

External Intervention in Ethnic Conflict: An Examination of the Role of Interest Factor with Special Reference to the Indian Involvement in the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka¹

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Transnational Dimension of Ethnic Conflict.

Until recently ethnic conflict was considered by scholars as part of domestic politics and received only passing attention in discussions of international relations. The majority of the available literature on the subject therefore is confined to analysis of issues related to either national or sub-national aspects of ethnic conflict.² This situation began to change only in the late 1970s, but since then students of international relations slowly have been turning to ethnic variables to explain trans-state relationships and transnational relationships³. Broadly speaking there are two reasons for this new development. The first is the realization by students of international relations of the importance of non-state actors in the explanation of global political developments (Keohane and Nye, 1972; 1977; Suhrke and Noble, 1984; Sheffer, 1986). This shifted the attention of scholars to international relations founded on relationships other than formal state to state relations. The linkages based on ethnic loyalties, namely irredentist and diaspora connections and to some extent ethnic economic networks (Esman, 1990), thus became part of the study of international relations. The second reason for this development is the increasing number of incidents of ethnic conflicts all over the world. The events in the past two decades show that not only domestic ethnic conflicts have increased both by volume and in intensity but also they have begun extending beyond national boundaries, mainly through irredentist and diaspora links that are conveniently exploited and manipulated by various interested parties. The result of this was ethnic conflicts becoming a major aspect of world conflicts.

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² Sociology and comparative politics clearly lead the field in terms of the number of studies on ethnicity and ethnic mobilization. Yet studies by sociologists and political scientists do not examine the influence of the ethnic variable in extra-national contexts. On the other hand scholars who attempted to study linkages between domestic and foreign policies either did not consider ethnic variable as important (see for example Rosenau 1969) or played down the importance of the ethnic factor (Kende, 1971).

³ Trans-state relationship is the term used by Sheffer (1986). The term transnational relationships on the other hand is used by others such as Keohane (Keohane and Nye, 1972).

With the increasing importance of ethnic conflict in the contemporary world the role of transnational ethnic linkages, therefore, has assumed a new position in inter state relations. Ethnic concerns have begun to play an increasingly important role in foreign policy decisions and diplomatic activities among states. Examples are many. The conflict in Cyprus involved both Greece and Turkey and finally resulted in Turkey invading the island to rescue its co-ethnics. The conflict in Sri Lanka is another example of transnational ethnic links playing a critical role in the intervention of an external power in an ethnic conflict. Though transnational ethnic links are not the only reason for external intervention in ethnic conflicts, (for a discussion on external intervention in different situations see Cooper and Berdal 1993) the mobilization of such links by interested external actors is an integral part of ethnic politics today. Though this may seem to be stating the obvious, it has added a transnational dimension to ethnic conflict. The result of this development is that understanding the transnational dimension of ethnic conflict has become necessary to understand not only the different expressions of ethnicity but also the dynamics of interstate relationships.

The transnational dimension of ethnic conflict is characterized by three parties who are brought into contact on the basis of ethnicity. These are the home country, the host country and the ethnic community, which is either a diaspora or an irredenta, that makes up the linkage. There are no disagreements among scholars that this triadic relationship is central to the explanation of ethnic conflict in the international context. The important issue in this context is the relevance of ethnic loyalties to understanding the interaction among these parties and how ethnicity influences inter-state relationships. In other words the question that needs explaining relates to the factors that make the ethnic link salient in a given situation, which in turn brings intervention and conflict into inter-state relationships. There is no need to reiterate the fact that the saliency of the ethnic factors in any given situation is a result of some form of interest mobilization. This is true of transnational ethnic links as well.

This paper is both descriptive and explanatory. It examines the Indian intervention in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka in order to understand the factors that led to Indian involvement in the conflict. I argue that to understand the mobilization of transnational ethnic links, which makes ethnicity salient in interstate interaction, one has to understand the interactive relationship among various interests on the basis of ethnicity. Two sets of interests are identified, namely, interests of the intervening government and interests of the groups, that are either part of or benefit from such conflict situation. To explain the interaction between the above two sets of interests the paper examines the different forms of involvement by certain interest groups, both Indian and Sri Lankan, and the congruence of their interests with the interests of the state actors involved. The importance of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka to the intervening power, namely India's security concerns and domestic politics, the mobilization of ethnic loyalties by interest groups involved, either directly or indirectly, in the conflict and how they shaped the Indian intervention in Sri Lankan ethnic conflict will be examined in this paper.

An overview of the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka

The two major players in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict are the Sinhalese and the Tamil communities of the country. The Sinhalese who are the majority of the country are roughly about 75% of the population⁴. More than 90% of the Sinhalese are Buddhists and the rest are Christians. The Tamil population in the country on the other hand is divided into two broad groups, each with its own historical origin and culture. They are however united on the basis of language. The first of the two Tamil groups is the Sri Lankan Tamils. They consist of about 12% of the country's population. The Sri Lankan Tamils are concentrated in the Northern province and to lesser extent in the Eastern province of the country. The majority of Sri Lankan Tamils are Hindus (about 90%) while the rest are Christian. The second Tamil group, which is of recent Indian origin, is the Plantation Tamils, who are also referred to as the Indian Tamils. The plantation Tamils were brought to Sri Lanka by the British to work in the tea plantations in the hill country. They are about 6% of the country's population and live mostly in tea estates in the Central Highlands of the country. Though the majority of the Plantation Tamils are Hindus, there is a substantial proportion of Christians among them. Both Tamils and Sinhalese are primarily ethno-linguistic categories but their respective traditional religions, i.e., Hinduism and Buddhism, also play a significant role, specially among the Sinhalese (Obeyesekere 1978, 155p), in their ethnic identity.

As mentioned, the polyethnic character of Sri Lankan society has a very long history. Prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, the first western colonial power to have contacts with the island and establish its rule in the coastal areas, Sri Lanka was inhabited by three ethnic groups, namely the Sinhalese and the Tamils and the Moors. There had been different kingdoms in the different parts of the country during different periods but the population of these kingdoms were not divided along ethnic lines. At the time Portuguese arrived in the country, however, there was a Tamil Hindu Kingdom in the Northern part of the country. As no king was content to see himself as ruler of only part of the island, there naturally were conflicts in the past to determine the ruler of the whole island. Those wars, however, cannot be considered ethnic conflict, as they were between different kingdoms inhabited by both Tamils and Sinhalese.

The British captured the whole island in 1815 and brought it under their rule in a single administrative unit. Although there was resentment and mutual distrust between Tamils and Sinhalese, the two groups acted in co-operation during the British period against the British, who were the common enemy. It was the independence in 1947 that brought the conflict between the two groups into the open. The first post independence political confrontation between the two communities occurred when the first parliament of the country dominated by Sinhalese decided to pass a law depriving the Plantation

⁴ The ethnic distribution of Sri Lanka's population is, Sinhalese 74%, Sri Lankan Tamils 12.6%, Indian Tamils 5.6%, Moors 7.1% and Others 0.7%. The religious distribution is Buddhists 69.3%, Hindus 15.5%, Muslims 7.6%, Christians 7.5% and Others 0.1%.

Source:- Statistical Abstracts of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1982 (Colombo: Dept. of Census and Statistics, 1983:pp 32-34)

Tamils of Sri Lankan citizenship. With that a group of Tamil parliamentarians formed the Federal Party⁵, declaring that "unless there is a federal system established there would not be a just settlement to the problems faced by the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka." The Federal Party at the time did not openly advocate separatism from the Sri Lankan society. They wanted only a federal system for Sri Lanka so that the Tamils could manage their own affairs within the Sri Lankan polity.

The struggle by the Tamils for a separate sovereign state is therefore of recent origin. It began in the seventies with the declared aim of liberating the homeland of the "Tamil Speaking Peoples" in the country. The term "Tamil speaking peoples" used by Tamil politicians with regard to the demand for a separate state for the Tamils is not without confusion and has been subjected to definitions and redefinitions over time, particularly during the struggle. Tamil political leaders first used the term in the late 19th century and according to that definition, in addition to Tamils, the Tamil speaking people in Sri Lanka included Muslims, mainly those in the Northern and Eastern provinces (Ramanathan 1888). The Muslims have, however, always resented attempts by Tamil political leaders to consider them as part of the Tamil community. The Tamil separatist movement on the other hand initially adhered to this definition by early Tamil politicians of Tamils in terms of language. Today, however, the term has lost its value and the leading Tamil guerilla group in the country openly rejects the inclusion of Muslims as part of the Tamil community. This group for example launched a systematic program of ethnic cleansing⁶ in 1990 to get the Muslims out of the Northern and Eastern provinces. Further, the Tamil separatist struggle does not get any significant support from the country's plantation Tamils even though the political leader of the Plantation Tamils was one of the signatories to the declaration establishing the Tamil United Front in 1976, which was the predecessor to the separatist Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), and also there have been attempts by Tamil militants to attract the support of up country Tamil youth. In fact, before the separatist struggle came into existence the Sri Lankan Tamils rejected even the notion that they and the plantation Tamils belong

⁵ Though the party is popularly known as the Federal Party the Tamil name of it is "Illangai Tamil Arasu Katchi" which translated into English means "Sri Lanka Tamil State Party". The name gave the Tamil population the belief that it was formed to fight a separate Tamil state not a federal system.

⁶ During the early stages of the Tamil separatist struggle ethnic cleansing was aimed at getting the Sinhalese out of "Traditional Tamil Homeland" by attacking Sinhalese villages in the North and the East. Initially several Tamil militant groups had members belonging to the Muslim community in the North and East. In 1990 the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam declared that Muslims were traitors and started a violent movement to chase them out of the so called "Traditional Tamil Homeland". Today, the Muslims who once were inhabitants of the areas of the "Tamil Homeland" that are under the control of the militants live in refugee camps.

to the same group⁷. The Tamil separatist movement in the country, therefore, is a movement by the Sri Lankan Tamils for the Sri Lankan Tamils. Further the separatist movement is dominated by Jaffna Tamils who consider themselves as the superior group of the Tamils in the country.

Though the formation of the Federal Party marked a new era of Tamil politics there were no significant political events in terms of ethnic politics during the life of the first two post-independence parliaments. The first major confrontation between the two communities occurred in 1956 when the government of the country changed hands, and the incoming regime introduced a bill proclaiming the Sinhala language to be the official language of the country. Tamils saw this as a gross injustice against their community and started a series of non-violent protest rallies which were attacked by Sinhalese mobs. The economic hardship and rising unemployment which Sri Lanka began experiencing in the early 1970s further complicated the Sinhala-Tamil relationship. When the economy began contracting the Tamils were the first to suffer. The situation was further aggravated by the introduction of standardization of university admissions in 1972 which restricted the intake of Tamil students to universities (de Silva 1974). Also in the same year Sri Lanka promulgated a new constitution that removed the constitutional guarantees given to the minorities in the country. Not only was the government indifferent to the protests by the Tamils, but also those who organized protest rallies against these decisions, in areas where Sinhalese were the majority, were attacked by Sinhalese mobs. With these developments one can observe emergence of sporadic student/youth agitations in the North of the country protesting the conduct of the Sri Lanka government and also pressurizing the Tamil political leaders to adopt a hard line attitude towards the increasing Sinhalization of the country. The result of that was the decision by the Federal Party leadership in May 1973 to work for an "Independent Tamil State". This decision marks the formal beginning of the ethnic separatist struggle by the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

The intention of the Tamil minority of the country to separate from the Sri Lankan state was officially announced in October 1976 by a hurriedly established coalition of three Tamil based political parties. The parties involved in the coalition were the Federal Party (FP) which was the main political party of the Tamils at the time, The Tamil Congress (TC) and the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) (Kodikara 1981:p. 194). Of the three parties the first two had their support base in the North and East of the country while the Ceylon Workers Congress represented the Tamils of the hill country, i.e., the plantation Tamils. The three parties formed a new political coalition called the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which was to be the umbrella organization to agitate for a separate state in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Though there may have been rhetorical statements on occasion by a few of the participants of achieving their aim even through violent means, the declared strategy of the coalition was a non-violent one.

In the early 1980s the agitation by the Tamil minority for a separate state began moving slowly towards militarization of its strategy. During this period militant political

⁷ For example one Sri Lankan Tamil scholar Dr. S. Arasaratnam does not even discuss the Plantation Tamil group in his book on the peoples of Sri Lanka (Arasaratnam, 1964).

groups advocating armed struggle to achieve a separate state began emerging among the Tamils (O'Ballance 1989, Kadian 1990). The Tamil separatist struggle is carried out today primarily by a highly organized guerilla group called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), popularly known as the "Tigers", in the field and by several other groups including- in the parliament- the Federal Party. The Tamil military struggle has a high level of international exposure. Though the leaders of both groups claim that their strength is the Tamils of Sri Lanka, there is no doubt that the Tamil separatism depends heavily on support from outside the country for its existence. In other words the Tamil ethnic separatism is not just an ethnic struggle taking place within national boundaries. It has a clearly visible transnational component which is essential for its existence. The ethnic linkages with India by the Tamil community is one part of this transnational connection.

Though the Federal Party was the first Tamil political organization to declare the intention to fight for a Tamil Homeland called "Eelam", it never was in the center of the struggle for a separate independent state. With the Tamil stand against the government hardening there emerged several militant organizations that later displaced the Federal Party from Tamil politics in Sri Lanka. The first militant group to emerge among the Tamils was the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) which was formed in 1972. In 1976 the Tamil New Tigers changed its name to Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (O'Ballance, 1989, p.13). The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is the most powerful Tamil group today. During the same period some other groups also emerged, namely the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) in 1973, Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS) in 1975 (O'Ballance, 1989:p.12), People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) in 1980 and Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) in 1981 (Kadian, 1990,pp 23-24). Of these, EROS and TELO were set up in foreign countries, in England and India respectively (Kadian, 1990:p.65). The ethnic riots in 1978 and the unprecedented violence in 1983 July against the Tamils followed agitations by the main stream Tamil parties and sporadic military attacks against government forces and institutions by the militants. The 1983 violence which is referred to as the "Black July" formally marked the ongoing ethnic civil war in Sri Lanka.

Tamil Minority in Sri Lanka and Indo-Lanka Transnational Relations

The transnational ethnic linkages between Sri Lanka and India are based on the links that binds the two Tamil groups in Sri Lanka with their brethren in South India. Of these two the Sri Lankan Tamils were not very much concerned about their ethnic links with India until the ethnic struggle became the main issue for the Tamils in Sri Lanka. In fact Sri Lankan Tamils consider themselves superior to their Indian cousins (Thambiah 1986) believing that Sri Lankan Tamil culture, unlike the Tamil culture in Tamilnadu, has not been corrupted by Sanskrit influence. For them the Indian connection, prior to the escalation of ethnic conflict, was more an instrumental link than an emotional bond. Instrumental because it provided them with an easy access to education for their children in educational institutions in Tamilnadu. This became more significant than ever when Sri Lanka moved towards favoring the majority Sinhalese in educational opportunities in the early 1970s (de Silva 1974). In addition there are

economic linkages, both formal and informal, that link India, mainly South India, with Sri Lankan Tamils. One of the most important of these linkages is the smuggling network that exists between Tamilnadu and the Jaffna peninsula. It has established a very strong network of informal and clandestine relationships between coastal villages in Tamilnadu and coastal villages in Jaffna. The leader of the most powerful Tamil guerilla group, the LTTE, and most of its other top leaders come from the Jaffna coastal line that is notorious for its smuggling activities.

The Indian Tamils who were brought into Sri Lanka by the British to work in the tea plantations not only have close social and economic ties with India but also are regarded by Indians as partly their responsibility. Until recently they were considered Indian citizens by the Sri Lankan government.⁸ The close association between the Plantation Tamils and the Tamilnadu society is clearly seen in the former's political work during the 1960s when Tamil separatism was active in South India. The Plantation Tamils also had their branch office of the South Indian separatist party in Sri Lanka. Therefore, prior to ethnic conflict the Tamils of recent Indian origin, i.e., the Plantation Tamils, were the group that were concerned with the Indo-Sri Lanka ethnic link. Though there are ethnic links between Sri Lankan Tamils and the Tamils in India, they became important only in the 1980s as part of the ethnic conflict.

The transnational ethnic linkage between India and Sri Lanka has another important aspect to it. This relates to the poly-ethnic nature of Indian society. The Indian diaspora in Sri Lanka, i.e., the Tamils, are not part of the majority ethnic group in the Indian society. So the link in this case is between a minority community in Sri Lanka and a minority community in India. Of the number of communities which form the Indian polity, Tamils themselves are in conflict with the majority ethnic group that is in power in India. The conflict is based, to large extent, on the use of language, that is, Hindi vs. Tamil, and on territoriality, that is, the North vs. the South, and perceived origin, that is, Aryan vs. Dravidian. The Hindi-speaking group that comes from the North and is Aryan in perceived origin dominates Indian politics. Tamils come from the Dravidian South, which is constantly in conflict with the attempt by the Northern Hindi belt to dominate Indian polity (see Mason, 1967 for details). The Indian identity, which is largely a result of the anti-colonial struggle, does not play a significant part in domestic Indian life. How could one explain the involvement of India as a whole in the conflict on behalf of a group with which the majority group itself is in conflict is a question that needs to be explained. The explanatory value of the ethnic variable is limited. Therefore one has to look for alternative explanations that go beyond ethnic links yet are associated with them. This is where the interaction between interest factors and ethnic loyalties become important.

⁸ The Tamils of recent Indian origin were deprived of citizenship and as result disfranchised by the first post-independent parliament. However a series of Indo-Sri Lanka agreements and political agreements between the government and leaders of Plantation Tamils have resulted in either these people being repatriated to India or given Sri Lankan citizenship. For details see Kadian (1990) and Dube (1989)

The first indication that the Tamil separatist movement intended to use extra-national support for its struggle and was planning to mobilize ethnic links overseas came when Messrs S.J.V.Chelvanyakam and A.Amirthalingam, the leader and the leader designate respectively at the time, of the Federal Party of Sri Lanka, declared in February 1972 in Madras⁹ in India that "they plan to fight for full independence for Tamils in Sri Lanka and would need not only the support of the people of Tamilnadu but also the people of India" (Tremayne, 1988:p.396). Though one may discard this statement as mere rhetoric, the timing of it is significant, as it was made just after the conclusion of the Indo-Pakistan war in which India helped the East Pakistani guerrillas to secede from Pakistan.

Though there have been occasional protests by India through diplomatic channels on behalf of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka, particularly for the plantation Tamils, (Kadian 1990:86-87pp) India got directly involved in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka only in the 1980s. India's active involvement in the Tamil separatist struggle in Sri Lanka since 1983 is no secret (Kadian, 1990; Greenberg, 1986; O'Ballance, 1989), though her leaders always emphatically denied giving military assistance to Tamil militants fighting the Sri Lankan armed forces¹⁰. Indian leaders, however, always openly declared that India has a role to play in the Sri Lankan conflict, as the conflict in Sri Lanka affects India's external relations, i.e., security concerns and domestic politics. To understand the Indian role in the Sri Lankan conflict, therefore, one needs to examine both India's position in the region as the regional power and also its domestic politics.

India is the biggest and the most powerful country in South Asia, and the Indian hegemony in the region is implicitly recognized by everyone, including the US administration, which until recently has been somewhat wary in recognizing India's hegemonic role in the region.¹¹ The Indian foreign policy with regard to the region is determined basically by two factors. The first is its position as the de facto regional super power. This makes India very sensitive to activities by outside powers that would

⁹ Madras is the capital of Tamilnadu, the South Indian state with a Tamil majority. The state always returns a regional Tamil nationalist party into government. It had its own separatist movement in the 1950s and 60s.

¹⁰ Indian involvement in providing military assistance to Sri Lankan Tamil groups according to some observers started around 1984. Some Indian officials have gone far as to say that India may have turned a blind eye to military assistance given by Indian parties. But there are well informed allegations that the Indian government under Mrs. Gandhi armed militants (Greenberg, 1986). Kuldip Nayar (1992), a respected Indian journalist, says that India trained the LTTE cadres, financed and armed the movement.

¹¹ Mr. George Bush, then Vice President, in his visit to New Delhi in May 1984 stated that India was the "pivotal power" in the region (De Silva, 1984:p.3).

question India's hegemony in the region. The second is India's relationship with Pakistan, which it sees as hostile to India, and with China, which is trying to establish herself as the leader of the third world, a role India would dearly love to have. India has therefore always been sensitive to the foreign policies of its neighbors. The behavior of her small neighbors who always rallied together fearing Indian domination in the region does not help reduce India's concerns. In addition it also must be noted that Indian role in the region is influenced by the personality of the leader (Greenberg 1986). For example, Mrs. Gandhi pursued a very aggressive regional policy that displeased all her neighbors, while her son who succeeded her was more accommodating yet continued the same role. The present Indian leader seems to prefer not to get involved.

The Indo-Sri Lanka relationship always had its share of problems. Sri Lanka has long standing close diplomatic ties with China and is also a close ally of Pakistan. During the border war between India and China in 1964 Sri Lanka remained neutral, which undoubtedly displeased India. During the Indo-Pakistani war in 1972 that was the Bangladeshi liberation struggle, Sri Lanka offended India by allowing Pakistani planes to stop for fuel in Colombo airport on their way to Bangladesh to fight both Bangladeshi guerrillas and the Indian forces. Further, there is a boundary dispute between the two countries, which was settled finally in 1973 in an agreement on the maritime boundary, but the residuals of the dispute still remain.¹² In addition disagreements regarding the treatment of Tamils in Sri Lanka, especially the Indian Tamils, have always been a feature of Indo-Lanka relations (Kadian, 1990).

The foreign policy dimension of the Indo-Lanka relations is very important to understand the behaviour of the Indians towards Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka, though was friendly with the Pakistanis and had a very special relationship with the Chinese, followed a non-aligned foreign policy up to 1977. After 1977, though Sri Lanka remained in the Non-Aligned Movement, its policies became clearly pro-West. This no doubts have irked the Indians who, until recently at least, looked at the West with suspicion fearing that the West, especially its leader the United States, is pro-Pakistani and also a challenge to India's hegemony in the region. The pro-West stance of Sri Lanka is clearly demonstrated by its support for Britain during the Falkland war, which was criticized by the rest of the non-aligned countries. Further, in 1983 the Sri Lankan government concluded a new agreement allowing the United States to increase broadcasting capacity of the V.O.A. transmitting station in the island. Thus, the relations between the two countries that were never good turned worse after 1977, with Sri Lanka's clear shift towards the west, reached a crisis point with the escalation of the separatist struggle in the country.

The above discussion demonstrates three important aspects of the Indo-Sri

¹² This dispute was about an island in the North of Sri Lanka used by both fishermen from Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka as a temporary boat yard during the fishing season. It also has a Hindu temple which is considered by South Indian Tamils as proof of its Indian connection. Though the dispute is now officially settled, whenever there is dispute relating to Sri Lanka, the Tamilnadu government brings this issue up again.

Lankan ethnic links. The first relates to the ethnic link between India and Sri Lanka as it is projected today. Prior to the 1980s Sri Lankan Tamils were not a major part of the link. Secondly, it shows that India has both foreign policy concerns and domestic concerns with regard to Sri Lanka. Thirdly and most importantly, the Indo-Sri Lanka ethnic link is not a link with India, but with a community in India. The transnational links based on ethnic loyalty with the Sri Lankan Tamils made the Sri Lankan separatist problem a powerful domestic issue for India. But ethnic links are not the only reason for Indian involvement in the Sri Lankan conflict. These linkages provided the basis for Indian intervention in the Sri Lankan conflict, an intervention that also served its foreign policy concerns. These links helped India, which was eager to have some leverage in Sri Lanka. On the other hand the links also helped the Sri Lankan Tamil groups which were looking for resources to continue their struggle, and also provided Tamil politicians in Tamilnadu a ready-made, attractive election issue to appeal to voters. My argument, therefore, is that the links were exploited and manipulated by the Indian government and mobilized by the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnic separatist movement as well as by the politicians in Tamilnadu. In other words the Sri Lankan Tamil separatist movement mobilizes resources available in the Indian context, both in Tamilnadu and in relation to the central government, and ethnic linkages are an effective basis for that action. This is the reason for the salience of ethnicity in the relationship between India and Sri Lanka in the recent past. As a result, since 1983 the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka has become an integral part of India's domestic politics.

Indian Domestic Politics and the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka

The foregoing discussion showed that Indian strategic interests that conflict with Sri Lankan policies and the existence of ethnic linkages with the Tamil-dominated state in India are being used by the Sri Lankan separatist movement to mobilize existing ethnic linkages with India. At the same time the Indian central government also uses the Tamil groups for its benefit. Last but not least, for the politicians in Tamilnadu, the Sri Lankan Tamil conflict gave an effective means to reach their electorate. To understand these relationships and the resultant process of mobilization of ethnic links it is necessary to examine several sets of relationships, namely, the relationship between Tamilnadu politicians and the Sri Lankan Tamil separatist movement, the Tamilnadu public and the Sri Lankan Tamil movement, and finally, the relationship between Tamilnadu government and the central government of India.

From the beginning there has been a very close relationship between Tamilnadu politicians and the Sri Lankan Tamil groups. Different groups have cultivated special working relationships with different politicians in Tamilnadu. The two most noted

alliances are the one between Mr. M.G. Ramachandran¹³, who was then the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu and a partner of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's government, and the most dominant Tamil militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the one between Mr. M.Karunanidhi, the opposition leader whose party later became affiliated with the new government that came with the defeat of Rajiv Gandhi, and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) (Wilson, 1988:p.204). But these alliances were not permanent. They changed with changes of political and other interests. When TELO was decimated by the LTTE in 1986 (O'Ballance, 1989:pp61-62), Mr. Karunanidhi got close to another group called the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF). When the LTTE turned against the EPRLF in 1989 and killed its leaders and most of its cadres, Mr. Karunanidhi became somewhat distanced from the militants. Similarly, the relationship between M.G.Ramachandran and the LTTE became strained after the Indian peacekeepers started fighting the Tamil groups. This gave an opportunity for Mr. Karunanidhi, who was a sworn enemy of the LTTE, to approach the group. For the LTTE also it was an opportunity, as it was losing sympathy in India. This rapprochement continues even today. The Tigers are today are in conflict with Mr. Ramachandran's party and have even threatened to assassinate Ms. Jeyalalitha, who is Mr. Ramachandran's heir apparent and the present Chief Minister in Tamilnadu.

This situation highlights another important dimension of the links that connect Sri Lankan Tamils with the Tamils in Tamilnadu. It shows that there is rarely any unity among the groups on the issues concerning them. The Sri Lankan Tamil militant movement is divided on the basis of ideology and shows even personality differences.

¹³ The first Tamilnadu political leader to openly support the Tamils in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka was however Mr. M. Karunanidhi. This was during 1981 ethnic riots in Sri Lanka and Mr. Karunanidhi was the opposition leader of the Tamilnadu State Assembly. Then Chief Minister of Tamilnadu Mr. M.G. Ramachandran (he was borne in Sri Lanka) who came to be known as the God Father of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam did not choose to get actively involved at the beginning. It is even rumored that he helped the Sri Lankan government to trace Tamil militants operating in Tamilnadu. He even banned the protest rally organized by Mr. Karunanidhi in 1981 to show solidarity with Sri Lankan Tamils. Clearly Mr. Ramachandran was not fully aware of the political value of the Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka for him. This illustrates that ethnic link was not the only reason for involvement of Indian groups.

Caste has also played a role in the formation and operation of the militant activities.¹⁴ The other actor, i.e., the politicians in Tamilnadu, are also divided on the basis of caste and most importantly along party lines, which again is based on socio-economic and even personality factors. Because of this there have been only rare instances in which all groups came together to help the Sri Lankan Tamils. This normally happens only when there is a heightening of tension in Sri Lanka and Tamil groups are losing their position. For example during the 1983 ethnic riots all South Indian Tamil political groups came together to pressurize the Indian central government to intervene in Sri Lanka. Again in 1987, when the Sri Lankan government was about to take Jaffna, they got together, and that resulted in India sending its army to Sri Lanka. On other occasions, however, the groups are more in conflict than in agreement, and this has, in a way, made the task of the Indian central government's role with regard to Sri Lanka somewhat complicated. On the one hand it has allowed the Indian government to manipulate the groups. On the other hand, it has made the situation less predictable, and the central Indian government has always to take extra care to properly balance the needs of all parties with regard to the Sri Lankan conflict. These events clearly show the relationships between the politicians and the members of Tamil groups is something based on mutually advantageous interests and opportunities. Ethnic links only facilitate their relationship.

These contacts translate into political, moral and financial backing for the Sri Lankan Tamil movement, while for the Tamil politicians in Tamilnadu they can be exploited in canvassing for votes. The role of these contacts affect not only Tamilnadu politics and the Tamil military struggle in Sri Lanka, but also Indo-Sri Lanka relations. For example, after the 1983 riots Mr. M.G. Ramachandran, who was the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu state, went to meet Mrs. Gandhi to request for Indian intervention in Sri Lanka on behalf of the Tamils to restore law and order, but she was not prepared to take direct military action. She instead offered help to Mr. J.R. Jayawardene, the President of Sri Lanka, to solve the problem through Indian mediation and stated that India did not support any breakup of Sri Lanka. Mr. Ramachandran had to be content with organizing a one-day strike. When India refused support for Tamil aspirations by sending its military to Sri Lanka, Mr. Karunanidhi, who was then opposition leader, walked out of the Tamilnadu State Assembly. Meanwhile P. Nadumaran, the leader of the Congress

¹⁴ I do not want to argue that the militants are divided on caste basis. However caste has played a role in the formation of the militant movement. In addition to the problems Tamils face in Sri Lanka as a minority, which no doubt is the single most important factor in the rise of the Tamil militancy, the rigid caste structure also played a part. The militants were, for example, fighting the *vellala* dominated Tamil politics as well. There are ideological divisions separating groups. For example, the LTTE is nationalistic and chauvinist while the EPRLF is socialist. There were also regional factors influencing divisions i.e., LTTE coming from Jaffna and the EPRLF from the eastern parts of the country. The PLOTE LTTE conflict originated basically a personality clash between two founding members who fought it out in Madras (Greenberg, 1986) but again has ideological and caste basis.

(Kananrai) Party, assembled about 5000 supporters to start a march called a *pilgrimage of sacrifice* from Madurai to Rameshwaran to sail to Sri Lanka. A ship was hired for the event, but, the Indian government banned its sailing. Mr. Nadumaran abandoned the project after Mr. Amirthalingam, the leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front, appealed to him not to go ahead. Still there was a symbolic boarding of the vessel for the benefit of the media (O'Ballance, 1989:p.27).

In addition to the politicians, the Tamil movement depends heavily on the public in Tamilnadu. This relationship is very much an ethnic loyalty, but it also not without its share of interests. There were interest cum ethnic issues such as the disputed island of Kachative (see footnote 10). As mentioned before, there is a close interaction between the Tamil villages in Jaffna and the coastal villages in Tamilnadu in the area of smuggling. These are also reasons for the people in Tamilnadu to provide shelter and moral support to the Sri Lankan Tamil separatists living in Madras and involved in political work. The ethnic kinship that binds the two peoples was effectively exploited by the separatist movement. The involvement of Tamilnadu public in the Sri Lankan conflict is particularly seen after the 1983 ethnic riots in Sri Lanka. The atrocities allegedly committed by the Sri Lankan army, the killings by Sinhalese mobs, and also the hard line attitude of the government during this period helped the Tamil militants operating in Tamilnadu to incite anti-Sri Lanka feelings among the masses. One of the aims of the propaganda machine of the separatist groups was to incite emotions among the masses, they did not require much effort there, to use them as a lever in getting politicians in line. Therefore it is valid to state that Tamil separatism depended on ethnic mobilization in India, which was effectively carried out by different groups involved in the Sri Lankan conflict.

The result of these linkages is the Sri Lankan Tamil struggle became part of Indian politics through its surrogate, the Tamilnadu government. The group Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization was formed in India in 1975. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) took their struggle to Tamilnadu and established bases there. Later other groups also joined in both for political work and military training provided by the Indian government. The Indian government's involvement in giving training to militants came as a result of India's interest in manipulating the situation for its security concerns as well as on the insistence of the Tamilnadu government¹⁵. To understand this therefore we need to look at the relationship between Indian government and the Tamilnadu government. The main variable here is the indispensability of the Tamilnadu government for the center, whatever the party in power.

¹⁵ The support of the Indian central government of India for Sri Lankan groups came both as a result of pressure by the Tamilnadu politicians and India's own interests. However the military training given to the groups was organized for India's security interest alone. The fact that India was selective in giving military training, and most importantly, did not choose to train the LTTE (South 1985 p.13) which always followed an independant line shows that India was trying to safegaurd its interests by arming the militants than strengthening the Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka.

Since the death of Nehru all governments in the center have aligned with one of the two Tamil regional parties¹⁶ in Tamilnadu to get a majority in the *Rajya Saba*, which is India's House of Representatives. Further Tamilnadu also had a strong separatist movement till 1960, and India does not want it to come up again. This makes the Indian government sensitive to demands of Tamilnadu. It becomes more important when demands are about their cousins in Sri Lanka. For example, though the central government of India rejected the appeal by Tamilnadu to intervene militarily in 1983, the pressure of Tamilnadu in July that year forced the Indian government to release several Sri Lankan Tamil militant leaders who were in custody (Ram, 1983) as a mark of protest, and to issue a strong protest saying that "India could not sit idly by because people of Indian origin were affected" (Greenberg, 1986). This was followed by a special mediator to Sri Lanka to bring the two warring parties to the discussion table (Greenberg, 1986). Yet the real Indian intervention came only in 1987, with the arrival of the Indian army in Jaffna under the Indo-Lanka accord of 1987.

The Indian Military Involvement in Sri Lanka.

India sent military forces to Sri Lanka to help make peace between the two warring groups in 1987 under the Indo-Lanka Agreement signed in September that year. The army that was initially sent in as peace keepers later was drawn into a fully-fledged war with the Tamil militants. The Indian military operation in Sri Lanka was not the beginning of Indian military role with regard to Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. It began long before the actual landing of Indian army in the island, with the Indian government's clandestine training of Tamil militants in Tamilnadu with the cooperation of the Tamilnadu government. Though actual records of the operation is sketchy, it is believed Indian training of Tamil guerrillas in Tamilnadu commenced soon after the 1983 ethnic riots (Greenberg, 1986).

The ethnic riots in Sri Lanka in July 1983 resulted in Indian government providing open support for the Tamil groups that were already operating on Indian soil e.g., in Madras- with covert Indian support. As stated earlier the state government in Tamilnadu provided the militants with residences, offices, telephone and other logistic support. They were allowed to move in Madras, often in combat uniforms, giving interviews to media and relaying radio orders to field commanders in Sri Lanka. The Indian central government provided former Indian Army personnel as instructors (O'Ballance, 1989:p.31). Indian military training to Tamil guerrillas was provided mainly because it served India's domestic political interests and national security interests. Sri Lankan conflict was creating problems in Tamilnadu and India therefore

¹⁶ This does not mean that the ruling party in the center could never get a majority in the parliament in the center since Mr. Nehru's death. To get the majority, however, most of the time the major parties have to come into no contest pacts with regional parties. One of the most important regional vote banks in this context is Tamilnadu. The two major Tamil parties in Tamilnadu have had coalition agreements with all ruling groups since Mr. Nehru's death.

had to do something to keep Tamilnadu happy. Further, purely for domestic reasons India did not want Sri Lanka disintegrating as a result of ethnic conflict as it would create a precedence and in turn would influence India which is a federation of ethnically based states. In the area of national security India wanted to have Sri Lanka in check and believed that an Indian-controlled guerilla movement would be the ideal way of doing it. For this purpose the Indian government approved the training of militants by the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), which is India's equivalent to the CIA. Thus the training of militants is an extension of India's foreign policy towards Sri Lanka on the one hand. On the other it also reflects the domestic political concerns, especially with regard to Tamilnadu. This makes India's situation with regard to Sri Lanka's conflict a very complex one. First there are security interests of using the conflict for its advantage to maneuver the neighbor. Second there is regional pressure from Tamilnadu to intervene. Third is the wider domestic concern of not legitimizing ethnic separatism that would finally be a problem to India. India therefore had a real balancing act to perform with regard to the conflict in Sri Lanka.

When the Indian army first came to Sri Lanka under the 1987 Indo-Lanka agreement they were seen by the Tamils as saviors. They were welcomed with open arms by the civilians in Jaffna. Though the militants were not very enthusiastic about the fact that they were forced to surrender arms -in fact the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) did not surrender their weapons- there was all round jubilation about the arrival of Indians in Jaffna. In the south of the country the story was different. The Sinhalese saw the Indo-Lanka agreement as something that had been forced on Sri Lanka. They rejected the accord and there were mass protests against the agreement. There was genuine fear among the Sinhalese that the Indians would ill treat the Sinhalese living in Tamil-majority areas and would finally help the Tamils to achieve Eelam. The events that preceded the agreement, namely the Indian food drop in Jaffna and Indian High Commissioner's forceful style of doing business with Sri Lanka during the Indian military operation in Sri Lanka, made Sinhalese feel Indians were against Sinhalese. This brought into question the legitimacy of Indian Intervention.

Though Indians expected to complete their work under the Indo-Lanka agreement and leave soon, it was not to be. Even before signing, the agreement was doomed to failure. The main militant group among the Tamils, the LTTE, was not willing to accept the agreement, saying it did not go far enough, but they were pressurized by Mr. M.G.Ramachandran and Mr. Rajiv Gandhi to accept the agreement (Kadian 1990). It is said that India paid the group 10 million Sri Lankan rupees as compensation for accepting the accord. After a few days of Indian presence, however, the troubles began. The Sri Lankan navy arrested a group of Tamil militants crossing from India to Sri Lanka with arms. The Tamils wanted them to be released under the general amnesty given to militants under the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement. The Sri Lankan government refused, saying that the militants were breaking the peace agreement by transporting arms to Sri Lanka, which was banned under the accord. During the negotiations between India and Sri Lankan on the crisis the arrested militants committed suicide by swallowing cyanide. That sparked the confrontation between the Tamils and the Indians. This resulted in the LTTE taking a television crew of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation in Jaffna hostage and killing all of them. As the hostilities

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increased the Indians had no alternative but to intervene and disarm the militants.

The Indian military operation that began with these incidents in the country can be divided into two stages. In the first stage it was a conventional war with the dominant Tamil group with the aim of capturing the areas under the control of the militants. This was accomplished by the Indian army with relative ease within about two months (Kadian, 1990). This is no surprise considering the Indian manpower and firepower. During the peak of the fighting the Indians were said to have had over 100,000 soldiers in the country, though India always insisted that it had only 52,000 (Kadian, 1990). The second phase of the struggle came after the Indians captured rebel-held towns and pushed the rebels into jungles. This was the start of the guerilla war that India could not win. Finally after two years of fighting and over 1000 deaths the Indians agreed to withdraw from Sri Lanka in 1990. The withdrawal was completed in April 1990, ending a new chapter of Indian involvement in Sri Lanka.

The Impact of the Indian Military Operation on Indo-Sri Lanka Transnational Relations.

When India withdrew from the island the Indo Lanka relations were taking a new turn. Indians had almost lost all sympathy among the Tamils by 1990. The civilians who welcomed them in 1987 now saw them as an invading army even worse than the Sinhalese. There were numerous stories of Indian soldiers raping women and killing innocent civilians. Of course some of these stories may have been the creations of the LTTE for the purpose of propoganda to discredit India, something they had been known to do during the army operation by the Sri Lankan government. In fact killing civilians was the main charge against the Sri Lankan army. Now the same charges are leveled against the saviors themselves. The activities of the Indian army had repercussions in India, especially in Tamilnadu. The Tamilnadu government was in a dilemma here as it was not sure where its loyalty was. Both politicians and the masses in Tamilnadu did not understand what the Indian army was doing by attacking the militants. That was not what they expected. They came to realize that the interests of the Indian government and the interests of Tamilnadu do not always coincide with regard to the conflict in Sri Lanka. Yet their wider loyalties with the Indian nation did not allow them to criticize Indian action outright. Doing that when Indian soldiers were being killed would mean being a traitor to the Indian nation itself. This is something most Tamilnadu politicians wanted to avoid. Still there were protests in Tamilnadu faulting the Indian operation. The opposition party in Tamilnadu issued a statement during the time declaring that " Tamils in India will not remain silent witnesses to the liquidation of their brothers in Sri Lanka by the Indian army" (O'Ballance, 1989: p.103). This time, however, the attempts by the opposition leaders to make it a political issue did not bring desired results. There was no support of the masses, unlike in 1983 when there were large scale agitations.

The public were in a dilemma trying to sort out their loyalties.¹⁷

I mentioned that the transnational ethnic link between the Tamil community in Sri Lanka and Indian society is an indirect one because it is not a link with the majority ethnic community in India. This situation became clearly evident during the Indian operation. Tamilnadu became increasingly uneasy about the Indian central government's handling of the Sri Lankan operation. The Indian operation in Sri Lanka questioned the loyalty of Tamilnadu to greater Indian society and also greater Indian society's responsibility to minorities. It also affected the relationship between Tamilnadu politicians and those in the central Indian government. This heralded a new era of Tamilnadu's relationship with the Indian center as well as Tamilnadu's relationship with Sri Lankan Tamils. It clearly brought home the message to Tamilnadu that wider interests are the driving force behind India's foreign policy and there is a limit to Tamilnadu pressure. As stated previously, the lack of unity among Tamilnadu politicians and the masses helped the central government. Throughout the Indian operation Mr. Ramachandran and his party, which was in power in Tamilnadu then, strongly supported the central government's policy towards Sri Lanka. Joining with the central government the Tamilnadu government imposed restrictions on Sri Lankan militants operating in Tamilnadu. These restrictions continue even today.

The Indian military operation did not help solve the Sri Lankan ethnic problem, nor did it help Indian interests in Sri Lanka. It only changed the nature of Indo-Sri Lanka transnational links. During the military operation we can see that the relations between Indian government and Tamil militants deteriorating. It also affected the relationships between Tamilnadu government and the Indian central government, a fact we have discussed already. Finally the relationship between the Tamils in Sri Lanka and Tamils in Tamilnadu was also affected. Therefore the Indian operation can be said to have elevated the Indo-Lanka transnational links to a different level. It redefined the links and as a result contributed to a change in the equation of Indo-Lanka relations. The war made it was difficult for Tamilnadu to defend Sri Lankan Tamils. They were now fighting the Indians. One who defends the enemies of your army is an enemy. That was a dilemma for the Indian Tamils. Though there were protests against operations by the Army by sections of Tamilnadu politicians the mainstream kept away. The facilities for the Sri Lankan militants to operate freely in India became restricted as a result of the government restricting access and people becoming unwilling to extend support. With this came the peace talks between Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. Cause of this was the anti-Indian sentiments of both parties. This further aggravated the situation in

¹⁷ The lack of unity in Tamilnadu, owing to the fact the Indian intervention resulted in conflicting loyalties, made the task of the Indian government relatively easy. The politicians in Tamilnadu were divided and so were the masses. The unity of the two groups is important if they want to bring real pressure on the central government. The best example is the effective mobilization of Tamilnadu pressure in 1983 and afterwards up to Indian military intervention. During this period Tamilnadu was united on one issue, that India should intervene to help Tamils in Sri Lanka.

India and it became more restrictive for the Tamils.

The Indian military operation in Sri Lanka affected Indo-Lanka ethnic links. It weakened the ethnic link between Tamilnadu and Tamils in Sri Lanka. Most importantly the operation resulted in practical problems for Tamil militants operating in Tamilnadu as the governments, both central and Tamilnadu, imposed restrictions on access to resources in India for the militants. These restrictions became stronger after the killing of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, allegedly by the LTTE. After Rajiv Gandhi's death India instituted criminal proceedings, indicting several LTTE leaders including its leader Mr. Prabaharan and imposed a ban on the LTTE. Though the ban is only on the LTTE the other Tamil groups also find it difficult to operate on Indian soil, mainly because they no longer have the same sympathy of the people of Tamilnadu, and as a result politicians do not find them the asset they were in the early stage of the struggle. This has made India's task in the Sri Lankan conflict somewhat easy. India today does not have the same domestic political pressure to intervene to help the Tamils, because on the one hand, politicians do not find in the Sri Lankan Tamil problem a ready made political asset free of any liabilities as in the past. In fact the Sri Lankan Tamils have become more a liability than an asset to Indian politicians in general and Tamilnadu politicians in particular. This situation is partly a result of Indian army involvement and the subsequent killing of Rajiv Gandhi.

One could, however, argue that Indian hegemony is now established in the region as a result of the changing geo-political equation, and therefore India does not have the same anti-US feelings as before. This could also be a reason for Indian disinterest in getting involved in Sri Lanka's affairs today. I do not agree. Though United States has better relations with India today, all is not well between India and the United States and India is still sensitive to US involvement in the region. For example, the recent agreement by Sri Lanka with the US to expand the activities of Voice of America by upgrading its relay station in the country met with strong Indian protests. This is one example that shows that changing world power relations have not altogether changed Indian attitude towards outside interference in the region. Further, Sri Lanka has decided go ahead with the project in spite of Indian protests and India failed to prevent it. This incident suggests that India did not achieve any significant security goals by intervening in Sri Lanka. India is not even in a position to use the ethnic link as it did some time ago to pressurize Sri Lanka, because it weakened the links by attacking Tamils during the Indian army operation. Tamils in general and Tamil militants in particular, namely the LTTE, do not trust India the way they did before the intervention. We may conclude that Sri Lankan Tamils and Indians both, at least temporarily, lost more than they gained from the Indian military adventure in Sri Lanka.

Interest Factor in the Indian Involvement in the Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict

Though ethnic links and loyalties are part of intervention by a third party, when it comes to the crucial question of state interests vs. ethnic loyalties, the interests of states supersede their commitment to diasporas. Esman (1986: p 348) is correct here when he says that foreign policy interests supersedes the commitment of states to their diasporas. The Indian involvement in Sri Lankan conflict from the beginning demonstrates this clearly. For example, India never wanted a divided Sri Lanka, though

it no doubt wanted to have a say in Sri Lanka's foreign policy. The Indian support for the Tamil militants has always been a balancing between Indian foreign policy and security concerns and domestic political concerns. The crucial turning point that demonstrated the primacy of the foreign policy interest factor came into the open during the Indian peace keeping operation in Sri Lanka. When the dominant Sri Lankan Tamil militant group refused to toe the Indian line, Indians declared war on them, which in turn led to a bloody war that killed the civilians they came to rescue. What is abundantly clear is that the intervening state always tries to balance between ethnic interests, which are part of domestic politics, and its foreign policy concerns. As shown in this essay with regard to the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka foreign policy concerns clearly became the major factor in the shaping of the Indian role in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Foreign policy concerns are, however, not the only factor that interacts with ethnic linkages in determining the external involvement in domestic ethnic conflict. This essay also showed that purely domestic interests can affect the commitment of the home country to its diaspora. The immediate and non-ethnic interests of the ethnic kins in the home country for example, can influence the way the home country reacts to the plight of its diaspora. In the case that was examined here we saw that the masses in Tamilnadu and also Tamilnadu politicians putting their immediate domestic concerns first when it came to a choice between the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and what was advantageous for themselves politically in Tamilnadu. Thus, the support for the Tamil groups in Sri Lanka itself has always been partly influenced by the domestic politics in Tamilnadu. For example, Mr. Karunanidhi, who was the opposition leader during the Indian involvement always demanded that India was not doing enough to help the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Later when the Indian government in the center changed and a group that had support of Mr. Karunanidhi's party came to power in the center, he became more restrained in his demands.

Interest factors also played a major role in the links between Tamilnadu politicians and Sri Lankan Tamil militants. The support for various groups by different political parties shows a similar situation. For example, Mr. Karunanidhi always supported the Sri Lankan Tamil group the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), while Mr. Ramachandran was the patron of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). After the killing of Rajiv Gandhi, however, Mr. Ramachandran's party, now headed by Ms. Jayalalitha, distanced itself from the LTTE, and Mr. Karunanidhi came close to it abandoning the TELO group. These changing loyalties and connections is only part of the complexity of the issues involved. It though is sufficient evidence to prove that ethnic loyalty takes a back seat when it comes to the crucial question between the diaspora and the interest related to the survival of the home country co-ethnics themselves. In addition the behaviour of the politicians in Tamilnadu during the Indian military operation that is, the lack of unity among them in their support with the Tamils in Sri Lanka, further supports the above line of reasoning. By the time the Indian operation began, the Tamil problem was beginning to lose its appeal in Tamilnadu. This partly explains the lack of unity in Tamilnadu in its support for their co-ethnics in Sri Lanka. In this case as in others, ethnic loyalties were primarily a means used by interest groups and other actors.

A brief examination of the Indian intervention in the war of liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971 and the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka will help us further understand the relative importance of the major variables, namely, the diaspora link (ethnic factor) and domestic and foreign policy concerns (interest factor) associated with external involvement in domestic ethnic conflict. In the case of Bangladesh, India was willing to go all the way in supporting Bangladesh's desire to separate from Pakistan, despite the fact that there was no strong ethnically determined agitations asking the Indian government to support in the Bangladeshi militants.¹⁸

This does not mean to say that there was no pressure from the Indian side to intervene in the conflict. There was pressure, but it came mainly from people who were concerned about the human rights violations by the Pakistani army and the people of Indian states bordering East Pakistan, which faced a massive influx of refugees. By contrast, in the case of Sri Lanka, in addition to the refugee problem and the human rights issues, there was a clear ethnic link between Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka. India did not, however, favour a separate state in Sri Lanka for the Tamils and the direction the Indian intervention took is ample proof of India's unwillingness to help the Tamils to get their own country. Why did India behave differently in the two situations is the question that inevitably comes to ones mind.

There are three factors that explain this differential treatment by the Indians when it came to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The first is the lesson learned from the involvement in Bangladesh war. By helping East Pakistan to liberate from West Pakistan and creating Bangladesh India expected to cut Pakistan to size and eliminate the treat India faced in the east. It also expected a grateful neighbor. The events that followed showed that in the long run India failed to achieve both these aims. Shortly after Bangladesh liberation Indo-Bangladesh relations turned sour. This became more and more evident after 1975 when Shiek Rahman was assassinated by the military. (Singh 1987, Hossain 1978, Bindra 1982). Instead of a grateful friend who would sit by India's side it has created another neighbor to deal with. Bangladesh for example has ties with China and has several outstanding disputes with India that are now concerning concern for Indian foreign policy makers. India did not want this to happen in the case of Sri Lanka. Secondly, at the time of India intervention in Bangladesh there was no serious ethnic separatist movements in India threatening the India polity. But in the 1980's India was facing separatist movements of its own in several areas. Creating a ethnically based country in Sri Lanka would have given validity and legitimacy to the claims of these movements. Thirdly, in a paradoxical, but perfectly logical, way the reason that made

¹⁸ It is true that there are cultural bonds between East Pakistanis, as Bangladesh was called then, and the Bengalis in India. It must be noted however that in spite of their cultural similarities East Pakistanis were willing to join with Pakistan to form a Muslim majority state after India gained independence. The ethnic factor therefore has been always determined by religious loyalty which in turn made Bengalis in India not very sensitive to the plight of the East Pakistanis who are Muslims who preferred religion to other bonds prior to the war of Liberation (see Singh 1987 p. 10).

India intervene in Sri Lanka prevented it from following the path it followed with regard to Bangladesh. By this I mean the strong ethnic links between Tamilnadu and the Tamils in Sri Lanka. The very fact that the closeness of these ties made India to think about the possible adverse consequences the Indian polity would face as a result of a Tamil country in northern Sri Lanka. In addition to creating a bad precedence it also would have provided a rear base for now dormant, but not dead, separatist movement in Tamilnadu. India did not want a Tamil state in Sri Lanka as it would provide the rear base for the now dormant separatist movement in Tamilnadu. This helps us to go one step further than Esman's argument (Esman 1986:p. 348) and say that not only foreign policy interests but also domestic interests, where relevant, limit the level of commitment by the home country to its diaspora in a third country.

The discussion has demonstrated the existence of two important aspects of transnational ethnic links, one that has been dealt with some detail by researchers and another yet waiting for recognition. The first is that the transnational dimensions of ethnic conflict is not limited to ethnic linkages based on shared cultural traits and emotional bonds across state borders. The important feature is the mobilization of these linkages by various transnational actors. Traditionally this mobilization is explained in terms of either the home country of the diaspora in question or in terms of the diaspora itself. This study has shown that this explanation is not adequate to understand the whole situation and its dynamics. It demonstrated that neither the home country nor the diaspora community is monolithic in terms of the nature of their involvement in transnational ethnic conflict. There are various interests groups or actors that cut across these two parties and their role is crucial to understand transnational ethnic conflict. Consequently, transnational ethnic links operate within a system of socio-political relationships that are mobilized by different actors. Their interests differ. Further, such mobilization, which has made these linkages salient in the contemporary world, is made possible by these links being part of the socio-political reality through the actors involved. Therefore it is essential that we understand the actors and their interests, if we are to understand the transnational dimension of ethnic conflict.