

WAS INDIA'S INTERVENTION IN SRILANKA A SOLUTION OR A MIS-STEP?

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ABSTRACT

When we analyse the strategy adopted by each country it is found to be unique. They adopt their own means and ethics to protect their people, culture and customs. Status of human beings at the universal level also varies from nation to nation. However, value and worth of peace and leading a peaceful life is more important than anything else in the world. We desire a life without war in a peaceful atmosphere. Have we not heard about stateless people and their condition in the universe? Have we thought about refugees whose lives are miserable and similar to that of homeless people? In the universe there are various types of refugees and their miseries are immeasurable. In India also we can see the plight of refugees who have come from other countries - most of whom are abused, raped, killed, abducted and lead a fearful life. Are all of them protected by Human rights? Do they enjoy all the rights that an ordinary citizen enjoys in a free country? Their problems are unresolved. There is no guarantee and security for the lives of stateless people. Due to the fear and darkness of lives the stateless people move to another country to get asylum like barbarians. Even from small children to pregnant women, aged people, sick persons, the handicapped who may have lost parts of their body due to terrorist activities, etc. carry their basic needs on their heads with trembling heartbeat and anticipating a new dawn in their eyes. They are evacuated to some other country where they lead a life with an uncertain future. There is no guarantee for their Education, Job, etc. India also gives asylum to many stateless persons or refugees. Most of them are from neighbouring countries like Tibet, Srilanka, Burma, and Afghanistan etc. In this article an attempt has been made to examine whether the role played by India in Srilanka to solve the ethnic crisis was effective or otherwise.

Keywords: Eelam, bully, genocide, ethnicity

INTRODUCTION

A sensational issue in India is about the plight of refugees. A neglected human right issue stares at us. Refugees at various levels suffer a lot. Aren't they human beings? Why are they oppressed? The efforts of UNHCR, EU, UNO and other organizations couldn't resolve the issue permanently. The outbreak of terrorist activities in Srilanka and the ensuing mass genocide resulted in innocent people losing their lives in the country. This led to the arrival of refugees in large numbers in Tamil Nadu who were lodged in various camps in Kanyakumari, Coimbatore, Chennai, Tiruvarur, Nilgiris, Rameshwaram, Theni and other districts. The Indian Government made many attempts to solve the racial discrimination and many welfare schemes were introduced for the welfare of the refugees. Former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who tried to bring peace in Lanka had to finally sacrifice his life at the hands of terrorists for the very same reason. This article tries to explore whether a third party's intervention in the domestic affairs of a war-torn country results in resolving the issue or aggravates the problem.

Historical Relationship:

Srilanka a piece of sub-continental land that is surrounded by water played a big role in history, culture and trade. The Indian subcontinent is closely related to Srilanka which is an isolated island separated by the Balk Strait. The island - known as the Pearl of the Indian Ocean, and the Indian peninsula share many similarities. According to the Lemurian Theory, once Ceylon was part of India and later it was separated from the mainland due to flood. The origin of Srilankans was from India and the archaeological evidence also reveals that. Ancient rulers from India made conquests, had trade relations and sent ambassadors to Ceylon. Some of the ancient rulers like Cholas, Pandyas, Pallavas, Mauryas and Vijayanagar rulers maintained cordial relationships with the rulers in Ceylon. The only nation that adopted Theravada Buddhism is Srilanka. By the efforts of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, Buddhism spread in Srilanka. According to history, Ashoka's son Mahindra and daughter Sangamitta were sent to Srilanka for the propagation of Buddhism. Most of the Tamils in Lanka were probably from southern India. Although they lived in Lanka, they had a feeling that their mother country is India and used to visit their kith and kin in India. This island nation in the Indian neighbourhood suffered a lot due to ethnicity. The minority Tamil group in Srilanka faced horrible events due to their race, origin and language. The terrorist activities and the ethnic conflict swallowed many human lives. This issue dragged the attention of International

countries as many public property and places, churches, libraries, temples, schools, hospitals etc. were devastated. Transport and communication systems were destroyed.

The relationship between India and Srilanka would have been better if there was no ethnic issue and Genocide. The ethnic problem exists even today. If we desire to know the basic reason behind this issue we have to go through the past history of Ceylon.

Background of the Problem:

Srilanka, once regarded as the country of Paradise, has now become a home for terrorist activities, suicide bombers etc. With the arrival of Europeans in Ceylon many changes took place in the country. Like other colonial countries, it was once ruled by the Dutch, Portuguese, British and finally became independent in 1948. The trouble in Srilanka was about supremacy and the fight for who has the real authority in Srilanka – Sinhalese or Tamils. The relationship between India and Srilanka seems to have begun since 5th century BC., when Vijaya a legendary prince from Northern India invaded and settled in Srilanka and his descendants were the Tamils. He is said to have been the founder of the Sinhalese culture in Srilanka. The Sinhalese were of Indo Aryan origin and Srilankan Tamils are the people who migrated from South India. The Britishers played an important role for the arrival of Indian Tamils in Srilanka. They were brought from South India to Srilanka for Plantation works during their period. They mainly worked in tea, coffee, rubber and coconut plantations. Most of them were from Trichy in Tamilnadu and other states like Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Their lives there was miserable – they got low wages and were threatened by the contract labourers.

Census of Population 1981

Communities	Percentage of population
Sinhalese	74.0%
Srilankan Tamils	18.2%
Indian Tamils	5.6%
Muslims	7.4%
Others	0.4%

The above table reveals the percentage of minorities and how it affects them in the prospects of job, professional education, political representation etc. Generally both the Tamils and Sinhalese had conflicting views about their origin, language and race. The Sinhalese had a view that Tamils were invaders and on the other hand, the Tamils felt that they were not getting equal status in society and were being discriminated.

From 1863 to 1880, a religious conflict broke out between Buddhists and Christians and the perpetrators are believed to be Buddhist monks. As per the “Son-of-soil policy”, more importance was given to Buddhism and the thrust was on driving away other communities. In 1917, policy of Standardization created ethnic discriminations against Tamils in jobs and professional admissions. In north and east of Srilanka, the Sinhala farmers created problems against the Tamils. In Srilanka, northern and eastern parts of the country are occupied by the Tamils. They were the first to get English education and got employment opportunities and powers in British period. In 1919, William Henry paved the way for communal representation under divide and rule policy which was somewhat beneficial for the Tamils till the independence. The Sinhalese mainly occupied the Southern and western part of the country and were of the opinion that unemployment was due to the settlement of Tamils in their country. As per the Land Development Act, 1935, Tamils were not allowed to own land and fishing was not allowed if they don't have written permission. In 1948, the Ceylon Citizenship Act made 7 lakh Indian Tamils stateless. The Tamils demanded 50% representation in the political constitution. Ponambalam – a Tamil politician and teacher - was the prime leader to raise his voice against the Sinhalese government for equal status. John Kothewala's “Sinhala only” Bill replaced English and made Sinhalese as the official language. So Selvanayagam and his Federal party protested against the policy in a Gandhian way. But they were vehemently thrashed by the violent Sinhalese and they were treated in an inhuman manner. There were outbreaks of violence between Sinhalese and the Tamil communities in 1977 and 1981. However in July 1983, the violence escalated into riots throughout the country leading to a civil war.

In order to gain support and power, most of the political leaders see a minor issue as a big threat. Likewise in Srilanka, the ethnic issue was made a political tool and Tamils were ill-treated. At one point of time, Tamil women were compelled to get their foetus aborted by the Sinhalese. Even school children were not able to go to schools happily and each school had pits so deep to shield themselves from air attack. The Civil war and Terrorist activities

made many homeless, lost their loved ones and became orphans. Not only in Srilanka, but other countries also face the same issue and human beings are not treated as a living thing. If each country decides to overthrow natives of other nations inhabiting in their country by giving more importance to their nationals, what will they gain?

LTTE and the civilwar

In 1972, a High School student name Velupillai Prabhakaran formed a small youth group known as Tamil New Tigers (TNT) in Jaffna Peninsula for regaining their genuine rights. Later in 1976, this organization was reorganized and renamed as LTTE. Prabhakaran had strong dictatorial and authoritarian tendencies and was uncompromisingly committed to the idea of an independent Tamil Kingdom. Their prime political and Ideological thinking and intention was to create an Independent Tamil State in Srilanka. Each Tiger had this unique intention and was willing to sacrifice their lives for this. In order to create an Independent Tamil state in North and East of the Island the tigers captured and controlled Jaffna in the northern part of the country. Some other major militant groups for the motive to achieve separate Eelam for Tamils were EPRLF, TELO, PLOTE, EROS, ENDLF, EPDP.

Rajiv Gandhi and Srilanka

Rajiv Gandhi, the talented, energetic, youngest and 6th Prime Minister of India, was the son of Indira Priyadarsini, the only female Prime Minister of India and the Grandson of the Architect of modern India, JawaharLal Nehru. He made an attempt to resolve the grievances of Srilankan Tamils permanently. The eminent leader who dreamed about establishing peace and nonviolence in his neighbourhood had to give up his life at the hands of terrorists. His policy of peacekeeping was construed as an interference and finally led to his assassination. He was assassinated by the blood thirsty LTTE. Did the LTTE achieve their goal by killing the person who wanted to make peace in Srilanka? Rajiv Gandhi had taken a broad minded view to settle the problems and grievances of Tamils. In recognition of his efforts, his death anniversary is observed as Anti-Terrorism day in India.

In 1987 the Srilankan government started a civil war against the LTTE in order to regain Jaffna. They named the military operation as "Operation Liberation" or "Vadamarachchi Operation". In this war the Srilankan Government imposed economic and communication blockade upon Jaffna the capital city of Northern Province. Many countries also supported the move of Srilanka against LTTE - they were Pakistan, Israel, Singapore and South Africa.

Four thousand troops were involved in this anti insurgent move of Lanka. Lot of innocent civilian lives were lost, belongings of poor civilians like properties, homes were destroyed and there was shortage of food and medicinal facilities due to bombing from the air, artillery shelling, etc. In this war the efforts and diplomatic moves of Rajiv Gandhi was extraordinary and worth mentioning. The Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi condemned the act of Srilanka and termed the massacre of unarmed defenceless civilians as unfair and the ultimate aim was to vanquish the Tamil Militant group. The wages of unresolved ethnic issue was shedding of innocent blood. Both LTTE and Sinhalese government couldn't see the grievances and sufferings of the common people. The international community should have taken stringent measures to prevent the human rights violations against the civilians.

At this time, (Operation Liberation) on humanitarian grounds, the Indian government led by Rajiv Gandhi decided to send relief supplies like food and Medicines through the Red Cross of India by sea. The journalists along with the relief workers started from Tamilnadu to reach Kalmunai in the Jaffna coast. Srilankan President Gunaratana initially welcomed these relief measures in the interest of good neighbourly relations. However, later he disavowed this. The Srilankan Coast Guard stopped the Indian boats from entering Srilankan waters and forced their return back to Tamil Nadu. Later the Indian government decided to send the relief measures through air. This operation came to be known as "Operation Poomalai". This was carried out on July 4th 1987. The Indian government invited the Srilankan Red Cross to join in this Mission. But this symbolic act made Srilanka's Prime Minister Premadasa blame India's move as likely to be a bully and President Jayewardene also accused India for violating the sovereignty of their country by interfering in their domestic matters and they were near the victory. The foreign minister Hameed also had a view that India violated Srilanka's territorial integrity. Why was India involved in this Civil War? Was interfering in another country's internal matters a diplomatic tactic?

The ultimate aim of the Indian Government and people of India was to maintain peace in Srilanka especially to prevent the violence against the Tamils in Jaffna. Against a humanitarian background this move seems to be good but we should also understand that sovereignty and territorial integrity of any country is unique and sensational.

Indian interference and war with LTTE

After this event the Indian government made peacetalks with Srilanka and this paved the way for the birth of The Indo-Srilankan accord. The Srilankan President Jeyavardhana and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi met on 29th July 1987 in Srilanka and reached an agreement for the development of friendly relations, to stop racism, to strengthen the protection of all people and the internal security of the country. The provision had another salient feature which ensures limited political autonomy to the Tamils. The Eastern Province was linked with the Northern Province as one administrative unit having an elected provincial council. India also provided military assistance (IPKF) to Srilanka to disarm militants and to declare ceasefire. This operation was named as "Operation Bhavan".

About this accord Rajiv said 'It is not mere geographical proximity which binds us, ours is a relationship of heart and mind'. Prabaharan met Rajiv at Delhi. Rajiv Gandhi explained about the accord and had discussions about the Accord. Initially LTTE regarded the agreement as distasteful because the principles in the accord led Srilanka accede to India's strategic sphere of influence and also prevented other countries involvement in Srilanka. Later he thought that the destiny and political lives of the Tamils will be based on this accord and finally accepted the accord although he felt it had deficient features. Prabakaran's view was – "I do have faith in the straightforwardness of Indian Prime Minister and I do have faith in his assurances. We do believe that India will not allow the racist Srilankan state to take once again the road of genocide against Tamils". The very same person can be regarded as an opportunist back stabber who was eventually responsible for assassinating him. After this Rajiv Gandhi went to Srilanka and while he was inspecting the Naval guard of Honour, he was attacked by a Sinhala soldier Wijitha Rohana Wijayemun with a rifle butt. This gives an indication that, Rajiv Gandhi's efforts to mediate peace between the Srilankan Government and LTTE was construed as an intervention in the domestic policies of Srilanka and did not find favour with both the warring parties. In India we have heard about Ashoka and his Dharma which preaches Ahimsa. The popular leader Mr. Gandhi who followed this principle and had a vision to maintain peace and harmony in a war torn neighbouring country, was looked upon as an enemy. Even the common man had extreme levels of rage towards Gandhi, one of the good missioned politician who was later assassinated by the LTTE on 1991 May 21. He was the first who had the credibility to solve the grievances of Tamils in Srilanka permanently. But his humanitarian and peaceful way to end the ethnic issue and civil war remained unaccomplished.

The day after the accord was inked, the Indian Peace Keeping Force landed in Srilanka with 6000 soldiers. The Tamil gave them a warm welcome. IPKF asked the Tamil Militants to surrender their weapons. The leader of the Tigers was at Delhi so they planned to surrender their weapons after Prabhakaran came back from Delhi. However, citing the reason that other militant groups had not surrendered weapons, LTTE cadres also failed to do so. The tigers violated the rules of the accord and on 10th August, a large boat was found carrying deadly weapons with 17 tigers including top leaders in Srilankan Territorial waters. The Srilankan army tried to lay siege on them and seized the LTTE boat and arrested 17 LTTE persons with prime heads. LTTE demanded the release of the prisoners and amnesty to the LTTE prisoners. Srilankan government accepted this and the prisoners were taken to Colombo but the 12 prisoners committed suicide by consuming cyanide. The death of senior LTTE members drove Prabhakaran mad. In retaliation, LTTE announced war and killed prisoners of war and dumped the bodies in front of the IPKF office in Jaffna. After this, the tigers demanded a reconsideration and refused to surrender their weapons. IPKF began to lose its hope in reaching their goal and tried to capture Jaffna, the fort of LTTE. So Indian government sent many forces to Srilanka to disarm LTTE by force and both fought each other.

Indian intervention in the Sri Lankan Civil War (July 1987 – March 1990)

Battle	Date	Location	Victory
Operation Pawan	11 th October 1987 – 25 th October 1987	Jaffna, Jaffna District	IPKF
Operation Trishul	April 1988	Northern Province	IPKF
Operation Viraat	April 1988	Northern Province	IPKF
Operation Checkmate	June 1988	Vadamarachi, Northern Province	IPKF
Jaffna University Helidrop	12 th October 1988	Jaffna	LTTE

LTTE didn't like the attitude of IPKF and made a secret alliance with President Premadasa. This was followed by the insurgency by Janatha Vimukhti Peramuna (JVP) jointly

with Buddhist monks and they demanded the withdrawal of the IPKF from Lanka. Quelling the revolt of JVP was another major duty to the government.

During Indira Gandhi's tenure, the foreign Intelligence Agency of India, RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) provided arms, training and monetary support to six Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups - they were LTTE, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS), Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and Tamil Eelam Liberation Army (TELA). It is believed that by supporting different militant groups, the Indian Government hoped to keep the Tamil independence movement divided and would be able to exert control over it. During Rajiv Gandhi's reign the RAW supported TNA (EPRLF) to form the government in Tamil dominating areas to oppose LTTE. This was another major reason behind LTTE's bitterness towards India. At this crucial juncture President Premadasa wrote a letter to Indian Premier mentioning that the presence of IPKF has become a deeply divisive and resentful issue. Gandhi in return replied that, IPKF could be pulled out only when the Srilankan Government granted autonomy to the Tamil areas and the LTTE are ready to surrender their weapons. Premadasa retorted they will surrender only after the withdrawal of IPKF. Finally India agreed to withdraw Indian Forces from Srilanka. The JVP, Srilankan Government and LTTE had the same intention i.e., to force the withdrawal of IPKF troops from Srilanka. The Tamils who initially welcomed the IPKF anticipating a new dawn, also began to dislike the Indian soldiers because of their actions. The goal of LTTE was to become the sole representative of minority Tamils. The JVP felt, their opposition to the presence of IPKF will fetch political gains in the election.

Did the politico social accord achieve the main goal? The IPKF was sent to make peace with LTTE and Ceylon government, to solve Tamils communal grievances and disarm the Militant groups. The actual purpose couldn't be achieved by them and were involved in war with LTTE. They failed to suppress the LTTE's supremacy in Lanka. India under-estimated the power of LTTE and IPKF were not well-versed in Guerrilla attack. Indian government without consulting them (LTTE) drafted the accord. It was a mistake. Finally the IPKF returned to India with the failure of un-accomplished mission. Prabhakaran initially viewed the aim and plans of the accord as affecting the structure of their struggle since, basically they adopted violent methods to achieve their goals and now have to surrender their arms to IPKF. But later he accepted the accord since it was felt that, only it paved the way for

the creation of a Separate Tamil Eelam from the hands of racist Sinhala government. But the IPKF's mission to find a solution in a peaceful way failed and waged war against tigers and most civilians lost their lives.

Later LTTE joined hands with the Srilankan Government and demanded withdrawal of IPKF as a pre-condition for surrendering their weapons. In a major twist, the Srilankan government supplied arms and ammunition to the LTTE. There is a speculation that Premadasa also sort their help to wage war against IPKF. Finally in 1989 the newly formed government in India under the premiership of V.P Singh authorized the withdrawal of IPKF and on 22nd October were evacuated from Jaffna. The last contingent from the IPKF in Lanka left on 24th March, 1990. The one year service of IPKF claimed the lives of 600.

The war between IPKF with LTTE cost the lives of poor people. Is there any gain for the Tamils after the arrival of IPKF? Prabakaran expressed "The Liberation Tigers are not independent of the people. The LTTE is people's organization. The tigers are people; the people are tigers. So, India has launched an unjustified war against our people". He also viewed, "IPKF stood against us by rendering their support to the government". This claim is totally unacceptable because LTTE stood against the racist Srilankan government and later joined hands with them to evacuate the IPKF. Tigers thought the IPKF was here to crush and to suppress their legitimate struggle to gain freedom for the oppressed. They accused IPKF of inflicting loss of lives and property on Tamil civilians which led to the increased flow of refugees to southern India. At the end of this Civil war both IPKF and LTTE made claims for their victory but the truth behind this is both sides had lot of casualties and innocent people lost their peaceful life. The accord had a peculiar devolution package for the Tamils and it was not achieved. Instead of the intended disarmament of the militant groups the Srilankan government provided arms to the LTTE to evacuate the IPKF. This was a move against the neighbouring power which tried to make peace. For meeting their selfish ambitions, the Srilankan government and LTTE forgot their enmity and played in the lives of minorities. They justified this by saying LTTE will surrender their weapons only after the evacuation of IPKF. Rajiv had failed to achieve his dream to maintain peace, integrity and sovereignty in its neighbourhood.

Any problem can be solved only when the affected parties come together to have meaningful discussions, negotiations and peaceful dialogue. To solve the ethnic problem the intervention of a third party will not be effectual. But the militant groups, IPKF, and the

Lankan government justoppressed the commonpeople who were alreadydistressedin the name of racism, terrorism, ethnicity, fanaticism etc.The Militant groups could haveprobably achieved their dreamland Eelam by unity and support of each other through non-violent means. The ultimate goal of the militant groups was to achieve the Tamil Eelam so instead of terrorist activities and retaliation they could have stood still on their intention whatever happens, forgetting supremacy and rivalry among themselves.After the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi the people and the government of India had begun to dislike the Tamil Militant groups.

UN estimate for those killed between 1983 and 2009:

Civilians	Srilankan Army	IPKF	LTTE	Total
30,000 – 50,000	23,790	1,555	27,693	80,000 – 100,000

This civil war came to an end in 2009. In the final battle held at Puthukkudiyirippu, Mullaitivu District, the LTTE Head along with his supporters were killed by the Srilankan army. By swallowing the blood and lives of many, the twenty six years old Civil war ended with the Srilankan Military force getting victory over the LTTE. LTTE conceded their failure by posting that “This battle has reached its bitter end. We have decided to silence our guns.”

Conclusion:

As discussed above, it is pertinent to mention here that adopting violent means has not been the solution to a problem haunting any country. In the case of Srilanka, be it the LTTE, Srilankan government or IPKF, the means adopted by them for solving the civil war has not yielded desired results. Their actions have led to loss of lakhs of innocent lives. In addition to the numerous casualties inflicted by LTTE and the army, the Jaffna Hospital massacre is a classic example of the excesses committed by IPKF. The political establishment of any country should realise the fact that all sections of the society - irrespective of their majority or minority status, should be accorded due respect and recognition. Likewise, nations having mighty powerand status should be guarded in their response to the local issues faced by their neighbouring countries, so that it is not construed as an intervention in their internal affairs.

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