

EELAM MOVEMENT
AND
THE TAMIL MILITANT GROUPS

After the exit of the British from Sri Lanka in 1948 the Sinhalese with their numerical superiority set motion to the process of racial discrimination. The Sinhalese never cared to keep the Tamil population content by giving them equal rights and due respect to their culture, language, religion, education and other vital matters. The armed forces committed excesses in suppressing the political rights of the Tamils.

The organisation of the Sinhalese majority on the basis of linguistic and religious appeals was followed by a counter mobilisation of the Sri Lanka Tamil minority. Since 1949 the FP worked hard to protect the interests of the Tamils¹.

In the beginning, the FP was concerned mainly with the four basic issues which were vital to Tamil interests:

1. Establishment of one or more Tamil linguistic states as a federating unit or units enjoying wide autonomous and residuary powers within a federal State in Sri Lanka;

2. restoration of the Tamil language to its 'rightful place' enjoying absolute parity of status with Sinhala as an official language of Sri Lanka;

3. conferment of full civil rights to all Tamil speaking people; and

4. cessation of colonisation of traditionally Tamil speaking areas with Sinhalese people.

1. See: Wilson, A.J., "The Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics", Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, Vol. 4(2), pp. 117-37.

The FP demanded that the entire land in the traditional Tamil homelands should be reserved exclusively for Tamils. It regarded the Sinhala Peasant Colonisation Schemes like the one at Gal Oya as an attempt to challenge the Tamil political predominance in their own lands. But the Sri Lankan Government did not accept the concept of traditional Tamil homelands. The border areas remained politically sensitive and in the North Central and Eastern provinces, very bitter conflicts broke out in 1956 and 1958.

The FP appeared to be more determined than the TC to maintain the separate existence of the Tamil community from the threatening Sinhalese domination. The 1956 elections were fought, by and large, on communal issues of ~~diversity~~ in language and religion. As a result of this, the FP gained political predominance in the Tamil speaking areas¹. For nearly ten years after 1956, the FP kept on bargaining with the SLFP and the UNP for concessions to Tamils on communal issues in exchange of Parliamentary support. The 1965 elections saw a polarisation in the Sinhalese areas as the UNP and few small

1. Jafar, Ghani, Op. Cit., pp.36-41.

allies fought against the United Front comprising the SLFP, LSSP and CP. After the Elections the FP and the TC joined with the UNP and several other parties to form a self-styled 'national government'. FP joined the government of Dudley Senanayake (UNP) on the basis of specific guarantees to Tamils in respect of language, District Councils and conditions of repatriation of persons of Indian origin. Contrary to their expectations, Prime Minister Senanayake envisaged the District Councils to function with limited powers under the supervision of the Central Government. Creation of the District Councils without sufficient autonomy was considered by the TC leader, G.G. Ponnambalam as 'Suicidal' for the Tamils¹.

Disappointed with the Government's attitude towards the autonomy issue, the FP withdrew its support to Dudley Senanayake's Government in 1968. The alleged non-implementation of promises made by the Prime Minister in regard to acquisition of proficiency in Sinhala by Tamil public servants and differences with the Government over declaration

1. See: The Sun (Colombo), May 4, 1967.

of the area around the Hindu Koneswaran Temple in Trincomalee as a sacred area, led the FP to leave the Government¹. They remained as the main opposition to Government.

In the 1970 elections the UNP Government was defeated by the United Front. The formation of the United Front Government under the leadership of Mrs. Bandaranaike intensified the frustration of the FP. This drove the Tamil Parties to unite with each other to take a strong position on communal relations. During early 1970s, the influence of the moderate leaders within the party was substantially reduced and the control over the party passed into the hands of younger and more militant leaders. The political developments on the language issue, threw the Tamil youth which was already restive and frustrated from frying pan into the fire. The Government's decision to replace English with Sinhalese as the official language seriously affected the Tamils, who had hitherto received their education

1. Kodikara, S.U., "The Separatist Eelam Movement...", Op. Cit., p. 200.

in English. Their white-collar public service jobs were jeopardised because they did not know the Sinhalese language. The Tamil youth were thus confronted with a rapidly worsening employment situation, in which there was general dearth of job opportunities.

In 1972 Mrs. Bandaranaike imposed a Republican constitution unilaterally against the will of the Tamil people. The FP participated in the initial stages in the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly in 1972 but withdrew from it when its demands on federalism, language and citizenship were rejected by the Government. Despite the constant agitation of Tamil Political Parties, the new Constitution gave pride of place to Sinhalese and Buddhism in Sri Lanka without a single concession to the Tamil speaking minority¹. The government which introduced 1972 Constitution had its genesis in the 'Sinhala-Only' policies of the 1950s². Following this the

1. See: Coomaraswamy, Radhika, Sri Lanka, The Crisis of the Anglo-American Constitutional Traditions in a Developing Society, (Vikas, New Delhi, 1984), pp. 31-32.

2. Ibid.

hitherto divided Tamil Political Parties - The FP, the TC, the CWC and the Tamil Progressive Front - met at Trincomalee on May 14, 1972 and formed the Tamil United Front (TUF)¹. The TUF had presented the government with a six point demand to reconsider the constitution in the light of these issues. These include granting of the status of official language to Tamil, granting of citizenship to the 'Indian Tamils', revocation of the privileged position of Buddhism and equal status to all religions, abolition of untouchability and last but not the least, decentralisation of power². But the government rejected all these justifiable demands. As a result of this the TUF had no option except to boycott the Constituent Assembly meeting of May 22, 1972 which was summoned to pass the Constitution. However, the New Constitution of Sri Lanka was adopted on the same day. This seemed to be the last attempt on the part of the Tamil leadership to win constitutional recognition of the Tamil nation without jeopardising the unity of Sri Lanka.

1. Jaffar, Ghani, Op. Cit., p. 37.

2. Tiruchelvam, N., "The Making and Unmaking of Constitutions - Some Reflections on the process", Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies, (June 1977), pp. 18-24.

In October 1972 the TUF launched a non-violent struggle under the leadership of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam to achieve its objectives and also decided that the rights of the Tamils could not be regained except within the frame work of a separate Tamil State. Protesting against the imposition of the new Constitution S.J.V. Chelvanayakam resigned to his Parliament seat in December 1972, to obtain a mandate for the establishment of Sovereign Eelam Tamil Nation¹. A by-election was held for the same seat after a lapse of more than two years in February 1975, in which Chelvanayakam sought the Tamil peoples' mandate for separation and won by overwhelming majority. The UF government persisted in its refusal to negotiate with the TUF. In this rapidly worsening situation the TUF met at Vannagam in Vaddukottai Constituency resolved to adopt the achievement of a sovereign, independent, secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam as its objective on May 14, 1976. The name of the organisation was changed to Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF)². The resolution thus marked a radical

1. Wilson, A.J., Op. Cit., p. 43.

2. See: Kearney, Robert N., "Ethnic Conflict and the Tamil Separatist.....", Op. Cit., pp. 904-5.

shift in the Tamil demand from the struggle for equality to an assertion of freedom, from the demand of fundamental rights to the assertion of self-determination, from the acceptance of a pluralistic experiment to the surfacing of a new corporate identity¹. A resolution adopted by the TULF, under the Chairmanship of Chelvanayakam, claimed that an Independent State has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil nation in this country². It also called upon the Tamil youth in particular to come to throw themselves fully in the sacred fight for freedom and flinch not till the goal of a Sovereign, Socialist State of Tamil Eelam is achieved³.

TULF fought the 1977 General Elections seeking a mandate for creation of Eelam and won 18 seats out of 22 seats which it contested and became the

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1. Tiruchelvam, N., The Politics of Decentralisation and Devolution: Competing Conceptions of District Development Councils in Sri Lanka', in Robert B. Goldman and A.J. Wilson, eds., From Independence..., Op. Cit., p. 198.
 2. Wilson, A.J., "Sri Lanka and its Future: Sinhalese versus Tamils" in A.J. Wilson, et al (eds.), The States of South Asia, Problems of National Integration, (C. Hurst, London, 1982, p. 306.
 3. Karan, James K., Op. Cit., p. 65.

main opposition in the National State Assembly¹. Thus, it was for the first time that a political party representing the interests of a minority community became the main opposition. This was considered as a proof of the overwhelming demand among the Tamils for a separate state. It was at this time there were hopes, especially among the Tamils, that something would be done to redress their grievances.

After assuming office, Prime Minister Jayewardene in a statement on Government Policy towards Tamil minority declared on 4th August, 1977: "My Government accepts the position that there are numerous problems confronting the Tamil speaking people. The lack of a solution to their problems had made the Tamil-speaking people support even a separate state..."². He promised to summon an All Party Conference to redress the grievances. However, no constructive efforts have been made to solve the problems of

1. Warnapala, W.A. Wiswa, 'Parliamentary Government or One Party Dictatorship?' India Quarterly, Vol. 38(3-4), Jul., & Dec., 1982, p. 272.

2. Sri Lanka National State Assembly Official Report, Vol. 23(1), 1977, p. 111.

See: Sivarajah, A., Op. Cit., p. 124.

the Tamils. The greatest barrier to a settlement is the Buddhist revivalist ideology of Sihadipa and Dammadipa. Sihadipa regards Sri Lanka as the land of the Sinhalese-Only. Dammadipa teaches the Sinhalese that they have a special role to play as the guardians of the Buddha Damma¹.

Having exhausted all avenues through Parliamentary and Constitutional processes to seek accommodation within the Sinhalese state and to protect the Tamils and their continued existence in Sri Lanka a segment of dissident militant youth disassociated itself with the TULF and took up the armed struggle as the last resort to achieve the goal of a separate Tamil State.

There has also been a conflict of opinions between the TULF leadership and the moderates on the one hand and the youth organisations on the other. A TULF Youth Front resolution to set up a national council to draft a constitution for Tamil Eelam was rejected by the TULF leadership at the TULF's Second Regional Convention held in July 1978².

1. Ibid.

2. Ceylon Daily News, Jul., 31, 1978.

Subsequently, M. Sivasitamparam, President of the TULF, appealed to the Tamil Youth to exercise restraint and to behave in accordance with the advice of their leaders¹. A meeting in London addressed by the Secretary-General of the TULF Amirthalingam ended in a fiasco as the police had to use tear gas to disperse the crowd. Those who caused the trouble were young Tamils who protested that the TULF leadership was not working fast enough to achieve 'Eelam'². When Tamil Youth organised a boycott of schools in Northern and Eastern Provinces in February 1979, Amirthalingam disassociated the TULF from the campaign³.

TULF leadership expressed its willingness to have a dialogue with President Jayewardene on matters of education, language, economic development and decentralisation. Such an attitude was opposed by the Tamil militancy. The Tamil militants had no desire to get their grievances redressed in collaboration or co-operation with Sinhala parties. They

1. Sun, Sept., 12, 1978.

2. Siriweera, W.I., Op. Cit., p. 906.

3. Sun, Feb., 2, 1979.

wanted nothing short of a separate Tamil State. The Tamil politicians who collaborated with Sinhala parties, or who did not move in line with the militant youth, became the targets of attack of the militant group of Tamil youth. These terrorists murdered police officers mainly Tamils, who were involved in the investigation and detection of terrorist activities in Jaffna¹.

Though the TULF leadership publicly disclaimed any connection with the Terrorist Movement, it neither completely disassociated itself from it nor discouraged the criminal activities of the Terrorists. Army and Police sources have divulged that a connection did exist between the TULF and the Tiger Movement².

Irrespective of these differences, however, militant youth organisations and the TULF leadership were working for a separate State for the Tamils. The struggle was carried out not only within the country but also outside. The leader of the TULF Youth Movement, Kasi Anandan, publicly stated that

1. Kodikara, S.U., "The Separatist Eelam Movement...", Op. Cit., p. 202.

2. Ceylon Daily News, Jul., 3 and 12, 1979.

every effort had been made to explain the Tamils' grievances to the international public. According to him the TULF had considerable sympathy in foreign countries where the Tamils' plight had been spotlighted¹. On his visit to India in March 1979, Amirthalingam appealed to the Indian Government and in particular to the people of Tamil Nadu to support the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils for a separate State². In May 1979, M. Sivasithamparam, the TULF President visited the United States to solicit support of the Congress men and others championing the cause of human rights, for a separate Tamil State in Sri Lanka.

Responding to increasing acts of violence by the militant Tamils in the north against the Government, President Jayewardene despatched the Sinhalese military forces with a determination to 'wipe out the terrorists' spearheading the demand for a separate Tamil state using all the resources of the State before 31st December, 1979. The Government also

1. Lanka Guardian, Sep., 1, 1978.

2. Ceylon Daily Mirror, Mar., 16, 1979.
Also see: Sun, Mar., 30, 1979,

3. Sunday Observer, Jul., 15, 1979.

brought in the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) in the same year. Through this Act the police and the army were given unlimited powers of arrest and search and restricting the movement of persons in the northern province. Attempts to overthrow the Government by illegal means was made an offence punishable by death sentence and censorship on the publications inciting persons to mutiny, riot or civil commotion was imposed. Brought in as a temporary measure the PTA has become permanent.

After prolonged negotiations with the TULF, President Jayewardene introduced a system of the District Development Councils (DDCs) in 1982 which was designed to decentralise the power of the centre. However, instead of decentralising power, the new system further centralised the powers of the President and the DDC's were left without adequate powers and funds. Consequently, these DDCs were abandoned in most of the Tamil districts. In fact, almost all the Sinhalese political parties conceded that the Tamils have genuine grievances¹.

1. Sivarajah, A., Op.Cit., p. 124.

The Government's failure to meet the just grievances of the Sri Lankan Tamils has sharply deteriorated the intercommunal relations which reached the lowest ebb in the living memory with the communal violence of 1983. As a consequence, the hostile relations between the two communities have been further stifled and fissiparous trends among the Tamils strengthened. The Government used the situation to distract people's attention from the social effects of the crisis and to put further burdens on them¹.

Meanwhile the Tamil guerilla groups have stepped up their violent activities attacking military and police targets in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. They have drawn severe army reprisals in which many people have been killed. As Rodney Tasker reports, the military campaign "has promoted bloody reprisals, often against civilians, by a badly prepared, predominantly Sinhalese army which, until recently, was more ceremonial than operational"².

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1. See: Silva, K.P., "Championing Independence, Democracy and Progress", Problems of Peace and Socialism, Aug., 1984, p. 35.
 2. Tasker, Rondey, "Brink of Civil War...", Far Eastern Economic Review, Feb., 21, 1985, p. 38.

The demand for separation and its extreme manifestation among Tamil militant groups has to be seen in the light of these developments. Although Tamil militants are dismissed by the Sri Lankan Government as 'Terrorists', it would be a grave mistake to view them in that light and write off the issue completely. Extremism is the manifestation of the disenchantment of the Tamil youth in the present political set up combined with an intense Tamil nationalist feeling.

The origin and development of extremism among Tamil youth can be traced on one hand to the effects of discrimination in language, education and employment which got compounded by State violence and, on the other hand, to the growing disenchantment with the established TULF leadership and their forms of Parliamentary struggle. After some sporadic violent incidents in the early 1970s, these militant youth came together in 1979 under the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) with the objective of attaining independence through armed struggle. Gradually schism developed among them due to differences in strategy and tactics, ideological outlook and personal

squables and the Tiger movement got splintered into many fractions¹. It should also be remembered that they are also fractioned into smaller groups based on caste² affiliation and trying for political dominance.

These Militant Groups, as a strategy to create fear psychosis in the Government, have committed a series of bank robberies, ambushed security personnel, assassinated policemen and security forces and have also liquidated 'informers' and 'traitors' from among themselves³. Instead of isolating these extremists and trying to find political solution with the co-operation of the moderate leadership, the Government of Sri Lanka responded to the situation by massive deployment of security forces in the Jaffna Peninsula, enforcing the prevention of Terrorism Act of 1979 and passing of the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution which even proscribed the peaceful

1. Suryanarayana, V., Op. Cit., p. 143.

2. Obeysekera, G., "Political Violence and the Future of Democracy in Sri Lanka", Committee for Rational Development, Op. Cit., p. 93.

3. See: Suryanarayana, V., Op. Cit., p.143.

advocacy of a separate Tamil State. The government measures failed to reduce the influence of the extremists, but resulted in the swelling of their ranks and growing isolation of the TULF leadership¹.

Insurgent Groups:

At the height of the Tamil militancy there are at least five major insurgent groups, each having a distinct identity, ethos and personality. All these groups were mutually suspicious and antagonistic of one another. In fact, much of their warring was among themselves rather than against the Sinhalese². There are only three things in common among them - the demand for Eelam, faith in violence and mutual hatred³. All these groups proclaim that they are either Marxists or Sociolists or both. Their Eelam would be a Socialist Republic where the people would have freedom to choose their Government⁴.

1. Ibid.

2. Kadian, Rajesh, Op. Cit., p. 22.

3. Ramaswamy, Cho, "The Final Solution?" Sunday, Jun. 15-21, 1986, p. 16.

4. Singh, Bhagawan P., "The Gathering Storm", The Week, Vol. 3(12), Mar., 10-16, 1985, p. 21.

The five main guerilla groups are:

1. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam;
2. Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation;
3. Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front;
4. Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students; and
5. The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam.

Apart from these groups, several others had also come into existence in 1980s, but by and large, above five groups are the major ones among the Tamil militants with LTTE gradually overshadowing the others and virtually occupying the centre stage position.

1. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE):

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is not only the strongest and most influential but also the most independent and most radical of the militant groups¹. Velupillai Prabhakaran from Velvettithurai is the founder leader of the LTTE and also its supreme military and political commander. Anton Balasingham is the political advisor to the LTTE². From his

1. Frontline, Apr., 2-15, 1988, p. 110.

2. Sunil, K.P., "What is the LTTE upto?" "The Illustrated Weekly of India, Jun., 22-28, 1991, p. 8.

youth Prabhakaran was interested in the nascent students movements. In 1970, when he was 16 years old, he joined the Tamil Students Organisation (TSO) founded by Kuttimani and Jagan. Later, in 1972, he broke away from this organisation to form his own guerilla outfit, the Tamil New Tigers. On May 5, 1976, the outfit was renamed as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)¹. Prabhakaran's trusted lieutenant, Uma Maheswaran was its Chairman at that time. Due to some personal and ideological differences with Prabhakaran, Uma Maheswaran quit the LTTE in 1979 along with sizeable number of followers to float his own militant group, the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOT).

Consequently, Prabhakaran disbanded his unit and retraced his steps to Kuttimani, whose TSO had by then metamorphosed into the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO). In early 1980s Prabhakaran left TELO and also Sri Lanka and moved to Tamil Nadu in South India, from where he regrouped his organisation and masterminded its operations with the moral

1. Ibid.

and economic support of the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran¹. Prabhakaran who learnt the use of weapons by himself sent his cadres to Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and to mercenary outfits in the USA for training in the guerilla warfare. His outfit collaborated with the TELO in the raid on a bank in Neerveli in Sri Lanka where nine million Sri Lankan rupees were looted. They purchased arms with this money. In addition to this an infinite supply of high quality arms and ammunition besides money from non-resident Tamils living in Australia, Britain and Canada, Prabhakaran grew from strength to strength².

In Tamil Nadu his intimacy with M.G. Ramachandran ensured him immunity from police action even when he involved in illegal activities³. During the mid-80s there were as many as 31 training camps organised for the Tamil militant groups in Tamil Nadu in addition to political offices in all the major towns, cities and coastal villages. At that

1. Raghavan A., "JRJ drifts with the local currents", Blitz, Sept., 27, 1986, p. 9.

2. Sunil K.P., Op. Cit., p. 8.

3. Ibid.

time the militants were treated as honourable guests in the state, despite the fact that their inter-group rivalries often involved in open clashes disturbing the general peace in the state. They have functioned outside the law of the State. Cases registered against them which were invariably swept under the mat and in the event of an arrest being made, bail was inevitably granted¹. However, after MGR's death, the friendship between the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kaghagam (AIADMK) and the LTTE started waning away and Madras is no longer the safe heaven for the Tigers as in the past.

The main ideology of the LTTE is to preserve and protect the ancient glory of the Kingdom of Jaffna, Tamil traditions, culture, language and the Tamil homeland from the Sinhalese. In this context the Socialist and leftist ideas of the organisation take a back seat². The people of Jaffna extended their support to the LTTE because they

1. Johnson, Marguerite, "Island of War", Time, Jun., 9, 1986, p. 15.

2. Hellmann, Dagmar, - Rajanayagam, "The Tamil Militants - Before the Accord and After", Pacific Affairs, Vol. 61(4), Winter 1988-89, p. 612.

are the most nationalist of the militant groups. The LTTE is not only intensely nationalist, but also fanatically committed to the cause of Tamil Eelam. It does not tolerate any one who opposes them and has no qualms in liquidating those whom it considers to be obstacle in the attainment of its goal¹ whether he may be Sinhalese, Tamilian, Indian or otherwise.

In the Jaffna peninsula and the adjoining areas of Mannar, Mullaitivu and Killinochchi, the LTTE runs a parallel administration along its own lines, running ammunition factories, nursery schools and also a military academy. Government servants, teachers and pensioners continue to draw their salaries and pensions from the Government, but work under the Tigers. During the last four years, the Tigers had built up an empire, established institutions and placed their cadres in key positions in the erstwhile government organisations². They have

1. Suryanarayana V., 'A Policy for Peace, on Indo-Sri Lankan Relations', Frontline, Sep. 28 - Oct. 11, 1991, p. 47.

2. Jayanth V., "A Parallel State", Frontline, Oct., 18-21, 1994, p. 38.

the police and judicial systems and also developed a self reliant economic structure. The LTTE also runs a "Voice of Tigers" radio station and publishes a couple of dailies. The latest addition to the chain of institutions was the "Bank of Tamil Eelam", which opened its first branch in May 1994 in Jaffna¹.

The LTTE has well trained, intensely motivated, armed fighters who have earned a name for themselves among the many "terrorist" organisations in the world. The LTTE's fighters are popularly known as Tigers. The tigers are decentralised force and masters in guerilla warfare. The Tigers have also become good experts in the use of landmines and improvised engineering devices, which they locally produce. They have patented and perfected the technique of suicide squads that have struck with deadly precision at human, military and other targets². The Tigers are armed with the best sophisticated equipment needed for guerilla warfare. The Soviet AK-47 assault rifles and M-16 rifles are at present their favourite weapons³. Their

1. Ibid., pp. 38-40.

2. Ibid.

3. Guha, Seema, "Sri Lanka: Back to bloodletting", Times of India, Jun., 24, 1990.

heavier weaponry including Browning, 5 inch machine guns, Soviet RPG-7 Rocket propelled Granades and home made mortars ranging from 60 mm. to 155 mm. in calibre. Mines and bobby traps were imaginatively developed and ingeniously used . The guerillas are alleged to have acquired SAM or Stinger missiles from Afganistan and they are building a navy called the Sea Tigers for which they have manufactured a rudimentary "submarine" using local raw materials². The LTTE also established several antitank units.

The LTTE is the most tightly structured, highly disciplined and autocratically led organisation. The fact that the Tigers always carry a glass ampoule containing potassium cyanide in their shirt pockets and around their neck, to be used by themselves in case of capture, is only one feature of this. In their first major assault, the Tigers ambushed an army petrol in the Jaffna Peninsula killing 13 soldiers. Soon after communal violence engulfed the Tamils all over the Island³.

1. Kadian, Rajesh, Op. Cit., p. 23.

2. Hennayake, Shantha K., "Sri Lanka in 1992", Asian Survey, Vol. 33(2), Feb., 1993, p. 158.

3. The Week, Aug. 14-20, 1983, pp. 16-21.

By mid-1983, Prabhakaran's Tigers consists of only 30 full time members. In early 1987, its strength rose to 5000 soldiers¹. A large number of its experienced fighters were wiped out by the IPKF during July 1987 to March 1990. Most of its cadres now are new recruits. Though the IPKF weakened the Tigers militarily, but their popularity in the north remains undiminished. Seema Guha observes that, "though the Tamils in Jaffna speak of a 40,000 strong force at the command of LTTE, the actual number is less than 18,000 by mid-1990"². Most of these cadres are as young as fourteen. In Jaffna it is a common sight to see uniformed girls belonging to the LTTE passing through the town on two wheelers with AK 47's, magazines and granades in their hands³. Though the experienced and well trained cadres are limited in number, their commitment to the Tamil cause and fanatical belief in the leadership of Prabhakaran makes them more than a match for any professional soldier⁴. It is often pointed out

1. Indian Express, Feb., 16, 1987.

2. Guha, Seema, Op. Cit.

3. Menon, Ramesh, "Return of the Tigers", India Today, Apr., 15, 1990, pp. 118 & 121.

4. Guha, Seema, Op. Cit.

that no army can easily destroy an organised force like LTTE so long as the people whole-heartedly support it¹.

2. Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO):

The Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation was founded in 1973 by Thangathurai, who claims to be the fore-runner of the Sri Lankan Tamil armed struggle. Sri Sabaratnam took over its leadership after its entire top brass was wiped out in the Wallikade massacre². Sri Sabaratnam was shot dead by LTTE men on May 6, 1986³. TELO is, by some accounts, the oldest militant group. It was once strong militarily and patronised by the DMK's M. Karunanidhi. However serious fighting within the leadership undermined the TELO's strength and led to defections and breakaways⁴.

The group's attempt to stage a recovery was thwarted when the LTTE, launched a full scale war

1. Katoch, Arjun, "LTTE: Need for a Balanced Assessment", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 26(44), Nov., 2, 1991, p. 2506.

2. TELO's front-ranking leaders Thangathurai, Kuttimani, Jegan, Devan and several others were killed in the Wallikada prison massacre during the July 1983 riots. See: Frontline, May 17-30, 1986, p. 11.

3. Ibid.

4. Sunday, Jul., 9-15, 1989, p. 13.

against it in May 1986 virtually reducing them to dust¹. More than 150 TELO members were killed and its leader, Sabaratnam was shot dead at Kondavil near Jaffna in May, 1986². The clashes demolished a 'military strong' TELO, with 22 of its bases over run by the LTTE, which also confiscated its arms and all their wireless communication equipment, appropriated its vehicles and burnt its boats³.

TELO claims that they want to establish a free socialist state and hold free elections⁴. This makes TELO the group most amenable to maintaining a "democratic" structure of government. The members of TELO fight equally for the suppressed Sinhalese and for the suppressed Tamils, their stated aim being peace in the Indian ocean⁵. On the other hand, members of TELO like the LTTE, do not seem to have much confidence in the willingness of the

1. Ramaswamy, Cho, Op. Cit., p. 16.

2. The Hindu, May 8, 1986.

3. Ibid.

4. Hollmann, Dagmar, - Rajanayagam, Op. Cit., p. 612.

5. Elucci, Sep., 1986, p. 9.

Sinhalese in general to come to a peaceful settlement and doubt that the Sinhalese will ever be prepared to recognise the nationhood of the Tamils¹. The deep mistrust TELO has of the Sinhalese can also be seen in their rejection of the idea of a referendum on any political settlement. Further way, a referendum is sure to go against Tamil interests.

The members of TELO has been called "India's little soldiers" because India not only openly funded, trained and supplied TELO with weapons, but also because TELO seemed to bow to Indian view of the problem and to push the Indian option in negotiations².

TELO was notorious for its violent internal power struggle and criminal activities³. The outfit launched a series of attacks on Sri Lankan security forces. It pulled off the sensational Neerveli bank robbery in 1981 and was responsible for the attack on the Chevakacheri Police Station in

1. Ibid., Jul-Sep., 1985, p. 8.

2. Hollmann, Dagmar, - Rajanayagam, Op. Cit., p. 607.

3. The Hindu, Sep. 3, 1984.

November, 1984 in which 53 Policemen and 68 soldiers were killed, the blasting of the train at Muragandy claiming 298 soldiers' lives and the raid on the Kokkavil army camp on May 9, 1985¹.

3. Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
(EPRLF):

Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, which was formed in November 1981, comprised of the majority tendency within EROS that was opposed to ideological obscurism and the absence of democratic centralism within the organisation². Its long term objective is the creation of an independent Socialist Eelam and the linking of the national liberation struggle with world-wide struggle against imperialism and Zoinism³. The EPRLF also sought to combine national liberation with social liberation, focussing on struggle against class exploitation and oppression based on caste system and gender. Marxism-Leninism was declared to be the guiding

1. Frontline, May 17-30, 1986, p. 11.

2. EPRLF & Eelam Resistance Movement: An Overview, Political and Propaganda Department of EPRLF, Madras, Oct., 1989, p. 6.

3. Ibid.

light and its ideological foundation. They emphasise, however that a Marxist-Leninist programme does not mean instant and violent revolution, but that gradually change with the help of national elements is possible. It is advocating close links with the leftist and progressive Sinhalese Organisations. They rule out any co-operation with JVP since this organisation is seen as being "chauvinist" and "fascist"¹. EPRLF members are said to be better educated and more ideological². This group too had brief ties with Palestinian Guerilla Organisation³.

Low caste Tamils form its main constituency and the group enjoys gross roots support in the island's east. The members of the EPRLF are good fighters, but they do not consider every Sinhalese an enemy⁴. The EPRLF which survived the LTTE's wrath in middle of December, 1986 when some 32 members were killed

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1. Ilaporali (Eelam Fighter), EPRLF, Madras, Nov.-Dec., 1986, p. 3.
 2. See: Inaugural address of K. Padmanabha at the first Congress of EPRLF held on June 28, 1984. EPRLF Department for Propaganda and Information Publication, p. 9.
 3. Marguerite, Op. Cit., p. 15.
 4. Padmanabha K., Op. Cit., p. 9.

and 800 forced to surrender to the LTTE and several persons suffered injuries¹. Various reasons were attributed to the rivalry between the LTTE and the EPRLF and the latter had expressed fears of an attack on it by the LTTE. LTTE argued that such attack is necessitated by the lawlessness, anti-social nature of the EPRLF². LTTE has now emerged as a dominant group in the North. In the east it was facing some resistance from the EPRLF, but with this battle LTTE has established clear supremacy in the east also³.

Besides kidnapping an American couple (The Allens) in Jaffna, the EPRLF brought out 'Tamil Eelam stamps for all postal services in Jaffna Peninsula in 1986. Earlier it had called upon the people in the peninsula to obtain licence from it to use radios, TVs and VCRs⁴.

1. The Hindu, Dec., 15 & 16, 1986.

2. Link, Dec., 28, 1986, p. 4.

3. Indian Express, Dec., 18, 1986.

4. The Hindu, Dec., 15, 1986.

EPRLF Government led by Varadaraja Perumal ruled the North-East Province for sometime from November 19, 1988 to March 1990 but it was dismissed after IPKF pulled out from the Northern and Eastern Province of Sri Lanka.

4. Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS):

Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students was formed by Tamil students in London in 1975¹. It is said to have connections with Palestinian guerilla organisations for some time². EROS is the only Tamil militant organisation that has cared to include the plantation areas in the map of Eelam, while other organisations maps are restricted to North and East. In 1975, it adopted a three point programme regarding the envisaged Eelam. They are: (1) all Eelam Tamils must unite and live together; (2) all Badulla including Pottuvil must, regardless of religion and region consider themselves to belong to Eelam; and (3) Eelam is part of the international socialist movement³. For EROS, the

1. The Hindu, Sept., 1984.

2. Marguerite, Op.Cit., p. 15.

3. EROS Documentation Unit, Jun., 10, 1986, p. 6.

fight cannot end with an independent Eelam as for its members the real struggle to establish a socialist society begins after liberation.

EROS, operating mainly outside Jaffna, toes the same line and concentrates on the Urban areas in the South. They were responsible for the blowing up an Air Lanka Air Liner in Colombo, the Central Telegraph Office and a cool drink-shop¹. It is the mouth-piece of LTTE in the South; advocates co-operation with "Progressive sections" of the Sinhalese masses in the South². EROS try to enlist some Sinhalese support claiming to have initiated meetings with leftist and other Sinhalese groups since 1985³. This strategy seems to be that with the help of these sections, the South is to be undermined and destabilised in order to ease pressure in the north and the east. EROS openly admits that they want to create a crisis in the South to facilitate action in the north. They go on to

1. Financial Times, Jun., 2, 1985.

2. EROS Documentation Unit, Oct., 28, 1986, pp. 3-4.

3. Ibid.

criticise the JVP's attitude towards the Tamils and the Left's Co-operation with the SLFP¹.

EROS claims that they are not following hit and run tactics. In an interview to Frontline, its leader Balakumar said, "So far we have carried out successfully 11 military operations in the East. These are not hit and run tactics but are based on some new strategies. When an area or village is harassed by the Sri Lankan security forces leading to the arrest of innocent civilians or raping of women, we launch 'safeguard' activities. We never provoke the army. We ambush the armed forces when they are returning to the barracks after looting or harassing the civilians. Hence, the armed forces had no alternative but to stop these hostile activities"².

5. The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOT):

The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam is a break away group of the LTTE that was

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1. Hellmann, Dagmar, - Rajanayagam, Op. Cit., pp. 614-15.
 2. Frontline, Nov., 30 - Dec., 13, 1985, p. 39.

formed by Uma Maheswaran, better known to his men as 'Mukundan', in 1980 in protest against the LTTE leadership's non-democratic style of functioning. PLOT was once believed to be the largest group. To-day, however, the outfit has been marginalised both due to poor organisation and Prabhakaran's personal animus¹.

Mukundan had his first training with the PLO. He condemns the hit and run tactics of the other groups, saying that they lead only to a retaliation against the civilians by the military². PLOT says its ultimate aim is to work with the leftist Sinhalese to foment an Island wide Communist Revolution. PLOT advocates co-operation with the Sinhalese because this is not a fight for the Tamils alone, but for all suppressed classes, which include Sinhalese³. PLOT enjoyed the most unsavoury reputation-extortion, smuggling, the drugs trade and mercenary activities were most often linked with this group⁴. All

1. Sunday, Jul., 9-15, 1989, p. 12.

2. See: Frontline, Nov. - Dec. 12, 1986, p. 42.

3. PLOT Bulletin, Madras, Feb. 1987, p. 11.

4. Kadian, Rajesh, Op. Cit., p. 24.

these militant groups feared and disliked the LTTE and, at times, many have collaborated with the Sri Lankans in military operations against the Tigers¹.

In the final analysis one can say that the rebel groups have grown in size and sophistication. Tamil moderates in Sri Lanka have increasingly been caught between the militants and the Government. Family life in the Tamil Society has been totally disrupted as youngmen have left to join the guerillas or have been taken prisoner by the Government forces.

There is no doubt that the Tamil militants enhanced the importance of the goal of 'Eelam' in view of their increasingly diminishing role in the Sinhalese dominated centre. Nonetheless, the intra-group and inter-group feuds coupled with the multi-leader character of the movement devoid it of cohesion and solidarity. As a culmination of their struggle all these militant groups must come under one umbrella sinking whatever differences existed among them and work unitedly to achieve their common and legitimate goal.

1. Ibid.