Political violence and its cultural constructions: representations & narrations in times of war

de Silva, P.L.

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CHAPTER TWO
LOCATIONS OF VIOLENCE
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Dear me, it is beautiful! And most sumptuously tropical, as to character of foliage and opulence of it (Mark Twain 1900:16).

When they arrested my neighbour I did not protest. When they arrested the men and women in the opposite house I did not protest. And when they finally came for me, there was nobody left to protest (Pastor Niemoller).

Fear is the outcome of weakness. The coward’s friend. The enemy of courage. The root of fear among humans is the fear of death. The one who destroys the fear of death, is victorious over himself [sic]. He is the one who liberates himself from the inner-prison - Leader’s Thoughts for the Week (Velupillai Prabhakaran, the LTTE Supremo on Netscape http://www.cantam.com/tamil/ - photographically recorded in Gunaratna 1997 - translation mine).

Sri Lanka, a 65,610 square kilometre tear-shaped tropical island,1 situated 46 kilometres off the south-eastern tip of India (latitude 5° 55’ to 9° 50’ N and longitude 79° 42’ to 81° 52’ E) and separated from India by the Palk Strait, is home to an ‘ethnically’ diverse population of around nineteen million, one hundred thousand (in 1999). Its strategic geographical position in the Indian Ocean - at the intersection of centuries-old shipping and trading routes (Prickett 1990:151-180 and de Silva 1990:287-302), between India (including other parts of South Asia), South East Asia, the Middle East, the Near East (also referred to as West Asia), East Africa (including the Horn) and Europe: combined with four hundred and forty three years of Portuguese (1505-1658), Dutch (1658-1802) and British colonial rule (1802-1948)2 - have given rise to a number of

1 Topographically, the (coastal) littoral and large tracts of the north and east (parts of which are covered by scrub jungle and tropical forestation) are flat, while central and south-central regions are hilly and mountainous. Climatically, Sri Lanka is divided between the dry zone, which covers the north, north central, and eastern parts of the island; and the wet zone, which covers the central, western and southwestern portions. For an idyllic representation of Sri Lanka’s natural beauty, see Tresidder (1960).

2 The first three hundred and ten years of European colonial rule was primarily limited to the (coastal) littoral,
heterogeneous and hybrid social formations, through blood-ties and centuries old processes of assimilation and integration. Examples include, the small but notable Eurasian, Burgher social formations made up of Portuguese, Dutch, British and other miscellaneous European descendants and assimilation of non-Sinhalese of South Indian origins into the ‘Sinhala-fold’ - royalty and commoner alike (Pieris 1956, Seneviratne 1976:55-61 and 1978, Dewaraja 1988:26-52, Gunawardana 1994 and Yalman 1997:136-146). Particularly since the thirteenth century (Kemper 1991:20), as in the case of persons belonging to the Durawa, Karawa, Salagama and Vahumpura (lower) castes. In present-day Sri Lanka, these heterogeneous and hybrid social formations are however, homogenised, categorised and constructed - for administrative, cultural, historical and (contemporary) political purposes - according to four major divisions or ‘ethnic groups’, namely: Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamil, Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Muslims. As a result, the politics of identity plays a

while the Kandyan (Sinhala) kingdom in the central hill country remained nominally intact. It was only after the British colonialists captured and annexed the Kandyan kingdom in 1815 (after defeating the army of the last king of Kandy, Sri Vikrama Rajasinha and dethroning the monarch), that the island was formally ‘unified’ under one colonial administrative and politico-legal system. This lasted for another one hundred and thirty three years and transformed the native inhabitants into subjects of the British crown. For more historical details of this period see the influential work of Dewaraja (1988), herself a native Sri Lankan of Sinhalese antecedents.


4 For background details, refer to a manifesto of the Dutch Burgher Union (n.d.).

5 Durawa is the toddy-tapper caste; Karawa is the fisher caste; Salagama is the cinnamon-peeler caste; and Vahumpura is the jaggery-maker and domestic service caste (known in less respectful terms as the Hakuru or Jaggery caste). For more details on the caste structure in (Ceylon) Sri Lanka, refer to the works of Ryan (1953), Raghavan (1961, 1971), Malalgoda (1976), Jiggins (1979), Roberts (1982), Russell (1982), Kannangara (1988), Karunatilaka (1988) and Kotalawele (1988). And in chapter six of his book Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy, Tambiah deals admirably with the make-up of the Sri Lankan peoples, since pre-history right up to the modern era (1986:87-113).

6 I do away here with the archaic term ‘Moors’ (Sri Lankan and Indian) coined by Portuguese colonialists in the 16th century. A factor that has led to the usage of unwieldy references such as ‘Sri Lankan Moors’ in the Censuses of Population and Housing in Sri Lanka (e.g. in 1946, 1971 and 1981). Instead I use the term

In a related context, the controversial,7 Harvard-based social anthropologist Stanley Tambiah (a native Sri Lankan of traditional élite, Jaffna Tamil origins) states that,

in the hope of dissolving contemporary fixations - Sri Lanka awaits the blooming of a social historian of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who will write the story of how different geographical segments (coastal and interior), different caste categories (Karava, Salagama, Paravar, Goyigama, and others among the ‘Sinhalese’ and Vellala, Karaiyar, Mukkuvar, and other among the ‘Tamils’), and different communal aggregates (low-country Sinhalese versus Kandyen Sinhalese versus Jaffna Tamils versus Batticaloa Tamils versus Indian plantation Tamils and so on) have at different times become participants in an increasingly encompassing political process and an expanding colonial-type economy during the time of British rule (1796-1948). And the post-Independence phase of Sri Lanka is necessarily a continuation and transformation of processes set in motion during the critical period of the

Muslim(s) in this text. In fact, Qadri Ismail argues that the racial identity of the term ‘Moor’ is a misnomer given the mixed antecedents of the so-called ‘Moors’.

Azeez [a leading Sri Lankan Muslim ideologue of the 1930s] claims that only Arab men came to Sri Lanka and that they ‘took Tamil wives’...Logically this would make the Moors ‘racially’ mixed, a possibility that doesn’t occur to Azeez, who represents women as simply reproducing the nation on behalf of men, as conduits without the power to mark. In other words, only the paternal marker of identity was allowed: an Arab masculinity is emphasized, and a Tamil femininity denied, in the originary construction of Sri Lankan Muslim identity...Both the inclusive and exclusive aspects of this representation are important: the denial of a Tamil component is required not only to emphasize the Arab ‘blood’ of Muslims but also to enhance Azeez’s claim that the Moors are racially distinct from the Tamils (Ismail 1995:69-70).

7 Tambiah is ‘controversial’ in terms of the furor caused in Sri Lankan circles, particularly by Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinists and (more moderate) Sinhala nationalists, in opposition to the views and opinions expressed in his book (1992) - Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka - the title of which is in fact, a tongue-in-cheek swipe at the parochial Sinhala-Buddhist oriented publication by the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry (1956) - The Betrayal of Buddhism. As background reading, a publication that was related to the original controversy between advocates of Buddhism and Catholicism in Sri Lanka, by the Catholic Union of Ceylon (1957) - Education in Ceylon According to the Buddhist Commission Report: A Commentary. Colombo: Catholic Press, might prove to be of additional interest.
The Sinhalese, who form the majority ethno-linguistic and culturally assertive social formation on the island, constitute 74% of the total population, while Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Muslims, make up 12%, 6%, and 7.6% respectively. Along religious lines, the majority of Sinhalese (99.5%) are (Theravada) Buddhists and similarly the majority of Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils (64.5% and 31.5% respectively) are (Saivite) Hindus, and constitute, 69.3% and 15.5% respectively of the total population. Blurring this ethno-religious distinctiveness are the Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamil and Indian Tamil Christians, who form 7.5% of the total population - i.e. 6% Catholics, 0.7% Protestants and 0.8% Other Denominations. The 7.6% Sri Lankan Muslims are sub-divided into 7.5% Sunni and 0.1% Shi‘i (while another minority religious group, the Bahá’ís, are 0.1% of the total population). For more details concerning statistical data pertaining to the **ethnic composition of religious groups** and the **religious composition of ethnic groups**, refer to Tables 9.10 and 9.11 respectively, in chapter nine of the Census of Population and Housing 1981 (1981:124). The (general) rate of population growth in Sri Lanka in 1995 was 1.4%, while life expectancy at birth was recorded as 68 years for males and 72 years for females respectively. The population is distributed along urban (21.5%), rural (72.2%) and estate (6.3%) divisions. And Sri Lanka has a total literacy rate of 89% (i.e. males 91% and females 89% respectively).

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8 According to the Oxford-based (Orientalist) don, Richard Gombrich:

Theravada is a branch of Buddhism now preserved in Sri Lanka and parts of continental southeast Asia [Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos]...The term means 'Doctrine of the Elders'; the elders in question are the senior monks who preserve the tradition. The title thus claims conservatism. An adherent of Theravada is called a Theravadin...Theravada reached Ceylon [Sri Lanka] from India in or very near 250 BCE...Hallmarks of Theravada Buddhism are the use of Pali as its main sacred language and dependence on the Pali version of the Buddhist canon as its sacred scripture...The word Pali originally means 'canonical' text': its use to designate the language of the Theravadin canonical texts seems not to antedate the eighteenth century. Pali is an ancient derivative of Sanskrit and quite close to it (Gombrich 1988:3).
The politics of numbers involved in these seemingly innocuous census statistics - that hark back in the case of Sri Lanka and India to British colonial times (Cohn 1987) - are troublesome to say the least, and have now become embedded in contemporary political culture and is a basis for the 'authority of conventional wisdom'. In other words, the finer mechanics of the British colonial project of divide and rule have been adopted and are still being put to use in more contemporaneous circumstances in postcolonial India and Sri Lanka, particularly through the representation of numbers in nationalist discourse. And in this context of enumeration, Arjun Appadurai notes - while citing Edward Said (1991) - that, "the discourse of orientalism created a vista of exoticism, strangeness, and difference" [emphasis mine] (Appadurai 1993:314). Appadurai, who is inspired by Sudipta Kaviraj's 'Construction of Colonial Power' (Kaviraj 1989) and Benedict Anderson's chapter on 'Census. Map. Museum' (Anderson 1991:163-185), builds on David Ludden's concerns vis-à-vis 'orientalist empiricism' (Ludden 1993:250-278) and contends that:

the exercise of bureaucratic power itself involved the colonial imagination and that in this imagination, number played a crucial role. My main argument is that exoticization and enumeration were complicated strands of a single colonial project and that in their interaction lies a crucial part of the explanation of group violence and communal terror in contemporary India...The 'communitarian' approach, which later (in the first part of the twentieth century)

9 My thanks to Peter van der Veer for pointing me towards a critical examination of this issue.

10 Such 'authoritative' writing, involving the politics of numbers, are displayed for example by the conventional historian Kingsley de Silva (1981, 1986, 1992, 1995, 1997).

11 Said's famous thesis is that Orientalism is a multi-layered conceptual construction typifying 'the Orient' (as opposed to 'the Occident') and which is a mode of Western dominance emanating out of the era of European colonialism (particularly Franco-British). Appadurai sets the stage for his argument using parts of Said's concerns that:

Rhetorically speaking, Orientalism is absolutely anatomical and enumerative: to use its vocabulary is to engage in the particularizing and dividing of things Oriental into manageable parts...[Furthermore] modern Orientalism...embodies a systematic discipline of accumulation. And far from being exclusively an intellectual or theoretical feature, it made Orientalism fatally tend towards the systematic accumulation of human beings and territories. To reconstruct a dead or lost Oriental language meant ultimately to reconstruct a dead or neglected Orient; it also meant that reconstructive precision, science, even imagination could prepare the way for what armies, administrations, and bureaucracies would later do on the ground, in the Orient [original emphasis] (Said 1991:72,123, Appadurai 1993:314-315).
has its most dramatic manifestation in separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims (Hasan 1979; Pandey 1990; Robinson 1974)...was built on earlier ideas about caste as the critical principal of a general morphology of the Indian population (as known through the census) and still earlier ideas about the powers of enumeration in grasping the variability and tractability of India’s land and resources. This communitarian approach was also crucial in defining the dynamics of ideas of majority and minority as culturally coded terms for dominant and disenfranchised groups in South India (Frykenberg 1987; Saraswathi 1974; Washbrook 1976: chap.6) and elsewhere. It is thus very plausible to argue, as Rajni Kothari (1989a, 1989b) and others have done, that the very fabric of Indian democracy remains adversely affected by the idea of numerically dominated bloc-voting, as opposed to more classically liberal ideas of the bourgeois individual casting his vote as a democratic citizen (Appadurai 1993:315,331).

In Sri Lanka, the unproblematic and widespread use of statistical enumeration (as a given, rather than being contested and delineated accordingly) vis-à-vis the peoples of this island - by statisticians, technocrats, journalists, politicians and academics alike - not only reifies and substantiates conventional ‘wisdom’ pertaining to demarcations, designations and stereotypes of ‘Otherness’, whether they be in terms of race, ethnicity, caste, class, gender, language, history, culture or politics. Furthermore, it also contributes to the discourse of maintaining differences and divisions in what is effectively, a deeply divided society - with a de facto separate mini-state being operated by the LTTE, in the eastern hinterland of the north-central and eastern provinces.

‘The Sinhala’ identity is further sub-divided along regional (e.g. Low-Country and Kandyan), caste, class and political affiliations. However I do not focus, in this text, on the intricacies and specificities of Sinhala (and Buddhist) social and political phenomena, except in passing or as examples, in view that this material has been given more than adequate coverage by other Sri Lanka studies scholars.12 Linguistically, Sri

Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils and a majority of Sri Lankan Muslims speak the Tamil language (with the balance speaking Sinhala) - although there are variations in dialect and accent due to regional and class differences. For example, Sri Lankan Tamils would speak Tamil (particularly the ‘Jaffna’ dialects) with what can be called a ‘Malayali flavour’; while the accents of Indian Tamils are closer to versions of colloquial Tamil spoken by Tamilians in Southern India. And similarly, there are clearly identifiable differences between colloquial ‘Jaffna’ dialects (spoken in and around the northern peninsula) and ‘Batticaloa’ dialects (spoken in the eastern province). In Tamil Nadu, particularly in Madras (or Chennai as it is now known), the lingua franca is colloquial ‘Indian Tamil’, which is a distinctive, accented version of Tamil, that utilises many ‘Tamilised’ English words. Many Sri Lankan Tamils and South Indian Tamilians (particularly those living in the Thanjavur district of the south-eastern Indian state of Tamil Nadu), are Saivite Hindus - who share in general, a common heritage, in terms of religious, cultural (art, dance, folklore, myths and legends), historical and linguistic roots. According to another controversial scholar, Jane Russell, a unique feature that distinguished Sri Lankan Tamils (approximately 2.3 million strong in 1995) from the Tamilians of South India (approximately 56 million strong in 1991), was their caste system.

the primary distinction being the domination, both numerically and socially, of the highest caste, the vellala. There were very few brahmans among Ceylon [Sri Lankan] Tamils, these being employed only as temple priests...The caste system that operated among the Ceylon Tamils was therefore an inversion of the pyramidal structure prevailing in South India. As such it bore a remarkable likeness to the caste structure of the Sinhalese-Buddhists in Ceylon [Sri Lanka], in which the inverted pyramidal characteristic was the dominant feature, the goyigama [or Goyigama], the highest caste being numerically the largest [cf. Byce Ryan, Caste in Modern Ceylon (New Brunswick, 1953). See also Janice Jiggins, ‘Caste and Politics

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13 I use the term ‘Tamilian’ in this text to refer to Tamils who live in general in India and in particular in the South Indian State of Tamil Nadu. I do this in order to differentiate between Tamilians living in India, from Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils who live in Sri Lanka.

14 Russell (who has lived in Sri Lanka for many years) was deported between February and March 1996 from Sri Lanka. It is rumored that this unprecedented action was the personal whim of an influential figure in the PA coalition government, allegedly over a family quarrel involving land that Russell had ‘interfered’ in. Some others allege that she overstayed her visa and had ‘arrogantly’ ignored repeated requests by the Department of Immigration and Emigration for an interview, and was therefore ‘rightfully’ deported.
Aside from this phenomenon, there are deep-rooted regional differences and rivalries, intertwined with caste, class and gender discrimination, and (more recent) political contradictions, which can be observed within Sri Lankan Tamil societal formations.

• Regional Differences and Rivalries - historically-situated discrimination by Jaffna Tamils (from the northern peninsula) of other Sri Lankan Tamils hailing from Batticaloa and Trincomalee (in the eastern region), Mannar (in the north-western region), and Vavuniya (in the north-central region). Many contemporaneous Jaffna Tamils (erroneously) consider themselves to be superior and possess a better pedigree in terms of caste-hierarchy, education, wealth and cultural heritage (as exponents par excellence of ‘the high culture’ of Sen Thamil or classical Tamil, as well as of Bharata Natyam and Carnatic music).

15 This thesis was later published, see Jiggins (1979).

16 This is an error inherent to considerations of traditional status and privilege. My thanks to Peter van der Veer for bringing this point to my attention.

17 Tambiah notes that, ‘the championing by a Jaffna Tamil local elite of Tamil literature and art forms, and their propagation of Saiva [Hindu] doctrines, represented a heightened cultural and linguistic consciousness that naturally emphasized the distinctiveness of the vocal Tamil revivalists from the Buddhist activist movements in the south’ (Tambiah 1986:108). However, as Russell observes in a contradictory note, the Sinhala-Tamil divide that Tambiah posits, was not so clear cut in the early twentieth century and neither was there a popular familiarity with the exclusive characteristics of Sen Thamil.

The political leaders of the Ceylon Tamils in the first half of the twentieth century, the Ponnambalam brothers, Arunachalam and Ramanathan, had not fallen prey to [the] fetish for English education. Both men could write and speak excellent classical or ‘high’ Tamil. Ramanathan translated the Bhagavad Gita into Tamil in 1914, and one of Arunachalam’s criticisms of the Colombo Tamils was that they had bastardized their mother tongue. [Arunachalam, P. Speeches and Writings (Colombo, 1936)] Their cousin, Ananda Coomaraswamy, had urged the Ceylonese to regenerate their national languages and the Buddhist-Hindu culture in Ceylon. [Coomaraswamy made it his life’s work to interpret the art of these cultures] and Ramanathan had advised a Sinhalese audience in a didactic lecture at Ananda College in 1904 to cultivate their language...However, classical or ‘high’ Tamil was a closed book to many Ceylon Tamil speakers. For example, J.V. Chelliah, an erstwhile president of the Jaffna Youth League, the ex-Principal of Jaffna College, and a Tamil scholar, prefaced a translation of classical Tamil poetry, Pattupattu published in 1946, with this comment: “Ancient Tamil literature is a closed book to most of our educated people. I am
There are also other forms of discrimination that take place, particularly by Sri Lankan Tamils against Indian Tamils - who are considered to be at the ‘bottom of the heap’, by sizeable sections of Jaffna, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Mannar and Vavuniya Tamils. Even the undisputed father of Tamil nationalism, Samuel James Velupillai Chelvanayakam, harboured such opinions, as noted here by the political scientist Alfred Jeyaratnam Wilson (a native Sri Lankan of traditional élite, Jaffna Tamil origins), “Chelvanayakam often told me that the ‘trouserled Tamils’ of Batticaloa were not generally with his party” (Wilson 1988:103). However the Jaffna-centric Vellala socio-political hierarchy was also divided into a pecking order of discriminatory sub-castes, micro-castes and kin-groups - for example, the socio-political status of a number of Jaffna Tamil families hailing from Manipay (also spelt Manipay), who were considered to be the crème de la crème.

Russell notes that in the 1930s, some particular kin groups or villages in the Jaffna peninsula regarded themselves as aristocratic or ‘first class’ vellala; the vellala in Manipay, in particular the Coomaraswamy-Ponnambalam kin group were so regarded [cf. M. Vytildam Vol I]. J.T. Rutnam has described Manipay in the 1930s as ‘An affluent village, but which was not without its quota of prejudices and parish pump politics’ [cf. J.T. Rutnam, Poi Pourri (Colombo, 1970)]. Paraphrastically, this signifies that the Manipay vellala...tended to dominate all other villages and communities, both vellala and nonvellala, circumjacent to Manipay [cf. H.A.P. Sandrasegara in evidence to the Delimitation Commission, who stated that Manipay, Navalay, was ashamed to say that it is easier for most of us to read in English than in Tamil. Until very recently, even Pandits here new very little of Sangham literature. So I thought that an interest in it might be created in the minds of educated Tamils by an English translation. I shall be equally pleased if this induces the rising generation of Tamils to take interest in their national heritage” (Russell 1982:115).

However the advocacy and popularity of Sen Thumil noted by Tambiah, which developed and deepened during the course of the twentieth century, ironically held within itself, the seeds of intra-Tamil discrimination along caste, religious and class lines, a veritable double-edged sword.

18 Samuel James Velupillai Chelvanayakam (1898-1977), who was a founder-member of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), broke away and formed the Tamil Federal Party in 1949 (its Tamil designation is ‘Halhikai Thamil Arooa Kodeli’ - i.e. ‘the Ceylon Tamil State Party’). The ‘Federal Party’ merged with other Tamil groups to form the Tamil United Front (YUF) in 1972 and Chelvanayakam was one of its co-leaders. In 1976, he became a co-leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which demanded the partitioning of the island and creation of a separate Tamil sovereign state, Tamil Eelam (Tamil Ceylon) (Wilson 1988:xii-xiii).
Uduvil, Tellipallai, Chankanai and Pandaterripu were 'first class vellala villages. The people in certain of these areas had a different standard of living from others; they had attained a degree of culture. At Navaly and Manipay, all the rich Tamils who did business in Colombo, resided. Chankanai and Pandaterripu had fine houses built by parents of those who were employed in the Federated Malay States.' *Ceylon Daily News*, March 10, 1930] (Russell 1982:14.77).

- *Caste, Class and Gender Discrimination* - as noted above, regional discrimination contains strong elements of caste and class bias. While class has always to do with the avenues for capital accumulation and land ownership, caste discrimination in Sri Lankan Tamil society in the north, and between the north and east, is somewhat more complex. While Vellala is the highest-ranking, *cultivator or farmer's caste* among Sri Lankan Tamils; Jaffna Vellala are considered to be the highest-ranking caste, and in comparison, Batticaloa Vellala are in a subordinate position. Dennis McGilvray’s thesis on mytho-historical caste formation and the hegemonic/counter-hegemonic struggles (inter-caste as well as intra-caste) for control of (Hindu) temples - between two immigrant castes, the agriculturalist Batticaloa Vellala and the low-caste Mukkuvur (one of the lowest-ranking fishing castes among Batticaloa Tamils, who are originally from Malabar) - highlight the rather distinctive flavour of social hierarchies along the eastern coastal littoral of the Batticaloa district (McGilvray 1974, 1982).

In the Batticaloa area...the ‘symbolic language’ of the caste system was shaped by the historical circumstances surrounding the establishment of the dominant caste, its ideological resources, and its specialist groups. Here, in fact, a heritage of warrior conquest by a formerly low-ranking Malabar fishing caste, combined with a distinctive non-Brahmin Viracaiva (Lingayat) priestly tradition, has produced a regional caste system with a markedly ‘political’ (or Hocartian) ideology of caste rank and caste honour (McGilvray 1982:35).

As the complexities of Sri Lankan Tamil caste formations are not my main concern here, for more details see the works of Canagaratnam (1921), Ryan (1953), Tambiah (1954), Banks (1960), Raghavan (1971), Stirrat (1977), Russell (1982), Tambiah (1986) and McGilvray (1974, 1982:35-97). On a more general note, Tambiah states that:

19 Tellipallai is the birthplace of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, the de facto father of Tamil nationalism.
Although the traditional pattern of caste relations in Jaffna was similar to those in the south [among the Sinhalese], the Tamil variant was more rigidly bound by stricter notions of purity and pollution, of food taboos and avoidances. Vegetarianism was practiced by certain segments, and the eating of beef was prohibited and the prohibition strictly observed by all the 'clean' castes. Moreover, the north contained larger segments of degraded low castes (outcastes) of servile status such as the Parayar, Pallar, and Navalar (the Rodyayas and Kinnaras of the Kandy region are very small in number), and women of upper-caste status were more hedged in by severe rules of premarital chastity, were more confined to the home, and had less freedom of physical movement and social intercourse than their Sinhalese counterparts (Tambiah 1986:105).

*Gender discrimination* in a patriarchally dominated society is self evident not only among Sri Lankan Tamil social formations but a globally visible phenomenon (in varying degrees). While such phenomena are *not* my primary concern, a significant development rising out of the ashes of ethnic conflict and civil war in north and east Sri Lanka, is that there are far more *female-headed families*, than say in the 1930s - which has given rise to a more socially *and* politically visible role for Sri Lankan Tamil women. In fact, it is fair to estimate that due to a 'manpower shortage' more than a third of the LTTE's paramilitary forces are made up of teenage and young women. I do not delve into the gender dimensions of paramilitary political violence in this particular research due to the lack of adequate access with female paramilitaries from the LTTE. However, the article of Sitarega Maunaguru (a native Sri Lankan of Jaffna Tamil origins, with close relations to the LTTE in the past) provides a useful expose of the constructed role of 'woman' in the contemporary Tamil nationalist experience (Maunaguru 1995:158-175).

Also within the Indian Tamil social formation, there is evidence of pervasive (internal) discrimination and a rigid pecking order nurtured by under-education and based more on caste, political influence (translated into 'class') and patriarchy. At the 'bottom of the heap' in Indian Tamil plantation society are women labourers, who are from the lowest castes. I will *not* focus in this text on the dilemmas faced by the Indian Tamil social formation. For more details concerning the socio-political history of this segment of Sri Lankan society and descriptions of difficult working environment in the case of plantation workers, see the writings of

- Political Contradictions - considering that this subject is an integral part of this research, I have given various aspects of this phenomenon special attention in the following sections of this chapter - i.e. in ‘ethnonational concerns’, ‘the birth and spread of Tamil nationalism’, ‘growth of Tamil paramilitary organisations’, ‘anti-Tamil riots and Indian intervention’ and ‘continuation of politics by other means’.

Sri Lankan Muslims, on the other hand, have a relatively distinct religious identity based on Islam (of Hashemite and South Indian Sunni mytho-historical extractions) through there are regional, political, class, gender and even ethnic differences (and underlying tensions) in evidence in this context too (for more details see Ismail 1995:55-105). Mohan notes that:

The adherents of Islam in Sri Lanka belong, chiefly, to three different ethnic backgrounds viz., the Sri Lanka Moors, the Indian Moors and the Malays. Others include the Memons, the

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20 According to the South Indian (Tamilian) historian Vasundhara Mohan, The Muslims of Sri Lanka, the Moors, trace their ancestry to the Arab traders of the past, the date of whose settlement in Sri Lanka is not certain. According to a tradition, the first Mohammadans [sic, Muslims] who settled in Sri Lanka were Hashemites who fled from Arabia towards the end of the 7th or early 8th century. The immigrants are believed to have formed considerable settlements at the various port towns of Sri Lanka. According to another tradition, some of the Arab traders who had settled down on the Malabar coast of India, used to visit Sri Lanka to worship Adam’s footprint on the Adam’s Peak and made Sri Lanka their home. Their trading activities circumscribed the growth of Muslim settlements mainly around the ports (Mohan 1987:13).

And for more background reading pertaining to the Muslim communities of Gujarat in western India, see Misra (1964) and one of the founding fathers of the Sri Lankan Muslim community, see the edited volume by Mutukumara (1963).
Bohras etc...The Sri Lanka Moors are also known as Sumankaras - those permanently settled in Sri Lanka - and the Indian Moors as the Sonahars - Those who were in Sri Lanka for trading purposes and intend to return to India [cf. Census of Ceylon 1946:1950:158-159]. The Malays, who also profess the Islamic faith, are considered as a separate group by the Moors, owing to their distinct ethnic background, culture and westernised lifestyle. With the passage of time, the Indian Muslims have either become absorbed in the Sri Lanka Muslim community through internmarriages etc., or have returned to India [original emphasis] (Mohan 1987:9).

In contrast, Ismail represents “the Muslim social formation as consisting of two ‘distinct’ groups. Southern and Eastern Muslims: ‘Southern’ referring to the Muslims of the seven Sinhala dominated provinces, who form roughly two-thirds of the Muslim population of Sri Lanka; ‘Eastern,’ to those of the former Eastern Province” [emphasis mine] (Ismail 1995:57). In relation to the contentious region of the north and east, the Tamil nationalist scholar, Karthigesu Sivathamby (a native Sri Lankan of Jaffna Tamil origins) - who is apparently linked (from his wife’s side) to the LTTE-supremo Prabhakaran’s Karayar (a traditionally low-ranking, coastal people’s caste among Sri Lankan Tamils, also spelt Karaiyar) new politico-military elite - notes that,

The social organisation of the Muslims living in Tamil areas has a close affinity to that of the Tamils of the area. This is especially so in the case of the Muslims of the East. It has been shown that the matri clan exogamous Kudi system found among the Batticaloa Tamils is also the system of social organization of the Muslims of this region...[where] Muslims form an integral part of its feudal system. There are Muslim Podiyars (landlords), Vayatkarar (lit: those of the fields; these are the Podiyar’s superintendents, looking after the processes of cultivation and harvesting) and the serfs. This pattern of social organisation of the Batticaloa Muslims is very different from that of Muslims in other areas of Sri Lanka (Sivathamby 1987:201-202).

Sivathamby notes that Muslims constituted 17% of the total population in the northern and eastern provinces (Ibid: 200-201). This statistic (like others used, at times inventively, by Sivathamby) is somewhat misleading, when the numerical strength of Muslims and the other two major ‘ethnic groups’ living in the north and east are broken down on a village by village or even a district by district basis. In fact, in antagonistic spaces where situated practices of political violence take place (particularly with regard to ethnic cleansing), more often than not it is the local situation that is of crucial importance, rather than any statistical computations of national
averages (which remain less than accurate estimates at the best of times). However, in order to have a rough demographic idea, here are some basic statistics (i.e., select ethnic composition of district population percentages according to the last conducted Census of 1981).21

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Province</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ampara</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Batticaloa</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>70.8%</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
<td>04.6%</td>
<td>03.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trincomalee</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Province</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jaffna (including Kilinochchi)</td>
<td>01.4%</td>
<td>01.7%</td>
<td>97.5%</td>
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<td>00.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mannar</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>68.1%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>04.1%</td>
<td>08.2%</td>
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<td>Vavuniya</td>
<td>06.6%</td>
<td>06.8%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
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<td>Mullaitivu</td>
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* (Source: Census of Population and Housing 1981)

Tensions resulting from intra-Muslim differences based on class and gender (Ismail 1995:55-105), are not as acute, when compared with the exigencies faced by Muslim social formations living in the north and east— in terms of coping with the vagaries of political violence. Muslims have therefore had to organise themselves politically at the local level, in order to withstand the pressures of a deeply divided society, where Sinhalese

21 These demographic figures have changed considerably in the wake of the policies of ‘ethnic cleansing’ practiced in particular, by Tamil paramilitaries from the LTTE (against Muslim and Sinhalese civilians living in the north and east). And also as a result of the military operations of the Sri Lankan armed services— some of which also follow this policy, particularly during the UNP’s Jayawardene era (1977-1989). The then Minister of Defense, Lalith Athulathmudali was ordered by the then chief executive President Jayawardene to “drive a wedge between the north and east in the Trincomalee district. This was in order to change the demographic pattern on the ground” (Personal interview). This strategy was implemented through extra-judicial means (via the army) to pre-empt the unification (symbolic or otherwise) of the north and east into a single geographical entity (which could be identified as a traditional Tamil homeland). This information was divulged to me during a personal conversation with the late Lalith Athulathmudali. He was the one time ‘hawkish’ Minister of Defense and later leader of the opposition political party, the Democratic United National Front or “DUNF” (which was set up after his resignation from the UNP due to serious differences with Jayawardene’s successor, the late President Premadasa). It is alleged in certain quarters that Athulathmudali was assassinated on April 23, 1993 as per the instructions of Premadasa (himself assassinated eight days while overseeing the UNP’s May Day parade later by an LTTE suicide bomber called “Baba”).

22 For the purpose of convenience, I have added the percentages of Indian Tamils to that of Sri Lanka Tamils in order to come up with total percentages for the (new) category ‘Tamils’. For a total breakdown according to ethnic composition of district population percentages for 1971 and 1981, see Census of Population and
Tamil conflicts spill over and engulf (from time-to-time) Muslim social formations situated in the north and east. Mohan's thesis concerning the identity crisis of Sri Lankan Muslims (who form the second largest minority grouping) is that they have for centuries remained an important part of a pluralistic Sri Lanka, while maintaining their distinct religious identity. Her argument is that an identity crisis was created during the counter-hegemonic struggles of Tamil nationalists at the time of independence. Particularly when attempts were made to incorporate the Muslims (the majority of whose vernacular is a version of Tamil) into the Tamil fold - on (unfounded) grounds that they were 'Tamil-converts to Islam', which led the traditional Muslim political elites to shy away and throw their lot in with the Sinhalese. However in Mohan's opinion, this did not resolve 'the problem', since Muslims (particularly in the eastern province) could not get away from aspects of Tamil culture and language inherent in Muslim cultural practices. This in turn led them to adopt the only possible solution, to cultivate a separate Muslim identity based on traditional claims of Arab lineage (Mohan 1987). For a in-depth examination of the process of identity formation see the work of Qadri Ismail (1995), a native Sri Lankan of 'southern Muslim' origins (who was journalistically involved in covering the war in the north and east during the 1980s, while at the same time being politically engaged).

In fact since the mid-1980s, Muslim efforts at creating a separate identity went beyond the bounds of cultural and religious practices, to an extent where small but significant efforts towards building up of a (primarily defensive) Muslim paramilitary capacity were initiated (particularly in the eastern province). These efforts can be observed, especially through the organisation of the Muslim paramilitary group, Al Jihad. Other efforts include the clandestine purchase of weapons from Tamil paramilitaries and members of the armed services (information I was privy to during my stay in the eastern province between 1987 and 1988). As well as close ties and linkages (official and unofficial) with the Sri Lankan military establishment, in particular the Special Task Force (STF) Police Commandos and Muslim Home Guard units (and even vis-à-vis the Indian

Peace Keeping Force during the 1987-88 period). And last but not least, participation in periodic anti-Tamil riots\(^23\) (with tacit support from the predominantly Sinhalese STF and Muslim Home Guard units). These efforts expanded and deepened, particularly after the Muslim social formations living in the north and east were targeted and subjected to 'ethnic cleansing' (in so far failed efforts, to drive Muslims completely out of the north and east). For example the Kattankudi massacre, where more than 300 worshippers were gunned down in the village mosque by the hegemonic Tamil paramilitary organisation, the LTTE.

Politically, these efforts by Muslims from the eastern province have also paid off, through the rise in the political fortunes of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC, founded in Kattankudi in 1980)\(^24\) under the presidency of attorney-at-law Mohammed H.M. Ashraff. He has not only secured a cabinet position as Minister of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (1994 to date) in the eleven party, Centre-Left, People's Alliance (PA - also referred to in Sinhala as the "Podujana Eksath Peramuna" or "Podu Peramuna" for short) coalition government (of which the SLMC is a partner). Given the PA's one-seat parliamentary majority, the SLMC (along with Thondaman's CWC)\(^25\) holds a crucial balance of power. However it should be noted that relations between Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinists and Sri Lankan Muslim social formations have not been continuously rosy. Starting from the anti-Muslim riots of 1915 (for more details see de Souza 1916).

\(^{23}\) Given the volatile recent history of the eastern province, both Muslims and Tamils protagonists are guilty of having been aggressors at one time or another, against their non-Muslim and non-Tamil neighbours.

\(^{24}\) The place of origin of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress seems to be symbolic of the determination of the Muslims: particularly of the Eastern Province. Kattankudi, a short distance away from Batticaloa town, is the most thickly populated village in Asia, accommodating 17,526 persons (1981) in less than one square mile area. Of these 17,217 are Muslims, 246 Hindus, 31 Buddhists, 26 Roman Catholics and 6 other Christians. Thus it is almost a 100 per cent Muslim village (Mohan 1987:66).

\(^{25}\) Suuviamoorthy Thondaman (1913-1999) was a founder-leader of the Ceylon Worker's Congress and de facto leader of the Indian Tamil community, particularly in the plantations of Hatton and Nuwara Eliya in the central hill country. He was former Minister of Rural Industrial Development under successive UNP regimes (1977-1994) and Minister of Plantations under the current PA coalition government - i.e. from 1994 till his death on 30th October 1999.
Ramanathan 1916, Kearney 1970:219-266, Ali 1981:1-20, Kannangara 1983:130-165 and Ismail 1995:82-83) to more contemporaneous, (periodic) localised tensions and (small-scale) clashes. Fuelled largely out of resentment at the (relative) economic prosperity and success of Muslim trading and business concerns and their concomitant socio-cultural visibility (e.g. the buying of property/houses and through Islamic dress codes, and religious practices, identified through mosques and the call to prayer five times a day). This is notwithstanding the fact that more members of the Muslim community are employed as part of the labour force in the agricultural sector.

Apart from the four major 'ethnic groups', there are also several smaller, minority groups living on the island that generally either tend to get overlooked or homogenised as in the case of small religious sects or communities. In fact this illustrates some of the prevailing diversity and heterogeneity of the Sri Lankan peoples, which is not visible at first glance. A fact that is not limited to the cultural or political spheres alone, as illustrated in an article by Mick Moore, who discusses the role played by identity (i.e. ethnicity, caste and religion) in Sri Lankan trading and commercial development, since independence (Moore 1997:331-366).

- *Baha'is* - members of a religious sect who migrated for trading purposes from India and are a small (low-profile) but integrated part of Sri Lankan trading circles;

- *Burghers* - peoples of Eurasian lineage, the majority of whom are Christians, and who profited in terms of employment and (petty) prestige during the colonial era, particularly when English was used as the lingua franca. However (after independence in 1948) large numbers migrated particularly to Australia (and a lesser extent to Canada), as a result of increased Ceylonisation and de-Burgherisation of the public

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26 Baha'ism was introduced to Sri Lanka via India in the 19th century. However, the origins of this religion lie in Iran, where “Baha’ollah...in 1863 declared himself a prophet and founded the Baha’i religion. From Baha’ism came a pacifist liberal outlook which would later appeal to elements of the Westernized business classes. The declaration of new religious authority was thus a way to generate 'modernized' versions of Islam” (Lapidus 1991:576).
services (Russell 1982:25), post-colonial language policies (from 1956 onwards) which favoured Sinhala over English (and Tamil), and economic vagaries in Sri Lanka due to the unsuccessful command economic policies of 1970-1977:

- **Colombo Chettiar** - the majority of this originally Tamil speaking community of traders and merchants who migrated from South India (sometimes referred to as the Nattukottai Chettiers) are Christians, with many in the process of distancing themselves from the Eelamist Tamil national uprising, through means of cultural assimilation and support for hegemonic (Sinhala-centric) majoritarian politics and nationalism (such as, sending their school-going children to study in the Sinhala vernacular, name-changing, joining mainstream majority-centric political parties, etc).27

- **Dawoodi Bohras**28 - members of an originally Indian Shi'i Muslim sect, who are a small but well integrated, influential and closely-knit business community in Sri Lankan commercial and financial circles.29

- **Malayalis** - the majority of this originally Malayalam (and Tamil) speaking community who migrated from South India during the British colonial period,30 are Christians, and an integrated part of Sri Lankan

27 Individual exceptions to the norm are to be found, as in the case of Shirley Candappa, who was a senior member of the Tamil paramilitary organisation, PLOT. For a discussion of more conventional activities of Nattukottai Chettiar merchant bankers in Sri Lanka, see Weerasooriya (1973) and for more background reading see Rudner (1994).

28 The Bohras are members of a branch of Isma'ili Shi'ism (first established in Yemen) who (most likely) migrated to Gujarat (in western India) in the early thirteenth century. And subsequently it was from this watershed community in India, that the Bohras moved to Sri Lanka for trading and business purposes. The Bohras emerged as a result of a schism among the Fatimids (founded in 909 AD and which was an offshoot of the Isma'ili movement, that itself was a subsidiary product of Shi'ism). For more details, see Anjuman-e-Saifi (Sri Lanka) Trust (1986) and Lapidus (1991:460-461).

29 For example the Jafferjee family business-empire, which owns among its many local and transnational business concerns, one of the largest privately owned tea broking houses in Sri Lanka.

30 Kumari Jayawardena (a native Sri Lankan of Eurasian origins) notes for the historical record that: The Malayalis were a group of migrants from the Malabar coast [along the Southwestern tip
(Sinhala hegemonic) cultural and political life, with a number serving in the police and armed services31

- **Malays** - a distinct group of people who migrated from Malaya during the British colonial period, the majority of whom are Sunni Muslims, and are an integrated part of Sri Lankan (Sinhala hegemonic) cultural and political life, with a number serving in the police and armed services;

- **Memonis** - members of an originally Indian Shi’i Muslim sect and part of a small (low-profile) community of traders;

- **Parsis** - a closely-knit community of adherents of the Zoroastrian faith, who migrated for trading purposes from western India32 during the British colonial period, and are an integrated but low-profile part of elite Sri Lankan commercial circles;33

of India] and the princely states of Travancore and Cochin (which now form Kerala). They were an important part of the Sri Lankan working class in the 1920s and 1930s being known locally, and somewhat derogatorily as Kochchi; since many were from the Cochin area. In Colombo, they worked in mills and factories and were employed in other key sectors such as the port and railways. The Malayalis also included members of the Ezhava caste who migrated to Sri Lanka to work as toddy tappers; there were also a petty bourgeoisie of Malayali clerks, teachers, small traders, owners of tea shops and eating houses. In 1911, there had been around 1,000 Malayalis in Sri Lanka, but the numbers had risen to 30,000 in the early thirties, the years of the world economic depression which had also affected Travancore-Cochin (Jayawardena 1990:45-46).

31 Individual exceptions to the norm are to be found, as in the case of Karathara Thomas George, who officially changed his name to that of Joe Seneviratne (a Sinhalese name). He was a senior member of the left-wing revolutionary group, the *Vikalpa Kandayama* (Alternative Group) and closely associated with the Tamil paramilitary organisation, EPRLF and later was the Minister for Transport during the short-lived EPRLF-led North-East Provincial Council (1988-1990). However, it appears that since the Centre-Left PA coalition government came to power, that he (like many others of his ilk) has joined the *Sudu Nelum Vivaparuvai* (White Lotus Movement), which is associated in drumming up support for the military campaign of the Sri Lankan armed services against the LTTE. For a historical perspective of migration from Kerala in medieval Sri Lanka, see Liyanagamage (1988).

32 Parsees or Parsis are descendants of the Zoroastrians (followers of an ancient religion founded or reformed by the Persian prophet Zoroaster) who emigrated from Persia (present-day Iran) to India in the 8th century.

33 A well-known Parsi family business house is *Abam’s*, owned and managed by members of the Pestonjee clan.
- **Sindhis** - members of a small Hindu, business community of pre-partition Indian origin, who are a well-integrated part of Sri Lankan commercial circles; and

- **Veddas** - the island’s dwindling autochthonous aboriginal peoples, whose distinct culture and way of life has all but disappeared due to indirect results of assimilation, modernisation, marginalisation and political violence.

**Ethno-national and Cultural Concerns**

Once upon a time, Sri Lanka was (stereotypically) portrayed as - a stable, model democracy inhabited by friendly and fun-loving natives; a place in the sun reserved for enjoyment; an oasis in the so called (poverty and disease ridden) ‘Third World’; a virtual paradise for tourists and natives alike. According to this romantic mytho-history, the prevalent stability and democracy were seen as attributes of the Westminster parliamentary system (e.g. Bailey 1953), which had been adopted from the imperial British. As noted by Calvin

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34 For example the Hirdaramani family business house.

35 See the article by Yuvi Thangarajah (a native Sri Lankan of Batticaloa Tamil origins) (1995) ‘Narratives of Victimhood as Ethnic Identity Among Veddas of the East Coast’; and the unpublished PhD dissertation ‘Ethnic Identity and Marginality Among the Coast Veddas of Sri Lanka’ by Dart (1985) for a more detailed expose concerning the difficulties faced by a section of these indigenous aboriginal peoples.

36 This system was first amended in 1972 when Sri Lanka adopted a Republican Constitution that, among other things, did away with the British Monarchy’s ceremonial role as ‘head of state’, along with the office of her representative the ‘Governor General’ and changed the (colonial) name of ‘Ceylon’. In 1978, under a new constitution (that was approved by the UNP’s two thirds majority in parliament), state power was removed from parliament and placed in the hands of a Gaullist (Fifth French Republican) cum American-style, omnipotent executive presidency, together with the introduction of a list proportional system of representation (Wilson 1980, Warnapala 1982).

37 When independence was granted on 4th February 1948, the political élites (Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim) who inherited power from the colonial masters continued governing in accordance with the notion of being the ‘model colony’ of the British Raj. They maintained many pre-colonial institutions of government, which had been set up, until the amended Republican Constitution was enacted in 1972. According to the historian Kingsley de Silva (a native Sri Lankan of Sinhalese Buddhist origins), the notion of the ‘model colony’ was coined during the period when the British were transferring power to the Ceylonese political élites.
Woodward:

In 1947, as Ceylon [Sri Lanka] approached independence, Great Britain looked with pride upon its accomplishments there. Five years later Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, a leader of the independence movement and the first native Ceylonese [Sri Lankan] to be Governor-General of Ceylon, remarked, 'Ceylon is the best job the Englishman has done anywhere in the world, almost better than in his own country.' [Quoted in the New York Times, May 7, 1952]...The occupation by the British, which began in 1795, has had a more enduring impact on Ceylon than did previous occupations...the British provided well for Ceylon in a number of ways. They left the island in 1947, satisfied that the environment in Ceylon would favour the growth of a democratic political system. No one was more optimistic about Ceylon's future than Lord Soulbury, who had led the commission that recommended independence in Ceylon. 'With such natural resources and with leaders of proved experience,' Lord Soulbury told the House of Lords in 1947, 'I feel that Ceylon can face the future under the happiest auspices.' [Quoted in Sir Charles Jeffries, Ceylon: The Path to Independence, p.126] Ceylon, as Sir Charles Jeffries observes, was in many ways considered 'the prototype and model for the new Commonwealth of the latter part of the twentieth century.' [Ibid., p.ix] The British fully expected that the political institutions they had planted would grow well in Ceylon and that Ceylon would exemplify the best traditions of the British political experience (Woodward 1969:3,9-11).

From an indigenous perspective, the anti-Tamil riots of 1956 and 1958, along with the first insurrection, mounted islandwide in April 1971 by the youthful Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP or the People's Liberation Front) and its brutal suppression, cast the first doubts on the accuracy of this idyllic

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38 In the 1956 general elections, due to intra-élite contradictions, a section of the traditional Sinhala political élite led by the (subsequently assassinated) Solomon West Ridgeway Dias (S.W.R.D.) Bandaranaike wooed the majority Sinhala-Buddhist constituency and promised them a greater share of power and resources. The non-materialisation of these promises added to the discontent of these politicised but marginalised sections of the Sinhala (Buddhist) youth, and culminated in the emergence of the JVP a decade later. The JVP membership was largely constituted by unemployed youth from rural areas of the Sinhala dominated hinterland (many of whom had benefited from higher education through the policy of free education). The majority of these youth belonged to the non-Govigama (lower) castes of the majority Sinhala (Buddhist)
representation of Sri Lanka. These doubts resurfaced around 1972 and thereafter, when politicised elements within the minority Tamil community, embarked upon a struggle for a greater share of power and resources. This struggle became more vocal and radical (especially among sections of militant youth) during the Sri Lankan Army’s (SLA) occupation of the principal Tamil City of Jaffna situated in the northern peninsula.

The JVP’s second failed insurrection, which lasted from around August 1987 to mid-1990, was much ‘closer to home’ for many Sinhalese, in comparison to the relatively ‘faraway war’ being fought against ‘the Tamils’. This is in spite of the heavy human casualties and infrastructural damage caused by occasional vehicle-bomb blasts and suicide-bomb attacks in the capital city of Colombo. It also brought to a rude halt in their gaze, any illusions that might have been entertained vis-à-vis “dharmishta am dulwa” (democratic rule or government) in the country. This slogan, coined during the Jayawardene era, epitomises a propaganda line that successive Centre-Right, United National Party (UNP) governments had been trumpeting - notwithstanding the (politico-military) conflicts in the north and east (1977 to date), and in the southern, western and central provinces (1987-1990). The possible exceptions to those rudely awakened were the overseas tourists who (at the time) enjoyed the experience of ‘sun, sea and sand’, along the south-western beaches, oblivious to the daily extra-judicial executions and other death squad activities that were going on in the inland areas of the same region. According to journalist William McGowan, commenting on the period where the government’s armed forces were in the process of militarily crushing the JVP,

community and apparently adhered to the rhetoric of a Maoist revolutionary ideology, backed up through the strategies of nativist putschism. The bleak outlook for those outside the avenues of social advancement enjoyed by the traditional political elites and their supporters, was a major factor in the logic and trajectory of the first JVP insurrection of April 1971. This particular rebellion was immediately crushed by the relatively ill prepared, Sri Lankan armed services (with external assistance from India and other countries) and had its leaders jailed (from 1971-1977).

39 The pan-Ceylonese, Ceylon National Congress which was founded in 1919 later became the UNP in 1946 and was led at the time by the eventual ‘father of the nation’ Don Stephen Senanayake, who went on to become the country’s first Prime Minister (1947-52).
[the] final government push to exterminate the JVP has been called by Asia Watch 'a period of lawlessness and bloodshed unparalleled in [Sri Lanka's] forty years as an independent state'. Death squads proliferated - Yellow Cats, Black Cats, Green Tigers - killing students, dissident monks, young men, intellectuals, human rights monitors, and the families of JVP suspects and sympathizers. Corpses were found hanging in what were called 'eternal fires', the craters where JVP land mines had destroyed government vehicles. Often these corpses burned for days because locals were afraid of the same treatment if they tried to bury the remains...During a five-week period in August and September of 1989, an estimated 5,000 people died, more than the casualty rate in Beirut for those weeks. It was the conflict's bloodiest phase (McGowan 1993:374-375).

The JVP is a predominantly Sinhalese paramilitary organisation, which challenged the outgoing UNP regime of the late President Jayawardene and the incoming UNP regime of the late President Premadasa for state power in a second abortive insurrection (1987-1990) in the southern, central, and western regions of Sri Lanka. The JVP was crushed militarily, with the majority (12 out of 13) of its politburo members being extra-judicially executed and it is conservatively estimated at anything between 70,000-100,000 Sinhalese were killed or missing, with many more thousands still unaccounted for - the vast majority of whom were civilians. During this period extra-judicial executions were carried out by death squads, which were allegedly affiliated to the then government of Sri Lanka led by two successive UNP regimes. It is estimated that there were 20,000 habeas corpus applications forwarded to the Attorney General’s department by Mahinda Rajapakse. At the time of forwarding he was the secretary of a parliamentary committee looking into human rights violations in Sri Lanka. He is currently a senior Minister in the PA coalition government. These habeas corpus applications are only in relation to disappearances in the southern, central and western parts of the island - which is somewhat of an infamous ‘record’, according to a lead article in the Sinhala language newspaper Lakdive (Issue 1. Number 20. June 7. 1992). It must be noted here, that this action excludes the north and east where the continuing war between Sri Lankan government armed forces and Tamil paramilitaries has also led to further killings, disappearances and other human rights violations.

According to a number of former JVP paramilitaries and sympathisers, with whom I had informal
discussions, the organisation appears to be clandestinely regrouping in Sri Lanka and overseas (especially in Italy, France, UK, Thailand and Japan). They also claimed that the state’s repression against suspected JVP paramilitaries and sympathisers had continued unabated during the Premadasa era (1989-1993), though at a less intense and visible level (even after the JVP’s military defeat in early 1990). By 1994 however, there was a sea change since the (current) PA coalition government replaced the UNP’s Dingiri Banda Wijetunge-led interim-regime in 1994. The PA ruling political elite has permitted the JVP (greater) participation in mainstream politics once more (e.g. above ground, legally sanctioned functioning of JVP party offices, unhindered contestation of elections - at the local, regional and national levels). Conditions have improved for the JVP, despite certain internal killings, which took place in the latter half of 1996 (where a self-styled JVP military commander, Wijesinghe, was assassinated in a jungle hideout). A (not unbiased) local news report described this particular killing and other related activities of the JVP, thus:

Wijesinghe, who operated covertly in Sri Lanka, is understood to have used Amarasinghe as a ‘front’, while he had been the real power behind the scenes. He is learnt [sic] to have been killed by member of a rival internal faction while he was delivering a lecture in a clandestine party camp in the jungle. The shadowy Wijesinghe is described as having been the principal deputy of [the late] JVP military wing leader Saman Piyasiri Fernando who operated under the feared nom de guerre ‘Keerthi Vijayabahu’ during the failed second insurgency. Wijesinghe is alleged to have engineered a large number of robberies in the deep south and south east in order to collect funds to build up his own power base. He was also allegedly involved in a jail break at the maximum security prison at Welikada, Colombo, in 1989. Meanwhile, a JVP fund-raising campaign was held in several southern districts...with red shirted youth accosting members of the public on the streets and buses with requests for donations. JVP officials were not available for comment.

In fact rumours that circulated in early 1997 in the local media hint at not-so-secret talks being on the cards in the near future, between representatives of the PA and JVP. Conversely, there is also (subsequent) speculation that the opposition UNP and the JVP have some sort of tacit ‘alliance’ following a rash of co-ordinated undergraduate student unrest on Sri Lankan university campuses in tandem with an opposition campaign to unseat the PA from government during planned general elections in 1998. The purported logic of which is to
create socio-political instability and thereby getting the PA to order an unpopular crack down. None of which has materialised to date. I do not focus in this text on the specificities of the JVP's situated practices of political violence and its cultural constructions - in evidence during the two unsuccessful insurrectionary attempts mounted in the Sinhala-majority southern, central and western provinces - or its real or imagined political manoeuvrings more recently. For more historical and descriptive details concerning the JVP, refer to the works of Halliday (1971), Arasaratnam (1972), Caspersz (1972), Obeyesekere (1974), Goonetileke (1975), Kearney and Jiggins (1975), Alles (1977a, 1977b, 1990), Keerawella (1980), Alexander (1981), Gunaratna (1990), Chandraprema (1991) and Hettige (1992). For a sympathetic account see Gunasekara (1998).

The paramilitary challenges set in motion by political groups within the Tamil (and Sinhala) societal formations, run counter to the power and hegemony of the Sri Lankan state and its apparatuses. State power and hegemony is exercised and enjoyed by competing political elites - in principal those owing their allegiance to the UNP and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)\(^{40}\), who belong to the majority, Sinhala and predominantly Buddhist community, and to a (comparatively) lesser extent, by their supporters among the general populace. Traditionally (prior to independence and immediately after) these élites belonged to the upper classes/castes (Gingigama and Rodala)\(^{41}\) and landed gentry (Singer 1964, Fernando 1973b), a phenomenon that has eroded somewhat with time. A good example of the new breed of politician who has emerged onto centre stage, is the late President Ranasinghe Premadasa, the first Sri Lankan head of state who was class-wise and caste-wise not from the traditional ruling political élite.

With these changes (since 1977) however, have come other, unwelcome shifts in contemporary

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\(^{40}\) The SLFP was founded by the late S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike who left the UNP in 1951 as a result of an internal power struggle for the mantle of leadership.

\(^{41}\) While Gingigama (also spelt 'Goigama') is the highest ranking, cultivator or farmer’s caste among the Sinhalese, Rodala is a collective term of reference for members of the Kandyan Gingigama nobility from the central highlands.
political culture and practice. Where, nowadays a career in politics and the parliament (generally for life, unless assassinated in mid-stream), is seen as a veritable business venture, which goes hand-in-hand with (high-level) bribery, corruption and (a new-look) gangsterism. The self-interest motives of such parliamentary politicians - and their (high living) cronies in the government bureaucracy (including the armed services) and private sector big business - is to capitalise on the frustrations, ignorance, naiveté and/or gullibility of respective constituencies during election time, in order to further petty, profit-driven objectives. Such high-level corruption (particularly in the form of bribes and/or commission-taking in relation to government tenders), simply disregards the ethnicity and professed 'national interests' of the players. The payment of kickbacks has almost become standard practice for multinationals operating in countries like Sri Lanka. And the seriousness of this (global) problem of epidemic proportions is highlighted in an article in The Economist

Graft, of one form or another, is probably the world's second-oldest business...[involving] a raft of high-profile arrests in recent years, including one or two former heads of state...Many governments, however, are growing increasingly determined to stamp out what has been referred to as the 'corruption eruption'. On May 26th, members of the OECD - the Paris-based club of rich countries - agreed to forge a treaty that would make it illegal for firms from member countries to bribe foreign officials. The treaty which the OECD hopes to have drafted by the end of this year, would need to be backed by new laws in each member's country, criminalising bribery abroad. Such laws have long been urged on others by America, which already has its own. As a result, American businessmen argue, they face unfair competition from their less scrupulous foreign rivals. One government study estimated that American firms lost some 100 deals worth $45 billion over the past two years to less principled rivals...The rapid growth of cross-border investment, and the growing competition to supply it, have increased pressure on rich-country governments to support their exporters. Indeed, all of them, including America, occasionally lobby foreign governments on their own firms' behalf. The most politically palatable way to curb bribery, therefore, is for all rich countries to take the leap together. For this reason, even a watered-down treaty would be better than the current arrangement, under which overseas bribes are tax-deductible in many places...If the battle against corruption is to succeed...[given the relative ease with which strict laws making bribery illegal can be bypassed through the use of third party 'mediators'] it will have to involve a change of heart on the part of those who take as well as those who give. Rooting out corruption is almost always in a country's best interests, but not always in those of its politicians. Some progress, however, is being made. Foreign-aid donors are becoming less willing to bankroll kleptocrats...Transparency International, an independent organisation that blows the whistle on bakshishehs, has branches in more than 60 mostly poor countries. Most recently, the World Bank, a major player in the developing world, has placed anti-graft efforts near the top of its agenda. It now stands ready to cancel contracts and to 'blacklist'

The seamy side of Sri Lankan politics also involves a tremendous intolerance of oppositional points of view, which cuts right across the Sinhalese-Tamil divide. Where, political assassination is perceived to be an ‘easier option’ in silencing external opposition and internal dissent, to that of political debate and democratic struggle - a phenomenon that gained currency particularly during the Premadasa era and which continues to be practised under the aegis of the LTTE-supremo Prabhakaran.

The Tamil paramilitary rebellion reflects a dominant aspect of *inter-ethnic* (in crude terms, Sinhala versus Tamil) power struggles. On the other hand, the two failed insurrections mounted by the JVP reflect *intra-Sinhala* power struggles along class lines, between the traditional political élite at the centre and predominantly non-élite Sinhalese (Buddhists) from the rural areas (a large number of whom were from non-Goyigama lower castes and lower-class Goyigama). At the same time, ‘the Tamil rebellion’, as it is sometimes referred to, is not a homogeneous `Tamil' challenge to Sinhala (Buddhist) hegemony. The bloody internecine warfare and power struggles within and between the Tamil paramilitary groups, demonstrates this very clearly. These *intra-Tamil* power struggles also reflect the marginalisation of conventional Tamil parliamentary parties/groupings such as the TULF (hitherto led by traditional élite, Jaffna-centric Tamil politicians - largely members of the legal profession), by the paramilitary groups (the leadership structures of which, though non-traditional, remained predominantly Jaffna-centric).

Since the early 1970s then, Sri Lanka has seen the burgeoning of nationalist fervour and revolutionary struggles for liberation and self-determination, particularly and most consistently, among politicised sections of the island’s minority Tamil community. This process has however been extremely complex, fraught with contradictions, internal wranglings and quite painful. In spite of all the complexities and obstacles, *Tamil nationalism* has endured in a variety of forms - from *chauvinist-separatism* (typified by the Eelamist LTTE) to
collaborationist-nationalisms. Such as those practised in the 1990s by the EPDP, EPRLF, PLOTE, TELO and breakaway factions, such as the former-EPRLF ‘Rasik group’ in the east and former-PLOTE ‘Mohan group’ in the Jaffna peninsula, that operate as auxiliary units of the Sri Lankan armed services. And Tamil nationalism has come to be recognised as a force to be reckoned with in the Sri Lankan politics of the 1990s and beyond.

The Birth and Spread of Tamil Nationalism

Looking back to the 1940s, in particular around the time when Ceylon was granted independence by the British imperialists, budding politicians belonging to local, traditional political elites (Singer 1964, Fernando 1973b) inherited the mantle of executive and legislative power, in accordance with the dictates of ‘parliamentary democracy’. And it was during this formative period that the seeds of the coming ethnocide

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42 The Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) is a breakaway faction from the EPRLF led by Douglas Devananda, who is currently a Member of Parliament and a key ally of the PA coalition government.

43 The EPRLF broke away from the EROS and was officially founded in 1982 by the late Kandiah Pathmanaba. He was murdered in Madras by an LTTE hit squad on 19th June 1990, along with twelve of his comrades (including the Member of Parliament V. Yogasanker and the Finance Minister of the North-East Provincial Council, P. Kirupakaran). The EPRLF is currently led by K. Premachandran (alias Suresh), a former Member of Parliament who appears to be shifting closer to the hegemonic LTTE.

44 The People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) was founded in 1981 by the late ‘Uma Maheswaran’, who was murdered by an internal faction (one of the assassins was allegedly a former bodyguard) on 16th July 1989. Member of Parliament D. Sidharthan, who was head of the political wing, is currently leading PLOTE. This event followed the death of N. Manikkadasan (deputy leader and commander of the military wing), who was killed along with the PLOTE Vavuniya military commander ‘Ilango’ in an explosion at “Lucky House” (PLOTE’s office in Vavuniya) carried out by the LTTE around 12:45 hours on 2nd September 1999.

45 The Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) was founded in 1977 by the late Thangadurai Mama (uncle) who was murdered by Sinhalese prisoners in the Welikada prison massacre of 1983. Sri Sabaratnam who took over from him was murdered, allegedly by the LTTE on 29th May 1986.

46 For interesting discussions of parliamentary representation in Sri Lanka from 1931-1986, as well as the workings of parliamentary democracy, see the writings of Coomaraswamy (1988), Tyagi and Bhardwaj (1969)
were sown. As Wilson notes:

The cabinet was a collective leadership representing most of the upper layers of the island’s multi-group society - community, religion, caste, as well as economic interests. But the representatives were more in the nature of showpieces than genuine spokesmen. The bureaucracy was colonial oriented, spiteful of the masses, willing to cooperate with the new political elite but old-fashioned, generalist and geared to the operation of an old-type colonial export-import economy...D.S. Senanayake (1947-52) and his successors Dudley Senanayake (1952-3) and Sir John Kotelawala (1953-6) in a way personified this elite and this kind of thinking. They were pro-West, anti-Marxist and hoped that everything would be well if the surface of political life was kept unruffled. The defence and external affairs agreements concluded by D.S. Senanayake with Britain in November 1947 prior to the grant of independence, the virtual wholesale imitation of the Westminster model, the decision to remain within the Commonwealth and to accept the British sovereign as Ceylon’s when India and Pakistan had decided to go republican, the enactment of such legislation as the Public Security Act of 1947 and the Trade Union (Amendment) Act of 1948 which was directed against Marxist-dominated working-class organisations, and the Citizenship Act of 1948, the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949 and the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act of 1949, all of which deprived the vast majority of the Indian Tamil population of its citizenship rights and the franchise, provided evidence of the basic political ideology of this conservative class (Wilson 1975:15).

The model of Westminster ‘parliamentary democracy’, involving periodic one-person-one-vote general elections in a multicultural society (like that of Sri Lanka), also held within its practice, a conducive environment for the coming ethnocide and fratricide, which to be witnessed from the 1970s onwards. The policies of divide and rule exercised by their colonial masters have been perpetuated by many post-colonial political élites, through the practices of official parties and groups. A process which involves (invariably) desperate attempts, to stay in power at all costs - leading to a brand of less-than-democratic electoral politics, ranging from majoritarian supremism and opportunism to crass populism.

In Sri Lanka, Sinhala and Tamil traditional political élites and upper castes (Goyigama Rukula and Vellala), engaged in a growing competition for power and resources through the ‘ethnicisation’ of electoral respectively. And in relation to questions of democracy and electoral politics, see the article by Moore (1994).

47 My thanks to Narendra Singh, whose erudite comments on a lecture at the Center for Asian Studies (CASA), University of Amsterdam, proved helpful here.
politics. Post-independence intra-Sinhala power struggles, in particular between the UNP and SLFP, included the scapegoating and marginalisation of minority Tamils, which in turn aggravated ethnic discord, and led to the first wave of anti-Tamil riots of unprecedented political violence in 1956 and 1958. The anti-Tamil riots of the 1950s followed in the wake of the election victory, in April 1956, of the Centre-Left, *Mahajana Eksath Peramuna* (MEP or People’s United Front) coalition government led by the late Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike[^48] - who used anti-Tamil, Sinhala-Buddhist (chauvinist) populism[^49] as a political ploy to win majoritarian support and secure an electoral victory over the UNP (Vittachi 1958, Wriggins 1960:268-270, Kearney 1967:87 and Tambiah 1986:13, 26, 32, 54, 71-72, 109). From a historical point of view, Kumari Jayawardena notes, that:

The agitation on the language issue led, in 1956, to the first outbreak of serious ethnic violence in forty years. It began when the Tamil Federal Party members who had started a satyagraha[^50] on June 5th, (when the ‘Sinhala Only’ Bill was introduced), were assaulted by a

[^48]: Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike (1899-1959), member of the State Council 1931-1947; Minister of Local Administration 1936-47; founder-leader of the *Sinhala Mahan Sabha* (‘the Great Council of the Sinhalese’) 1937; founder-member of the United National Party 1947; Minister of Health and Local Government 1947-51 [in the first post-independence government formed by the UNP]; resigned 1951 and formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, leading it to a great electoral victory in 1956 against the United National Party, then led by Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawela; Prime Minister 1956-59; assassinated by a [Sinhala chauvinist] Buddhist monk 1959 [for attempting to resolve the ‘Tamil Question’ through political negotiations involving a possible Federal solution under the so-called Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact]; failed to honour the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957 (Wilson 1988:xi).

Bandaranaike’s widow, Mrs. Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias Bandaranaike (1916 to date), became prime minister from 1960-65 a little over a year after his assassination (thereby becoming the world’s first woman premier). She was also prime minister from 1970-77 and is the leader of the SLFP. Currently she serves as Prime Minister (1994 to date). Their daughter, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, is the incumbent (executive) President (1994 to date) and leader of the Centre-Left, PA coalition government. For more details on the Bandaranaike political dynasty, see Gooneratne (1986) and Manor (1989).

[^49]: For a sample of Bandaranaike’s rhetoric, see Wickramaratne (1961) and Bandaranaike (1963).

[^50]: *Satyagraha* was a successful tactic of non-violent public demonstrations (involving sit down strikes and work stoppages, hunger strikes and other manifestations) and civil disobedience, adopted by the Indian statesman, Mahatma (Mohandas Karamchand) Gandhi (Brown 1977) - who was a leader and symbol of the Indian nationalist movement - in protest against British imperialist rule (particularly during the years leading
crowd; there were further violent incidents against Tamils in Colombo and in the colonisation schemes of the Gal Oya Valley (in the Eastern province). During this phase of violence, over 150 people were estimated to have been killed...the rioting that broke out in many parts of the country on May 23rd 1958...was especially severe in Colombo, Batticaloa, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Kurunegala, Panadura, Galle and Matara. Shops were looted and set on fire. Tamils were attacked and killed, trains were derailed and unparalleled violence took place for four days before a state of emergency was declared. The riots resulted in 12,000 Tamils having to flee their houses and take shelter in refugee camps before being transported to Jaffna (Jayawardena 1990:121-122).

Out of the struggles and political manoeuvrings of those early years, it was the Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kadchi (ITAK or the ‘Ceylon Tamil State Party’, more commonly referred to as the ‘Federal Party’ or FP) led by S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, that emerged at the helm of the nascent Tamil polity - primarily as a counter-hegemonic challenge to Sinhala (Buddhist) supremism and hegemony. The emergence of the FP (or ITAK) as a neo-traditional political force was in the wake of intra-Tamil political elite wranglings and contradictions.51


51 As noted in an acerbic tone by Russell:

Indeed, the Ceylon Tamils suffered from the mid-1920s until the arrival of G.G. Ponnambalam in the mid-1930s from the absence of any strong and imaginative leader. The ageing [Sir Ponnambalam] Ramanathan, resembling the aged Gladstone whom he had so admired, took refuge more and more in oracular dogmatism delivered with such a patriarchal air that he became more like an Old Testament prophet than a politician. The remainder of his clan, [including his nephew, Sir Arunachalam] Mahadeva, R. Sri Pathmanathan and S. Natesan were, unfortunately, essentially epigoni. [H.A.P.] Sandrasegara pursued his own erratic and opportunistic course, strongly advocating cooperation with the Sinhalese when speaking in Colombo, and then reverting to virulent communalism in Jaffna in 1930 [See, e.g., Ceylon Daily News, March 22, 1930; Morning Star, August 12, 1930]. [Nevins] Selvadurai, more constructively, set up a non-vellala caste organisation with the help of the Jaffna Youth Congress, called the Depressed Tamils Service League [Ceylon Daily News, January 29, 1930. Dr. Paul Crossette and J. Hensman were also involved]. W. Duraswamy and K. Balasingham, the most capable and flexible of the seasoned Tamil politicians, seemed afflicted by a political form of parapraxis in 1930 and 1931. In toto, the Tamil leadership from 1926 was characterised and debilitated by dissension, indecision and personal squabbles. Consequently, the opposition to the Donoughmore Constitution, both inside and outside the Legislature, lacked coherence and cogency. Partly this was due to Ramanathan’s thoroughly inflexible stance, partly to the absence of any disciplined party and partly to the individualist nature of the leaders themselves [The disunity among the Ceylon Tamil leaders had
highlighted latterly through the inevitable struggle between Ganapathipillai Gangesar Ponnambalam (founder-leader of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress or ACTC)\(^{52}\) and Chelvanayakam (a founder-member of the ACTC) - over the question of cooperation and collaboration at the traditional élite (and middle class) level between Tamils and Sinhalese, particularly in government. In fact societally, as Tambiah notes, “there have been [and continue to be] numbers of Sri Lankan Tamils of élite and affluent origins, who live the same kind of life as the élite Sinhalese, and, barring intermarriage, move in the same [high society] circles and clubs of Colombo” (Tambiah 1986:107).

Chelvanayakam broke with the ACTC (led by the collaborationist Ponnambalam, which they had founded together in 1938) and launched the FP in December 1949, advancing a federalist form of government, as his solution to the ‘Tamil question’. According to Wilson, the FP,

became within seven years the leading instrument for the implementation of Chelvanayakam’s solution for the Tamil people...he saw his task as building a new nation, giving the Tamil people a sense of pride in their homeland, and educating them to rely on their own strengths and not on the favours and caprices of an alien Sinhala government. He was regarded by the public, Sinhala and Tamil alike, as the Moses who would lead his people to the promised land (Wilson 1994:8).

Chelvanayakam is undoubtedly, the acknowledged father of modern Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka. And it is his legacy that was hijacked by the Tamil paramilitary groups (collectively), around the mid-1970s and later cornered in the late-1980s by the predominantly Karunyan new politico-military élite - belonging to the inner-circle of Velupillai Prabhakaran’s LTTE and their followers. According to an ex-LTTE paramilitary called

manifested itself very strongly in the Legislative Council in 1927/28 over the so-called ‘Battle of the Causeways’. So incapable were the Ceylon Tamil representatives of coming to an agreement as to which of their constituencies should receive the first government subvention to build the much-needed causeways in the Northern Province, that in the end nothing was done at all. *Hansard, 1927-28* See pp.274 ff.] (Russell 1982:19).

\(^{52}\) In an earlier struggle for the leadership of the Tamil community, Ponnambalam had superseded an older and more experienced élite Tamil politician, Sir Arunachalam Mahadeva, who was the son of the founder-leader of the ‘pan-Ceylonese’ Ceylon National Congress (in 1919). Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam (Russel 1982:297).
‘Ahilen’ whom I interviewed, Prabhakaran’s most trusted inner-circle in the LTTE leadership is predominantly Karaiyar. And this practice is taken to such an extent that at the time Prabhakaran had appointed a Karaiyar called ‘Thurai’ over the heads of more senior Vellala (high-caste) commanders from the east, as the political leader of the Batticaloa region [Personal field-notes 1995].

The Karaiyar, who paralleled the Sinhalese Karava...were Jaffna’s second major caste traditionally associated with coastal trading and fishing, and around them were also deployed a (lesser) array of subordinate service castes...The Karaiyar-Vellala rivalries, which were much less acrimonious in the past because they did not directly compete in British times, today have ironically surfaced at the time of the political mobilization of all Tamils. These rivalries are alleged to have some salience among the Tamil ‘freedom-fighting rebels,’ who are said to be split into rival factions, a major split (but not the only one) being between the Karaiyar-dominated rebels drawn from and based in the coastal settlement of Valvettithurai [also referred to as VVT, which is the birthplace of LTTE-supremo Prabhakaran, where he enjoys near God-like status] (famous in recent times for its successful smuggling operations linking Jaffna and the Coromandel [south-east Indian] coast) and with those with Vellala affiliations [emphasis mine] (Tambiah 1986:103-104).

However, it was Chelvanayakam’s able lieutenant Appapillai Amirthalingam and other ‘radicals’, who first deviated from their leader’s espoused non-violent, Gandhian vision of establishing a Tamil federalist state, and supported a more vigorous, militant expression of establishing a Tamil separatist state, including activities of the FP’s influential militant youth front.

In the Tamil areas, Appapillai Amirthalingam took control of affairs, and was assisted by Murugesu Sivasithamparam when the latter joined with the majority of Tamil MPs to become one of the principal architects of the TUF and later the TULF. A duumvirate thus emerged. However, there were other formidable leaders in the FP’s top parliamentary echelons. The strongest of these was S. Kathiravetpillai,53 whom sections of the youth front viewed as being the most militant and inflexible on the Tamil stance. Chelvanayakam still remained the leader in the context of this unofficial division of labour, and his presence prevented open rifts (Wilson 1994:114).

From around 1970/71 onwards - under the aegis of Kathiravetpillai (who is quoted above). Amirthalingam, et

53 S. Kathiravetpillai was the former Member of Parliament for the Tamil constituency of Kopai (in the Jaffna peninsula). He was also a former Secretary of the Federal Party, who "put the position [called for by youthful Tamil paramilitaries during the Vaduvoorklai Resolution, vis-à-vis the pursuance of a separatist option, using methods of warfare and political violence, to win Tamil national liberation] squarely in his A Statement on
of budding Tamil nationalist paramilitaries (who were collectively referred to simply as “the boys”), received inspiration and a ‘guidance’ of sorts, through the activities and struggles of the Tamil parliamentarians. The formation of the Thamilor Aikya Munmani or Tamil United Front (TUF - also known more popularly, simply as the Kanimadai) on May 14, 1972 (in Trincomalee), was a first major step in fashioning an unified stance in this direction. Previously competing Tamil nationalists belonging to the FP (led by deputy-leader Amirthalingam), the ACTC (led by deputy-leader Sivasithamparam), along with the smaller Adanga Thamil Munmani (ATM or the Tamil Front That-Cannot-Be-Suppressed), and the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC, an Indian Tamil trade union), among other organisations, merged in order to act together under the TUF umbrella - “to assert, ‘the freedom, dignity and rights of the Tamil people’” (Wilson 1975:188). The second step was the FP’s 12th annual convention held at Mallakam in 1973 - in close proximity to (the by then ailing) Thanthai Chelvai’s (Father Chelva’s) hometown of Tellippallai. “The Mallakam convention confirmed the FP’s new line of thinking, namely separate statehood” (Wilson 1994:124-125). The final step in this sequence of events was the establishment of the Thamilor Aikya Viduthalai Munmani or the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) during a TUF Action Committee meeting held in 1975 in Jaffna - where Chelvanayakam’s FP, Ponnambalam’s ACTC and Sauviamoorthy Thondaman’s CWC were all unified in one organisation, under their co-leadership. The aims of Tamil separatist nationalists were further sanctioned by the Vadikokkodai Resolution of May 14, 1976, during the first national convention of the TULF, which was presided over by Thanthai Chelva.

This historic pronouncement accused the [then] Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranaike of having ‘callously ignored’ the TULF’s ‘last attempt...to win constitutional recognition of the Tamil nation without jeopardising the unity of the country’. The convention called on ‘the Tamil

Eclam Co-existence not Confrontation” (Wilson 1988:90).

54 However, during the long reign of power by successive UNP regimes led by J.R. Jayawardene, R. Premadasa and D.B. Wijetunge (1977-1994), Thondaman led his CWC into a tactical alliance with the power brokers in Colombo. A practice he continued to do till his death when he became Minister for Plantations in the current PA coalition government. A manoeuvre that earned him the reputation of being a politician with the “uncanny knack” of making tactical alliances with the powers that be in order to secure the best possible deal. Particularly for his supporters among the Indian Tamils community, working on the highland plantations of central Sri Lanka (whom he has represented in patriarchal fashion for decades).
nation in general and the Tamil youth in particular to come forward to throw themselves fully in the sacred fight for freedom and to flinch not till the goal of a sovereign socialist state of Tamil Eelam is reached' (Ibid: 128).

Following Chelvanayakam’s death in April 1977, Amirthalingam successfully manoeuvred himself in order to take over the mantle of leadership of the TULF. Unrestrained by the more moderate Chelvanayakam, Amirthalingam pursued the Tamil Eelamist (separatist) nationalist agenda with more vigour - following the TULF’s electoral victories, which left him at the helm of the largest single opposition party in parliament. Linked to this agenda was the strategy of defining the north and east as a single entity, or a ‘Tamil homeland’. As Wilson notes, “The T.U.L.F. - especially the leader of its ‘purist’ wing, the late S. Kathiravelupillai, M.P. - was insistent on the Northern and Eastern provinces being amalgamated into a single regional council” (Wilson 1988:144). From a Tamil separatist perspective, the concept of a ‘Tamil homeland’, is the basis for the establishment of a sovereign Tamil state called “Eelam”. Under Amirthalingam’s stewardship, Tamil nationalist parliamentarians supportive of more militant views attempted to provide a buffer or protective umbrella of sorts to the activists on the ground, through their parliamentary presence. Primarily this support was extended to members of the FP’s militant youth front and thereafter to ‘the boys’ at large. Amirthalingam continued to play a role in separatist Tamil nationalist politics right up to the late 1980s, however in the end, the able and charismatic lieutenant of Thanthai Chelva was found wanting and paid the ultimate price to the very forces that he and others like him had helped nurture.

The bespectacled lead trigger-man who fired three fatal bullets into the head of Amirthalingam on July 13, 1989, was “Visu”\(^{55}\) (Rasia Aravindarajah). He was a senior LTTE paramilitary from Vavuniya, who had at one time headed the political wing in the Vanni region and was the right-hand man/confidant of the then

\(^{55}\) ‘Visu’ was imprisoned in India and held for a week at the Madras Central prison in early 1987, along with a large number of Tamil paramilitaries from different groups (which included myself). This was when the government of India was exerting coercive pressure on the main Tamil paramilitary organisations to accept (unconditionally) the terms of the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord, that the Sri Lankan President Jayawardene had earlier acquiesced to uphold.
deputy leader of the organisation "Mahattaya". His partner-in-assassination and assistant was another paramilitary "Almasius" (Peter Aloysius Leon), who fired simultaneously alongside "Visu". During which, the TULF Member of Parliament V. Yogeswaran was also killed, shot five times in the heart and liver; and the President of the TULF, Murugesu Sivasithamparam, received serious gun shot injuries to his right shoulder. TULF politburo member, Somasunderam (Mavai) Senathiraja - who witnessed the assassination and subsequent killing of the two assassins and their accomplice (a third LTTE paramilitary Sivakumar alias "Arivu"), by the bodyguards assigned by the UNP’s Premadasa-led government to protect the TULF leaders - escaped without injury. The journalist and biographer Thambiahah Sabaratnam (a native Sri Lankan of Jaffna Tamil origins) notes that: "Colombo Judicial Medical Officer Dr. M.S.L. Salgado performed the autopsy on Amirthalingam and declared that death had resulted due to injuries to the head and chest...The police took two pistols and a revolver from the dead assailants" (Sabaratnam 1996:3-5). The silencing of Amirthalingam et al was the final epitaph in the demise of the Vellulu old-guard of Tamil nationalist politics, hailing from the days of Thanthai Chelva.

At the October 1989 press briefing, Indian Express correspondent, [the late] Rita Sebastian, said that in the Tiger camps in Batticaloa she had seen photographs of the three assassins prominently displayed among LTTE heroes...On 15 March 1990, the Lanka Guardian published the interview its editor Mervin de Silva had with LTTE deputy leader Gopalaswamy Mahendirarajah alias Mahattaya. ‘If you stand for the multi-party system, why did your men kill Amirthalingam and the other TULF leaders?’ de Silva had asked. Mahattaya’s reply was: ‘They were not killed because they held views different from that of the LTTE, but because they were acting as the agents of India, in short, traitors, collaborators. In that background, the LTTE kills those who betray the cause...In a national struggle, the battle is everywhere, the traitor anywhere [original emphasis]’ (Ibid: 12-13).

It is ironic that, none other than the very same “Mahattaya”, was at the receiving end of the same kind of rough justice and secretly executed after a mock trial in early 1995 (echoing the words of Pastor Niemoller), under the direct orders of the LTTE-supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran.56 Prabhakaran accused his childhood friend

56 According to the writer Rohan Gunaratna, who is privy to documents and information originating from Sri Lankan intelligence sources (and their overseas contacts), a senior LTTE paramilitary, “Soranalingam
and long time deputy of being an ‘Indian agent’ and a ‘traitor to the cause’, by allegedly tipping off ‘the Indians’ about the movements of the *MV* *Ahut* (originally the *MV* *Yahata*),\(^5\) which was shipping a consignment of arms, and was responsible ‘through association’, for the sinking of the vessel, as well as the deaths of “Kittu” (Sathasivam Krishnakumar a top LTTE commander) and the cadres under his command.

When challenged by the Indian Navy [sic - Indian Coastguard], just outside India’s territorial waters. Kittu ordered the civilian crew and Cader (3rd batch Indian trained), a member of the LTTE civilian staffed procurement department, to jump overboard and swim away. Thereafter, Kittu ordered the explosion of Yahata killing all the LTTE cadres on board (Gunaratna 1997:85).

Subsequently, a bulk of the senior and middle-ranking LTTE paramilitaries who served in the Vanni sector under the command of Mahattaya and viewed by Prabhakaran to be ‘unreliable’, were sent out on ‘missions impossible’ - e.g. as part of the first wave of a concerted attack on a fortified Sri Lankan military encampment in Pooneryn. An unenviable task at the best of times, which is usually the task of lower ranking cadres (i.e. the regular cannon fodder), the bulk of whom are young teenage boys and girls. No LTTE paramilitary can refuse or countermand a direct order from the supremo, since the penalty for insubordination is a death warrant (of

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57 Gunaratna notes that:

Except for the PLO [sic - no longer considered an ‘insurgent group’] and the IRA, the LTTE is the only insurgent group that owns and operates a fleet of deep sea going ships. Equipped with sophisticated radar and inmarsat for communication, the LTTE built its fleet from small beginnings. Today, the LTTE ships communicate with a land based inmarsat in Sri Lanka. The LTTE ships play a vital role in supplying explosives, arms, ammunition and other war related material to the theater of war...intelligence agencies with a global reach continue to monitor LTTE shipping activity quite closely but operationally could detect or prevent less than 20% of the weapon consignments from reaching the target. In fact, Ilyana, an LTTE ship that unloaded weapons off Mullaitivu [located in the north-eastern coastal region] in October 1987 was monitored by Indian vessels entering Rangoon harbor. Similarly Indian submarines, ships and aircraft’s [sic] have tracked LTTE ships over the years. Aware of this, LTTE has yet managed to keep most of its shipping fleet intact. The deceptive shipping operations, indigenously developed, avoids detection and surveillance. Yahata transporting weapons and explosives changed its name to *Ahut* [emphasis mine] by painting off the first and last letters of the ship’s name upon nearing the South Asian wars [sic - waters] (Gunaratna 1997:27-28).
varying degrees), it is better to chance the vagaries of mortal combat than otherwise. In the LTTE, Prabhakaran demands absolute loyalty, which gives him something akin to "total control" over the actions and (physical) bodies of his paramilitaries, with the ultimate sacrifice to his will being martyrdom and the oblivion of the hereafter.

Wilson states the following, while concluding his father-in-law Thanthai Chelva's political biography, "The TULF and, earlier, the FP were Vellala-dominated but were generally benevolent towards non-Vellalas...a bourgeois attitude...Chelvanayakam's world was of that texture" (Wilson 1994:139). Looking back to the 1930s, it is possible to get a feel of this nostalgic sense of magnanimity. Russell notes, that

"Some of the wealthiest Tamils came from Manipur. Most of them left their palatial buildings untenanted or in charge of some poor relation in order to reside and work in the metropolis. They returned home finally only in their old age. This was the rule' [cf. J.T. Rutmam (1970)]. This had certainly been the case with Ramanathan,58 [cf. Vytilingam Vol I] and Dr. Natesan merely emulated his august father-in-law in following the same pattern. It is to be remarked that many of the leading Ceylon Tamil politicians in the twentieth century, including W. Duraiswamy, A. Mahadeva,59 G.G. Ponnambalam,60 R. Sri Pathmanathan, C.

58 Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, K.C. (1851-1930), retired as Solicitor-General of the Crown Colony of Ceylon; entered Legislative Council as a nominated Tamil member in 1879; the first elected 'Educated Ceylonese Member' of Legislative Council, on a restricted franchise, 1911; re-elected, supported the Sinhalese in the Sinhala-Muslim riots of 1915; in and out of the constitutional reform movement 1879-1926; bitterly opposed Donoughmore Reforms 1930, without success...[and from the same family comes] Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam (1853-1924), brother of Sir P. Ramanathan; first Ceylonese to pass Ceylon Civil Service examination 1875; retired as Registrar-General of the Crown Colony of Ceylon 1913; the third Ceylonese to be appointed to the Executive Council of Ceylon (1912). On his retirement, he entered the constitutional reform movement and became a founder-leader and guiding spirit of the Ceylon National Congress. 1919. Lived to rue the day when he left the Congress in 1921 and formed the Ceylon Tamil League in 1922. when pledges given to him by the Sinhalese leadership had been violated (Wilson 1988:xii).

For more details and insights into communal politics under the Donoughmore Constitution, see Russell (1982). which Wilson summarizes as follows;

Earl of Donoughmore (1875-1948), headed Special Commission on Constitutional Reform, 1927, which recommended abolition of communal representation, introduction of universal franchise and a novel constitutional package based on the then London County Council model; these reforms came to be known under the rubric Donoughmore Constitution, 1931-1947 (Ibid: xi).

59 Sir Arunachalam Mohudeva (1855-1969), son of Sir P. Arunachalam; member State Council
Sunthralingam, K. Vaithianathan and even S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, in their turn have tended to correspond to this model. If, in attempting a historical analysis, one is tempted to draw what might be regarded as invidious distinctions between ‘Colombo’ Tamils and ‘Jaffna’ Tamils, it is because there would seem to be a definite demarcation, distinguishable even among the political representatives of the Northern Province. Crossette-Thambiah has said in 1972: ‘Unfortunately, Jaffna has always turned to Colombo to find its leaders. It was the Tamils living in Colombo who had the money and prestige to become leaders of Jaffna’ [cf. R.W. Crossette-Thambiah, *Stranger in His Land* (Colombo, 1972), p. 35] (Russell 1982:14,77).

The long-standing, leading role of Jaffna-centric, Colombo-based, middle and upper class, élite Tamil parliamentarians - who were by and large, a collective of professionals (e.g. lawyers, doctors) and land owners (many with professional, business and other connections in Colombo) - in the domain of Tamil nationalist politics, was eclipsed in a very short space of time (1970s to mid-1980s). One of the key factors that led to the


61 Professor of Mathematics, C. Sunthralingam, was a former adviser to the pan-Sinhala Board of Ministers in 1936 and the Member of Parliament for Vavuniya and cabinet Minister for Trade and Commerce (in the first cabinet of independent Ceylon, which was headed by Prime Minister, D.S. Senanayake of the UNP). Wilson notes that he was “a loser twice defeated in by-elections” (Wilson 1988:82), but nonetheless a prominent figure among Ceylon Tamil nationalist circles, in the eyes of Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam.

It took less than ten years after independence for trouble to blow up over S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike’s ‘Sinhala Only’ bill in 1956. That prompted C. Sunthralingam...to write a series of articles and letters between 1955 and 1964 advocating autonomy or, failing that, independence for ‘Eylom’. Legal, political and historical arguments were used in these articles to substantiate the claim for Tamil autonomy and for the age-old animosity between Sinhala and Tamils [sic]. These articles and letters are full of invective against the Federal Party and what he saw as its failure to demand full independence for ‘Eylom’ [cf. C. Sunthralingam 1967: *Eylom - Beginnings of Freedom Struggle - Eleven Documents, Colombo*] (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1990:115-116).

62 Sir Kantiuh Vaithianathan was a key player during the first post-independence government of Ceylon (led by Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake), “who at that time was Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of External Affairs (a portfolio held by the Prime Minister) and one of the Prime Minister’s most able civil servants and a guiding member of his group of advisers” (Wilson 1988:82).
eclipsing of these conventional parties, was their inability to transcend ‘traditional’ political practice - of coexisting with the Sinhalese power brokers in Colombo despite their separatist rhetoric and depending only to a limited extent on the coercive ‘activities’ of local toughs - and compete at the level of organised, technologically more advanced and utterly ruthless, paramilitary political violence.

The proponents of this new form of political violence were originally a rag-tag bunch of non-élite (in terms of power, prestige, connections and resources), rural (peninsula-based), non-Vellala Tamil paramilitaries (particularly from among the Karayur youth of Vadamarachchi) - who were once referred to simply as the ‘the boys’. A term of reference, that has lost its meaning, along with much of the professed ‘old world innocence’ of a previous generation, since ‘the boys’ took over the show, from around the mid-1980s. One of the principal reasons underlying this phenomenon was a prevalent notion among paramilitaries, that Tamil parliamentarians, were at the end of the day, “all talk with little or no action” (which was a dire condemnation of their leadership and politics). The era of action had dawned. And today it is the charismatic Karayur paramilitary supremo Prabhakaran and his cohorts, who have the money and prestige, not forgetting the guns and power (amounting

63 Russell notes in this context that:

By January 1933, the Jaffna peninsula was riven with endogenous bitterness. The [Jaffna] boycott [of the State Council elections, which took place on April 25, 1931] and the Jaffna Youth League were largely discredited, and G.G. Ponnambalam emerged as the one non-boycotting Northern politician to save the Jaffna Tamils [Ponnambalam and S.M. Ananthan at Mannar did not join the boycott in 1931. Ponnambalam lost by a narrow margin to Ananthan]. In January 1933, a ‘Conference of Tamils’ was formed to oust the Youth Congress dominance and the anti-boycott campaign was formally initiated. [Sir Ambalavancr] Kanagasabhai, [Sir Arunachalam] Mahadeva, and Sri Pathmanathan joined G.G. Ponnambalam, and the anti-boycotters then set about trying to secure a nomination day for a re-election in the Northern constituencies.

Throughout 1933, the peninsula was the scene of incidents of violence as boycotters and anti-boycotters clashed in demonstrations or at public meetings. Meetings were broken up by the opposing party; fights and all kinds of thuggery broke out in these clashes. At the Liberal League-Jaffna Youth Congress conference in April, C. Balasingham’s pandal was set on fire by anti-boycotters who tried to break up the meeting [Morning Star. April 28, 1933]. The bitterness engendered in this year makes it a ‘time of troubles’ in Ceylon Tamil political history (Russell 1982:39).

This is very small beer indeed, when compared with contemporary political violence of the 1980s and 1990s.
to de facto control over swathes of territory and people living in the east and north).

**Growth of Tamil Paramilitary Organisations**

Tamil paramilitary organisations emerged slowly but surely, as a militant response to the discrimination and political violence of state sponsored Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism, which was accompanied by Police and Army brutalities (primarily in the Jaffna peninsula) - in the wake of the anti-Tamil riots of 1956, 1958 and the decades that followed. In evidence since the early 1970s, *ad hoc* groupings such as the *Thamil Viduthalai Ivyakkam* or Tamil Liberation Organisation (TLO), led by the likes of Thangadurai and Kuttimani, began their embryonic organisational development. And as a result, a relatively low-key but concerted armed struggle was initiated from around 1972. This trend was followed in 1974 by the formation of the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) of which Velupillai Prabhakaran was a member. Out of these two precursory Tamil paramilitary groupings emerged the *Thamil Eelam Viduthalai Ivyakkam* or Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO - led by Sri Sabaratnam following the arrest of Thangadurai muma [uncle] and Kuttimani in 1981), the *Thamil Eelam Viduthalai Prilgal* or Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE - founded on May 5, 1976 and subsequently led by Prabhakaran from around 1981/82) and the *Thamil Eelam Makkal Viduthalai Kalahan* or People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOT E - led by the former chairman of the LTTE ‘Uma Maheswaran’ from around 1981, following his acrimonious break with Prabhakaran).

Right from the inception of the new *action model* of Tamil paramilitary nationalism, there were isolated but successful attempts by members of the embryonic Tamil paramilitary groupings in assassinating and coercing Tamils who had been branded as *traitors* - i.e. those who had links with the Sinhalese power brokers in Colombo. The first significant, successful action of political violence was executed by the TNT (according to the LTTE’s *Diary of Combat*) and involved the assassination on the August 27, 1975 of the mayor of Jaffna city, Alfred Duraiyappa. The victim was a representative of the then United Front (UF).
Centre-Left coalition government in Colombo, led by the SLFP (LTTE 1984; de Silva 1990:93; Schalk 1991:2, Swamy 1995:30-31/56-57). Subsequently, the label terrorist to the separatist-nationalist cause of Tamil Eelam became a convenient device to stifle all dissent, both within (as in the case of Mahattaya) and without (as in the case of Amirthalingam et al). And this tactic was not only the singular province of the LTTE but one that has been adopted by most (if not all) Tamil paramilitary organisations.

Under the action model of Tamil nationalism, Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism was being fought through Tamil chauvinism, with little end in sight (including the foreseeable future). The political stage was now set for the coming ethnocide, involving Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, which was to be followed by intra-Tamil and intra-Sinhalese fratricide. Closely linked to this phenomenon was the reinforcement of separatist strategies, which were aimed at establishing an exclusivist Tamil state of Eelam through armed struggle. An examination of the organisational names of many Tamil paramilitary groups (some of which, such as the TEA, TELA and TELF, no longer exist today having fallen victim to the internecine warfare unleashed by the LTTE since 1984) highlight this fact. For example: Thamil Eelam Viduthalai Puligal or Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Thamil Eelam Viduthalai Ivakkam or Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), Thamil Eelam Makkal Viduthalai Kadhal or People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Thamil Eelam Ranavam or Tamil Eelam Army (TEA), Thamil Eelam Viduthalai Ranavam or Tamil Eelam Liberation Army (TELA), and Thamil Eelam Viduthalai Munnani or Tamil Eelam Liberation Front (TELF).

The politically conscious exceptions to this populist wave of Tamil chauvinism were ‘Marxist’ or Left of Centre paramilitary organisations (despite occasional lapses on the ground in certain local contexts). Namely: the Eelam Makkal Purachchikara Viduthalai Munnani or Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the Eelam Makkal Jananayaga Kachchi or Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) and the Eelam Purachchi Amipu or Eelam Revolutionary Organisation (EROS). A possible addition to this list would be sections of the Eelam Thevooja Jananayaga Viduthalai Munnani or Eelam National Democratic Liberation
Front (ENDLF). Non-sectarian Tamil paramilitary groups using *Thamil* as part of the organisation name were more ideologically committed. Maoist-leaning organisations (none of which are in existence now). Namely: the *Thamil Theseeya Viduthalai Munmani* or National Liberation Front of Tamil Eelam (NLFT); the *Thamil Makkal Viduthalai Munmani* or People’s Liberation Front of Tamil Eelam (PLFT); and the *Thamil Makkal Pathakkam Peravai* (TMPP, translated as the ‘Tamil People’s Defence Federation’).

In the somewhat similar political ideologies articulated by the EPRLF, EPDP and a faction of the EROS, the concept of *Eelam* included a more open and inclusive understanding of the *Eelam peoples* - namely, Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese. This political consciousness led first of all to linkages (fraternal and less formal) from the early 1980s, with revolutionary groups based in the predominantly Sinhala regions of western, central and southern Sri Lanka, and later (from around 1988), with more mainstream Centre-Left political groups and parties. The ENDLF, which was an offshoot of the PLOTE, had a less clearly articulated political consciousness and was possibly a remnant of strategic options pursued by the PLOTE. The PLOTE, for its part, also encouraged linkages with non-Tamil revolutionaries, even though it opted for the notion of Tamil Eelam. In fact in the early years, almost all the Tamil paramilitary groups fed upon the prevalent Tamil chauvinist currents. However due to the foresight and political maturity of certain Tamil paramilitary leaders, such as the late Kandasamy Pathmanabha of the EPRLF, a handful of these organisations were able to overcome such populist influences. They were also able to help build bridges between Tamil nationalist paramilitaries and adherents of Left/Centre-Left (revolutionary and mainstream) political tendencies in the western, central and southern regions of Sri Lanka. Due to the climate of trust created (a commodity in short supply at the best of times) some of these linkages have survived up to the present, even after the untimely deaths of these pioneers.

The five major Tamil paramilitary groups that came into prominence in the 1980s were the LTTE, EPRLF, PLOTE, TELO and EROS. It is important to note here, that ‘the Tamil rebellion’, as it is sometimes
referred to, is not a homogeneous challenge. The bloody internecine warfare and power struggles within and between the Tamil paramilitary groups, demonstrates this very clearly. These intense struggles also led to the marginalisation of conventional Tamil parliamentary parties/groupings and their brand of politics. After much Tamil blood had been spilt by Tamils in the internecine warfare that ensued, it was Prabhakaran’s LTTE that emerged as the politico-military victors.

The fratricide unleashed by the LTTE destroyed any real chance for a united Tamil paramilitary position. These intra-Tamil conflicts only escalated (in spurts) from May 1986 onwards, when the TELO was crushed by the LTTE. The brief but unsuccessful attempts to repair good relations between the LTTE, TELO, EPRLF and EROS, under a joint front called the Eelam National Liberal Front (ENLF) - founded in April 1985 - finally broke down in December 1986, when the LTTE also attacked the EPRLF. The PLOTE was never allowed into the ENLF due to Prabhakaran’s vendetta against its leader ‘Uma Maheswaran’ - the roots of which go back as late as 1979, around which time the PLOTE emerged as a breakaway group from the LTTE, due to internal power struggles. A move, that was vehemently opposed by Prabhakaran.

By the end of 1986, the LTTE had banned all other Tamil paramilitary groups from operating in ‘the land’ and thereby effectively forced around 10,000 paramilitaries from ‘rival’ organisations into ‘exile’ in India and areas not held by the LTTE. Many of these paramilitaries were to leave the struggle altogether and become part of the Tamil Diaspora in Europe, North America and Australasia. Around 1990, the EROS was coerced into an ‘amalgamation’ of sorts with the LTTE and does not exist as an independent entity in any serious sense any longer. Despite the fact that it has been party to political negotiations in the recent past under the name of its officially registered political party, the Eelam Democratic Front (EDF). These particular negotiations first took place during the sittings of a Parliamentary Select Committee set up on August 20, 1991 - with the approval of the then President, Premadasa. The talks were under the chairmanship of Mangala Moonesinghe (who was then an opposition Member of Parliament belonging to the SLFP) - and involved

74
"seven Tamil organisations, TULF, EPRLF, ENDLF, ACTC, EDF (the political party of EROS) and DPLF (the political party of PLOTE)" (Loganathan 1997:170). Subsequent negotiations have been held in June 1996 with the current President Kimaratunga, which also included the EPDP, an organisation opposed to the LTTE that has emerged as somewhat of a key player. This particular set of negotiations focused on meaningful devolution and constitutional changes (transition from a Unitary State to a Federalist option), as a solution to the ongoing crisis in the north and east (also referred to as 'the Tamil question').

There have also been questions raised in 1997, that a breakaway faction of the ENDLF has allied itself with the LTTE. Sceptics argue to the contrary, that the LTTE-supremo does not need the marginal cadres-power of this breakaway faction and neither was he going to act any different to his 'often paranoid' modus operandi. An example provided in this context, is the summary execution of a number of LTTE cadres who tunneled their way to freedom out of a prison in Tamil Nadu, India in 1995 and made it across the Palk Strait (having evaded a state-wide manhunt) to rejoin their organisation, on the suspicion that they might be 'Indian spies or assassins'. The EPRLF maintained a brief presence in parliament and nominally functions today as a 'mainstream political party', despite its failure to win a second round of parliamentary seats in the general elections held in 1994 and lack of dynamism of its current leadership. At the same time, other more 'active' connections have also sprung up (from the late 1980s onwards), given the exigencies of realpolitik and 'your enemy's enemy is my friend' syndrome. Following this trend, a breakaway faction from the EPRLF, the 'Rasik group' was militarily active in the eastern province, as an irregular military unit attached to the Sri Lankan Army. Similarly the ex-PLOTE 'Mohan group' is also active in the Jaffna peninsula. The EPDP and PLOTE64 (and to a lesser extent the TELO), maintain a more formal military presence on the ground, as well as in the current parliament (1994 to date), given their authoritative position as long-standing allies of the government of Sri Lanka's armed forces on the ground, in the (common) fight against the LTTE.

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64 The Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF) is a breakaway faction from the PLOTE.
minimalist negotiating position maintained by these Tamil paramilitary collaborationist-nationalists is that the
PA government should:

1. Formally create a Tamil brigade or division (made up predominantly of their cadres), as part of the Sri
Lankan armed services (which are currently made up by more than 90% Sinhalese), and
2. Facilitate the formation of an interim council for the governance of the north and east, in order to create an
alternative power to counter the politico-military hegemony of the LTTE.

It is estimated that the LTTE had at one time (around the late 1980s and early 1990s) over 3,000 prisoners who
belonged to these rival groups, as well as an unspecified number of former LTTE paramilitaries being kept
prisoner (many of whom are reported to be those who have refused to fight on)- none of whom have been
accounted for. Therefore, there is ample reason for members of other paramilitary organisations and anti-
Prabhakaran factions within the LTTE (e.g. paramilitaries that once were loyal to the executed “Mahattaya”) to
settle old scores and vice versa. As a result, the intra-Tamil paramilitary revenge/counter-revenge syndrome
looks set to continue unabated.

**Anti-Tamil Riots and Indian Intervention**

An important aspect that requires mention is the impact of inter-ethnic riots. A second wave of anti-Tamil
riots, were set in motion by Sinhala mobs in 1971, 1977, 1979, 1981 and 1983, which fuelled separatist
convictions and strengthened the embryonic Tamil paramilitary groups. The bulk of these riots were during the
reign of President Jayawardene’s UNP regime - the worst of which was conducted in July 1983 (of an
unprecedented scale and intensity), with tacit official sanction (or at least backing from influential ministers
within the cabinet). Jayawardene’s Machiavellian brand of politics witnessed an increased ruthlessness in the
actions of state forces, along with an active suppression of the agencies of democracy - epitomised by the
guardians of the rule of law, namely, the judiciary. As noted by Human Rights Watch in a book titled *Slaughter Among Neighbours: The Political Origins of Communal Violence*:

The politicization of the police and military along ethnic lines, the active involvement of government forces in ethnic attacks, and its failure to prosecute offenders from human rights violations against Tamil civilians led to a rise in Tamil militancy and to attacks on Sinhalese and Muslim civilians. Government forces engaged in similar attacks on Tamils. Ethnic hatred escalated into civil war, a political conflict defined along ethnic lines (Human Rights Watch 1995:100).

With the anti-Tamil riots of July 1983 a decisive moment in this narration of Sri Lankan political violence had dawned. These riots were an important series of incidents, which were emotionally charged moments and led to a phenomenal expansion in the cadre strength of Tamil paramilitary organisations across the board (as a reaction against factual and fictive atrocities by the majority Sinhalese). And ethnic hatred and revenge were key mobilising elements. In fact, the anti-Tamil riots of 1983 set the stage for much of the (increased) political violence that followed in the north and east. However a very important geo-political event preceded this escalation of political violence in Sri Lanka.

The anti-Tamil riots of 1971, 1977, 1979, 1981 and 1983 in Sri Lanka, were viewed (increasingly) with deep consternation, by Tamilian nationalists across the Palk Strait (in Tamil Nadu). Particularly by activists who belonged to: the Tamil Nadu Kamraj Congress (TNKC, led by one of the most extreme Tamilian nationalist leaders, P. Nedumaran); the All India Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK or the ‘All India Anna Dravidian Progressive Front’, led at the time by the late M.G. Ramachandran, also referred to as “MGR”); Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK or the ‘Dravidian Progressive Front’, led by present Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M. Karunanidhi, also referred to as “Kalaingar”); and the Dravida Kazhagam (DK or the ‘Dravidian Front’, led by an extreme Tamilian nationalist K. Veeramani). The political roots of these Dravidian nationalists go back to the Tamilian revivalism, and anti-Hindi and anti-Brahmin.

65 See various reports of the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) for more details.

66 Kazhagam is pronounced as ‘Kalaham’.

Tambiah notes that:

One of its major features was the anti-Brahman movement of the non-Brahman castes with its many-faceted programme which rejected alien Sanskrit elements in language and literature, alien brahmanic elements in religious ritual and practice, contested the social and political dominance of the Brahman minority, and mobilised the DMK (Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam)... It too generated a new sense of social and cultural identity, a revivalism in literature, and a reformism in religion, and while seeking pristine roots and releasing creative impulses also spawning tendentious mythohistory, and preached and paraded a chauvinist militant Tamilian nationalism. The hoary and fabled North-South, Aryan-Dravidian divides were resurrected and made politically alive in terms of a twentieth-century democratic politics in which majorities sought to wipe out historic wrongs and to engage in corrective affirmative action in a theatre of populist rhetoric and ethnic nationalism. In many ways Tamil Nadu politics parallels that of Sri Lanka, though there are also distinct differences between them (Tambiah 1986:110-111).

In the aftermath of the July 1983 riots, thousands of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka arrived on South Indian shores. "The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam... demanded that India should deploy its troops to save the Sri Lankan Tamils. Tamils all over India expressed sympathy by taking out processions and marking [sic-marching] to the Sri Lankan Consulates in India" (Mohan 1987:135). Unable to disregard popular sentiments over the plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka, the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, AlADMK's Ramachandran was prompted into making a personal appeal to the Prime Minister of India, calling for intervention.

The Prime Minister (at the time) was the ruling Congress (I) party's leader Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who proceeded to act out of greater Indian, national self-interest. Mohan notes that "Apart from the burden of refugees, the [internal] political situation of the period prompted the Indian Prime Minister to condemn 'the genocide' of Tamils in Sri Lanka" (Ibid). In principle, Indira Gandhi was against the ideology of separatist nationalism, being espoused by Tamil paramilitaries (for the creation of an independent and sovereign state of Eelam in north and east Sri Lanka). Nevertheless, she instructed a key senior advisor in her cabinet and the then chairman of India's Policy Planning Committee, Gopalaswamy Parthasarathy (himself a South Indian

78
Tamilian-Brahmin, referred to commonly as “GP”), to implement a new policy measure pertaining to Sri Lanka. And in an official diplomatic response to President Jayawardene concerning the July 1983 anti-Tamil riots, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi “conveyed that, ‘because of historical, cultural and such other close links between the people of the two countries, particularly between the Tamil community of Sri Lanka and us, India cannot remain unaffected by such events there’” (Ibid).

India’s new Sri Lanka policy was aimed, first of all, towards improving Indian policy-making and intelligence capabilities to deal with the growing crisis in north and east Sri Lanka. The underlying belief was that ‘the known devil was more easily identifiable and thereby manoeuvrable, than the unknown’. Therefore GP and the ‘South Block’ (the key policy-making body in New Delhi, which comes directly under both the Prime Minister’s Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) - operationally under the aegis of the (New Delhi-based) Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC)67 - set in motion a mechanism that enticed (Eelamist) Tamil paramilitaries into dialogue, and (eventually) attempted subjugation and control. Parthasarathy was also entrusted (as Mrs. Gandhi’s personal envoy) with the intermediary role of drawing President Jayawardene’s government in Colombo, away from a military solution and the task of setting up an alternative method aimed at bringing the conflict to an end. The first of the twin-strategies adopted by Mrs. Gandhi’s team to fail was the efforts aimed at reaching a negotiated settlement. And as noted by Wilson68 this was due to the rejection of its main plank ‘Annexure C’ by members of Jayawardene’s cabinet:

Parthasarathy met President Jayawardena [sic] in New Delhi in December 1983, and the two men drew up a document commonly referred to as ‘Annexure C’, which the President said he

67 During the Bangladesh operation, “several [Indian] intelligence agencies also had input into the decision-making process through [the] Joint Intelligence Committee consisting of representatives from the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the Intelligence Bureau, and the directors of intelligence under the three armed services, headed by the vice chief of staff” (Sisson and Rose 1990:140).

68 Wilson was himself a one-time intermediary between the then Sri Lankan President Jayawardene and the TULF, as well as an unofficial Constitutional Adviser to President Jayawardene from 1978-83, immediately prior to Parthasarathy’s involvement with the Sri Lankan embroilglo.
would submit for the consideration of an All Parties Conference to be convened in January 1984. The document had its roots in previous district councils plans but was wider in scope and provided for a more extensive range of powers to the districts or provinces (Wilson 1988:176).

The failure of ‘Annexure C’ was followed, by diplomatic arm-twisting by the Indians, who attempted to force Jayawarden e back to the negotiation table. This was an event that did not take place for another four years, until the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord was signed in Colombo on July 29, 1987, between the (new) Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (who succeeded his assassinated mother) and President Jayawarden e. However, this event too would have been impossibility had senior Indian diplomats not threatened Jayawarden e with the ‘Manekshaw model’ (in relation to the Sri Lankan crisis). This model of Indian geopolitics, is in effect, an interventionist plan of action first implemented in 1971 by General S.F.H.J. (Sam) Manekshaw (the then Indian Chief of Staff who was later promoted to Field Marshal) - which saw the military defeat of the East Pakistani forces under the command of General A.A.K. Niazi and the emergence of a new separate state called Bangladesh (Sisson and Rose 1990). As in the Bangladesh operation, success on the ground meant having ‘friendly forces’ that the Indian military could install as the ‘new political heirs apparent’. For the successful implementation of this model in the Sri Lankan case, another strategy had to be adopted, one which ‘rope d in’ the Tamil paramilitaries to ‘play ball’ (according to Indian geopolitical considerations).

On the other side of the Sri Lankan divide, the carrot that was offered to the Tamil paramilitary groups (that had been identified as potential targets), was the clandestine provision of Indian-sponsored ‘military training’ (rudimentary infantry training and latterly, very limited special operations capabilities). This was followed by (tacit) official approval to use secluded sites in Tamil Nadu (in the districts of Thanjavur, Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai, Tirunelvelly, South Arcot, Chengalpattu, Madurai, Salem, Tiruchi, Coimbatore) as rear base facilities. Primarily for the procurement and transport of weapons, ammunition, explosives and other items of warfare; conduct of clandestine infantry training camps; use of state hospital facilities;
unhindered crossing of the Palk Strait; and most importantly, maintenance of UHF/VHF (coded) radio communication with cadres in north and east Sri Lanka. As a spin off, it was believed by the (pre-Indian Peace Keeping Force) policy makers in New Delhi, that central Indian authorities and their apparatuses would be able to secure the Tamil paramilitaries, like a ‘bird in the hand’ (viewed literally, as ‘worth more than two in the bush’). It was also perceived that Indian agencies would be able to pinpoint and nip in the bud, any resurgent signs of anti-Hindi (anti-northerner) nationalism (Nambi 1980) and curtail the subversive activities of Maoist revolutionary groups. For example, preventing such groups as the (neo-Naxalite) People’s War Group (PWG) from receiving assistance from Eelamist Tamil paramilitary groups (in Tamil Nadu and other parts of India).

In fact, there were instances in the mid-1980s of small, Maoist-leaning, Tamil paramilitary groups like the TMPP, NLFT and PLFT, where assistance was provided to neo-Naxalite groups like the PWG in South India. The LTTE for its part, has also trained and even supplied weapons to a number of Indian, anti-establishment (ultra-radical) and separatist paramilitary groups. Particularly after the induction of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in 1987 and the subsequent fighting that took place, between the IPKF and the LTTE (Karim 1993:69-79, Baral and Muni 1996:29, Bastianpillai 1996:213-214). The insurgent groups supported by the LTTE, which entailed technical, material and logistical support, include:

- In Tamil Nadu - the Viduthalai Kulihal (a literal translation would be the ‘Liberation Cuckoos’, a group headed by Saba Veerapandian - in Tamil, ‘Kulihal’ rhymes with ‘Pulihal’, a reference to ‘the Tigers’, the feared nom de guerre of the LTTE); the Tamilar Pusarai (literally the ‘Tamilian Camp’, a group linked to P. Nedumaran, the leader of the Tamil Nadu Kamraj Congress, a long-standing supporter and personal friend of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran); the “Thileepan69 Munichai” (or the ’Thileepan Foundation’, a

69 Amirthalingam Thileepan is the ‘Bobby Sands’ of the LTTE and fasted to the death in September 1987 in accordance with the orders of his leader Prabhakaran.
group led by Thilag); and the *Thamil Thilekkam Meedpu Padaip* (the Tamil National Retrieval Troops or TNRT).

- In Andhra Pradesh - the faction of the Peoples War Group (PWG) led by Kondapalliseetharaman.
- In Assam and Nagaland - the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland.

It is alleged in certain quarters, that these anti-Indian actions carried out by the LTTE after 1987, were secretly aided and abetted by the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence Agency (the ISI is a Pakistani military intelligence agency that has been known to engage in covert operations, aimed at destabilising Indian hegemony in South Asia - since the Indo-Pakistan wars). In return, the LTTE was apparently provided with unhindered access to Pakistani-based arms markets (of Afghan origin) in Peshawar and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).

Logically, given these historical precedents, the great fear among Indian ‘policy-wallahs’ is the possibility of Tamil separatism in north and east Sri Lanka, catching on in the Indian mainland. Such an eventuality could in a hypothetically worse case scenario, spark off the beginning of the end for the unitary character of the Republic of India (given its extremely heterogeneous composition). The Indian federal union is made up of twenty-five states (including Tamil Nadu) and seven centrally administered union territories that accommodate literally hundreds of ethnic, linguistic, religious and social formations, groups and sub-groups. This inherent paranoia among the Indian ‘top brass’ proved to be quite advantageous, particularly for the five principal Tamil paramilitary groups. Although it needs to be mentioned, that they did not all benefit at the same time and to the same extent, due to strategies of ‘divide and rule’. Another reason for this was competition and lack of co-ordination between a plethora of Indian agencies (affiliated to the central

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70 There are approximately forty-six officially listed ‘mother tongues’ in India, seventeen of which, including Tamil, have the added status of being officially 'recognized languages'.
government and/or the Tamil Nadu state government), ‘handling intelligence operations’. Technically speaking, these agencies - namely, the ‘South Block’, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Naval Intelligence, Military Intelligence (MI), and Tamil Nadu’s - Q Branch, Special Branch and the Criminal Intelligence Department (CID) - are all accountable to and under the aegis of the JIC (which was definitely not the case in practice, given inter-agency rivalries and sycophancy vis-à-vis the powers of the day). ‘Indian training’ and rear base facilities, are factors which enabled the five major Tamil paramilitary groups to make qualitative jumps in terms of technological know how, logistics and capacities to wage war against the Sri Lankan armed services. And thereby, counter the hegemony of the Sinhala dominated state and its monopoly over large-scale practices of political violence.

*Continuation of Politics by Other Means*

Other important moments, though not in the same league, which have had considerable impact in the continuation of violent political practices in the north and east and (to a lesser extent) in other parts of Sri Lanka, involve the LTTE’s repeated intransigence vis-à-vis attempted, negotiated political settlements (Loganathan 1996).  

1. Thimpu Negotiations I (8-13 July 1985) - between the J.R. Jayawardene-led United National Party (UNP) Regime and the main Tamil paramilitary organisations - conducted through Indian mediation.  
2. Thimpu Negotiations II (12-17 August 1985) - between the J.R. Jayawardene-led UNP Regime and the main Tamil paramilitary organisations.  
3. Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord (29 July 1987- March 1990) - during time of the Indian Peace Keeping...

71 For an opinion of the role of Indian intelligence agencies in the Sri Lankan embroglio, albeit from the perspective of their Sri Lankan counterparts see Gunaratna (1994).  
72 Ketheswaran Loganathan (a native Sri Lankan of traditional Jaffna Tamil origins) was a senior member of the EPLRF, directly involved (during the periods 1983-88 and 1992-94) in the war and processes of reaching a negotiated political settlement.
Force intervention under the terms of the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord signed by President Jayawardene and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and agreed to, albeit under Indian duress, by all Tamil paramilitary organisations.

4. R. Premadasa-led UNP Regime-LTTE Talks (12 April-June 1990) - after the withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), during the short-lived reign of the Premadasa-led UNP regime.

5. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga-led People's Alliance (PA) government-LTTE Negotiations (August 1994-19 April 1995) - the first attempt at peacemaking during the tenure of the PA coalition government, which was elected to office in 1994 on a peace platform and a resolution to the ethnic conflict

The LTTE reneged on the agreements it made under the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord, which were namely: to observe a cease-fire, surrender weapons, join the political mainstream as a recognised political party and contest provincial council elections, in order to obtain the substantial devolution of powers and resources to the Tamil inhabitants of the north and east. Among the principle reasons for the LTTE leadership’s change of tack, was the perception among its leadership, that it could lose out on power if more politically manoeuvrable and less hard-line groups, such as the EPRLF, were able to muster enough electoral votes through superior campaigning. My impression, is that the logic of militarism and existing cultural codes of political violence and practice (which had been prevalent up to that time) - what I have termed as the combat mode (de Silva 1995a) - were more appealing and ‘comfortable’ for the LTTE’s leadership. For them, it was easier to follow such an option, rather than getting involved with the uncertainties of peacetime and the electoral process. Especially in the eyes of its supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran, the LTTE as an organisation is more geared to warfare and mortal combat, rather than to tasks of electioneering, reconstruction and rehabilitation, let alone demilitarisation and demobilisation. Therefore, the LTTE hierarchy chose (after some internal wrangling it is rumoured, which may have accounted for the demise of Mahattaya) the ‘known devil over the unknown’ and
ended up in armed conflict against the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF).

Thus far, the logic of militarism, the conditions of political antagonism and their relational practices have served the LTTE in good stead. It has outlived the IPKF (which withdrew at the end of March 1990), outmatched the EPRLF and the ill-fated North-East Provincial Council (which was dissolved by the Premadasa-regime sometime after the departure of the IPKF), outlasted the JVP (which was militarily crushed by the Sri Lankan armed services) and fought the Sri Lankan armed services to a virtual stalemate. The short-lived successes of the government of Sri Lanka's large-scale, combined armed service operations of *Riviresa* (Sunrise) I and II enabled the joint Sri Lankan government forces to re-capture the Jaffna peninsula and put the LTTE on a more defensive footing. However, during the implementation of this stratagem, the LTTE was able to withdraw the bulk of its paramilitary forces out of the northern peninsula without any serious casualties. The withdrawal of Sri Lankan forces from many other sectors, particularly in the east, has allowed the LTTE greater mobility, particularly in the North-central Vanni district and in the eastern province. A telling example in the LTTE's costly campaign to regain and maintain its prestige, was the total annihilation of the Sri Lanka army garrison at the key Mullaitivu jungle base. This particular operation cost the LTTE dearly in terms of thousands of combat casualties. Nevertheless, it also resulted in an estimated loss of around 2,000 Sri Lankan soldiers, the capture of more than US$ 30 million worth of military hardware, including longrange Chinese-made artillery pieces and control of a strategic stretch of coastline with direct access to sea lanes. In March 2000, the LTTE continues to maintain military pressure through continuous hit and run ground and sea-based attacks in the northern Jaffna peninsula. Other operations with clear military objectives have been in coastal waters off the Northeast, as well as the occasional commando raid elsewhere, such as the audacious but abortive sea-borne operation carried out by the Sea Tigers in Colombo harbour. There are also sizeable land-based LTTE units that operate in the jungles of the eastern province and continue probing operations against selected army and police garrisons - south of Trincomalee right down to Panama - a constant thorn in the side
of the Sri Lankan military. In an attempt to save face in light of the Mullaitivu debacle, Sri Lankan combined forces captured the last LTTE-held town of Kilinochchi, with the reported loss of 250 soldiers, compared to 800 on the side of the LTTE. Subsequently the LTTE reversed these losses, leading to a seesaw battle for comparatively small though strategic portions of territory. However, none of this action on the military front has changed the overall game plan, which is deadlocked into a stalemate with no outright winner.

The current stalemate has been costly for both sides in terms of men and material. The bulk of the LTTE’s fighting force is now living in malaria infested jungles with lack of access to conventional hospitals - south of Elephant Pass, north of Trincomalee and Vavuniya and east of Mannar - as well as in the eastern districts. The over-stretched Sri Lankan military and its current politico-military allies (PLOTE, TELO, EPDP, EPRLF and ENDLF), have lost their monopoly of violence over the years, particularly in contested spaces of the north and east, and have been forced instead to ‘share’ this monopoly with paramilitaries from the LTTE.

The morale of the predominantly Sinhala, Sri Lankan armed forces has also been seriously dented, signified through the large number of deserters and the lack of volunteers to fill in much needed vacancies.

On the humanitarian side, there is a desperate necessity for a negotiated political settlement - with or without third party mediation - to bring about a lasting cease-fire and an end to the loss of life - civilians and combatants alike. In other words, there is dire need in Sri Lanka, to support all efforts at demilitarisation, demobilisation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction, which go hand in hand with processes of conflict resolution and good governance. Human Rights Watch, has this to say about the current situation.

New efforts by Sri Lanka’s government to redress the grievances of its citizens and account for abuses committed against members of all ethnic groups by state forces and other political actors is an essential first step in the creation of any lasting peace in Sri Lanka. But the damage done by years of politically contrived enmity and bloodshed promises to make any peace process a tentative one, and any political solution fragile. The Sri Lankan people have shown great popular support for an end to the fighting, but it will take a lot to repair their faith in political forces (Human Rights Watch 1995:100).

The Sri Lankan crisis has been nominally ameliorated, with the election (in 1994) of the PA coalition
government, which was elected to office (as noted by Human Rights Watch) on a peace platform. However, there are still great many changes that need to be implemented, in order to redress this situation -

- Bringing to account members of death squads, particularly those who were affiliated to the Sri Lankan armed services (some of whom are still in operational units) through the judicial system;
- Dismantling of the omnipotent powers of executive presidency and making the president more accountable to parliament;
- Implementing the right to free media and other forms of expression, particularly in the realm of politics, that are in accordance with internationally accepted standards of democracy to which Sri Lanka is a signatory; and most importantly,
- Eradication of corruption and ethical malpractice (at all levels) within government (in particular, in relation to bribery, commission-taking, political favouritism and nepotism in appointments and promotions, as well as politically motivated demotions and punishment transfers).
- The adoption of a multipartisan approach, on the side of the political parties represented in the Sri Lankan parliament, so that a united negotiating position can be garnered in order to reach an equitable settlement to ‘the Tamil question’ and cope with the problematic posed by the separatist LTTE. The bipartisan protocol signed on 3rd April 1997 (reportedly following coaxing by Tory MP Dr Liam Fox an emissary of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office), between the PA’s President Kumaratunga and the UNP’s Ranil Wickremasinghe (the leader of the opposition in parliament) seems to point in the right direction. And subsequent high-level consultations between the government and opposition between January and April 2000 and formally inviting Norway as a third-party mediator are positive moves in the volatile and highly charged context of “jaw-jaw, war-war”.

Since the early 1970s then, the steady escalation in the levels of political violence in operation in Sri Lanka has been inexorable, given the strategies adopted by successive regimes in exercising hegemony over the peoples
of Sri Lanka at the cost of democracy. These short sighted policy decisions have resulted in the longterm erosion of the rule of law, the powers of the judiciary and other democratic institutions. The contemporary militarisation of the body politic and bloody hegemonic/counter-hegemonic conflicts have led to the continuation of politics by other means à la Carl von Clausewitz. This is further compounded by war-related kickbacks and commission-taking in a situation where the government of Sri Lanka now spends an average of 50 billion rupees a year on military procurements for the war effort in the north and east. The cumulative affects of these and related factors have led to incalculable costs in terms of material damage and destruction of human resources - in a country that was once thought to be a model of post-colonial parliamentary democracy.

*Historicity and Theorising Violence*

As I have alluded to in the three quotes at the beginning of this chapter, there are three primary locations or spaces, where situated practices of political violence are unleashed and acted out. The first of these locations or levels, are physical sites or geographical spaces where situated practices of political violence are enacted. Namely: along the (sandy) coastal littoral - i.e. anti-clockwise from Panama (and Kumana) in the Southeast, around the East covering Trincomalee and Mullaitivu, on around the Northern Jaffna Peninsula, down to Kalpitiya and Karaitivu (north of Puttalam) in the Northwest, to the jungle interior of the North-central province. In these locations gently swaying coconut palms (depending on the strength of the breeze) and other tropical flora of a myriad shades of green, cloak a military stalemate in one ‘major theatre of combat’. An almost ‘silent’ stalemate as war as the global media is concerned. Carried out in times of throat parching, all enveloping, sticky heat and during the wetness of monsoonal downpours, night and day, over land and sea. Interspersed with the sounds and loud reports of sporadic skirmishes and the continuous, daily throb of military aircraft, droning ever on, like a thousand angry bees - a clue that speaks volumes, that all is not well in
this resplendent land.

The second quote relates to material conditions and psycho-social realms of fear and anguish, terror, hatred, revenge, cruelty, humiliation and helplessness, felt and remembered, again and again, by humans living in built-up areas of rural and urban Sri Lanka. Many of who have been touched by the emissaries of death, who are the silent majority, witnesses to the manifold violations of human rights (primarily vis-à-vis the right to life and freedom to live in peace and harmony, over the long-term). These are the felt sensibilities resulting from situated practices of agents of political violence, who themselves cannot escape the nightmares of their deeds - many of whom, like “Mahattaya” of yesteryear, live and die by the sword, or are exiled, to live far away from the land of their dreams.

Related to the psycho-social realms of political violence is the third quote, which deals with the secret sphere of self-sacrifice, where young Tamil women, men and even children willingly follow the pied piper, down a path of no return, where the brave (wisely) fear to tread. It is control over this sphere and the sophisticated use of technology (including the information super highway) which has given Prabhakaran and the LTTE the cutting edge over all rivals, much to their (grudging) envy.

Having stated the above, I now comment on the historical sketch drawn in the previous sections of this chapter. This unfolded glimpses of moments in Sri Lankan time and space (some of them rare, while others are of a more standard orientation), concerning the political actions of groups and individual actors (present and past). To have done otherwise would have been considered a disservice to readers, the majority of whom would be in line with the more traditional demand for me (as the author) to be ‘historically informative’ and to place ‘the object of my investigation’ within ‘its historical context’ (or ‘backdrop’). At the theoretical level, there are certain difficulties with such a demand. As Dominick LaCapra has argued, “an appeal to context is deceptive...one never has - at least in the case of complex texts - the context. The assumption that one does relies upon a hypostatization of ‘context’, often in the sense of misleading organic or overtly reductive
analogues" (LaCapra 1983:35). Frank Ankersmit, follows a similar line of argumentation, which runs counter to the traditionalist demands of the central historicist dogma (noted above), and reasons that-

The context is historically no less complex and no less problematically given, than the historical object we want to understand by contextualizing it. One may suppose that the (mistaken) belief that we can gain access to a historical object by placing it in its wider historical context, is a methodological reminiscence of the historicist metaphysics of ‘Universalgeschichte’ [universal history]. With the disappearance of metaphor (and epistemology), however, historicist contextualization will be replaced by de-contextualization, for it was always the historiist ‘point of view’ [a spatial metaphor] that permitted the historian to see the contextual coherence of the elements of the past. With the collapse of Mink’s [1987] metaphor of the vantage point from which the flow of the river of time can be surveyed and the emergence of the post-modernist oxymoron of ‘the point of view of the absence of points of view’, the elements of the past regain their autonomy and become independent of one another. The result is the fragmentation of the past into independent entities or particulars, emphasis mine so characteristic of the post-modernist picture of the past (Ankersmit 1995:37).

Philosophically speaking, the very broad canvas referred to by the generic term postmodernism is in fact an eclectic enterprise, selecting opinions from different systems of knowledge. And according to the quite controversial anthropologist and linguist Stephen Tyler (in the gaze of many of his more conventional colleagues):

Post-modernism resists historicization and avoids historical argument as a means of periodization or as the enabling condition for critique. Its figures do not privilege lineal,
irreversible monotonic, periodic or punctuative time in which segments arrange themselves in ordered, connected, and directed sequences. To put it another way, it resists the idea of narrative consequence as a foundational mode of organising discourse and thought. It is more comfortable with the notion of pluralities of parallel times that are akin alike to the real times of everyday life and to the hyper-real times of dreams and memories, multiple, simultaneous times that overlap, interpenetrate, repeat, parallel, spiral, spurt, slow, and encompass one another. It is a different geometry of time in which superimposition, spirals, and parallels that sometimes cross are the figures of its figuration (Tyler 1995:78-79).

Tyler goes on to argue, that *historicism* is just a “kind of hypocritical relativism”, 74 which “projects a judgement from a site that is not the direct object of the judgement, as for example, a judgement in the present about the past” (Ibid: 80).

As mentioned in chapter one, history is understood in this text, as memories, particularly those relating to (folk) narratives of Tamil paramilitaries-in-exile. What Tyler refers to as “pluralities of parallel times that are akin to the real times of everyday life...multiple, simultaneous times that overlap, interpenetrate, repeat, parallel, spiral, spurt, slow, and encompass one another” (Ibid: 79). In the context of this research, while not trying to be as ambitious as Tyler, I choose to represent spatial ‘realities’ of times gone by through specific experiential narratives of parallel times, as remembered by a number of Tamil paramilitaries and myself. That is narrative representations that are other than standard notions of Sri Lankan politics and history. What I found out during my interviews, was that time had to a great extent ‘stood still’ in the memories of my interviewees and myself, in relation to events in our personal life histories, and that these moments of

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74 On a related point, concerning a similar ‘kind of hypocritical relativism’, Tyler argues that:

Post-modernism is pluralistic without being relativistic. Paradoxically, relativism requires some fixed position from which to be relative. It needs a transcendental moment or location from which the judgment of relativism can be projected. All perspectival notions of relativism involve ‘sited sightings’, and entail at least one site that facilitates at least one panoptic sighting of other possible sites-for-seeing, and which is, for that judgmental moment, not itself relative to those other sites-for-sighting, until it too loses itself once again in the undifferentiated plurality of sights. Pluralism does not entail relativism, even though it may be one of the conditions for it. This neither argues for nor against the idea of perspectival relativity, the sighting-of-sites-for-sighting, but it does imply that sights and sites are odd figures outside the figuration of vision (Tyler 1995:80).
remembering were only a snapshot of the past. In other words moments which simply could not be completely integrated (from beginning to end) in ‘a historical narrative of political violence in Sri Lanka’. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot has argued so cogently, “the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production” (Trouillot 1995:xix). In his exposé, Trouillot goes on to argue that these forces “are less visible than gunfire, class property, or political crusades...[but] they are no less powerful” (Ibid). He rejects “both the naïve proposition that we are prisoners of our pasts and the pernicious suggestion that history is whatever we make of it” (Ibid). In Trouillot’s opinion, “history is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous...[And the] ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots” (Ibid).

In fact, one can never ‘tell the whole story’ due to a number of methodological drawbacks and ethical concerns. For example, in reading my ‘traditional historical piece’ on Locations of Violence, one finds an enormous (and helpful) mass of information. This is interspersed with occasional instances of ‘not being able to see the wood from the trees’ - a problematic that is common to this type of social science writing (however well organised). And as a matter of strategic choice, as James Clifford argues, “Experiential, interpretive, dialogical, and polyphonic processes are at work, discordantly, in any ethnography, but coherent presentation presupposes a controlling mode of authority. I have argued that this imposition of coherence on an unruly textual process is now inescapably a matter of strategic choice”’ (Clifford 1988:54). I deal with this, and other related methodological and ethical issues, in the following chapter on Limits of Empiricism, Information Gathering and Knowledge Construction.

What I do represent in this research, are particularistic narratives pertaining to independent identities and ‘realities’ of situated practices of political violence, that highlight certain specific aspects of Tamil paramilitary culture and group dynamics (such as survival instincts in the face of adversity and pragmatic
views of the future). And it is also my desire, through this experimental work, to demystify some of the ‘mystique and secrecy’ surrounding agents of political violence, who are seen in action globally. Such experimental processes of understanding, will no doubt provide food for thought - a pre-requisite to (any) action (here I mean specifically at the level humanitarian assistance and intervention). Methodologically and comparatively speaking, such experiments that actively look for new understandings and means of implementation (aimed at regulating conflicts and bringing political violence to a close) are invaluable to scholars and practitioners. Particularly those who pursue multidisciplinary approaches (globally, regionally and locally) and who are also engaged in the even harder tasks of facilitating processes of long-term peace in previously or currently deeply divided societies.