

Colombo's Diplomatic Artistry!

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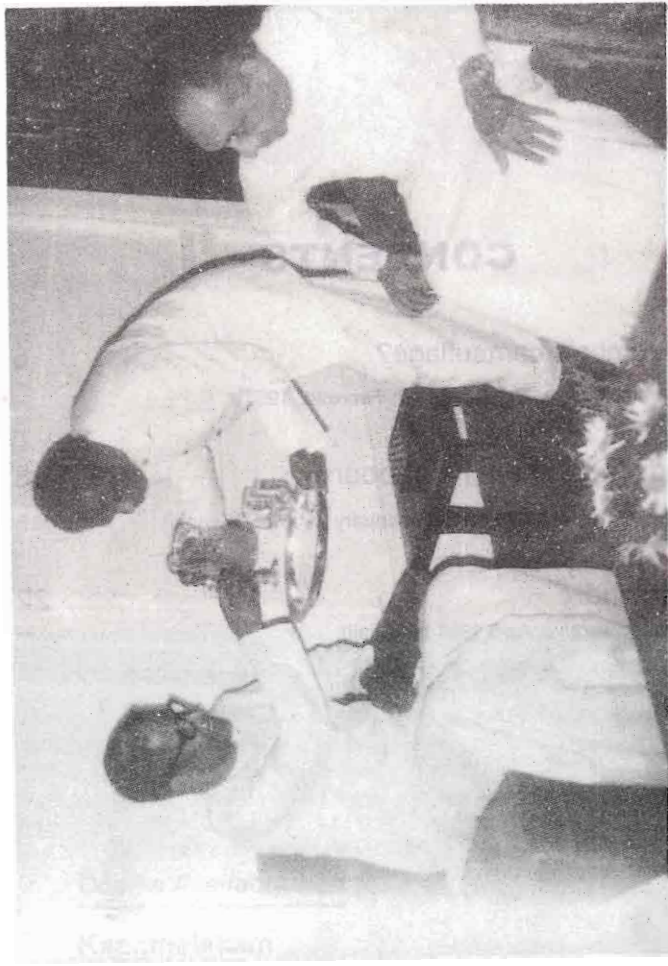
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Author with President J. R. Jeyawardane at President's House, Colombo (1987)



Colombo's camouflage?

If Kachativu is repeatedly in the news, it is because of the frequent firing by the Sri Lankan Navy on fishermen from the Tamil Nadu coast off the Palk Strait. Even as the Indian External Affairs Minister, Mr. I.K. Gujral, was parleying in Colombo on matters including the killing of Tamil Nadu fishermen in the Palk Strait, there was yet another incident on January 20, 1997. The Sri Lankan navy shot at Muniswamy (21) of Rameshwaram who was fishing near Kachativu. This prompted the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi, to appeal on the same day to Mr. Gujral, who was in Colombo then, to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan Government and put an end to such incidents. Mr. Karunanidhi, along with the Tamil Nadu officials, had briefed Mr. Gujral and his officials, at Delhi on January 17, 1997, on the recurring incidents of firing by the Sri Lankan navy killing and injuring innocent Tamil fishermen.

That the Tamil Nadu Government was upset at the unabated killings was evident again when the Governor told the State Assembly on January 22, 1997, that, "the Government was seriously concerned at the repeated attacks by the Sri Lankan navy on our innocent fishermen who venture out into the sea for their livelihood. The recent incidents of violence have been taken up with the Government of India." When the Kachativu agreement was reached in 1974, it contained a clause to protect the fishing rights of the Tamil Nadu fishermen near Kachativu and "the rights of pilgrimage to Kachativu from Tamil Nadu." The Governor added, "But it is not known why these clauses were not enforced after the DMK Government was removed in 1976. The Government will continue to press the Government of India to enforce the clauses again to solve the problem."

Successive Sri Lankan Governments have nursed the policy of alienating the Tamil Nadu Tamils from the North-East Tamils of Sri

Lanka. As an extension of this policy, they wanted to block the cultural contacts. Kachativu provided a base for close contact between fishermen from both sides of the Palk Strait, many of whom happened to be Catholics. St. Anthony's Church on this uninhabited island attracted many ardent devotees from both sides of the Palk Strait.

There was no serious contention for ownership of this island by anybody from both sides of the Palk Strait. Parliamentarians from Jaffna never raised the matter. It was not politicized. Politicians in Tamil Nadu made no demand until this was sorted out in Delhi in 1974. Earlier, it was the Sri Lankan Government, which insisted on the demarcation of the maritime boundary.

The intolerance of the Sri Lankan Government to Tamil boat traffic across the Palk Strait has been consistent since the British left. First, the naval contingent at Trincomalee was used. Later, a naval base was established at Karainagar in the Palk Strait. This was followed by bases at Kankesanthurai and Talaimannar. All these positions were aimed at blocking the traditional boat traffic between landing points on both sides of the Palk Strait. Interestingly, India did not take any effective step until the early Eighties to curtail or regulate this traffic. The authorities in the coastal district turned a blind eye.

Until 1948, passenger, trade and fishing traffic between landing points on both sides was a legitimate, traditional activity. Vedaranyam, Adiramapatinam, Thondi, Mandapam and Rameswaram were some of the familiar landing points in the Tamil Nadu. Point Pedro, Valvettithurai, Mathakal, Kayts, Jaffna and Delft were some of the familiar landing points in the North-East Sri Lanka.

The post-1948 Sri Lankan Government insisted on regulating this traffic, scrapping the traditional landing points in Jaffna and allowing Talaimannar as the only entry/exit point on the Sri Lankan side. The introduction of travel documents, immigration formalities and the restriction of entry/exit points after 1948, made this traditional migration between both sides of the Palk Strait, an illegal activity. Passengers using the traditional landing points were labeled *kalla thonis* (clandestine travelers). Traders using these points were labeled

'smugglers'. Fishermen were termed 'trespassers'. Not only are they termed so but are also being killed at sight by the Sri Lankan navy. The father of Varadaraja Perumal, once Chief Minister of the North-East province might have been one of the many who escaped the Royal Ceylon Navy's firing range to reach Jaffna for the purpose of employment in the early Fifties. He hailed from Rajapalayam in the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. The Colombo Government, referred to him and most others as '*kalla thonis*'. If not killed at mid sea, they might have been caught, taken to torture camps at Slave Island, Colombo and deported to Tamil Nadu. He and thousands of others were, upon arrival, enrolled as Ceylonese village residents by courteous village headmen in Jaffna.

The once accessible 'travel citadel', the Palk Strait, was becoming the graveyard of the Tamils hailing from both sides. Trading centres such as Valvettithurai and Point Pedro became the "smugglers' enclave" and were subject to continuous raids by Sri Lankan customs and police.

Sailors and traders in these centres had very good trade and other connections not only in Tamil Nadu but also in Cochin, Visakhapatnam, Calcutta, Rangoon, Penang and Singapore. Soon, some shifted to Colombo. Many became fishermen. Few continued and are continuing to this day to trade or 'smuggle', what they consider the holy occupation handed over by their forefathers. These have vowed not to give up.

Subsequent to the Sri Lankan action, landing centres along the Tamil Nadu coast lost their charm. But the people and the authorities continued to be receptive. 'Vadakkan' bulls from Kangeyam continued to reach Jaffna. Kancheepuram sarees came in large quantities. A shortage of dried chillies in Sri Lanka during the early Seventies made the Palk Strait crawling with 'chilly boats'. The Sri Lankan navy shot at some of these boats and dried chillies were washed ashore in large quantities on both sides.

The Jaffna population considered this boat traffic essential. So much so, one of the first resolutions passed by the TULF dominated

the Jaffna District Development Council (a sort of devolved institution) asked the Sri Lankan Government to reopen this boat traffic as a full-fledged exercise. The Government never responded favorably to such resolutions.

The Palk Strait is an inshore water body situated well within the continental shelf of its two littoral states (Sri Lanka in the east and India in the west), bordered by two large islands (Rameswaram and Manner) in the south linked by a discontinuous strip of shifting sand mounds forming the Sethu bridge. It is open to the Bay of Bengal in the north. There are more than ten islands in the Strait, many of them adjoining the Jaffna peninsula and inhabited.

Cauvery and the Vaigai are the major rivers flowing directly into the Strait. A few rivulets on both sides empty themselves into the Strait during the North-East monsoon. Oceanic currents during the North-East monsoon flowing north-south from Bengal brings the drainage from the Himalayan and Vindhyan rivers. All these inflows provide the required replenishments of nutrients to maintain the productive of the Strait.

The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) at Mandapam, the Marine Biological Station of the Annamalai University at Porto Novo and the Fisheries Research Station at Colombo are the major institutions conducting research on the living resources and the fishery of the Strait in addition to occasional research projects by students from the Madurai Kamaraj University and Jaffna University.

There has been no overall evaluation or assessment of the living resources of the Palk Strait so far. There has been no reasonable accurate assessment of any of the stocks or their abundance or otherwise around the Strait. Exploration for offshore oil has been undertaken by both Governments and Russian experts and equipment were commissioned off Manner island by the Sri Lankan Government to conduct a survey in the early Seventies. ONGC is now conducting surveys in the Cauvery basin. No other major resource has been spotted except that salt production is active.

Drainage from the two major Tamil Nadu rivers into the Strait has been restricted in the recent past, owing to the construction of dams and *anaicuts* upstream, and that may have upset the ecological balance of the Strait and affected its productivity and replenishment of the exploited resources.

Natural increase in the fishing population, influx of the sailor-trader category in the fishing arena, introduction of mechanized craft, improvements in the fishing methods, introduction of new gear, improved methods of post-harvest handling, preservation and processing have all enhanced that rate and the level of exploitation of the resources. Monitoring of the production level on both sides of the Strait has never been analyzed to guide the level of exploitation.

The pelagic variety of fish appears to remain at a stable level in spite of the development inputs and a weakened ecological balance.

Demersal fish, the fishermen complain, is fast depleting. The components of the demersal stock are: crustaceans (prawns, lobsters and crabs), molluscs (oysters, shanks), echinoderms (beche-de-mer), rays and some bottom species of fish. Except for rays and fish, the major portion of the harvest is for export at very lucrative prices. Shanks go to Bengal, beche-de-mer goes to Southeast Asia and crustaceans reach the tables in Japan, Europe and North America. That dollar-input triggers over fishing.

The demersal stock is available at specific locations and require special skills such as diving and spearing for selective collection. The introduction of small-mesh trawl nets and their indiscriminate use have adversely affected the replenishments of these stocks, the fishermen complain. So much so that shank, oyster and lobster fisheries are said to be at the verge of extinction. CMFRI is trying to save the beche-mer and oyster fisheries by introducing culture techniques. Before the mechanization of fishing craft, fishermen on both sides limited their activities to near-shore regions. Depending on the seasons, these fishermen migrated to each other's side, established matrimonial dependencies and had cordial family and professional relationships.

Mechanization of the craft and modernization of the gear (Sri Lanka – early Fifties, India – late Sixties) allowed the fishermen to penetrate vertically and horizontally and extend their areas of activity. In spite of all these changes, the fishermen on both sides of the Strait have never invited their respective authorities to lay claim on any special right or privilege on any area or region for the purpose of fishing. They had very good understanding and never entertained any hostility. There were a few instances where inadvertent tearing off of drift nets by mechanized boats caused an irritation. Sometimes small mesh trawl-net operators were chased away from rich lobster beds. But never did the fishermen report to their respective authorities requesting punitive action. It was a question of mid-sea co-operation rather than confrontation.

In the history of post-independent Palk Strait boat operations, not once did India fire at the boats coming from Sri Lanka. There were seizures, arrests (that too in a big way only after 1983) but not killings. Are they not '*kalla thonis*', or 'smugglers' or 'trespassers' in India? India simply recognized the human factor in such operations. India had no genocidal intentions. India had never had an anti Sri Lankan policy. India never feared that this boat traffic may generate any serious law and order problem within its limits. Even if it brought about such problems, India did not resort to any mad killings in the Palk Strait.

For Sri Lanka, killing Tamils is part of a policy of annihilation of a race. Kachativu is not the issue. Fishing rights is not the issue. Tamil militancy is not the issue. These are simple overt excuses to a covert policy of attacking the Tamils wherever they are whoever they are, whatever they are. Sri Lankan Tamil and Sinhalese fishermen have often crossed into Indian waters inadvertently or intentionally. They have been treated with care and sent back with honour.

Neither the Tamil Nadu Tamils nor the Sri Lankan North-East Tamils are interested in seriously bargaining for the island of Kachativu, a piece of land, uninhabitable and without any tangible resource. Both have repeatedly expressed good neighborliness.

The **revival** of the traffic between traditional landing points is a dire necessity for the culturally thirsty and developmental oriented hard working Tamils of North-East Sri Lanka. This thinking is reflected in the text of the 1981 resolution of the TULF dominated Jaffna District Development Council.

Tamil Nadu has repeatedly conveyed to the Government of India its apprehensions of the Sri Lankan Government's policy of deploying its navy to police the entire Palk Strait.

The fishery resource of Palk Strait is common. A **joint effort** to achieve the following requires priority: 1. Determine the available stock; 2. Assess the optimum level of exploitation; 3. Regulate the fishing methods; 4. Monitor the production level to relate it to optimal exploitation; 5. Plan to maintain the ecological balance to sustain productivity.

India's southern neighbour

Even though Lanka and Ravana are names carrying a stigma among the Ramayana literate populace, Indians do not entertain any malice towards the present day Sri Lanka.

An innate suspicion and the consequent feeling of insecurity have historical reasons for the Sinhalese towards India in general and Tamil Nadu in particular. Sinhalese misgiving stems from the experiences of repeated military expeditions from the mainland to the island over a period of more than 2000 years. This attitude is directly related to the manifestations of the Sri Lankan policies towards India even today.

The many fold interactive historical associations among the Kingdoms in the region including those in the island has left many landmarks in history as recorded in stone inscriptions and literary writings. Matrimonial alliances, military conquests, cultural exchanges and pilgrimages brought about this active interaction.

For the Sinhalese, the only external front was the influences and forces from or through Tamil Nadu. Whereas for the Tamils, it was from all sides and the Sinhalese front formed a very insignificant factor.

Given this historical and mindset backdrop, it is very easy to perceive the Indian (Tamil Nadu) reaction to the recent ethnic related happenings in Sri Lanka.

During the first half of this century, Sinhalese were concerned with the continued arrival of Indian labour and Muslim businessmen to serve British interests. There were anti-Muslim riots in the hill country. Muslims not only refused to evacuate but hit the Sinhalese back during the riots. Thereafter until now the Sinhalese have not tried their hands at the Muslims.

Later, Sinhala Maha Saba members protested against the presence of Indian port workers and asked them to return home. Keralites working in the harbour and suburbs of Colombo voluntarily evacuated after 1925. Emboldened by this, the Sinhala chauvinists were toying with the idea of deporting the entire Tamil plantation community.

For the first time in the century, India reacted to the emerging Sinhala nationalism and sent Jawaharlal Nehru to Colombo in 1939, which resulted in the formation of the Ceylon Indian Congress. Later the Indian National Congress at the instance of Mahatma Gandhi and Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru passed a resolution criticising Sri Lankan initiative to deport the plantation Tamils. Indian National Congress leaders were aware that any unrest due to maltreatment of plantation Tamils would become a concern of Delhi and Chennai.

Unlike the Muslims, the plantations Tamils were weak. This weakness of the Indian labour community beginning with the Keralite evacuation, gave the post independent Sinhala majority parliament to legislate two enactment's, one in 1948 and the other in 1949, disenfranchising the plantation Tamil community.

India became furious. Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru was at the helm of affairs in New Delhi. He refused to accept the plantation Tamil community back in India. He said that it was an internal problem of Sri Lanka. They were neither Sri Lankans nor Indians, and hence 'stateless'.

Prior to independence in February 1948, Sri Lankans and Indians freely travelled without restrictions. A visa regime was initiated after the independence and Sri Lanka was particular that only visa holders from India could travel to the island. India was more liberal and visas could be obtained in India at the point of landing.

Until the early fifties, fishermen and traders from northern Sri Lanka arrived freely by boat at the many landing points along the coast of Tamil Nadu. Export and import of commodities were allowed from these landing points from Tuticorin stretching to Nagapattinam. But Sri

Lanka permitted cargo and human traffic only from designated landing points like Colombo, Talaimannar, and Jaffna.

Sri Lanka declared any transportation of cargo and humans from its traditional landing points as illegal. The traffic was either called smuggling or illegal immigration (*Kalla thoni*). To enforce this policy Sri Lanka established naval units at Kankesanthurai, Karainagar, Talaimannar and Kalpittiy. India did not even have police outposts along the coastline to check this traffic. India acknowledged the historical exchange of goods, services and people across the Palk Straits and Gulf of Mannar and did very little to close its maritime border with Sri Lanka. India's borders were porous and the Sri Lankan borders had taps. This allowed the Tamils on both sides of the border to openly flout the customs, excise and immigration laws of Sri Lanka.

Colombo's policy towards the traditional boat traffic between the shores of north Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu reflected its need to protect the *status quo* in the ethnic composition of the island. Colombo was irritated by the slow influx of economic migrants who illicitly crossed over to the island and started settling down. These migrants maintained close connections with their kith and kin in Tamil Nadu and periodically remitted their savings allegedly causing a drain on Colombo's foreign exchange reserves but in effect were a paltry amount.

The naval units in northern Sri Lanka arrested many Tamils in the high seas and sent them to a camp in Slave Island for punitive detainment and subsequent deportation. This camp was a source of irritation between Colombo and New Delhi because New Delhi suspected that Colombo was dumping its unwanted plantation Tamils also into this camp for deportation to India. Tamil Nadu did not protest either to New Delhi or to Colombo of the inhuman conditions its own citizens were undergoing in the camp of Slave Island.

From 1947-1964, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru prevailed upon the Indian establishment to reject any proposal from Sri Lanka to take back the plantation Tamils. Having made nearly a million Tamils stateless, the Sinhala chauvinists were progressively depriving the Eelam Tamils

of their rights to language, their traditional homeland, education and employment.

The Sinhala colonisation of the Tamil homeland began in right earnest in 1952. Sinhalese was made the official language in 1956. Tamils had a taste of Sinhala violence in 1956. This was followed by a Government sponsored pogrom in 1958. There were no large scale protests in Tamil Nadu because the Congress party in power at that time in Tamil Nadu refused any public debate on what was essentially a 'central subject' - the external affairs.

However, the Dravidian parties made their impact in the form of articles, platform speeches and press statements. Mr. C. N. Annadurai, the DMK chief had with him a sober lieutenant from Eelam, Mr. Eelaththu Adigal who gave the DMK leadership a detailed analysis on the consequences of the emergence of Sinhala chauvinism.

Mr. E. V. Ramasamy Naiker, the DK leader was espousing the cause of the downtrodden in Tamil Nadu. In the process of attempting to dismantle the caste-based Hindu feudalism, he was hoping that the underprivileged might be better off as Buddhists. Mr. E. V. Ramasamy Naiker visited Colombo once. Mr. E. V. Ramasamy Naiker met Dr. G. P. Malalasekhara, a Sinhala Buddhist ideologue at a Buddhist conference in Burma.

Tamil Nadu's emotional reaction to the horror and agony inflicted on the Eelam Tamils in 1958, was conspicuously low, even though Sinhala moderates like Mr. Tarzie Vitachi, were abhorred by the ghastly inhuman acts of their fellow Sinhalese.

In 1960, Eelam Tamil reaction to the successive discriminative enactment's, and government orchestrated violent onslaughts sharpened and took the form of a campaign of peaceful non-violent civil disobedience movement. This peaked in April 1961 with the gheroing of the district administrative units in the Tamil homeland by Tamil Satyagrahis.

Mr. C. Vanniasingham came to Tamil Nadu and met leaders of all political parties in an attempt to galvanize the slender support base

in Tamil Nadu for the Satyagraha movement. The Congress leadership pointed its fingers to Delhi and told Mr. Vanniasingham to contact them as external affairs was a central subject. Mr. C. Rajagopalachari told Mr. Vanniasingham and others from Eelam that the United Nations should be invited to intervene in the conflict. He also wrote a one page article in *Swarajya* (1961) clarifying the two different situations, viz., first of the plantation Tamils and second of the traditional inhabitants of Eelam. In that article he appealed to the Sinhalese leadership to exercise restraint and exhibit statesmanship in dealing with its own citizens. He supported a federal form of government as a sound basis for containing the grievances of the traditional Tamil inhabitants.

Mr. Kasi Anandan, then a student in Chennai, undertook a one-day token fast in Marina in support of the Satyagraha campaign in Sri Lanka and Mr. C. Rajagopalachari gave him the fruit juice to end the fast. That was the first protest registered in the recent past in Tamil Nadu in support of the Eelam Tamils.

Subsequent to the visit of Mr. Vanniasingham, Mr. Pathmanathan from Batticalloa was stationed in Chennai by the Federal party to be in touch with the leaders of political parties in Tamil Nadu. Also there were large number of Ceylon students studying in the various university colleges in Tamil Nadu. They also lobbied with the political leadership. Consequent to the efforts of these students (Mr. Kasi Anandan and myself included), Mr. C.N. Annadurai agreed to hold a public meeting at Marina in early 1961 in support of the Satyagraha campaign in Eelam. That was the first public meeting in Tamil Nadu during this century held in support of the Eelam Tamils in their campaign for justice.

This meeting was an isolated event. However, it gave the Eelam Tamil Campaign a pat in the back. Sinhala chauvinists confirmed their suspicions of an 'unholy link' between the island Tamils and the mainland Tamils.

Tamil Satyagraha movement received a soft blow from Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru in his last visit to Colombo during 1964. He reportedly said that the concept of Satyagraha ended with Mahatma

Gandhi and was not any more relevant in the resolution of internal conflicts. During this visit he avoided a direct meeting with Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, who by then had emerged as the leader of the Tamil protest campaign. However, persistent pressurization resulted in an invitation to Mr. Chelvanayakam to a function held at the residence of the Indian High Commissioner where and Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru was also present.

During the Indo-China war, Colombo wanted to play a mediator role. Prime Minister Mrs. Bandaranaike went to Peking and then she came to New Delhi. This obviously irritated New Delhi. India did not feel comfortable with influences Colombo may have from forces inimical to India.

When and Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru died, Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri took over as Prime Minister. New Delhi wanted to reduce the number of hostile fronts across its borders. It wanted to mollify Sri Lanka and relented to one of its repeated requests to take back the plantation Tamils.

The Sinhalisation of the island required,

1. The deportation of the plantation workers,
2. The colonization of the Tamil homeland,
3. Giving Sinhalese language, and Buddhist religion the pride and prominence in the social and political fabric of Sri Lanka.

The 1964 Srimavo-Shastri pact was a step forward in the Sinhalisation of the island, to which New Delhi unwittingly consented by taking back about 400,000 plantation Tamils in return for conferring Sri Lankan citizenship to the rest. This retrogressive Indian contribution (a policy of appeasement) was rejected in *toto* by the Eelam Tamil leadership, which from 1948 has been campaigning for the full-fledged citizenship rights to all plantation workers.

The 1965 Hindi agitation and the emergence of DMK to wield power in Tamil Nadu rekindled the hopes of the Tamil protest

campaign in Sri Lanka, but then the Eelam Tamil leadership had frozen their civil disobedient movement for a while to participate in the Colombo government. That silenced any slender support that DMK might have wanted to give to the Eelam Tamil protest campaign.

It should be said to the credit of the Tamil Nadu leadership that at no time in their post independent history they established any form of political contact with the Sinhalese leadership or with the Colombo government to the detriment of the Sri Lankan Tamils. None of them visited Colombo or publicly received Sinhalese leaders in Tamil Nadu.

The message from Tamil Nadu to the Sinhala leadership was clear. "Your attempts to discriminate and/or dislodge the Tamils in Sri Lanka will not be recognized by us. We will not be friendly with you. Because you are a government recognized by the Govt. of India, we are obliged to provide you the necessary official facilities."

The presence of a Deputy High Commissioner for Sri Lanka in Chennai has been one of the official windows Sri Lanka enjoyed in Tamil Nadu to monitor and measure the pulse of the Tamil Nadu reaction to its Sinhalisation agenda.

When the Sinhalese youth revolted against the government in Colombo in April 1971, India rushed a small contingent of armed men in support of the Colombo government to quell the insurgency. But that bonhomie was not to last long. Few months later, during the liberation of Bangladesh, Colombo provided landing facilities to Pakistani military aircraft in their long haul from Karachi to Dakka circling the subcontinent. This was resented by India, which had the US seventh fleet at its doorstep. A disloyal neighbour at its southern front in spite of India's policy of appeasement!

During the early seventies, the magnitude of the discriminatory measures by the Sri Lankan government provoked the Eelam Tamil youth to develop armed resistance. This was spontaneous and unorganized during its early phase. Many of the resisters hailing from Valvettithurai, (a town famous for disregarding the Sri Lankan post independent customs regulations) were familiar with the Tamil Nadu

coastline. These youth used to cross over for safety to Tamil Nadu after 'retaliatory operations'.

It happened during the mid seventies, that Mr. Karunanidhi as Chief Minister agreed to the deportation of a youth suspected of having master minded 'retaliatory operations' in Sri Lanka. Mr. Kuttimani was brought to Sri Lanka and was under custody for some time. Tamil Nadu was not helping the Sri Lankan government but was obliging a request (once again to appease Colombo) from New Delhi for extradition. There were mild protests in Tamil Nadu when Kuttimani was deported.

Colombo insisted and India agreed (once again to appease Colombo) to a maritime delimitation in the Palk Straits and Gulf of Mannar (1974 and 1976). Colombo got the island of Kachativu and a virtual control over the seas of Palk Straits and Gulf of Mannar. Sri Lankan navy was granted the 'official' licence by India to shoot and kill anybody it pleased anywhere in these waters in addition of extortion of money, fish-catch and fishing gear from the traditional users of these waters. These waters became the water-grave for a large number of persons, all of them Tamils (traders, migrants, militants, refugees and fishermen). More than one thousand Tamil Nadu fishermen have lost their lives and many thousands have been maimed and India stops at asking its High Commission in Colombo to facilitate the return of arrested fishermen. The usual series of diplomatic expressions - 'concerns', 'protests', or 'warnings' - were never used by New Delhi in checking these trigger happy naval boats from Colombo. One incident worth mentioning is the recent (1999) incursion by the Sri Lankan navy into Indian waters to reach the village Ollaiyadi in the island of Rameswaram and destroy the hutment there (a feeler for future incursions) and return with impunity!

During the early seventies Mr. Rajaratnam from Eelam came to Tamil Nadu to lobby for the cause of the Eelam Tamils. A youth leader, Mr. R. Janardhanan hired a house in Egmore, (courtesy, a Muslim philanthropist) to run an organization whose basic object was to lobby for the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka. Mr. Rajaratnam was behind these activities.

Periodical briefings to political leaders, conducting small meetings and publishing leaflets were the main activities of this organization. Mr. S. J. V. Chelvanayakam visited Chennai along with his lieutenants and met all the first and second line leaders of all political parties in Chennai. Mr. & Mrs. Amirthalinkam amplified his feeble utterances during discussions. Mr. Rajaratnam and Mr. Janardhanan arranged for these meetings. Mr. Karunanidhi was then Chief Minister.

In early 1977 when Mr. Chelvanayakam was ill Mr. Karunanidhi as Chief Minister sent a neurosurgeon and later when Mr. Chelvanayakam passed away, second line leaders from DMK and ADMK visited Jaffna to pay homage. This was reflective of the efforts of Mr. Rajaratnam during his mission in Chennai. Thus began the active interest Tamil Nadu took to the sufferings the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The 1977 manifestation of the violent pogrom drew huge protests in Tamil Nadu. Some of us (including Mr Kovai Mahesan and myself) telephoned the DMK leaders from Colombo and urged them to do anything that will protect us from the hooligans. The state of Tamil Nadu observed a 12-hour hartal in July 1977, for the first time in support of the Eelam Tamils, answering a call of Mr. M. Karunanidhi, who was then a leader of the opposition in the assembly.

The Tamil United Liberation Front and the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu had by then established an emotional relationship which had sincerity of purpose, dedication to values and most of all a deep involvement to uplift the Tamils in Eelam and in the plantation sector of Sri Lanka.

They could have easily chartered out a political course with connotations of a greater Tamilakam but that was not anywhere in the agenda. TULF wanted the restoration of Tamil rights in Sri Lanka towards sharing power in Colombo or having it on their own. Similarly Dravidian parties were not only forging electoral alliances with national parties in India but also enjoying the fruits of such associations by sharing power in Delhi.

In 1979 I attended a seminar in Gujarat representing one of the front organisations of the TULF. Followers of the Jayaprakash Narayan movement were at the seminar. An informal request seeking India's intervention in taming Sinhala chauvinism was made by me to Mr. Narayan Desai and Mr. Radhakrishnan (both of them from Gandhi Peace Foundation). This was conveyed by them later to the then Prime Minister Mr. Morarji Desai.

During his visit to Colombo during early 1979, Prime Minister Mr. Morarji Desai publicly offered to facilitate a settlement of the ethnic conflict. TULF leaders led by Professor K. Nesiiah had few rounds of discussions with Prime Minister Mr. Morarji Desai at Colombo. This was the first offer by any Prime Minister of India to facilitate a settlement. That was the beginning. Thereafter India began providing a firm support base to the Tamils.

The Tamil militancy became more organized and forceful. Government of Sri Lanka continued its oppressive measures. Tamil militancy gave Colombo the necessary excuse to enlarge its security establishment. Numerous army camps spotted the Tamil homeland. Many locations in the Tamil homeland were identified for Sinhala colonization. Ex-convicts and goondas were settled in these colonies.

During this period (1977-1983) Tamil militants crossed the Paik Straits many times to establish pockets of support bases in several parts of Tamil Nadu which after 1983 became their centres of training. Also during this period Tamil militants organized themselves into groups. Their group names included two key words - Liberation and Eelam.

These and other related events were ferments for the next mega pogrom of 1983. Mrs. Gandhi as Prime Minister sent Mr. Narasimha Rao to Colombo during the rioting days of August 1983. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Mr. M. G. Ramachandran spoke on the All India Radio emphasizing the support Tamil Nadu will provide for the Eelam Tamils. President Jayawardane was working on an undeclared a war and Mr Rao's visit could not stop it.

The spontaneous emotional upheaval in Tamil Nadu to the 1983 events in Sri Lanka received recognition all over India. Dravidian and National parties vied with each other to support the Tamil Eelam liberation groups. Indian media gave adequate coverage. Mrs. Gandhi ignoring protocol, invited Mr. Amirthalinkam for talks. The protection of Tamils in Sri Lanka was India's duty President Giani Jai Singh said. India's *de facto* recognition of the Tamil militant groups was another step in that direction. India provided them arms and training.

The people of Tamil Nadu enthusiastically supported the Tamil militants. They were like cheering supporters at sports events. They gave financial, logistical and moral support to the militants and stopped at that. In similar situations in Africa, Latin America and the Far East some of such supporters transformed themselves into recruits either as volunteers or as mercenaries. To the credit of Tamils on both sides of the Palk Straits this transformation did not take place at all.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi identified the Colombo Government as lackey of US interests in the region. Verification is necessary about a statement attributed to her calling Mr Jayawardane as a 'political old fox.' India was trying to understand the real nature of the Sinhalese polity.

But Colombo has been known for outmanoeuvring India. When Mr. Rao's mission failed, Mr. Parthasarathy took over as India's chief negotiator. He had an open mandate from Mrs. Gandhi to tame Colombo. But Mr. Jayawardane did not oblige. He led India into a maze of political lanes and by-lanes and bought time.

Passing away of Mrs. Gandhi and the arrival of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi made a relaxing change for Colombo. Mrs. Gandhi was the most feared of all Indian Prime Ministers in Colombo. She was not there. For Mr Jayawardane the wind was taken off the sail and he indicated in Bangalore that Mr. Rajiv Gandhi was a political novice.

Mr. Bhandari took over from Mr Parthasarathy. The Thimpu talks were a set back to India. Mr. Dixit was appointed. One incident -

when Mr. Dixit had to wait at Prime Minister Premadasa's door for few hours before being called in - provided the hint for India bashing.

Colombo cleverly manipulated India to send its forces to contain Tamil militancy. The 1987 agreement between India and Sri Lanka provided for an inkling of a political institution (for the Tamil homeland), which never took shape.

The signing of the agreement was a clear infringement of the sovereignty of Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese nationalists were fully aware of this. Their token protest was through a naval rating that hit Mr. Rajiv Gandhi in his back inside the Presidential Palace of Colombo. This was not the first time Sinhalese were hitting Indian leaders. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's grand father Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, while addressing a meeting at Galle Face Green in July 26, 1939 was hooted and humiliated by thugs organized by the Sinhala Maha Saba's Mr. A. E. Gunasinghe to protest at India's intervention in the formation of Ceylon Indian Congress. The naval rating that hit Mr. Rajiv Gandhi in 1987 was a follower of Prime Minister Premadasa (in turn a disciple of Mr. A. E. Gunasinghe).

Using the agreement, India was gearing to translate the emotions of its Tamil Nadu citizens to save the Eelam and plantation Tamils. However, Colombo meticulously perfected the transformation of these Indian objectives to turn the Indian forces fight the very same people (Tamils) they came to save! That is why Mr. M. Karunanithi as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu reflecting the mood of all Tamils did not go to receive the returning IPKF at Chennai harbour.

Two major events after 1987 put India's support to Eelam Tamils in hibernation. First was the Tamil support for the withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force. The second was the murder of Rajiv Gandhi in Tamil Nadu. Two minor factors were 1. The spill over violence in Tamil Nadu that received undue media attention in India, 2. Murders of moderate Tamils and fellow militants.

During 1991-95 India was gasping for a way to wriggle out of the embroilment of the 1983-1989 past. There were mistakes made by

all sides in handling the situation. India did not want the situation to get out of its hand and allow the western countries to poke in. At the same time both warring parties were reluctant consult India.

The conquest of Jaffna in November 1995 brought the Eelam Tamil issue back into focus in Tamil Nadu. Mr. Karunanidhi led DMK, organized a black shirt procession to test the reaction of the people. Later he called for a 12-hour hartal on 30th November 1995, which was supported by all political parties in Tamil Nadu including the ruling ADMK. This marked the beginning of the revival of the support base for Eelam Tamils in Tamil Nadu.

However, past experiences prevented the translation of this support into any form of action. The establishment in Delhi, as Colombo's Foreign Minister Kadirgamar once said, "the Mandarins at the South Block" both in the defense and external affairs call the shots. Because they have understood the dubious attitude of Colombo, they are not prepared take chances and for another bout of disappointment from their southern front. Also the Tamil militants have nearly reached a point of no return from their position of liberated Tamil Eelam. That is why south block is hesitant to chalk out another diplomatic offensive to give effect to the emotional and political content of the growing protests in Tamil Nadu.

Mr. Gujral as Foreign Minister and later as Prime Minister after 1995 drew a policy charter for India's neighbours, which was later called the Gujral doctrine. This policy envisaged among others, the 1. Non-interference in the internal affairs of neighbouring states, 2. Non-availability of Indian soil for dissenters and revolvers from neighbouring states, 3. Dismantling of any image India had as big brother in the region. This was a big boon to Colombo. Even after BJP led coalition took over in 1996, Mr. Gujral had his say in Foreign policy whom the south block frequently consulted.

The continuing movement of most people across the borders of India's neighbours does not enjoy any legitimacy in any country in the region. If they are innocent people, these countries may close their eyes and allow them to move across the British introduced

demarcations violating British introduced travel procedures. But among these migrants are 1. Armed persons, 2. Political asylum seekers, 3. Economic offenders, 4. Missionaries, and 5. Persons intentionally seeking to change the demography of regions in the subcontinent. Also India is hosting a Government in Exile for a neighbouring liberation movement.

In this context, as I said earlier, the southern front is an insignificant front for India. This by default, is to the advantage of the Sinhala chauvinism and its continued violent manifestations.

APPENDIX

From: Swarajya, April 1961

THE CEYLON STRUGGLE

By

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

The Ceylon Tamils (who are old Ceylonese and are as attached to their mother island as any other citizens of Ceylon) are asking for a federal form of government in which the Tamil speaking population of North and East Ceylon may have autonomy subject to the Federal Government of all Ceylon. This will enable them to take pride in Ceylon nationality, without any bar-sinister of inferiority.

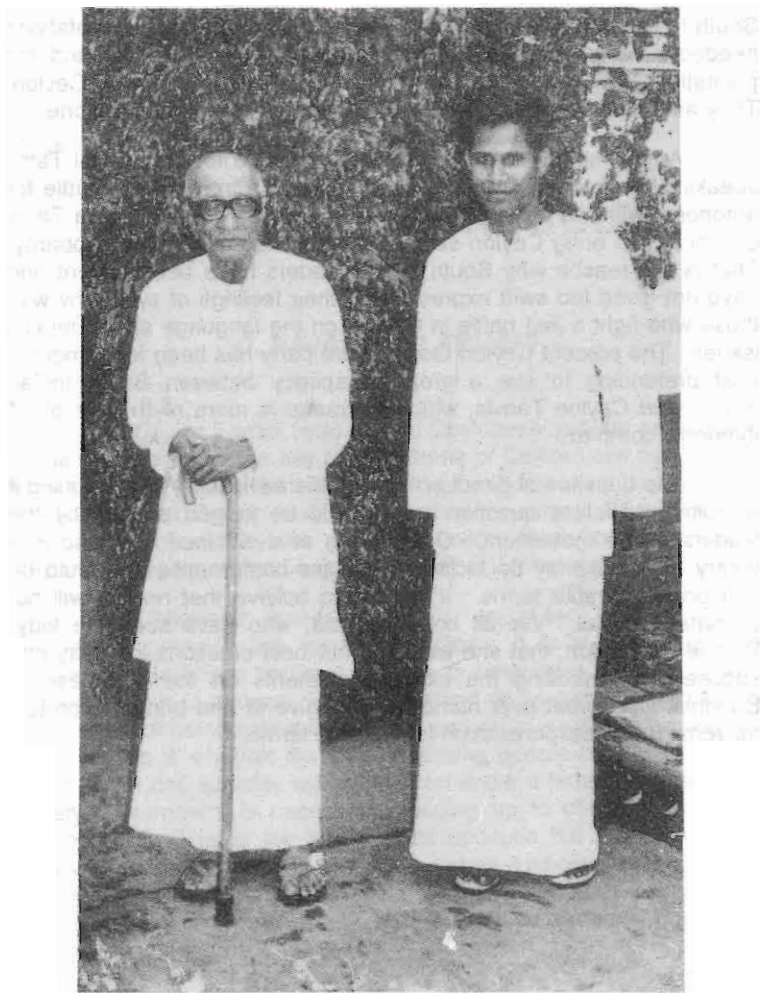
The language issue is merely an outer symbol of the competition between the two nationalities. It is a battle between communities, not at a battle of cultures or languages. Neither culture nor language is in danger. Either can stand on its own strength and is not capable of being extinguished or even hurt in a substantial degree. The question is whether the Tamil-speaking people are to be treated as equals or not. Equality will be ensured under a federal regime. The unitary Government is necessarily leading up to place them on an inferior level. This is the more unjust because the progress so far achieved and the present status of Ceylon as a whole depended not a little on the patriotic services of the eminent Tamilians of Ceylon. The refusal to grant equal status on a federal basis to the Tamil population amounts to ingratitude.

Let not the Tamil Northern and Eastern Ceylon population be confounded by superficial readers of news in India with the people of

South Indian origin who have migrated to Ceylon when the plantations needed hard labour and who have settled down in and around the plantations as permanent but yet unrecognised citizens of Ceylon. They are an entirely different group. Their quarrel is a different one.

Any sympathy from South India extended to the original Tamil speaking people of Ceylon, who are fighting a tremendous battle for autonomy within a federal regime, can be easily mistaken for a Tamil conspiracy to bring Ceylon sovereignty and its integrity into jeopardy. That is the reason why South Indian leaders have been patient and have not given too swift expression to their feelings of sympathy with those who fight a just battle in Ceylon on the language and federalist issues. The present Ceylon Government party has been for sometime past pretending to see a great conspiracy between South Indian Tamils and Ceylon Tamils, which of course is mere myth born of an inferiority complex.

The question of direct action and the advisability of continuing it is quite a different question and should be judged entirely by the leaders of the movement. One who is at a distance and who is a votary of peace may be inclined to advise compromise if it could be had on honourable terms. It is hard to believe that reason will not ultimately prevail. We all hope in India, who have seen the lady-Premier of Ceylon, that she will bring her best emotions into play and succeed in controlling the extreme elements on the Sinhalese or Buddhist side (what ever name we may give it) and bring the protest movement to a suspension on honourable terms.



Author with *Bharatha Ratna C. Rajagopalachariar* (Feb. 1966)

