most take four to six days of fighting to finish the Tigers for ever], a group of foreign journalists smuggled into the peninsula by the Tigers...were returning with graphic tales of the Tigers' bravery, organisational skills and support among the civilian population (Simon Freeman in the *Sunday Times*, 25 October 1987).

The Tigers were, after all, local youth who were defending their own homes and communities.

Second, and perhaps even more importantly, the Indian offensive brought a trail of death and destruction to the civilian Tamil population. Shelling and strafing by artillery and helicopter gunships, as well as indiscriminate shootings by frustrated Indian soldiers unattuned to combat with an elusive insurgent enemy, took a toll of hundreds of Tamil civilian lives. Thus, in course of Operation Pawan, the Indians squandered what had, till then, been the only real asset of their entire intervention in Sri Lanka—they forfeited the goodwill of the populace. Among the Tamils, the sense of betrayal was particularly bitter, since India had, until then, been looked up to and respected much like a benevolent elder brother. For the next two years, and more, the IPKF and the LTTE 'were to carry on a ghostly little war—a war of midnight

ambushes, mine explosions and sniper fire, fought in the classic guerrilla pattern codified by Mao Zedong; the guerrilla takes like a fish to water, becomes part of the people' (Ram 1989: 69).

The Indian state, however, seemed incapable of, or unwilling to, recognise reality and come to terms with the military strength and mass support of the Tiger Movement. Its sole policy response to the stalemate was singularly unimaginative, as well as completely ineffective—pumping in more and more military power in a facile effort to 'saturate' the north-east with armed men. A leading Indian defence analyst, Ravi Rikhye, writing in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in March 1989, estimated the peak IPKF combat strength in the Tamil region at some 102,000 to 105,000 men, a military commitment comparable in scale to that of the United States in Vietnam, the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and Vietnam in Cambodia (Rikhye 1989: 606). This figure represented 10 per cent of India's total standing army of 1.1 million personnel. But the IPKF deployment accounted for an astounding 30 per cent of the *specialised* troops of the Indian army, including elite strike forces withdrawn from the sensitive border with Pakistan, and counter-insurgency formations skilled in jungle warfare brought in from the north-eastern frontier with China (Kadian 1990: 117-18). However, it appeared that even this massive military build-up, and various offensives and 'search-and-destroy' operations that went with it, failed to intimidate, leave alone overwhelm, the Liberation Tigers. They continued to fight on, with Prabhakaran and Mahattaya directing the war effort from their operational command base deep in the Wanni jungles of Sri Lanka's northern province, encompassing the districts of Vavuniya and Mullaithivu.

New Delhi also exhibited a consistent disregard for any political initiatives mooted to resolve the stalemate. As early as 28 October, 1987, Mahattaya, on behalf of LTTE, had asked for an extended ceasefire, a withdrawal of Indian forces to their pre-offensive positions, and talks between Tiger representatives and Indian officials at a neutral location to de-escalate the crisis. But the offer, which, as it turned out, was the first of a number of similar conciliatory overtures that were to be made by the Tigers in the coming months, was rejected outright by the Indians. Instead, New Delhi stubbornly clung to its demand that the Tigers lay down all their weapons and accept the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement in its totality

as *the* final resolution to the Tamil question, Thus, on 13 January, 1988, and 9 March, 1988, in two essentially similar letters addressed to Prime Minister Gandhi, Prabhakaran wrote:

> Morally and spiritually, we are opposed to this war. We always wished to put an end to this painful tragedy, which was not of our choice. In this context, we regret to note that the Government of India has persistently rejected our urgent and sincere pleas for peace....I appeal to you, once again, to call off offensive military operations and initiate peace negotiations to end all hostilities and establish peace and normalcy....As we have repeatedly assured you, the LTTE will cooperate with the Government of India in the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord if Tamil interests are promoted and the Tamil people are protected....We still insist that the implementation of the accord should safeguard the interests and aspirations of our people. Our concern...is based on our legitimate fears about the chauvinistic attitude of the Sri Lankan regime... (cited in Suryanarayana 1988: 30-31, 89).

By this time, the Tigers were obviously overstretched and eager for peace—but their appeals went unheeded and the fighting continued.

The obdurate and unrealistic Indian stance outlined above stemmed, it seems, from a serious and persistent underestimation of the political will and determination of the LTTE leadership and rank-and-file, and their ability to go on waging a 'protracted people's war' against a foreign army that was daily making itself more unpopular by its actions. K. Subrahmanyam was typical, in Indian official circles, in brashly proclaiming, in the immediate aftermath of Operation Pawan, that 'the bravado of the Tamil Tigers in continuing guerrilla warfare...need not constitute a serious threat to the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement' (1987a: 24). In hindsight, it does seem self-evident that the policy-makers and ideologues of the Indian state should have taken far more serious note of the defiant statements made by Tiger leaders and cadres even as they fought a desperate war for survival, of which the following one, from LTTE's then top-ranking political commissar Yogaratnam Yogi, was typical:

> We do not blame Rajiv, but his advisers who are misleading him on the situation. We do not blame the Indian soldiers, they are only carrying out orders. *But we will never surrender.* We can keep fighting for another 10 to 20 years, if necessary. For every Tiger killed, another is born (cited in Bobb 1987b: 20) (emphasis added).

But Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi continued to delude himself that the LTTE was 'a small outfit of 1500 to 2000 persons that represents no one but itself,'[42] and the war went on.

Having failed to liquidate the Tigers militarily, the only hope for the Indian state, and for the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, lay in being able to successfully marginalise them *politically*, such that their hardcore, however committed, would wither away in the jungles and eventually lose their relevance in the eyes of the Tamil people. With this end in mind, the Indian military administration organised elections, even as intermittent fighting continued, to the Northeastern Provincial Council in November 1988. The Tigers promptly announced a boycott of the elections, and swore vengeance on anyone who participated in them in any way. As early as November 1987, an Indian commentator had warned that

> the danger is...that New Delhi might be tempted to ignore the Tigers altogether in future negotiations on the composition of the interim administration [for the north-east] and the Provincial Council. That may prove to be another fatal mistake...which will rob the Provincial Council of much of its credibility in the eyes of the Tamil people (Bobb 1987b: 21).

This was precisely the blunder that New Delhi *did* commit. The Provincial Council elections turned out to be a complete farce. As Mohan Ram commented: 'By definition, any normal electoral process must have a few unvarying aspects; the participation of contenders who matter, an open campaign, and a decent voter turn-out. None of these parameters obtained in the IPKF-controlled elections to the Northeastern Provincial Council' (1989: 73).

On the Tamil side, there were just two participants, the Eelam

42 During a speech in Madras on 21 December 1987, quoted in Seevaratnam (1989: 192).

People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF), both splinter-groups, known Indian protégés, and propagators of a one-point programme—a pathological (if understandable) hatred of the Tiger Movement. Under Indian protection, members of both these groups had already acquired an unsavoury reputation for atrocities on the Tamil population, particularly death-squad killings of prominent civilians sympathetic to the LTTE. In fact, there was no balloting at all in the northern province, where the Tamils were overwhelmingly concentrated, and a pre-arranged slate of EPRLF and ENDLF candidates were declared elected 'unopposed' from this area, which included the all-important Jaffna peninsula.

Even in the east, where the Indian-backed groups faced a token challenge from Muslim and Sinhalese parties, there were widespread reports of intimidation, malpractice and voting fraud by EPRLF and ENDLF, with Indian connivance, as, 'protected by the IPKF, the armed cadres of the EPRLF went about killing non-combatant LTTE sympathisers'(Ram 1989: 74). The rump council set up in the aftermath of this bogus poll expired, predictably, more or less simultaneously with the withdrawal of the IPKF from the island. On 1 March, 1990, a month before the departure of the last Indian units, its members unilaterally declared the formation of a sovereign 'Republic of Tamil Eelam', and fled to India.[43]

As the Indian presence wore on, it started to resemble a copy-book military occupation much more than the 'peace-keeping' enterprise it ostensibly was. Tamil Sri Lanka under IPKF/EPRLF/ENDLF rule was not an easy place to live in. 'Disappearances', kidnappings, mass arrests, incommunicado detention without recourse to any procedure of law whatsoever, widespread torture, countless rapes and sexual assaults on women, hooded informers, wanton destruction of crops and forests in rural areas, a total ban on fishing, and, frequently, random murder of persons suspected of LTTE links all became routine under the 'peace-keepers'.[44]

43 Nemesis followed them there: a mere three months later, in June 1990, 14 leading EPRLF men, including the chairman of the organisation, were gunned down in Madras by unidentified assailants. The Tigers are known to always keep their threats .

44 For a chilling compilation of atrocities committed by Indian soldiers, see, for example, Amnesty International (1990c).

New Delhi dismissed persistent documented reports of grave violations of human rights as LTTE-inspired propaganda. But perhaps the most eloquent response came from the IPKF commander for Jaffna city, a Brigadier Kahlon, who informed concerned members of the press: 'The Indian army are not angels. We are not devils either. We are just human. Rape happens even in the West'.[45] Massacres, too, became increasingly common: on 2 August, 1989, in an especially ghastly incident, dubbed 'India's My Lai' by the international media, an IPKF unit murdered 71 unarmed civilians in Velvettithurai, Prabhakaran's hometown and a known LTTE stronghold, in reprisal for a Tiger ambush that had killed seven Indian soldiers and wounded 11.[46] A popular joke in Jaffna, during the Indian presence, reportedly was: 'You open your mouth here for two things only: to brush your teeth and to eat' (See Shanmugaratnam 1989: 3). An expatriate Tamil, on a visit back to his homeland, was given an inpromptu lesson by the taxi driver who picked him up at the local airport on how to deal with the IPKF and particularly the EPRLF's despised 'Citizen Volunteer Force' (CVF):

> Please smile and bow, and open the door giving the impression that you are willing to cooperate with them. Never stare at them if you want to avoid trouble. Some of them are not human beings. What to do, we asked for this. It is our fate (Shanmugaratnam 1989).

A bizarre touch was added to this grim scenario when, in the second half of 1989, as the Indian presence drew to a close, the EPRLF and its allies kidnapped some thousands of schoolboys and young men, and forced them to join the 'volunteer' armed force that the organisation was trying to assemble, with Indian

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It would however be totally misleading to imply that all, or even most, IPKF personnel were uniformly guilty of atrocities. Kittu, for one, told me that he was quite impressed by the impeccable conduct and humane behaviour of many Indian officers and men. He clearly drew a distinction between a 'barbarous' minority and a majority who, on the whole, kept their sanity despite the trying circumstances. Personal interviews in London, June-July 1991.

45 Report in *The Sun*, Colombo, 15 January 1988.

46 For meticulous, if utterly heart-rending written and photographic documentation of the Velvettithurai massacre, see Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat (1990).

training and equipment, for the impending showdown with the Tigers (in the event, this militia collapsed in a matter of days when the time came, and could inflict hardly any casualties on the Tigers). Perhaps the most telling indictment of what went on in Tamil Ceylon under the Indian military occupation was provided by this eyewitness observer in rural Jaffna in June 1989:

> One old woman, about 70 years of age, stood up with rage in her eyes and said—'Our men are either dead or in hiding. Our boys have to go underground to avoid conscription [by the EPRLF], our young girls have to be kept indoors to protect them from sexual assault [by Indian soldiers]. We, the mothers and grandmothers, have to run the farms and households most of the time' (Shanmugaratnam 1989: 6).

Even the Indian 'free' press, which, on the whole, had uncritically supported the intervention, seemed to belatedly realise the ground realities prevailing in the Tamil region. As one Indian journalist wrote in April 1990, after visiting the Tamil region:

> Even the most cursory of visits to the [Jaffna] peninsula is sufficient to confirm old suspicions: that the anti-LTTE groups—particularly the EPRLF and ENDLF—enjoy next to no support; that the people are overwhelmingly in favour of the Tigers; and that the IPKF, in its post-October 1987 incarnation as a force of combat, was as detested as it was feared (Padmanabhan 1990: 42).

Indeed, as Lt. Gen. Sardeshpande, the principal Indian military commander on the Jaffna peninsula for most of the IPKF's stay in Sri Lanka found, to his dismay:

> Eelam had taken firm root as an idea and the LTTE was firmly established in the consciousness of the Sri Lankan Tamils...[as their] sole saviour, fighter, hero and representative....Nobody could let down or challenge the LTTE except the people themselves, a proposition beyond the realm of possibility (1992: 3, 12, 15).[47]

47 Sardeshpande's account, while not bereft of a noticeable self-serving component, is also remarkable for its honesty and candour. Much of the book makes fascinating

To compound the Indian predicament:

> Our [IPKF] unit and formation commanders too came under the mental hypnosis of the LTTE. They would graphically explain how well-entrenched the LTTE was in the midst of the people, how ungrateful people were to us, how elusive the LTTE was, how perfect it was in the midst of the people and in its actions, how effective was its grip over the public and so on—virtually admitting that it was an impossible task and that all our endeavours were pointless (Sardeshpande 1992: 152).

Meanwhile, events had been moving fast in the south. The JVP had been waging a violent insurrection, ever since end-July 1987, on what was an increasingly obvious one-point political platform—the ejection of the Indian troops from the island of 'The Land, The Race, and The Faith'. By early 1989, the Sinhalese areas were in the grip of anarchy, with the economic infrastructure paralysed by strikes, the universities (traditionally hotbeds of JVP activity) closed down, and the state's forces and members of the JVP's armed wing slaughtering each other, and uninvolved innocents, by the thousands.

In this critical situation, a desperate Ranasinghe Premadasa, who had succeeded Jayewardene as President in December 1988, offered to hold unconditional talks with both of the country's principal rebel movements, the Tigers and the JVP. The offer was directed primarily at the JVP, which rejected it outright. But the Tigers, after some initial hesitation, accepted the invitation, and in April 1989, negotiations began in Colombo between senior government ministers and leaders of the LTTE's political wing. Once the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers had begun talking directly to each other, New Delhi should have been able to anticipate what was coming next. The natural move for Premadasa, which would at one stroke earn him and his government prestige and popularity with *both* Sinhalese and Tamils (for once!), was to order the foreign troops, which had brought so much death and misery in their wake, to leave the country. Thus, at a critical point in the island's political history, a rather ironic

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reading particularly because the author is very well-acquainted with the realities prevailing at the grassroots level in the peninsula and adjoining areas.

convergence of interests had taken place between the Sri Lankan state and those irrevocably committed to its destruction.

On 1 June 1989, Premadasa publicly declared that he desired the last Indian soldier to be out of Sri Lanka by 29 July, the second anniversary of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord. The Tamils had already consigned the agreement to the dustbin of history, and now the Sinhalese were about to do the same. Premadasa's somewhat intemperate proclamation caused much resentment in Indian official circles, and touched off a diplomatic crisis of sorts between the governments of the two countries. But the fact was that under the terms of the accord, the IPKF was in Sri Lanka at the express invitation of the head of that country's 'democratic government', and once Premadasa had issued them with marching orders, they had absolutely no alternative, under international law, but to comply.

However, the precipitate ejection of the IPKF by the 29 July deadline would have been an unacceptable and disastrous humiliation for the government of Prime Minister Gandhi in an election year—parliamentary elections were due in India by December 1989. So the Indian regime browbeat its Sri Lankan counterpart into accepting a token withdrawal of some 600 IPKF personnel by the 29 July deadline.

Despite such futile attempts to cushion the shock, it was increasingly evident that the Indian state's misadventure in Sri Lanka was all but over. In September 1989, a ceasefire between the LTTE and the Indian army finally came into force, and by 31 March, 1990, the last of the Indian units left Sri Lanka. As early as May of 1988, an Indian political commentator had urged: 'Let us pull out in honour before we are forced to do so in disgrace' (Krishna 1990: 113). The folly of the regime in New Delhi had ensured that when the Indian army finally did pull out of Sri Lanka, its exit was celebrated by Sinhalese and Tamils alike. The Indian disaster had been multi-dimensional—military, political, diplomatic. On the military front, the IPKF had failed abjectly to neutralise the Tigers, despite its overwhelming superiority in numbers and firepower. The Indians had failed equally dismally in their sporadic attempts to create a political alternative to the LTTE in the Tamil region—thuggish and hated groups such as EPRLF were hardly the kind of entity to base one's regional policy on. Lastly, when it became clearly apparent, as it soon did, that

it was beyond the capacity of the Indian state to destroy the Tigers, diplomatic moves should have been initiated to end the impasse in a way acceptable to all parties concerned, and, at the very minimum, dialogue with the 'boys' should have been resumed, and military operations scaled down. However, as we have seen, this was hardly attempted.

Prior to Tamil Ceylon between 1987 and 1990, the last major projection of Indian military might beyond the Indian state's territorial frontiers had been in East Pakistan, in December 1971. In Bangladesh, the Indian armed forces had achieved military victory in less than two weeks, and suffered a total of 1,047 combat fatalities. By comparison, India lost 1,155 dead and 2,987 wounded (many maimed for life) in two and one-half years of operations in the Tamil region, and failed totally to either terminate the 'ethnic fratricide' between Tamils and Sinhalese, or to exploit the intervention to irrevocably establish the Indian state's 'big brother' status in the South Asian region (of course, the one goal was inextricably linked to the other). As a Sinhalese writer has commented, 'for a third party that got involved in a contemporary separatist problem in a [neighbouring] foreign country, India was undoubtedly in an [exceptionally] strong position' (Samarasinghe 1990: 66). The Indian state's fiasco in Sri Lanka, therefore, seems to indicate yet again that there are serious limits to the efficacy of big power intervention in the internal conflicts of smaller and weaker countries, especially when the intervening power does not sufficiently take into account the dynamics and configurations of domestic politics in the country in question. New Delhi's imperial project in its backyard had ended in ignoble failure and defeat.

Conclusion

There appears to be a Sinhalese-Tamil consensus on the central weakness of the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka. Samarasinghe, a Sinhalese academic, writes that Indian policy-makers appear to have failed to appreciate that

> Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism...had its own local roots with a strong sense of independence....The LTTE was not prepared to do India's bidding. The Indian experience in Sri Lanka reinforces

> yet again, as happened in Vietnam with the French and Americans and in Afghanistan with the Soviets, the limits of the power of external forces in conflict with nationalism (1990: 67).

Nadesan Satyendra, a Sri Lankan Tamil, concurs with this assessment:

> It would seem that today a spectre is haunting the Indian subcontinent—the spectre of Tamil nationalism. It is a spectre that is haunting both the Sri Lankan government and the Indian government. And it would seem that in their fear, they are hugging each other....*Reason tells us that the central failure of the Indo-Sri Lankan peace accord was its refusal to recognize the political reality of Tamil nationalism* (1989b: 164-98) (emphasis added).

As a triumphant Velupillai Prabhakaran declared on 1 April 1990:

> The termination of the Indian intervention is a grand victory for our struggle....For more than two years we fought a ruthless war, shedding our blood, against a formidable military force, a mighty power in Asia....It is a tragedy that the Government of India completely disregarded the political aspirations, interests and security concerns of our people...who have long suffered oppression...this was the Himalayan blunder made by India, and she has learnt a bitter historical lesson for such a misguided policy....(LTTE 1990b).

It appears evident, then, that the Indian state failed to take the political force and mass appeal of Tamil nationalism seriously. But where does this 'determination', this 'political reality of Tamil nationalism', spring from? How did it arise? And did the Indian state, through its intervention against the Tamils, make any contribution to its consolidation among the masses of the Tamil people?

The Roman Catholic Bishop of Jaffna has explained the growth of separatist Tamil nationalism in the following terms:

> For years, the people in Jaffna were brutalised by the Sri Lankan army, which was running riot with cordons and searches, detentions

> and executions...we had no redress. We were desperate....It was only these Tiger fellows who were able to fight against the soldiers and police, who were able to hold them back in their barracks so people could walk freely outside their homes. This is what has given them the irreducible support of the people, their admiration (McGowan 1992: 325).

A young captain in the Indian Army, in the frontline of the battle against the Tigers, shared this view of the origins of total polarisation. Discussing the Indian role in the Tamil region with an American journalist, he said:

> It is like the way you Americans went into Vietnam, after the French had already lost. History tells us it's a lost cause...why are we in this bloody country anyway?...these Tigers are trained killers, and we will never win. The Buddhists are to blame. They have turned these Tamils into killers, and we are their dupes for coming to the rescue (McGowan 1992: 311).

If the violence and perfidy of the Sri Lankan state had given rise to secessionist Tamil nationalism in the first place, the popular commitment to Eelam was cemented and solidified by the Tamils' bitter experience with the Indian state. The extreme harshness of the Indian occupation brutalised Tamil society almost beyond redemption, and convinced thousands of young Tamils, of both sexes and all socio-economic backgrounds, that the Tiger path was the only path for them to take, and that the states of the region, whether Indian or Sri Lankan, understood only the language spoken by the AK-47. This was discernible even in numerical terms. The Tiger army grew from 4,000 to over 10,000 fighters between 1987 and 1990, despite high casualty-rates. With the Indian intervention, the dialectic of state and society, of repression and resistance, had attained a climax. Not only did the Indian intervention fail to achieve its goals: it was actually *counterproductive*, because it precipitated a closing of ranks behind the LTTE, which, for all its cruelties, was seen as the one authentic force representing popular aspirations. For the Tamil population, the LTTE was now, even more than ever before, their only option. They could not support the Sri Lankan state, which practised discrimination and massive violence against them.

Through its actions, the Indian state, too, forfeited whatever respect it had once enjoyed among the Tamils. As for non-Tiger alternatives in Tamil politics, the Indian occupation revealed only too clearly what lay in store for the Tamils if groups such as EPRLF and ENDLF (as well as the 'non-violent moderates' of the TULF, whose remnants allied themselves, in early 1989, with these rogue factions), ever again succeeded in gaining the upper hand. Besieged by two state-apparatuses and their home-grown collaborators, Tamil unity and solidarity (which meant, given the realities of the situation, rallying behind the 'boys') was now an even more urgent imperative than ever before. The LTTE, the fighting arm of nationalist resistance, actually thrived in the climate of violence and state repression. As a senior Sri Lankan government official told William McGowan: 'It [the LTTE] is like a tennis ball. The harder you hit it, the faster it comes back to you' (1992: 379). Thousands flocked to Tiger recruiting centres and training camps. The process of state-induced radicalisation was complete.

Most perceptibly, the ordeal during 1987-90 contributed greatly to a hardening of attitudes within the LTTE itself. At one level, the fact that they had successfully fought off an overwhelmingly superior foe instilled a great deal of confidence in the Tigers. As Yogi said, after the resumption of hostilities with Colombo in June 1990:

> We carried out our fight when the huge Indian Army was standing at every doorstep...our cadres showed maximum determination by living through hardships and even skipping meals for days. The crisis we are facing now will only serve to harden our resolution.[48]

The failure of the Indian forces to subdue them also convinced the Tigers of the long-term viability of their struggle. It was clearly out of the question for the Sinhalese state to successfully implement a 'military solution' to the national question if that had been beyond the capacity of even the regional superpower. As Thilagar put it:

48 Broadcast on 'Voice of Tigers' (LTTE radio), reported in *Tamil Nation*, January 1992, p. 4.

> ...the Sri Lanka government believes that LTTE is in a weak position, that militarily it can be defeated, that its leadership can be liquidated, and after that there will be no problem. The logic of this thinking stands condemned when one sees that over 100,000 Indian troops could not...extinguish the flame of freedom, when one sees that today, there are vast areas of the Tamil homeland under LTTE control, and that in the island, there are two armies with conventional warfare capabilities (LTTE 1992b: 2).

Thus, it was totally uncompromising armed struggle, according to this line of analysis, that paid dividends. Along with the conviction that armed resistance was a viable prospect, indeed the *only* prospect, came an intensified commitment to the ideal of a sovereign Eelam as the only decisive solution to the Tamil predicament. As McGowan observed in Indian-occupied Jaffna in 1988, 'the situation had grown so extreme that not even the feelings of the people mattered to the Tigers any more. Anyone who voiced any position that diverged from the Tiger line of complete and unending struggle for Eelam was silenced' (1992: 315). Perhaps most instructive was the conclusion Prabhakaran drew concerning the significance of the outcome of the Indo-Tamil war for 'liberation movements' around the globe: 'Our victory in this war has set an excellent example that the legitimate struggle of an oppressed people and their yearning for freedom cannot be crushed by military force, however formidable that may be' (LTTE 1990b).

By 1990, thanks, in no small measure, to the combined exertions of New Delhi and Colombo, the 'Tamil nation' had indeed become a 'political reality'. It was a reality that could not be wished away, nor, apparently, eliminated through brute force. It is now left for the twin realities of state power and nationalist consciousness, currently on collision course, to adjust and accommodate to the presence of each other, if there are to be any hopes for peace and normalcy in the foreseeable future. Otherwise, the prospects are grim: it will be interminable war, for, as of now, neither state nor nation seems to have the capacity to decisively overcome and prevail over the other.

5

Reconceptualising State, Nation and Sovereignty

It seemed to me, then, that within this circle there were only states and citizens; there were no people at all.

—Amitav Ghosh (1988: 233).

The source of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation: no group, no individual may exercise authority not emanating expressly therefrom.

—*Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (1789).

If the 1950s and 1960s were the decades of the anti-colonial liberation movements, the 1990s will prove to be the decade of post-colonial liberation movements. Self-determination is not a mere phrase. Nor is it a dirty word. The political force that it generates has begun to prevail over the power of many existing state-structures.

—*Tamil Nation*, January 1992.

The territorial, juridical state is in serious peril. Despite the legalistic 'legitimacy' that such states enjoy, and the formidable coercive resources that they often have at their disposal, their very existence is facing concerted challenges, the world over, from those who speak the emotionally charged language of 'national self-determination.'

Perhaps the most striking facet of the confrontation of state and nation is that it is omnipresent. It characterises a wide variety

of societies and polities, and not merely in the 'Third' World alone—though it is a fact that such conflict is most pervasive in developing countries. The former 'socialist' bloc has already disintegrated, and a large number of independent states, all justifying their existence in the name of 'nationalism' and 'self-determination', have emerged from the wreckage. Nor are the industrialised states of the capitalist West immune to challenges to their authority that emanate from some approximation or variation of nationalist sentiment.

But, as Walker Connor has correctly pointed out, 'few indeed are the scholars who can claim to have anticipated even the possibility of such a trend' (1978: 377). The conventional wisdom in Western scholarship held that the 'neutral' Third World states, headed by cosmopolitan elites, that emerged in the wake of decolonisation, would rapidly render 'primordial', 'parochial' and 'tribal' allegiances redundant (for example, Geertz 1963). My study of Sri Lanka, for one, demonstrates that this optimism was not merely founded on myth—it was a farce. It is the supposedly 'neutral' state (the 'racketeer' that perpetrates 'organised crime', in Tilly's parlance), primarily the Sri Lankan but also the Indian, that stands squarely indicted in my account of the genesis and evolution of the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict, and of the rise and consolidation of the Tamil national liberation movement in Sri Lanka. At the other end of the political spectrum, meanwhile, the ideologues of 'socialism' had convinced themselves that 'Marxist-Leninist' indoctrination, and fraternal socialist solidarity, would render such historically retrograde and antiquated ideas as nationalism simply irrelevant. In one sense, the second group were closer to reality than the first. They at least explicitly acknowledged that their state-building efforts were having to deal with *nationalism*, as opposed to 'primordialism', 'parochialism', etc. But even so, the extent of their self-delusion is today there for all to see.

Crawford Young wrote in 1976 (p. 82) that

> despite the frequently arbitrary and artificial manner in which it came into being, the state-system is firmly anchored in contemporary reality, and the central trend appears to be its aggrandisement and reinforcement...whether it is viewed as the ultimate framework for human fulfillment or a constricting straitjacket of discord and division, that the state-system in

> approximately its present form is here to stay seems one of the most durable axioms of modern politics.

Indeed, the 'international' state system has for long been so much a part of our routinised perceptions of reality that its very existence has seemed entirely banal and ordinary. But seventeen years down the road, with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia no longer in existence, this most resilient of modern political axioms seems far less permanent than Young assumed it to be. Indeed, Young's most recent writing bears ample testimony to the fact that the equations and conditions governing the workings of the 'international system' have dramatically changed:

> Another critical transformation that seems imminent is the erosion of the normative force of 'territorial integrity' doctrines in international affairs. The long period of state stability appears at an end. The break-up of Canada, Yugoslavia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Sri Lanka, among others [apart from the Soviet Union], is no longer a remote contingency. Some of these will find formulas for survival, but it is inconceivable that all will persist in their present form into the next century. The international normative order will thus once again need to redefine the scope and limits of the doctrine of self-determination (1992: 92).

The clash between the ever-increasing clamour of claims to nationhood and aspirations to sovereignty, on the one hand, and the persistence, indeed consolidation, of visions of a monolithic, unitarian, and indivisible statehood, on the other, certainly represents one of the most striking contradictions, and one of the most fundamental moral and ideological conflicts, of our times. As Lisa Anderson has observed, politics in the modern Middle East has been characterised by an almost endemic strain between officially sanctioned 'state patriotism', on the one hand, and the appeal of 'alternate identities', on the other. As a result, 'the notions of citizenship, patriotism and love of country which undergird loyalty to the modern state frequently face competing conceptions of identity, loyalty and legitimacy' (1987: 13). Rodolfo Stavenhagen has pointed out that the central contradiction in Latin American politics is that between the 'model of the unitary state ...adopted after the wars of independence and developed during

the republican period', and the 'ethnic and cultural diversity of the societies of Latin America' (1992: 422). Jackson and Rosberg have commented that 'in almost every Black African country, there are ethnic groups that wish to re-draw international boundaries', and that movements championing the cause of 'self-determination' are 'alive sociologically among millions of Africans' (1982: 15).

Thus, it would appear that just as the dialectic of an over-powering colonial state and subjugated civil society gave rise to anti-colonial liberation movements, so also the dialectic of the 'nationalist' state and excluded, oppressed sections of society has led to the growth of 'post-colonial' liberation struggles. While it remains to be seen whether the 1990s will go down in history as the decade of post-colonial liberation, it is a reality that this dialectic of state and society has culminated in certain instances, Sri Lanka being a most notable example, in an almost total rejection by a substantial segment of civil society of the ideology that has hitherto sustained and legitimised the existence of the juridical state. The contest is, above all, over the notion of 'sovereignty'—a conceptualisation of sovereignty that emanates from the highest echelons of a centralised state is at fundamental variance with one that holds that sovereignty resides essentially in the social base of that self-defining community, the 'nation'.

Dissent on this critical core of the state's *raison d'etre* is usually regarded as the height of sedition, and sovereignty has been declared a non-negotiable issue, as in Sri Lanka. Paradoxically, however, as we have seen, the very denial of nationhood to a collectivity that has come to regard itself as such, and the use of coercion to decisively establish the supremacy and inviolability of the juridical state, seems to further the spread of 'national' consciousness among the dissenting collectivity, and heighten the resolve of the alienated to resist the state, with arms if necessary. The result of this state-society dialectic is precisely what we have in Sri Lanka today: civil war and the coming into being of two national states (in the *true* sense of the term) on practically every level but the formal, legalistic, juridical one.

Assertions of a collective national identity, and demands for popular sovereignty, are today sweeping the former Soviet Union, eastern and central Europe, the Middle East, Canada, the Horn of Africa and other parts of the world. But perhaps nowhere

are they being articulated more powerfully, *and* resisted more stoically, as in South Asia in general, and Sri Lanka in particular. Indeed, there is a double irony inherent in the unquestioning acceptance of the legitimacy of unitary states, so near-universal among scholars and lay public alike, in the context of much of the 'Third World', including the Indian subcontinent. The first irony is that such states, in the case of the vast majority of the 'nations' of Asia, Africa and Latin America, are legacies of colonial conquest and imperialist partition. As Jackson and Rosberg have pointed out in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, 'the juridical state in black Africa is a novel and arbitrary political unit: the territorial boundaries, legal identities and often even the names of states are contrivances of colonial rule' (1982: 14). And, of course, it is generally believed, in most of the 'Third World', that the colonial era was one of tyranny and enslavement. What compounds the irony is that ruling Third World 'nationalist' elites, legators of a tradition of political activism which historically defined its agenda in total, binary opposition to colonial power, are today the greatest champions of the sanctification and perpetuation, apparently by any means necessary, of the centralised, territorial entities bequeathed by the colonialist.

In such circumstances, it is hardly a surprise that the major states in the South Asian region have been confronted with broadly similar challenges to centralised authority, and, no less importantly, to the hegemonic discourse revolving around that misnomer among misnomers, the 'nation-state'. The observation Hamza Alavi made two decades ago about Pakistan can thus be readily extended to the rest of the subcontinent:

> The...outstanding fact about Pakistan's political history is that the most powerful challenges to the dominant central authority...came primarily from political movements that drew their strength from people of underprivileged regions and voiced demands for regional autonomy and for a fuller share...in the distribution of resources, as well as in state power (1972: 152).

Indeed, the national question is a paramount political issue in the subcontinent today. While the Kashmiri, Sikh, Tamil, Assamese, Chakma and other movements are very different in many

respects, they do share in common an uncompromising opposition to the authority, and unequivocal rejection of the legitimacy, of the 'nation-state' as presently constituted. Radical Tamil nationalists in Sri Lanka, for one, have explicitly recognised that theirs is not an isolated struggle, but an inseparable part of the fate of the subcontinent as a whole:

> The Tamil national liberation struggle is not taking place in outer space. It is taking place on the ground—and in the Indian region. The political impact of much that happens on the...subcontinent is also felt by the people of Tamil Eelam. Though reports of the disintegration of the Indian Union are often greatly exaggerated, events in the Soviet Union show that empires do crumble, if they do not recognise, well in time, the political force of emergent nationalisms, and take steps to restructure in a genuine and meaningful way. And for the Indian Union the time is now. *Unity will emerge only when the different nations of the Indian Union are recognised as equals, not when it is sought to deny their existence. Unity will emerge only when New Delhi acquires the vision and the strength to constitute [India as] a federal commonwealth of free and equal nations.* It will be futile for New Delhi, Canute-like, to order the rising tide of...nationalism to recede. The rising tide of Kashmiri nationalism will not recede in the years to come. Neither will Assamese nationalism recede...on the contrary, these nationalisms [and others] will grow from year to year[1] (emphasis added).

In light of this reality, the need to resolve the contradiction that has arisen between state power and nationalist consciousness attains a grave urgency. Such an exercise, though it certainly represents a major intellectual challenge, is not merely of academic interest. On its success depends the future of many millions, as well as prospects of regional stability, mutual coexistence and cooperation, and, ultimately, world peace. What, then, are our options?

One ironical point that must be noted at this stage is that the 'post-colonial' nationalists seem to be just as enamoured of the state as their anti-colonial predecessors. To the Tamil Tigers, it is an article of faith that the Tamil nation *must* seek its ultimate

1 Editorial in *Tamil Nation* (London), June 1992, p. 10.

fulfillment, or self-expression, in a territorially demarcated State of Tamil Eelam. Everything in Tiger politics is geared towards the achievement of this ultimate 'political objective'. In this regard, the Tigers appear to have thoroughly imbibed the Leninist maxim that 'the basic question of any revolution is that of power in the State. Without a clear grasp of that question, there can be no talk of conscious participation in a revolution, not to speak of leadership of it' (Lenin 1978: 94).

One can understand where this uncompromising commitment to the normative prescription of secession springs from. Above all, it stems from a yearning for physical safety, and security from the violence of the military and the mobs, to which the Tamil people have repeatedly been subjected. It also arises from the incontestable fact that Tamil demands for meaningful regional autonomy, and for a federal redistribution of power within a united Sri Lanka, have repeatedly been dismissed as non-negotiable, and a holy cow has instead been made of a discriminatory and brutally authoritarian central state. Even so, however, there are serious problems inherent in a partitionist argument, as reflected in the fetishisation of an independent state as the ultimate panacea to the Tamil predicament. Most importantly, perhaps, the thrust of such an argument is essentially at variance with the *fluidity, flexibility and malleability* of the process of identity formation and transformation that results in the coming into being of a nationality. Simple-minded votaries of partition do not usually take into account the reality of the existence of *multiple identities*. On the contrary, they posit the supremacy, presumably for all time to come, of *one particular identity* (say, 'Tamil') over all possible alternatives, rivals and competitors (even if that identity may actually *have* emerged as the definitive focus of group behaviour *at a certain point in time*, as in the case of the Tamils of Sri Lanka). Thus, the Muslim population of eastern Bengal attained an impressive degree of solidarity with their brethren in West Pakistan in 1946-47, but that did not prevent the state of Pakistan from being shattered by the explosive force of Bengali mass nationalism (in whose rise, incidentally, the post-colonial Pakistani state played a central role), a mere quarter century later! As Horowitz comments:

> For most ethnically-divided states, secession or partition is likely to merely effect a re-ordering of heterogeneity. The prescriptions

> that postulate a clean break are heedless of both the complexity of ethnic configurations in such states, and the fluidity of identities at different levels of salience... (1985: 588-92).

It is this neglect of subtleties that prompts Robert Dahl to brand partitionist positions a form of 'philosophical anarchism'.[2]

Equally importantly, and disturbingly, the notion of a Tamil national fraternity that seeks fulfillment in an independent homeland of Eelam *itself* has strongly unitarian and monolithic overtones to it, much in the style of *La Republique une et Indivisible* of French liturgy, and the 'One Nation, Indivisible' of the American pledge of allegiance. Even though the ideal of Eelam may *today* signify a beacon of liberation to the overwhelming majority of Ceylon Tamils, who is to say that it might not come to be perceived *tomorrow* as a mechanism of a stifling, imposed homogeneity, an ideological straitjacket that propagates a false monolithicism? In this context, movements such as the Liberation Tigers', which pride themselves on their 'revolutionary' credentials, would do well to take note of Benedict Anderson's warning that

> the model of 'official nationalism' assumes relevance, above all, at the moment when revolutionaries successfully take control of the state, and are for the first time in a position to use the power of the state in pursuit of their visions...even the most determinedly radical revolutionaries *always, to some degree,* inherit the state from the fallen regime...like the complex electrical system in any large mansion where the owner has fled, the state awaits the new owner's hand at the switch to be very much its old brilliant self again. One should therefore not be much surprised if revolutionary leaderships, consciously or unconsciously, come to play lord of the manor...the more the ancient dynastic state is naturalised, the more its antique finery can be wrapped around revolutionary shoulders (1983: 145-46) (emphasis added).

There are also serious *practical* problems inherent in the partitionist solution. For one thing, the territorial boundaries of

2 See Dahl (1991: 491-96) for a thoughtful discussion of the many problems and negative implications that accompany wholesale fragmentation, as is happening in the former Soviet Union today.

putative states are usually contested—and a settlement acceptable to all parties concerned would probably require, in most cases at least, lengthy negotiations, arbitration and adjudication. This is very much the situation in Sri Lanka, where the Sinhalese-Buddhist state has consistently refused to recognise the North and East as the 'traditional homeland' of the Tamil people.

Closely related to this problem is the exceptionally urgent question of *minorities* within the newly sovereign political units. The demographics of most of the world today are such that it is infeasible to try to segregate whole collectivities, even if they are 'nations', from one another, and almost any newly independent state is bound to have some kind of 'minority problem' of its own. As is well-known, this factor is playing havoc with prospects of peace, normalcy and economic progress throughout the territories of the former Soviet Union (the tragic conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, the northern Caucasus and Moldavia being the most extreme instances), as well as in Croatia and, above all, Bosnia-Herczegovina, both formerly constituents of the deceased Yugoslav state.[3]

This is also a major consideration in Sri Lanka, where the Ceylonese Muslims, who comprise close to a fifth of the population of the areas that would constitute the state of Tamil Eelam (and a full one-third in the eastern province), and are sometimes called the 'third nationality' of Sri Lanka, have repeatedly made it clear that they wish to have no truck with the Tamil bid for secession. In recent years, there have frequently been violent clashes between radical Tamil youth and local Muslims in the eastern province, and a number of brutal massacres and counter-massacres have occurred as well.[4] The Tamil-Muslim conflict in the eastern

3 Slovenia, also a former constituent of Yugoslavia, is a rare exception to this general rule—it has a largely homogeneous population.

4 The Muslims constitute 17 per cent of the population of the north-east taken as a whole, and a full 33 per cent of the population of the eastern province (Government of Sri Lanka, Official Census, 1981). There is some reason to believe that the Tamil-Muslim conflict in the eastern province has been fomented and instigated by *agents provocateur* acting on behalf of Colombo. Groups of anti-Tiger Muslim vigilantes, typically recruited from the dregs of east coast Muslim society, have been financed and equipped by Colombo, and have carried out horrible atrocities on Tamil civilians. The Tigers have retaliated with bloodcurdling massacres and expulsion campaigns of their own, and a vicious and seemingly unstoppable spiral of terror and counter-terror has developed in 1990-91. However, it remains true that the majority of Muslims want only peace, and are not enamoured of the idea of

province has added an entirely new dimension to the struggle between the Tamils and the Sri Lankan state, and the 'Muslim question' now deserves to be seen as an integral aspect of any postulated solution. Thus, it seems evident that if peace, justice and reconciliation are the eventual goals, redrawing the map of the world anywhere and everywhere might not be the most ideal or effective way of going about it.

Nonetheless, it remains very true that the urge to secession, especially when it assumes the form of a mass movement, leaves the scholar saddled with a particularly difficult moral dilemma. As Horowitz (1985: 588-92) observes, 'there are times when a resulting homogeneity may be envisioned, or when, despite all its problems, partition seems the least bad of the alternatives...*there are times when the passion for 'self-determination' is so great that it is senseless to thwart it*' (emphasis added).

As long as Tamil Eelam remains a 'state of mind', a revolutionary ideal as opposed to a juridical reality, the model of an oppressive 'official nationalism' will probably not have a chance to fully assert itself, and the struggle for Tamil liberation will probably continue to call forth the unstinting devotion and commitment of the vast majority of Sri Lankan Tamils. It is especially important to remember that what makes the Tiger Movement a veritable political religion for its participants and supporters is that it is considered a vehicle for the attainment not simply of national freedom, but also of social liberation. 'Self-determination', in Tiger ideology, is defined as national liberation *and* social revolution. For those countless Tamils, particularly the youth, who subscribe to this view, the struggle against the state holds out the prospect of freedom, not just from *national* oppression, but *also* from social inequality and exploitation. The inspirational power of the *idea* of a Tamil state that will not just be *independent*, but will also not replicate traditional forms of social domination and oppression, is so great that the scholar's penchant for pointing out the possible pitfalls of a partitionist solution may well seem

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Eelam, a fact the Tigers cannot change by force. This undoubtedly represents a grave problem and dilemma for the Tamil struggle, given that Muslims have, unlike state-sponsored Sinhalese 'colonists', been living in areas such as the eastern province for many generations. It needs to be stressed, however, that Tamil-Muslim tension is a very recent development, and that the Muslims (who are very similar to the Tamils, in many ways) have long lived in peace and harmony with their Tamil neighbours.

incidental, if not entirely redundant, to those in the frontline of the revolutionary struggle. The suicide bomber and the cyanide capsule guerrilla are here to stay.

This moral dilemma has assumed particular salience and topicality with the fracturing of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, and the coming into being of a myriad of sovereign states in these regions. With members of the 'international community' falling over each other in the rush to establish diplomatic and economic missions in the capitals of Tadjikistan, Kirghizia, Estonia, Slovenia *et al.*, the recent words of a ranking Tamil nationalist leader seem especially poignant: 'We ask: why do you look at our problem differently? Why adopt two standards and two different approaches to that which is after all very similar? Why do you look at national questions in the Third World differently?' (LTTE 1992b).

Of course, the blatant opportunism and double standards of the 'international community' ('freedom struggle' and 'self-determination' when convenient, 'terrorism' and 'civil war' when inconvenient) is hardly something that affects the Tamil struggle alone. A Bosnian military commander, for example, has recently said what is arguably the last word on this question: 'If you ask me, the whole of the international community are bastards. Nobody is helping us. What's more, they have sold out and are accomplices to the extermination of our people'.[5]

The note of ambivalence in the analysis of the last few pages cannot have gone unnoticed. In a way, this element of uncertainty, of doubt, is unavoidable, for the problem is one of the greatest complexity. In the words of Dahl: 'A crisp, unimpeachable solution [to the question of states, nations and sovereignty] would be a marvellous achievement of political theory or practice. Alas, no altogether satisfactory solution seems to exist' (1991: 493).

It seems indisputable, however, that if the juridical state is to survive at all, it must seek a *rapprochement*, an honourable peace, with the forces of mass nationalism. This is a particularly desperate imperative in Sri Lanka, where a large number of the most important empirical attributes of state sovereignty have been very seriously eroded and undermined, if not altogether destroyed, by the Tamil uprising.

5 Zulfiqar alias 'Zuka', former smuggler and later one of the most important Bosnian commanders in the Sarajevo area. Quoted in Fuentes (1993).

The first of these is *popular acceptance and recognition* of the legitimacy of the state's authority—the 'consent of the governed', which, in the ultimate analysis, *must* constitute the moral foundation of every truly democratic state. This popular sanction is something which is dangerously close to becoming extinct in the Ceylon Tamils' attitude towards Colombo. As Young points out, 'the basic survival of the state will always be in doubt if large numbers of subjects, particularly if they are...collectivities, reject the state as a legitimate framework' (1976: 70). For the rising generation of Sri Lankan Tamils, who have grown up in an environment of fervent nationalism in the quasi-state created by the Tigers in their 'liberated zones' in the north, it makes very little sense that they are still, formally speaking, citizens of a juridical state called Sri Lanka, which, apart from exercising no positive influence over their lives, intermittently bombs them from the air and tries to starve them into submission.

The second key defining principle of the modern state that has been fatally undermined in Sri Lanka is the state's *monopoly over the means and instruments of coercion*, with all its implications for the effective control of territory. Since 1985-86, the Jaffna peninsula, the thickly populated Tamil heartland in the far north, has virtually been an undeclared Eelam, with Colombo's authority practically non-existent and all aspects of administration totally in the grip of the LTTE. Today, the LTTE exercises total control over some 85 per cent of the area of the northern province, and maintains a major presence throughout the eastern province as well. Despite the most strenuous efforts of the Sri Lankan armed forces, it has proved impossible to dislodge the LTTE from the north, and from its rural and jungle strongholds in the east.

This firm control over the majority of the territory and population of 'Tamil Eelam' has enabled the ever-resourceful and hardworking Tigers to set up the framework of what amounts to a *de facto* state in their northern 'liberated territories', especially the Jaffna peninsula. A recent visitor to the north observed that while the unofficial border between Sri Lanka and 'Tamil Eelam', marked by the first Tiger checkpoint just outside Vavuniya town, was 'not [yet] an international border, it might as well be',[6] while

6 Vijay Joshi, reporting in the *Asahi Evening News* (Japan), 29 September 1992.

another discovered that 'this jungle checkpost is the gateway to what is, in effect, the *de facto* state of Tamil Eelam'.[7]

Indeed, it would be a mistake to call the Tigers the 'parallel government' in northern Sri Lanka, for they constitute what is in effect the *sole* government in that region. The LTTE has assiduously built on its military success in expelling the Sri Lankan army from the 'liberated areas' by establishing its own police force, judiciary, taxation structure, education department, transportation system and information and broadcasting networks (they have their own radio and television stations) throughout the north, to the extent that the *de facto* Eelam has unmistakably begun to exhibit many of the empirical features of a sovereign state.

In fact, from the standpoint purely of *empirical* criteria, it is absolutely no exaggeration to say that Sri Lanka does not qualify as a full-fledged state any longer (and has not for some time now). It would be more accurate to characterise the present situation in Sri Lanka as one of 'fragmented' or 'multiple' sovereignty, with the fragmentation of state authority into two epicentres, Tiger Jaffna and Sinhalese-Buddhist Colombo, each claiming exclusive legitimacy in a territory (the north and east) where only one such violence and taxation monopoly had previously operated (for an elaboration of this theme see Tilly 1975: 483-555). And the fact that the Tigers are, in the unromanticised professional opinion of an Indian general who fought against them, 'an unique fighting-force', unparalleled in 'motivation and calibre',[8] makes the viability of a 'military solution' to the national question very tenuous indeed. Even if, hypothetically speaking, the state *was* to defeat the nationalist resistance in battle, such an exercise would be ultimately futile, in that it would set the clock back even further on winning the 'hearts and minds' of an already profoundly alienated populace. N. Ram (1991) correctly argues that

> talk about 'liquidating' the LTTE and hammering down a military solution in the north and east is old and virtually useless currency in Sri Lankan politics...at the end of the chapter,

7 Report in the *Sunday Observer* (Delhi), 29 March-4 April 1992.

8 Cited in Ram (1991). See also William McGowan's (1992: 328) account of his conversation with Brigadier Kahlon, one time IPKF commandant of Jaffna.

> each adversary [of the Tigers] has learnt the same bitter lesson: the guerrilla 'fish' cannot be flushed out of the water by any means short of genocide. The problem...lies as much in the socio-political arena and in the hearts and minds of divided, bitter and alienated people as it lies down the barrel of the gun.

As Dahl has remarked, 'in practice, as distinct from theory, the usual solution [to national questions] has been force plus time' (1991: 493). In Sri Lanka, force is simply not feasible any longer as a solution (or even part thereof), while time, even by the most optimistic calculations, is rapidly running out.

All this notwithstanding, it remains perfectly valid that even the most dedicated of 'Eelamists' has compelling pragmatic motives to seek negotiated solutions to the conflict. Why? One reason certainly is that

> a [purely] military solution to this conflict is unlikely to succeed. The Sri Lankan government cannot win this war, nor can India win it for them. The [Tigers] are too organised and have far too much grassroots support to be wiped out...*[but] on the other hand, the militant Tamils cannot win this war either.* They can drag it out and frustrate both the Indian and Sri Lankan governments, but it is seriously doubtful that they can establish Eelam by force. If they drag it out too long, they might even incur the wrath of a war-weary local people, which would spell disaster for a movement that relies heavily on grassroots support (Senawiratne 1989: 31) (emphasis added).

But there is an even more crucial factor involved here. While unflinching determination, a powerful military capability, and a congruence with the social base may all be *necessary* components of a formidable bid for secession, they are in themselves not *sufficient* to establish a fully sovereign state in the world of today. This is because 'sovereignty', in the practical sense, is not composed of empirical criteria alone—it also has a critically important *juridical* aspect to it (for a detailed explanation of these concepts, see Jackson and Rosberg 1982). The juridical aspect translates, in everyday terms, into 'international recognition'. This precious commodity is something that can be conferred only by the 'in-

ternational community' of extant sovereign states, acting through its coordinating mechanisms, such as the United Nations. And we have already had occasion to discuss the conservatism and opportunism of this particular 'community' of 'nations'. It does seem, as of now, that the international recognition which would convert Tamil Eelam's *de facto* existence into a *de jure* one has relatively little prospect of materialising in the very near future. The bitterness generated by the Indo-Tamil war of 1987-90, the alleged complicity of members of the LTTE in the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Tamil Nadu in May 1991,[9] and India's own growing crisis of survival as an unified, democratic and secular state all make it rather unlikely that New Delhi will have either the time or the inclination to take the lead in securing international recognition for an independent Sri Lankan Tamil state (as it did so successfully in the case of Bangladesh in 1971). This denial of formal statehood means that Tamil Eelam, while possessing many of the empirical qualifications of sovereignty, is likely to remain a non-entity in the juridical sense for the foreseeable future. We thus have a peculiar situation of *fractured sovereignty* in contemporary Ceylon, with 'Sri Lanka' clinging on to juridical legitimacy but very seriously deficient in empirical statehood, and 'Tamil Eelam' empirically largely sovereign but, as of now, devoid of juridical recognition.

If the warriors of Tamil Eelam have good reason to seek a negotiated resolution to the national question, this must surely rank as a truly desperate imperative insofar as those at the helm of the Sinhalese-Buddhist state are concerned. In addition to all the considerations outlined in the last few pages, it would appear, as of early 1993, that even the military balance in the Tamil region is shifting decisively against Colombo, and that the Tigers, whose morale and motivation apparently remains as strong as ever, are gradually gaining in the extremely protracted and painful war of attrition, certainly in the north and perhaps in the east as well. A recent report in a very mainstream Indian magazine, for

9 There are very strong circumstantial indicators that point to LTTE involvement in the assassination: for example, the use of a woman suicide bomber, attempts by LTTE networks in southern India to hide the remaining members of the assassination team from the massive manhunt launched by Indian police, and the fact that the suspects, when eventually cornered, took cyanide to escape capture. What has not been conclusively established, however, is whether the assassination was ordered by the LTTE high command.

instance, noted with some trepidation that 'the [Sri Lankan] army is reeling from heavy casualties and collapsing logistics', and that 'an estimated 6,000 armymen have deserted this year [1992], many...with arms' (the total operational strength of the Sri Lankan army is believed to be less than 60,000) (Menon 1992: 109). Indeed, the Tigers are now (early 1993) killing government soldiers at an average rate which is well in excess of a hundred a month (mostly in the eastern province), and during the second half of 1992, they successfully executed several spectacular 'decapitation attacks' on the enemy command structure, eliminating in the process many of the top-ranking officers in the Sri Lankan army and navy.

Not that those who control state power in Sri Lanka are entirely ignorant of these unavoidable realities. The late Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa recently expressed the opinion that 'a peaceful solution to the north-east [Tamil?] crisis' is essential to 'save innocent lives', 'release...funds to improve the living conditions of the people', and, most instructively, to 'prevent the division of the country'.[10]

But a 'just peace', as the Tigers call it, is apparently easier said than done. Fully in line with Premadasa's thinking, the 'Indian' Tamil minister in the Sri Lankan cabinet, the octogenarian Mr. S. Thondaman, had, as early as December 1991, proposed a political solution to the national question.[11] Candidly admitting that only the grant of 'maximum autonomy to the people of the North-East Province can stem the disintegration of the nation' (*sic*), the minister opined that 'a commitment from the Central Government and the majority community to share power with the people of the North-East Province is imperative for peace'. The provisions of the package, if implemented, would effectively transform Ceylon into a confederal polity, and concede the essence of Tamil self-determination while preserving the unity and territorial integrity of the juridical state. The Tigers had welcomed the suggestions as a 'positive development' and an 'advance',

10 Mr. Premadasa was making his customary New Year address at the famous Buddhist shrine in Kandy. See the report in *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), 2 January 1993, p. 5.

11 See 'A Peace Package: The CWC's Effort for a Solution', in *Frontline* (Madras), 17 January 1992, pp. 91-93; also see the rejoinder to the proposals from the *Sinhala Arakshaka Sanvidanaya* (Sinhalese Defence Movement) in *The Sunday Island* (Colombo), 19 January 1992.

and called for a public debate and detailed discussions, as well as face-to-face negotiations, to thrash out any remaining ambiguities or omissions.[12]

The proposals were aborted at the very outset. They provoked a hysterically negative response from a cross-section of influential Sinhalese opinion, socialised over generations to view even the slightest concession to the Tamils with suspicion, with the Buddhist clergy, in an eerie repeat of their performance at the time of the B-C Pact in 1958, leading the charge of the faithful. A prominent monk denounced the proposals as 'treacherous', and declared that there 'should be no negotiations [with the Tamils] till the war has been successfully concluded.'[13] An impromptu organisation called the 'Sinhalese Defence Movement' took it upon itself to inform the public that the proposals, if implemented, would have 'disastrous consequences for the country', 'what the LTTE could not obtain by force of arms they would have received as a gift', and that 'the heroic sacrifices of the Sri Lankan armed forces who fought to prevent the creation of Eelam would have been in vain'.[14] An alarmed government, concerned, no doubt, about the implications of such sentiments for its electoral prospects, promptly put the peace plan in cold storage.

This episode clearly reveals that there are serious structural obstacles to a lasting settlement in the Sri Lankan situation. But why, precisely, does the Sinhalese-Buddhist elite, pious platitudes notwithstanding, consistently find it so difficult to reach an understanding with the Tamils? I believe that in order to arrive at a complete explanation of this puzzle, one must go beyond the 'competitive chauvinism' bred by Sri Lanka's form of electoral competition.

What is urgently needed in Sri Lanka today is clearly *a fundamental democratisation of the apparatus and structure of the state.* Cosmetic surgery will not work. Any solution to the national question, if it is to retain any viability at all, must go far beyond halfway-house liberalising reforms (the 'constitutional engineering' advocated by Horowitz, or the elitist 'consociationalism' of Arend Lijphart) such as proportional representation or a diluted and insignificant local autonomy. Of course, the Sri Lankan state

12 Ibid. This was also confirmed during a personal conversation I had in end-January, 1992, with 'Anton Rajah', LTTE spokesperson for Britain.

13 Walpola Rahula, in *India Today*, 15 March 1992, pp. 73; and in West (1992).

14 In *The Sunday Island* (Colombo), 19 January 1992.

elite finds it hard enough to reconcile itself to the thought of even such minor reforms. But if ever (God forbid!) it were to have to agree to the structural transformation that is the need of the hour, the Sri Lankan state that would emerge in the aftermath of the democratisation process would surely bear rather little resemblance to the entity that existed prior to the initiation of that process. In a truly and substantively democratic state of Sri Lanka, would there be any place (in the hierarchy of power, at least) for the post-colonial elite who have built their careers and legitimised their privileges by selling to the Sinhalese people a thoroughly hollow and foul opiate of a monolithic, indivisible sovereignty, purportedly based on the inalienable rights of the 'majority'? Probably not. Indeed, to the extent that even the initiation of a substantive democratisation would be tantamount to an admission that the state-building enterprise in Sri Lanka has been deeply flawed from the very beginning, an enraged Sinhalese constituency might then justifiably demand an explanation from their leaders as to why they have been led up the garden path for so many years and decades. Why did rivers of blood have to be shed if the enemies of the unitary state were right after all? With the onset of a process of genuine democratisation, there is a real risk that the entire edifice of state authority might be irrevocably undermined, and that the Jayewardenes, Bandaranaikes, ultranationalist interest groups such as the Buddhist clergy, hardliners in the military and cynically opportunist and hypocritical 'leftist' factions, all compromised and tainted by their association with that state structure and with the propagation of the supremacy of the 'majority', might come tumbling down from their self-arrogated lofty pedestals as well. In other words, heads would roll—at least in the figurative sense, and who knows, perhaps literally as well.

It is this understandable fear of upheaval, I believe, which blocks the will to systemic change in Sri Lanka. A bleeding and seemingly interminable war is certainly an unpalatable prospect—but at least the ones who are losing their lives in this conflict, in the thousands, are ordinary Tamils and Sinhalese. If the alternative—a radical and comprehensive restructuring of the state—means (as it well might) that the political and perhaps even physical survival of the hitherto privileged and dominant

would be under grave and immediate threat, *that*, by comparison, is an entirely unacceptable proposition.

But this pattern also illustrates what I believe is a much wider phenomenon—the continuing persistence, even consolidation, of monolithic, unitary conceptions of state sovereignty. Indeed, the intensity of such a commitment, at least in the South Asian context, appears to be actually *increasing* in direct proportion to the rise of potent and powerful challenges to precisely that kind of authority—yet another instance, it would seem, of the dialectic of state and society. The recent meteoric rise of the extreme centralist, unitarist and majoritarian ('Hindu') chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on India's political firmament is a good case in point. Since the 'Hindutva' movement the BJP represents is itself an exceptionally ugly and malignant symptom, or manifestation, of a deep structural crisis afflicting an increasingly unitary Indian state system (largely dominated, since 1947, by a failed and discredited ruling order, symbolised by the Congress-I party),[15] it is little surprise that the BJP seems to attach inordinate importance, in its platform, to, say, the massive popular uprising for independence currently raging in Indian-held Kashmir (this of course also supplies a handy pretext to bait Muslims in general, and foment anti-Pakistan hysteria).

The fate of Sri Lanka is a grim warning as to what happens when movements professing such singularly destructive and anti-

15 One must emphasise here that the 'Hindutva' movement is the *symptom*, and *not* the cause, of the crisis in India today. For the source of the problem, one must look elsewhere—to 45 years of growing mass poverty and illiteracy, deepening ethnic and religious divisions, and an increasingly obvious bankruptcy of morals and ideology in public life. In this regard, the culpability of the cynically opportunist regimes of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi merits special mention. The country is today reaping the fruits of the seeds of destruction sown by them: oligarchical rule revolving around one family is obviously inimical to both democracy and development. It is therefore not quite fair to pinpoint the BJP, dangerous and destructive as it is, as the sole progenitor of the present crisis of the Indian state, just as it would be unfair, and inaccurate, to call the JVP the cause of Sri Lanka's problem. The JVP was obviously an extreme manifestation, rather than a cause, of the deep maladies and contradictions afflicting the Sri Lankan state and, unfortunately, large sections of Sinhala-Buddhist society. My favourite metaphor of the current Indian situation is to liken the Congress-I to slow poison, while the BJP is more like a bullet to the back of the head. Of course, both are equally deadly—the difference is one of degree, not substance.

For a discussion of the pervasive crisis of the Indian state and system of governance, in the context of the rise of the BJP, see Amrita Basu's forthcoming book.

democratic ideologies succeed in seizing control of the state. Indeed, the central tenets of the 'Hindutva' world-view bear an uncanny, almost eerie similarity to the most virulent and xenophobic aspects of the ideology of modern Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism. It is a fact that whenever and wherever such movements have succeeded in capturing the state power they all crave, both the 'majority' they claim to speak for, and the (always indispensable!) 'minority' they stereotype and vilify as the 'other', have ended up paying a terrible price. One can only hope that India will not tread its own variant of the disastrous road charted by its small neighbour.

The metaphor that inescapably comes to mind is that of a person resolutely and defiantly sitting it out in a badly leaking boat in mid-ocean, or even trying to enlarge the hole through which the water flows into the boat. Decentralisation and devolution of power will, in the opinion of these self-proclaimed usurpers of the 'nationalist' mantle, whether 'Hindu' or 'Sinhalese-Buddhist', foster fragmentation and dismemberment, rather than what *I* feel it would, in all probability, lead to—the democratic empowerment of civil society as a whole. This opinion regards the democratisation of the state and the sharing of power between the Sinhalese and Tamil nations as a zero-sum game—while empirical studies of similar experiments worldwide actually suggest that 'there is no reason to posit a zero-sum relationship between power available to central and regional units of government' (Young 1976: 77). Yet the inadequacies, if not the inappropriateness, of centralised state structures in highly diversified societies are becoming increasingly obvious all over the globe. Sri Lanka is but an extreme instance of a worldwide phenomenon.

There are two cases in the contemporary world that would seem to stand in contradiction to my argument. One of these is the disintegration of the ostensibly 'federal' state of Yugoslavia; the other is the recent resurgence of separatist sentiment in Quebec, the Francophone province already enjoying considerable autonomy within Canada. But as I will show, a closer examination of the specificities of these instances, far from refuting my argument, actually serves to powerfully reinforce and confirm the validity of my thesis.

It is especially important to tackle the question of Yugoslavia. A Sinhalese polemicist, among others, has recently argued that

'the threatened disintegration of the federal State of Yugoslavia is surely a warning' against such 'facile ideas' that federalism might be an effective antidote to Sri Lanka's ills (De Silva 1991: Preface). But did Titoist Yugoslavia represent even an imperfect approximation of the idea of a 'federal state'?

There is a remarkably broad consensus among scholars of post-war Yugoslavia that it did not. Wayne Vucinich opined almost a quarter century ago that despite an extraordinary preoccupation among the ruling Titoist elite with the most minute details of the organisational or institutional aspects of federalism, post-World War II Yugoslavia was, in effect, 'an unitary state' (Vucinich 1969: 282), with the really decisive power safely centralised in the hands of Tito and his closest associates, and a range of residual powers delegated *not* to the constituent 'federal' republics as such, but to Titoist sub-elites in the republican capitals (Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Skopje and elsewhere). Ivo Banac has written that 'Tito's domestic policy...*actually put a premium on the power of the centre*...[while] decentralisation was enshrined in the [ostensibly confederal] Constitution of 1974...[even] this constitution retained the majority of powers for the centre and the ruling party, and was, hence, by no means the code for a confederation' (Banac 1992: 171-73) (emphasis added). Svetozar Stojanovic has been even more explicit on this issue. As he says, Yugoslavia 'was not a genuine federation before 1974, and did not automatically become one after the constitution of that year' (Stojanovic 1991: 94). The reason for this apparent paradox is a simple one. 'The distinctive forms Yugoslav socialist practice takes have all been initiated and controlled from the top' (Zukin 1984: 251) by a monolithic party leadership, and 'one-party rule and a [truly] autonomous society are mutually exclusive' (Tomc 1988: 70, 72).

I have elsewhere summarised the central problem in the Titoist conception of state-building and federalism as follows: 'Far too much form, far too little content' (Bose 1992: 938-41). Indeed, if we are to make sense of the Yugoslav outcome, it is essential not to confuse the *outward trappings* of a (con)federal system with its *essence*. One must be able to distinguish between the Titoist *rhetoric* of federalism, on the one hand, and what it amounted to in *practice* in post-war Yugoslavia, on the other. Titoist Yugoslavia's much-vaunted 'federalism' was *never* more than a

pale shadow of the real thing, the reason being that a highly decentralised, federal order that is not just form but *substance* is not quite compatible with the singular lack of political democracy that is implied by a permanent party monopoly on all political activities. In fact, as I have argued in much greater depth and detail elsewhere, *it is this very centralisation of power and the failure to undertake substantive democratising measures in good time that lie at the root of Yugoslavia's apocalyptic demise* (Bose 1992; and forthcoming 1995). Southern Asia and south-eastern Europe are very dissimilar contexts, but what is common to Sri Lanka and the former Yugoslavia is the organic linkage between frameworks of unitarist and hegemonic rule and the coming of civil war.

As for Quebec, the unexpected revival of support for the independence option that took place there in 1990-91, and which was taken by some to indicate that federalism merely whets the closet secessionist's insatiable appetite, must also be seen in its proper context. The resurgence of Quebecois separatism was the result of a conjunctural rather than a structural factor—the rejection in 1990 by English Canada of the Meech Lake accord, concluded in June 1987, which, if implemented, would have somewhat enhanced and extended Quebec's autonomy. As Maurice Pinard has persuasively argued, the 'main motivating factor' behind the resurgence was that 'the accord's failure was perceived by many...francophones in Quebec as a humiliating rejection by English Canada...[and] produced a deep sense of resentment among them' (1992: 471-97). This resentment was particularly keenly felt because the Meech Lake agreement, on the whole, contained 'moderate, minimal [federalist] demands—and even this was rejected by English Canada'. This denial of what they considered very reasonable demands so enraged the francophone population that 'many former supporters of independence who had abandoned the cause and many disillusioned federalists turned [again] to the sovereigntist option' with a vengeance.

But it is most noteworthy that even at the peak of the separatist resurgence, 'most Quebecois still preferred some kind of *renewed federalism* to a sovereigntist outcome' (emphasis added). Thus, in April 1991, an opinion survey found that 52 per cent of Quebecois still preferred federalism, either with the status-quo federal–province distribution of powers (16 per cent), or, significantly,

with greater powers granted to the province (36 per cent). Of the 47 per cent who favoured some form of sovereignty, 37 per cent wished to retain at least an economic association with the rest of Canada, *and only 10 per cent supported a clean break.* Moreover, in 1991, as many as 62 per cent of Quebec francophones still felt 'profoundly attached' to Canada! (all statistics cited in Pinard 1992). Thus, the evidence from Quebec would seem to support, rather than invalidate, my argument for wide-ranging decentralisation of authority and devolution of powers to constituent federal units.

Compelling evidence is also forthcoming from other parts of the world that granting regional autonomy to distinctive groups serves to *consolidate* rather than *weaken* the juridical state. The recent research of Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan on Spain, for example, has demonstrated that once the (previously highly unitary) Spanish state made a clear commitment, in the late 1970s, to 'change its historically centralised state-structure for a new decentralised one characterised by an unprecedented devolution of power to peripheral nationalist constituencies', i.e., the rebellious Basque country and Catalonia, strong separatist tendencies in these regions largely dissipated, and 'the legitimacy claims of the central government' were greatly strengthened.

Even more significantly, following the restructuring, Basque and Catalan identities came to be seen, by and large, as *complementary to*, rather than *in conflict with*, a broader Spanish and even European identity—support for European unification is very strong among both Basques and Catalans. In other words, *once the state-structure was democratised, and the aspirations of distinctive national communities taken into account in a generous, accommodative spirit, 'mutually supportive, legal and affective memberships in substate (Catalan), state (Spanish) and suprastate (European) polities' emerged* (emphasis added). Further, the hardline Basque separatist movement, ETA, suffered a precipitous decline in popular support (see Linz and Stepan 1992: 123-39, esp. 126-30 for relevant statistics).

What is clearly needed, then, in Sri Lanka as in the other countries of South Asia and in much of the rest of the world, is the *will*, the *sanity*, even, to recognise that there is nothing inviolable or sacrosanct about the constitution of extant juridical states—that all forms of unitary or centralised authority are social and political constructions. A view of state power that regards

it as a zero sum game can *never* foster the creation of the complementary, mutually supportive identities ('Tamil', 'Sri Lankan' etc.) which are crucial to prospects for democracy and stability in multinational states. Indeed, it is likely to achieve just the opposite. There must therefore be the realisation that a *fundamental renegotiation* of state-society relations is the only path to lasting peace and justice. If the complete collapse of state structures, and ensuing fragmentation, is sought to be avoided, scholars and policy-makers must address themselves to the task of accommodating these multiple identities by advancing creative, flexible ideas of dispersed, diffuse sovereignties—of building institutional frameworks of decentred, democratically accountable systems that will give distinctive national formations a sense of belonging, and will bestow upon them the power to *actively negotiate* terms on which to forge larger economic and political unions, which, I strongly believe, will be beneficial to all concerned. The challenge today is to find ways and means to blend power with principle, to reconcile authority with freedom. In other words, it is imperative to totally re-think our understanding of 'state' and 'nation', and creatively re-conceptualise the notion of sovereignty to accommodate both.

As Ruth Lapidoth has put it,

> a compromise must be found to satisfy...the aspirations of various groups...the term 'sovereignty' can be used in a flexible manner; in a case of diffusion of power, both the central government and regional/autonomous authorities could be the lawful bearer of a share of sovereignty, without necessarily leading to the disappearance or dismemberment of the state (1992: 345-46).

And, as Allen Buchanan has forcefully argued:

> Rightly or wrongly, more and more people are becoming convinced that the centralised, large-scale nation-state is more an evil than a necessity. The most fundamental assumptions about the scale of viable political association are being widely questioned...for the first time in perhaps three centuries...when the idea of the nation-state first took hold in [Western, European] thought and practice....secession is now on the political agenda

> across the globe....[however] *once the possibility of a variety of types of political association with differing forms and degrees of self-determination is appreciated, dissatisfied groups within existing states will not be faced with the stark choice of either remaining in a condition of...[subjugation] or of taking the radical step of seceding to form their own sovereign state. Exercising the right to self-determination need not always involve secession if other degrees and forms of self-determination are available* (1992: 351-52, 362) (emphasis added).

Otherwise, Tilly's prediction that 'the state-system Europeans fashioned has not always existed...[and that] it will not endure forever' (1990: 225) may yet turn out to be a prophetic one.

Demands for 'national self-determination' are, in one sense, therefore, also a struggle for a higher form of democracy. It must then be recognised that 'post-colonial liberation movements', far from being inherently 'undemocratic', 'subversive', 'terrorist' *ad infinitum*, are often the most effective medium for *democratic assertion* by social groups who have been deprived of equal citizenship rights, who have been subjected to denial and state oppression. This is something that is true from Palestine to Kashmir, from Kurdistan to Tamil Ceylon. As Lenin once wrote, 'the bourgeois nationalism of *any* oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression, and it is this content that we [socialists] *unconditionally* support' (1970: 73) (emphases Lenin's).

The political and philosophical vision that is required today has been eloquently articulated, ironically enough, by radical Tamil nationalists ('chauvinists' and 'separatist terrorists', according to the official wisdom), in 1985:

> We know that in the end, national freedom can only be secured by a *voluntary pooling of sovereignties*, in a regional and ultimately in a world context. And we recognise that our future lies with the peoples of the Indian region, and that the path of a greater and larger union is the [eventual] direction of that future. It is a union that will reflect the compelling and inevitable need for a common market and a common defence and foreign policy, and which will be rooted in the common heritage that we share with our brothers and sisters not only of Tamil Nadu but also of India as a whole. It is a shared heritage that we

> freely acknowledge and it is a shared heritage from which we derive strength—and we know that we too, as a people, can at times contribute to that strength (The Thimphu Declaration, in Satyendra 1989a: 142-43) (emphasis added).

In the specific Sri Lankan context, the challenge is to devise and implement innovative and imaginative associative structures whereby the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples can peacefully coexist, and freely associate and cooperate in certain vital spheres of common concern (and there are many), so that the welfare of both peoples may be safeguarded and enhanced. In my view, the most efficacious solution would transform Sri Lanka into a voluntary confederation of two essentially sovereign peoples. In other words, the Sri Lankan state as it presently exists must be thoroughly overhauled, if it is not to expire altogether. Kittu, in his conversations with me, repeatedly expressed himself in favour of such a 'confederal' resolution, negotiated in a civilised manner, rather than a bloody and acrimonious partition.[16] A cautious and reasonable international intervention, through the medium of the United Nations, might potentially contribute something towards achieving this end—the UN-sponsored referendum on Eritrean sovereignty in April 1993 is one instance of a fruitful and positive UN role. But ultimately, of course, the transformation of Sri Lanka will have to be accomplished through the will and efforts of Sri Lankans themselves, be they Sinhalese, Tamil or Muslim.

Such a transformation might take as its starting point, and philosophical basis, the four-point Tamil declaration of sovereignty at the Thimphu conference in 1985. Of course, the rights of minorities, especially the east coast Muslims in the Tamil region and the Colombo Tamils in the Sinhalese region, is a subject that should command special attention and the utmost priority. Compromises could also be worked out across the table on other contentious issues. For example, Trincomalee could be declared a free port, to which the Sinhalese authorities and people would also enjoy unimpeded access. Till all this is done, however, peace on the fractured island will remain a distant and elusive dream. And, of course, if there is ever to be peace and stability in South Asia, there is an absolutely compelling moral and pragmatic case for extending similar processes of structural democratisation to

16 Personal interviews with the author in London, June-July 1991.

the other countries of the subcontinent, India in particular—and the sooner the better.

The LTTE claims that 'the Tamil national movement cannot be snuffed out. It can be reasoned with' (LTTE 1988). Despite its element of self-serving bluster, I would take this apparently bland statement very seriously indeed, especially if I were one of those who walk the corridors of power in New Delhi or Colombo. The capacity of individuals, and collectivities, to go on defying state power in the name of a deeply held 'national' cause has been repeatedly demonstrated in course of history. As Subramaniam Bharathi, poet of revolutionary Tamil nationalism, wrote in colonised India at the turn of the century:

> In our land
> we can no longer be slaves,
> asleep.
> We are no longer afraid.
>
> On this earth
> injustice multiplies with
> impunity....
> To the motherland we sacrifice
> ourselves
> in adoration.
>
> Should we continue
> to die
> sobbing silently to ourselves
> forever?
>
> Or is life so sweet
> we dare not risk it
> for rebirth in freedom?...
>
> Is it a sin to love freedom
> until death?
>
> Is it a crime to end our suffering?
> Is there hatred in that?
>
> We have learned
> the only way is unity.

That
we have learned well.

We will no longer be surprised
confused
separated
by your cruelty.

Our will is unshakeable.

If you slice my flesh
into bits,
will you lose your fear of us?
your hunger for revenge?
Will you gain your purpose?

When my corpse is burnt
my heart will not melt,
for there is locked
unsatisfied
my life desire:

freedom.[17]

17 From Subramaniam Bharathi, 'Chidambaram Pillai's Reply', translated in Ludden (1973: 274-75). Bharathi's intensely political poetry, incidentally, bears a striking resemblance to the ideology of the LTTE, whether in its passionately romantic evocations of Tamil nationhood (which is, nonetheless, placed at the service of the pan-Indian struggle against colonialism), or in its emphasis on the need for social liberation of oppressed groups such as women and 'lower-castes' as a requisite for strengthening and unifying the national formation.

Appendix A: Commonly Used Abbreviations

UNP : United National Party; elitist, right-wing political organisation led by upper caste/class Sinhalese-Buddhists. Currently Sri Lanka's 'ruling party' (since 1977). UNP activists are said to have instigated and organised a major anti-Tamil pogrom in Colombo in July 1983, killing some 3,000 Tamils and precipitating all-out civil war.

SLFP : Sri Lanka Freedom Party; populist Sinhalese organisation with 'socialist' leanings on economic policy. Pioneer of politicised Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism. Alternated with UNP in holding power in Colombo between 1956 and 1977, and aggressively engaged in (anti-Tamil) 'competitive chauvinism' with UNP in order to capture the Sinhalese vote. Main Sinhalese opposition party since 1977.

FP : (Tamil) Federal Party; founded in 1951 to campaign through peaceful means for regional autonomy for Tamils living in the north and east of Sri Lanka; representative political party of Tamils for two decades between mid-1950s and mid-1970s. Despite strenuous efforts, eventually failed to win even a semblance of autonomy for Sri Lankan Tamils from the Sinhalese-Buddhist state.

TULF : Tamil United Liberation Front; coalition of FP and two smaller Tamil organisations, formed in 1976 to campaign for a sovereign state of Tamil Eelam in the north and east of Sri Lanka. Constitutional, conservative organisation; became increasingly irrelevant in Tamil politics from 1980s onwards, as Tamil armed struggle intensified and young radicals wrested the initiative. Practically defunct today; enjoys next to no support among Tamil population.

LTTE : Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Tamil Tigers); radical, extra-

parliamentary youth movement formed in 1972 with the objective of launching an armed struggle to achieve Tamil Eelam; political and military spearhead of the Tamil quest for independence; probably the most sophisticated and formidable armed opposition movement in the world today. Has a powerful worldwide network of supporters and sympathisers, and a record of ruthless intolerance towards political opponents.

IPKF : Indian Peace-Keeping Force; formal title of the 100,000-strong Indian military force that occupied the Tamil region of Sri Lanka and fought the Tigers between 1987 and 1990. Compelled to withdraw in 1990 in the face of relentless LTTE resistance. Accused of widespread atrocities against the Tamil population it was ostensibly 'protecting'.

Appendix B: Major Personalities

Bandaranaike, Solomon : Founder, Sri Lanka Freedom Party (1951): Oxford-educated godfather of modern Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism, populist politician *par excellence*. Assassinated by fanatical Buddhist monk, 1959.

Bandaranaike, Sirimavo : Widow of Solomon Bandaranaike and leader of SLFP after his death; Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, 1960-65, 1970-77. Head of the government responsible for adopting a Sinhalese-supremacist constitution for the country in 1972, and for discriminating against Tamil youth in admissions to professional university education (engineering and medicine) during mid-1970s—both of which had enormous inflammatory effects on political situation and Sinhalese-Tamil relations. Continues to be official leader of SLFP (as of 1993).

Chelvanayakam, Samuel James Velupillai (S.J.V.) : Founder and leader of Tamil Federalist Party (FP); dominant figure in Sri Lankan Tamil politics between 1956 and death in 1977. Signed a famous pact (later aborted) in 1958 with then Prime Minister Solomon Bandaranaike, laying down a comprehensive federal solution to Sri Lanka's national question. Publicly endorsed demand for sovereign Tamil Eelam in 1975-76.

Gandhi, Rajiv (1944-91) : Prime Minister of India, 1984-89. Ordered huge Indian military intervention ('Indian Peace-Keeping Force') in Sri Lanka in 1987 to disarm Tamil Tigers and end Tamil uprising. Assassinated in southern India in May 1991 by Sri Lankan Tamils suspected of LTTE links.

Jayewardene, Junius (1906—) : Senior leader of United National Party; President of Sri Lanka, 1977-88. Presided over the disastrous slide into bloody civil war. Lives in retirement in Colombo.

Krishnakumar, Sathashivam ('Kittu', 1960-93) : Legendary Tamil nationalist leader and revolutionary; immensely popular in Sri Lanka's Tamil region. Held a number of top positions in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, including military commander for Jaffna peninsula (1983-87). Was also unofficial LTTE envoy to India (1987-88) and central coordinator of the movement's worldwide operations, headquartered in London (1989-91). Reported killed in suspicious and murky circumstances in January 1993 after a ship in which he was travelling was first intercepted in the Indian Ocean (allegedly in international waters) and then attacked by crack units of the Indian navy and air force. Kittu's body is however not known to have been recovered, and there were numerous contradictions in the Indian version of events. A senior member of LTTE's Central Committee at time of death. Hailed by the Tigers as a 'great martyr'.

Prabhakaran, Velupillai (1954—) : Founder and supreme leader, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; brilliant military commander, eulogised by large sections of Sri Lankan Tamil youth. A folk hero of mythical proportions in Sri Lanka's Tamil region. Has strong dictatorial and authoritarian tendencies, and is uncompromisingly committed to the ideal of an independent Tamil homeland in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

Appendix C: A Chronology of Events

1833: The island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) is, for the first time in over 2,500 years of its recorded history, brought under a single centralised administration by British colonial conquerors.

1948: The British leave. A government dominated by the Sinhalese elite takes power, and proceeds to disenfranchise and render stateless more than a million plantation workers of Indian Tamil origin, most of whom have been settled in Ceylon for several generations.

1951: Tamil Federal Party (FP) holds it first convention, and declares its intention to campaign for a federal renegotiation of Ceylon's polity, and specifically for regional autonomy for Sri Lankan Tamils living in the North and East. Solomon Bandaranaike forms Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) after breaking away from the United National Party (UNP).

1956: A landmark year for Ceylon. UNP, the party of inherited privilege, is toppled from power, in elections to Parliament, by the SLFP, riding a wave of populist Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism with strong anti-Tamil overtones. Sinhalese is proclaimed the sole official language of Ceylon. The FP consolidates its position as the representative political party of the Ceylon Tamils. There is an outbreak of anti-Tamil rioting, the first in the post-colonial phase, in the eastern part of the country.

1958: Prime Minister Bandaranaike and FP leader Chelvanayakam reach a historic agreement (the B-C Pact) on a comprehensive federal solution to growing Sinhalese-Tamil tensions. The plan postulates wide-ranging devolution of power to the Tamil-majority region in the North and East. Within weeks, the Pact is unilaterally abrogated by Bandaranaike in the face of hysterical protests from the UNP and the Buddhist clergy. FP

launches a campaign of civil disobedience in response. The state reacts with violence: police and military forces are sent to Jaffna to put down the agitation. In May-June, a major anti-Tamil pogrom sweeps the Sinhalese-majority areas. Hundreds are killed, over 12,000 Tamils are made homeless.

1965: UNP Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake attempts to reach an accord with the FP leadership. But the agreement, which amounts to a diluted version of the B-C Pact, is never implemented because of strident opposition from the SLFP, as well as from UNP backbenchers.

1972: SLFP regime uses its massive majority in Parliament to enact a Sinhalese-supremacist 'Republican Constitution' for the country; Ceylon is officially renamed Sri Lanka. Buddhism is made *de facto* state religion. Velupillai Prabhakaran, a 17-year old high-school student, forms a small youth group, Tamil New Tigers (TNT) in the Jaffna peninsula to fight for Tamil rights.

1974-75: The state's discrimination against qualified Tamil students in admissions to university-level medicine and engineering courses reaches a peak. A prestigious international Tamil cultural conference being held in Jaffna city is subjected to an unprovoked attack by Sinhalese police—nine persons are killed. Alfred Duriappah, SLFP organiser for Jaffna, is assassinated in retaliation.

1976: An extraordinary session of the newly formed Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), comprising FP and two smaller Tamil groups, vows to restore a 'free, sovereign, secular, socialist State of Tamil Eelam based on the right to self-determination', 'in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil nation in this country'. TNT is renamed and reorganised as Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

1977: TULF contests parliamentary polls on a one-point programme of obtaining a popular mandate for its goal of a sovereign Tamil Eelam. The party wins a massive victory in the overwhelmingly Tamil north, and does very well in Tamil-dominated areas of the eastern province. UNP is returned to power in Colombo with a huge majority. Severe anti-Tamil riots occur in Sinhalese-majority areas; hundreds die.

1978: LTTE 'and other similar organisations' banned as police stations and army camps in the North come under armed attack by young Tamil radicals.

1979: The government enacts a Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), a magnified blend of the British and South African ordinances of the same name, to curb Tamil youth militancy— Jaffna peninsula is effectively under martial law. More anti-Tamil riots in Sinhalese areas.

1981: Further anti-Tamil riots. Military repression and Tamil violence continue in the north, as fitful negotiations between the government and TULF leaders fail to make headway.

1983: Situation deteriorates sharply. In July, a very serious anti-Tamil pogrom takes place in Colombo and other Sinhalese areas. Up to 3,000 Tamils are killed and over 150,000 become refugees, mostly in neighbouring India and the West. The Indian government comes out in support of the Tamil cause as its own 60 million-strong Tamil population becomes increasingly restive over the plight of the Sri Lankan Tamils. LTTE and other guerrilla organisations set up training camps on Indian soil, abetted, directly and indirectly, by various organs and agencies of the Indian state. Thousands of radicalised youth join these guerrilla movements. The TULF leadership, seen as ineffectual, opportunist and self-seeking, is beginning to fade into political oblivion.

1983-87: State repression and Tamil violence intensify in the North and East, till, by the mid-1980s, it is all-out war between the Sri Lankan state and the Tamils. LTTE emerges dominant among Tamil guerrilla groups, and takes effective control of Jaffna peninsula and other northern areas as state authority gradually collapses in these regions. Thousands, especially Tamils, die as the fighting takes on an increasingly brutal dimension, with non-combatants on both sides being systematically targeted, first by the Sri Lankan armed forces and subsequently also by Tamil guerrillas. Hundreds of thousands of Tamils become refugees. Constitutional politicians of the TULF variety are totally eclipsed. Occasional talks between the new Tamil leadership and Colombo lead nowhere, as the government still seems reluctant to give the Tamil region a substantial measure of federal autonomy. India continues to aid the Tamil insurrection.

1987: In an apparent reversal of policy, New Delhi sends tens of thousands of troops into north-eastern Sri Lanka in July to disarm the Tigers and end the Tamil uprising. This is done under the ostensible pretext of a 'peacekeeping' mission intended to implement the provisions of an accord, signed on a bilateral basis by the Indian and Sri Lankan governments, granting minor autonomy to the Tamil-majority areas. No Tamil organisation has been previously consulted on this matter. By October, the Indian

soldiers are at war with the LTTE, which refuses to give up its struggle for full Tamil statehood and accept the Indian contention that the 'Indo-Sri Lanka accord' represents a final, definitive redressal of Tamil grievances. The LTTE, much to everyone's surprise, performs brilliantly in combat against vastly superior Indian forces. By November, the Tigers, having lost Jaffna city to Indian firepower, have reverted to classic 'People's War' against the Indians in the countryside and smaller towns throughout the Tamil region.

1987-90: The Indo-Tamil conflict drags on, as New Delhi rejects LTTE overtures for peace. Hundreds of combatants die on both sides. But the worst sufferers are the Tamil civilian population, who are subjected to gross atrocities by the Indian occupation and their Tamil collaborators. Indian repression, ironically, significantly augments the strength and popularity of the LTTE among the Tamils. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of young Sinhalese are massacred or 'disappear' in the Sinhalese areas as the Sri Lankan government cracks down with incredible savagery on a Sinhalese youth insurrection led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). In April-May 1989, the LTTE reaches an informal understanding with the Sinhalese government on the need to terminate the Indian presence, which is unpopular with Tamils and Sinhalese alike. In June of that year, the Sinhalese President asks the Indians to leave the country. The Indians complete their withdrawal by March 1990, harassed and harried by the Tigers till the very end. In June 1990, the fragile truce between Colombo and the Tigers breaks down, and the war is resumed with a vengeance. Brutality scales unprecedented levels on both sides. Thousands of civilians, particularly Tamils, are killed—hundreds of thousands of Tamils become internal refugees or flee the country.

1993: In April-May, Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa and top opposition politician (and former UNP National Security Minister) Lalith Athulathmudali are assassinated in rapid succession. The technique used in the Premadasa killing (a suicide bomber) appears to point to the LTTE, while government-sponsored death squads are blamed by Athulathmudali's family and supporters for his murder.

Meanwhile, the LTTE, despite the armed forces' strenuous and repeated efforts, manages to hold on, by and large, to its 'liberated territories' in the North. The Jaffna peninsula, in particular, continues to be under near-total Tiger control. Fierce fighting also continues in the East, where the Tigers are still entrenched in forested and rural areas. A military stalemate appears to have been reached, with the Tigers gaining gradually in the war of attrition, as the government forces' morale and discipline appears to be on the decline.

During the year, Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran publicly calls for

unconditional talks with the government, with a commitment to the federalisation of Sri Lanka forming the basis of negotiations. But in September, the Sinhalese President, D.B. Wijetunga, declares that the war is the result of a 'terrorist problem', and that no ethnic/national question exists in Sri Lanka. He categorically rejects a merger of the country's northern and eastern provinces (a minimum demand shared by all Tamil political groups), and reiterates his predecessors' oft- stated commitment to a 'military solution' to the conflict. Government minister Thondaman is repeatedly prevented from pursuing his peace initiatives involving direct dialogue with the LTTE leadership. In October, the Sri Lankan armed forces launch a massive offensive against parts of the Jaffna peninsula; it ends in failure, with the army suffering very heavy casualties. In November, a Tiger counter-attack in the same area leaves one thousand government soldiers dead.

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