

# THE INDIRA DOCTRINE THE GUJRAL DOCTRINE AND INDO-SRI LANKA RELATIONS SINCE 1983

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## INTRODUCTION

In Sri Lanka's foreign relations India occupies a prominent place. This is not only because of the disparities between the two countries in size, population, military strength and resource potential but also due to close cultural relations between the two countries.

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru outlined the basic principles guiding India's foreign relations in a broadcast on 7 September 1946: "end of colonialism and racialism, independence of African and Asian countries, independence from power blocks, support for United Nations striving for world peace and cooperation security through commonwealth membership".<sup>1</sup> The above objectives were based on the modest role that India wanted to play in world affairs. But Nehru did not develop a regional policy for India. However a combination of many factors pertaining to South Asian region finally resulted in the emergence of a dual pattern of foreign policy—a pattern that was global as well as regional "Dualism was the broad frame work that was conceptually discernable in India's foreign policy behaviour during Nehrunian era."<sup>2</sup>

But what is important to note is that "through the years, and under different leaders, a trend has emerged where the relative importance of globalism has slowly declined, while regionalism has acquired a much larger place in India's foreign policy."<sup>3</sup>

In this paper an attempt is made to examine the relations between India and Sri Lanka since 1983. In order to examine the relations between India and Sri Lanka since 1983 it is essential first to understand the changed nature of India's regional policy. At global level India built up her image as a non-aligned peaceful and anti-imperialist country. Considerable efforts were made during Nehru's premiership to build up this image.

## II. INDIA'S REGIONAL POLICY

The military impasse in which India found herself during her first encounter with Pakistan in 1948 and the humiliation defeat that she suffered at the hands of the Chinese in 1962 eroded her image in South Asia. After Nehru things began to change. Priorities began to be reversed. Interests began to shift. There was a new Indian determination to play

<sup>1</sup> A.Appadurai, Documents of India's Foreign Policy (Delhi: Sterling Publications, 1963), p.1

<sup>2</sup> Ashok Kapur and A.Jeyaratnam Wilson, The foreign Policy of India and the Neighbours (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996), P.5

<sup>3</sup> Harris Kapur, India's Foreign Policy 1947-92 (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994), p.5

dominant role in South Asia.<sup>3</sup> The defining moment in this ongoing process was India's military intervention in East Pakistan. Since 1971, the broad Indian policy towards South Asia under different governments has revolved around the following objectives:

- i. Politics of accelerating the strategy of increasing Indian military clout.
- ii. The confrontational aspect of Indo-Pakistan relations.
- iii. Increasingly unstable, violent and guerilla like situation that has developed within its boundaries.
- iv. Politics of bilateralism in her relations with her South Asian neighbours.
- v. Eliminate or reduce Chinese influence in the states of the region, and
- vi. The next objective of India's regional policy is to disallow the destabilization attempts in any of neighbouring states by any internal or external forces perceived to be inimical.<sup>4</sup> There were few such cases. Example:

- a) Influx of a large number of economic and political refugees from Bangladesh has seriously destabilized Assam and other areas of northeast.
- b) The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) a guerilla movement operating from the area has made Assam more unsettled and chaotic than ever.
- c) The large number of Nepalis traditionally residing in India have started a movement for the establishment of a autonomous Gorkhaland.
- d) The existence of parallel government in Pakistan occupied Kashmir territory.

- e) Sri Lankan ethnic conflict has been seriously destabilizing the Indian State of Tamil Nadu.<sup>5</sup>

### III INDO SRI LANKA RELATIONS UNDER INDIRA GANDHI

Although the origins of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka could be traced to misunderstandings between the middle class leaders of the Sinhalese and Tamil communities during the British rule in 1920s it became explosive in the late 1970s and early 1980s due to escalation of the struggle against the armed forces by the Tamil militants.

In the last week of July 1983 Sri Lanka witnessed and unprecedented racial riot with extensive destruction of factories, shops and houses and brutal killings of defenceless Tamil people. During the anti-Tamil riots of July 1983 Mrs. Indira Gandhi sent her Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao to Colombo to ascertain the facts on the spot on July 29, 1983. On his return from Sri Lanka, Mr. Rao informed his Prime Minister that the Sri Lankan situation was serious indeed and that "the government of Sri Lanka had failed to bring the ethnic violence under control. Rao also confirmed media reports that the Sri Lankan government had sought military assistance from the United States, Britain, Pakistan and Bangladesh to meet the crisis."<sup>6</sup> India took this seriously. The Heads of the Foreign Office and asked to tell the respective governments to keep their hands off Sri Lanka.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> H.M.Jain, India's Foreign Policy (New Delhi:)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.76.

<sup>6</sup> P.Vekateshwar Rao, Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka India's Role and Perception Asian Survey VI. XXXVIII No.4 April 1988, p.420

<sup>7</sup> Khan Alilham, "The Tamil Question in Historical Perspective: Its Impact Pakistan Horizon Quarterly. Vol. 27 No.3, 1984, p.6

Office and asked to tell the respective governments to keep their hands off Sri Lanka.<sup>7</sup>

Urmila Phadnis and Nancy Jetly pointed out that "Indira Gandhi's policy towards the neighbouring countries in the seventies was essentially three pronged - these were mutually exclusive and were in fact simultaneously explored -i) to sustain, and if possible broaden through confidence-winning gestures, areas of agreement between India and its smaller neighbours; ii) to maintain a high power profile which would make it unwise or impossible for them to pursue goals that would be antithetical to India's national interests; and iii) to seek to keep External powers presence/influence in the region at bay resulted in the emergence of a regional policy".<sup>8</sup> "This policy gave way to a two track strategy by Indira Gandhi: militant supportive on the one hand and mediatory on the other."<sup>9</sup>

Policy towards Sri Lanka under Indira Gandhi after 1983 anti-Tamil riots had been expressed by herself as follows:

We have made it clear in every forum and in every possible way that India does not pose and threat to Sri Lanka, nor do we want to interfere in their internal affairs. I reassured the President on this. We want the unity and national integrity of Sri Lanka to be preserved. At the same time I pointed out

to the president that developments in Sri Lanka affect us also. In this matter, India cannot be regarded as just any country....<sup>10</sup>

Indira Gandhi appears to have believed that United States was engaged as a strategic action designed to sandwich India between China on the one side and the smaller pro-Western States of Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh on the other. In this connection Prof. Bhabani Sen Gupta has developed India's policy of regional security into a doctrine of regional security known as Indira doctrine as follows:

India has no intention of intervention in internal conflicts of a South Asian Country and it strongly opposes intervention by any country in the internal affairs of any other. India will not tolerate external intervention in a conflict situation in any South Asian country if the intervention has any implicit or explicit anti-Indian orientation. No South Asian government therefore should ask for external military assistance with an anti India bias from any country.<sup>11</sup> This doctrine has been the guiding principle for the Congress I governments under Rajiv Gandhi and Narasimha Rao. Only exception was the V.P.Singh's National Front government. Before examining the policy followed by V.P.Singh it is appropriate to examine the policy followed by Rajiv Gandhi at this juncture.

<sup>7</sup> Urmila Phadnis and Nancy Jetly "Indo-Sri Lanka Relations: The Indira Gandhi Years" Indian Foreign Policy eds AK Damodaran and U.S. Baipai (New Delhi: Radiant publishers), p. 156.

<sup>9</sup> Government of India, Selected Speeches and Writings of Indira Gandhi, Vol. V. January 1982 - October 30, 1984 (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1986), p. 418.

<sup>10</sup> Ashan Alikhan op.cit p.63

<sup>11</sup> M.S Iyar, Foreign Policy At Ease with the World" in Rajiv Gandhi: A Political Study (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing Ltd. 1992) p.151

#### IV. INDO-LANKA RELATIONS UNDER RAJIV GANDHI

Although Shri Rajiv Gandhi who had become Prime Minister of India after his mother's untimely death followed his mother's two-track strategy he gave more emphasis to mediation. His efforts resulted in two rounds of talks between the representatives of the Sri Lanka government and the Tamil moderates and the militants at Thimphu capital of Bhutan. However this attempt did not bring the desired result. Continuing his efforts to find a political solution to ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka Rajiv Gandhi sent a team to Sri Lanka in May 1986 headed by the State Minister for Internal Security of India P. Chidambaram. The talks between the Chidambaram delegation and the Sri Lanka government paved the way for two rounds of talks between the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and the UNP government. From these two rounds of substantial talks emerged the proposals for setting up of provincial councils.

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka entered a new phase when the Sri Lanka government imposed an economic and communication blockade on the Jaffna Peninsula in early 1987. This caused considerable hardship to the Tamil civilian population. Therefore the government of India decided to send urgently needed relief supplies to Jaffna.

Relations between India and Sri Lanka reached an unprecedentedly low ebb when the Indian government air-dropped what it described as humanitarian relief supplies

over Jaffna Peninsula by planes on 4 June 1987. Outraged by this action, Sri Lanka lodged a strong protest with the Indian government describing the Indian action as a naked violation of Sri Lanka's independence. However Indo-Sri Lanka relations entered a new phase of reconciliation and friendship when a peace accord was signed between President Jayawardene and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. As M.S.Iyer has observed "Rajiv Gandhi did not seem to have a foreign policy 'design' of his own", in his speeches and statements, it is difficult to find a conceptual framework of the world and India's place in it. However, piecing his foreign policy thrust together, it is possible to discover with an effort, an attempt to join Jawaharlal Nehru's orientation to the centre of world politics to Indira Gandhi's focus on regional prominence....."

#### V. INDO-LANKA RELATIONS UNDER V.P.SINGH

Unlike his predecessors, when V.P.Singh assumed office as Prime Minister of India in December 1989, he did not face any serious problems with any of India's neighbours. In his address to the nation on 3rd December 1989, V.P.Singh said that effective steps will be taken to improve relations with India's neighbours. He also said that he will endeavour to make SAARC a dynamic institution.<sup>12</sup> But after eight months of his rule he did a stock taking. During his address on the occasion of the Independence Day celebrations V.P.Singh observed that "India has not

<sup>12</sup> Ambalavanar Sivarajah, India and its Neighbours, Lanka Guardian Vol.13, No.7, January 7, 1991, p.9.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.9, 17 February 1992, p.9

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.10.

only solved the problems which had cropped up with Nepal but also maintaining good relations with Bhutan, Maldives and Bangladesh.<sup>13</sup> In the case of Sri Lanka, he said that "India was concerned about the life and property of the Tamils and volunteered to help Sri Lanka where Tamils could feel secure. At the same time he insisted that India will not allow extremists and militants to use Indian soil as their place."<sup>14</sup>

Keeping in line with the new approach then India's External Affairs Minister and later Prime Minister of India Inder Kumar Gujral said that "the Indian government would never send its army to intervene military abroad and stressed that Tamil security and welfare was ultimately the responsibility of the Sri Lankan government."<sup>15</sup> In fact, Gujral said that the National Front government has succeeded in improving good neighbourliness between the two countries. What is important to note is that Gujral had laid the foundation for his five principles developed later known as Gujral Doctrine. When he served as Minister of Foreign Affairs in V.P.Singh's government.

## VI. INDO-LANKA RELATIONS UNDER NARASIMHA RAO

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's approach to India's relations with Sri Lanka was as follows:

- i) India continues to be supportive of the legitimate political, social and cultural aspirations of the Tamils.

- ii) India, however, opposes the LTTE's violent and terrorist methods to achieve these aspirations.
- iii) India would be supportive of initiatives aimed at resolving the crisis in Sri Lanka through political dialogue.
- iv) Having been criticised by all parties concerned, for the sincere efforts made by India to mediate between Tamils and Sinhalese dominated government, we would not desire to take any active part in resolving the problems of Sri Lanka.
- v) Apart from these specific aspects of Indo-Sri Lanka relations, India would try to build up bilateral relations and cooperation in the political, economic and cultural spheres with Sri Lanka.
- vi) The Government of India and government of Tamil Nadu would ensure to the extent possible, that the LTTE does not have bases or sanctuaries in India. India remains opposed to any secessionist or terrorist operations from its territory against any of its neighbours.<sup>16</sup>

## VII. INDO-LANKA RELATIONS UNDER DEVGOWDA AND I.K.GUJRAL

The National Front government's policy headed by Devgowda towards India's neighbours was first made known when I.K.Gujral as foreign minister of India made a speech on foreign policy objectives of India's United Front

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>15</sup> Shri I.K.Gujral, Foreign Policy Objectives of India's United Front Government (India: Graphic Point Pvt.Ltd., 1966),p.6.

<sup>16</sup> Urmila Phadnis and Nancy Jetly op.cit., p.157.

government at Chatham House, London on September 13, 1996. During the course of his speech I.A.Gujral said that:

The United Front Government's neighbourhood policy now stands on five basic principles. First with the neighbours like Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka. India does not ask for reciprocity but gives all that it can in good faith and trust. Secondly no South Asian country will allow its territory to be used against the interest of another of the region. Thirdly none will interfere in the internal affairs of another. Fourthly, all South Asian countries must respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. And finally, they will settle all their disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiations.<sup>17</sup>

The above five principles known as Gujral doctrine has already brought dividends to India as well as to countries in the neighbourhood. According to Gujral "the principal objective of the UF's foreign policy is to promote all-round economic and social development with justice and equity. The accelerated development of every country in the subcontinent is a key goal of the Gujral doctrine."<sup>18</sup>

Since taking office Gujral has tried to put the five principles into practice. With Pakistan's Foreign Secretary level talks have taken place. Gujral has initiated his own diplomatic initiatives in respect to Pakistan.

One of the biggest achievements of Gujral's second tenure as External Affairs Minister was the resolution of the contentious water dispute between India and Bangladesh. This landmark event, it was hoped would help the development of the backward northeastern India and the adjoining areas of Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh.<sup>19</sup>

The foundation for sound relations between India and Sri Lanka was laid when Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga visited New Delhi in March 1995 on her first state visit abroad.

In her convocation speech at the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies on September 29, 1995 President Chandrika Kumaratunga said that

It is no accident indeed it is a matter of deliberate choice that my first official state visit as President was to our largest and immediate neighbour, India. I think I can say that this visit succeeded in eliminating at one stroke the legacy of mutual suspicion and distrust that had been carried over from the past and restoring friendly relations."<sup>20</sup>

During his official visit to Sri Lanka in January 1997, Gujral reiterated the same principles enumerated at Chatham House, London addressing a joint press conference with Minister Luxman Kadirgamar at Colombo Taj Samudra on the conclusion of his visit to Sri Lanka

<sup>17</sup> Shri I.K.Gujral, Foreign Policy Objective of India's United Front Government (India:Graphic Point Pvt.Ltd.) p.6

<sup>18</sup> John Cherian Clear and Coherent Front Line, April 4, 1997, pp.4-5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.5

<sup>20</sup> The Sunday times February 2, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> The Island, January 26, 1997.

Gujral said " I am prepared to take the first step to move forward in the context of Indo-Sri Lanka relations (economic and otherwise) without expecting anything in return. India will do its best for Sri Lanka and whatever possible will be done"<sup>21</sup> "More significant was Gujral's firm assurance that India did not wish to interfere in the internal problems of Sri Lanka."<sup>22</sup>

As in the case of political relations Indo-Sri Lanka economic relations also have improved in the recent years. For example during the third session of the Joint Commission held in Colombo in January 1997 four agreements were signed: (1) Bilateral Investment Protection Agreement (2) Second Tranche of Government of India Line of Credit Agreement for Us \$ 15 million (3) Programme of cooperation in the field of Science and Technology (4) Cultural Exchange Programme (5) A Joint Workshop on Bio-Technology was held in New Delhi on January 1997. Also India allocated credit for purchase of buses, locomotives and rice mills under the Indian Line of Credit. In addition India gifted 100 computers to Sri Lanka Ministry of Science and Technology worth of Sri Lankan Rs. 13.3 million. Indian experts visited Sri Lanka to prepare a detailed project report on Dandro Thermal Power Plant in early 1997.<sup>23</sup>

According to trade statistics India is the second largest supplier of Sri Lanka's import in 1995. She supplied Sri Lanka with imports valued at Rs. 24, 045 million of 9.0 percent of Sri Lanka's total imports following Japan supplied imports to the value of Rs. 25, 556 million or 9.6 percent of total imports.<sup>24</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our examination of Indo-Lanka relations since 1983 shows that the relations between India and Sri Lanka have undergone several changes. In the seventies India's policy under Indira Gandhi towards Sri Lanka was based on confidence building and resolution of conflicts through negotiations. However this policy underwent changes with the escalation of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Changed policy was both Tamil militants supportive and mediatory. This policy was continued by her son Rajiv Gandhi and Narasimha Rao both became Prime Ministers after Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's death. Only exception was V.P.Singh.

<sup>22</sup> The Island, April 2, 1997.

<sup>23</sup> John Cherion, op.cit, p.7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.9.