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### An Analytical Review of India's Role in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Politics

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#### ABSTRACT:

This Research papers examines Sri Lanka's political and security developments after a 26-year civil conflict, focusing on India's role in the 1987-1990 ethnic conflict. The conflict began with the formation of the LTTE due to discrimination against Sinhalese, and the essay highlights India's historical ties to Sri Lanka. India and Sri Lanka fought over Kachativu island until 1974, but the Bharatiya Janata Party reintroduced it under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Indo-Sri Lankan conflict, rooted in political grievances and ethnic tensions, hinders reconciliation. India and Sri Lanka have long faced political, economic, and ethnic tensions, with many Indian Tamils denied citizenship and facing financial hardship. The Sirimavo-Shastri Agreement of 1964 resolved this issue, but was criticized for compromise. The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord (1987) faced resistance from the LTTE and Sinhalese nationalists. The Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord, signed in 1987, aimed to resolve the Sri Lankan Civil War by granting Tamil concessions. However, the LTTE rejected the agreement, leading to a 26-year civil war. India's assassination influenced policy, and the conflict ended in 2009. Sri Lanka's conflict, involving ethnic tensions, marginalization, and geopolitics, has resulted in over 100,000 deaths and disrupted the economy. Reducing conflict requires political reforms, economic development, and human rights education. India and Sri Lanka have a close relationship since the end of the civil war in 2009. India has provided financial support for reconstruction projects and contributed 15% of major donors' foreign financial commitments to Sri Lanka in 2010. In 2015, Prime Minister Modi visited Sri Lanka to realign foreign policies and sign agreements. The Kachathavu dispute between Sri Lanka and India, involving traditional fishing rights, is set for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, with Prime Minister Modi accusing Congress and DMK.

**Keywords:** LTTE , Kachathavu dispute , Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord , DMK., NDA,



## Introduction

The island is portrayed as the kingdom of the demon king Ravana in the epic Ramayana, making Sri Lanka an important component of Hindu mythology. Deeply embedded in Sri Lankan tradition is the tale of Ravana abducting Sita and bringing her to Lanka. Beyond the Ramayana, the island is associated with the Buddha and other gods in its mythology. The long-standing relationship between India and Sri Lanka stems from linguistic, religious, and cultural contacts, especially the dissemination of Buddhism during the reign of Emperor Ashoka in the third century BCE. The two countries' trade, creative impact, and political exchanges have all benefited from this relationship. Since ancient times, there have been trade and economic connections, and Indian languages have affected Sri Lankan literature and the Sinhala language. Ancient civilizations, European colonial authority, a protracted civil war, and even prehistoric settlements are all part of Sri Lanka's 3,000-year history. British colonial domination resulted from attempts by European countries, such as the Portuguese, Dutch, and British, to dominate the island's resources and trade. During this time, Sri Lanka's economy changed and attracted Tamil workers from India. Political problems and ethnic conflicts continued after independence in 1948, resulting in a civil war that ended in 2009. Formerly known as Ceylon, Sri Lanka is an island nation in the Indian Ocean with a varied population that primarily consists of Muslims, Tamils, and Buddhists spread across a wide geographic area. India's attitude toward Sri Lanka is influenced by its close cultural and ethnic links to the Tamil people. Tamil Nadu political parties defend Sri Lankan Tamils' rights. Although many Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka have returned, there are still issues with resettlement. There are religious and cultural connections, such as collaboration in tourism, education, and Buddhism.

Ethnic warfare between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities, who were primarily Buddhist and located in the northeastern part of Sri Lanka, disturbed the country's social and economic development. Commercial, religious, and cultural relations between India and Sri Lanka are longstanding. Despite Sri Lanka's 1948 independence, demands for autonomy were stoked by discriminatory policies against Tamils. A civil war between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, the Indo-Sri Lankan conflict has been impacted by India's military engagement, diplomatic initiatives, and humanitarian assistance. The early 1980s saw a civil conflict between Tamil militants and Sri Lanka, with India at first covertly backing Tamil militants because of political pressure in Tamil Nadu as well as cultural and ethnic ties. An objective of the 1987 India-Sri Lanka Agreement was the transfer of authority and the deployment of the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPF) to the Tamil-dominated regions.

Alleged war crimes were committed by both sides of the 26-year conflict between Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which came to an end in 2009.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to analyze the security concerns related to the post-civil war bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka. India's strategic location in the Indian Ocean is important for security, naval, trade and networking, while China's growing presence in Sri Lanka raises concerns. The study assesses the historical perspective, examines the political movement, analyzes the issues of Kachathivu Island, explains the economic relationship and outlines the recent trends and future directions of Indo-Sri Lankan relations.

## Literature review

- Manoharan, N. (2019) Mahatma Gandhi referred to the relationship between India and Sri Lanka as "mother and daughter" even before the country's independence. This metaphorical analysis suggests that the bilateral relationship between Sri Lanka and India is unique for its own reasons. The two countries have had diplomatic, commercial and social relations for over two thousand years. Their similar views were influenced by their shared colonial upbringing during British rule. Foreign and strategic policies may differ and conflict due to national interests and other strategic considerations.
- A 2018 study by Singh and Sharma examines trade relations between India and Sri Lanka, highlighting challenges and potential solutions for expansion. They find Sri Lanka's most balanced relationship with India, with high exports and imports.
- .S.Y. Surendra Kumar (2017) Over the past few decades, China has changed its foreign policy to set an example for other countries to coordinate their interests. Northeast and Southeast are the primary focus of China's Asia policy. However, South Asia has grown in importance in recent years as China's foreign policy aims to maintain regional peace and stability and support China's own peaceful rise. As a result South Asia especially Sri Lanka is strategically important for China. The purpose of this study is to examine the significant changes that have taken place in Sino-Sri Lankan relations under the leadership of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. President Sirisena's efforts to maintain a balance between China and India as well as India's response to the growing relationship between China and Sri Lanka were discussed.  
The paper by Athukorala, Prema-Chandra (2016) suggests that Sri Lanka's economic problems are not due to a return to its old growth path, but due to addressing its history of wasted potential.
- **Rajapaksa, Sampath (2015)** This study explores China's influence on small states using UN General Assembly voting data from the last decade. It aims to provide a broad overview of China's foreign relations, showing that it maintains healthy relations with minors, highlighting the importance of inter-interest, economic, diplomatic, strategic and military relations in international affairs.

- Kelagama, Ek Sath (2014) This paper discusses the economic development between China and Sri Lanka since 1952, especially rubber-rice pectin. China's military and financial support has helped curb violence in Sri Lanka, and although trade and investment have not strengthened, Sri Lanka hopes to establish a free trade agreement with China in 2014.
- Amalie Vedagedara's 2013 article explores the issue of ethnicity in Sri Lanka, highlighting the influence of the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL), the Government of India (GOI) and Tamil Nadu on Indo-Sri Lankan relations. The article suggests that GOSL is better equipped to deal with ethnic issues due to the change in attitude of the Indian government.
- . Sandra Destradi's 2012 essay examines India's relationship with Sri Lanka, highlighting historical and domestic factors, but concerns about China and international opinion supporting Colombo for military operations.

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## Research gaps

The study of India-Sri Lanka relations, which emphasizes the influence of socio cultural elements and interpersonal interactions, has a significant research gap. Examining how relationships are shaped by common history, language, religion, and cultural links is crucial. The picture of relationships may be distorted by bias, interpretational variability, scope limits, and temporal limitations, which may also overlook current dynamics and upcoming issues.

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## Research Methodology

The research uses analytical, exploratory and descriptive methods such as parliamentary debates, official comments and foreign policy reports of India and Sri Lanka, as well as primary and secondary sources such as books, journals, newspapers and magazines.

study money

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## Causes of India-Sri Lanka Conflict.

There is still a lack of political and economic unity, discriminatory laws like "Sinhalese-only" laws, and ethnic tensions between the Tamil and Sinhalese communities. Many Indian Tamils were refused citizenship, which resulted in statelessness and financial hardship, and Tamils felt excluded by the Sinhalese-dominated administration. Jawaharlal Nehru led India's independent government from 1947 to 1964, promoting citizenship rights for Tamils and allowing immigrants to choose between Indian citizenship and their host country. In 1953, India granted citizenship to 4 million people and permanent residency to 2.5 million, but attempted to deport 3 million. In 1954, Sri Lankan Prime Minister John Kotelawala implemented a strict citizenship verification system, allowing travel documents for both Tamils and urbanites. The Sirimavo-Shastri Agreement of 1964 resolved the issue of stateless Tamils of Indian origin in Indo-Sri Lankan relations. The treaty divided the population between India and Ceylon, deporting 525,000 Indians and 300,000 to 50,000 Sri Lankans. The status of the remaining 150,000 individuals will be decided later. The agreement was intended to repatriate Indian Tamils to India, but negotiations with the Indian government changed the position.

In 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri became Prime Minister and invited Ceylon Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike to Delhi. He signed the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact, granting citizenship to 25,000 Indians and 3,000 Sri Lankans. The Sirimavo-Shastri Agreement between India and Sri Lanka has been criticized for being a compromise, accepting large numbers of stateless persons without determining their fate, and not appointing those appointed on the date of the agreement. The treaty failed to achieve its goals due to an error in determining the number of stateless persons, with more than 975,000 of them becoming stateless. Systematic discrimination and violent tactics led to the rise of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 1970 demanding an independent Tamil state. India's strong cultural ties to Sri Lankan Tamils have led to political pressure and covert support for Tamil militants, countering Sri Lanka's Cold War alliance with the United States and Pakistan. The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord (1987) was intended to mediate the Tamil conflict, including the deployment of the IPKF, but was met with resistance from the LTTE and Sinhalese nationalists. In 1989, a fierce war broke out between the Indian Army and the Sri Lankan Tamil Ethnic Liberation Front (LTTE), with the IPKF taking control of Jaffna. The Sri Lankan government defected to India, leading to a ceasefire. However, frustration continued to grow, leading to the withdrawal of the IPKF in 1990. In 1985, the Sri Lankan government attempted to gain control of Jaffna, causing discontent among the Tamils. An Indo-Sri Lankan peace accord was signed in 1987, but the IPKF continued the war.



On July 29, 1987, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and President J.R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka signed the historic Indo-Sri Lankan pact in Colombo. File image

The Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord, signed in 1987, aimed to resolve the Sri Lankan Civil War by enabling the thirteenth Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution. The 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution, resulting from the 1987 India-Sri Lanka Peace Accord, aimed to resolve ethnic conflict between the armed forces and Tamil Eelam. It created Provincial Councils, devolved power to provinces, and made Tamil an official language. However, the amendment has not been fully implemented.

The Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Treaty was signed in 1987 to reduce tensions between India and Sri Lanka. The agreement gave Sri Lanka concessions on Tamil claims, including devolution of power to the provinces and official status for the Tamil language. India maintained order through the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and provided support to Tamil rebels including the LTTE. However, the LTTE rejected the agreement, leading to three years of conflict. The IPKF launched Operation PAN to disarm the LTTE, which resulted in brutal fighting and killed around 214 soldiers. The assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by an LTTE suicide bomber in 1991 influenced Indian policy towards the LTTE and reduced direct intervention in the conflict. Sri Lanka's civil war, a 26-year conflict between the government and the LTTE, ended with a military victory in 2009, resulting in significant casualties and human rights abuses. The Sri Lankan government and the LTTE have been accused of human rights abuses, including genocide and the use of child soldiers. The conflict, dominated by ethnic tensions, political marginalization and geopolitics, has killed more than 100,000 people and disrupted the economy, affecting livelihoods and tourism revenues. The Sri Lankan conflict has caused political instability, militarization and domestic tensions in Tamil Nadu. Diplomatic relations between India and Sri Lanka are strained and the conflict affects regional geopolitics. India's cultural and religious ties influence policy. The United Nations monitors human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, providing humanitarian assistance. India supports the resolutions emphasizing Sri Lanka's sovereignty and calling for reconciliation and accountability. India has engaged diplomatically with the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil leadership, advocating a united Sri Lanka. Conflict can be reduced through political reforms, ethnic reconciliation, economic development and human rights education. Sri Lanka should accelerate these reforms, address marginalisation, improve local governance, establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, strengthen bilateral relations and integrate human rights education.

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### Relationships after the Civil War

India celebrated the end of the 26-year civil war and sent a top-level delegation to Sri Lanka in May 2009. The party expressed concern for a political solution to the national crisis and sought a long-term solution to Tamil separatism. In June 2009, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse visited India, where Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced support for reconstruction and rehabilitation of war-torn areas. India has provided financial support for various projects, including emergency supplies, temporary housing and cement, and mining programs in war zones. In 2010, India increased its cooperation with Sri Lanka by engaging in reconstruction projects in Uttar Pradesh, Duraipa Stadium, cultural centres, healthcare facilities and industrial areas. India provided credit for the construction of the Northern Railway line and a housing project for resettled families. In 2010, India contributed 15% of major donors' foreign financial commitments to Sri Lanka. India's relations with Sri Lanka have been strained over the past three years as Tamil Nadu has been influenced by New Delhi's foreign policy. Pro-LTTE political parties accused the Sri Lankan government of war crimes,

leading to protests demanding an international investigation. In 2013, the Tamil Nadu State Legislative Assembly called for economic sanctions on Colombo stated that in order to realign the two nations' foreign policies, Prime Minister Narendra Modi traveled to Sri Lanka in May 2015. 28 years had passed since Rajiv Gandhi's 1987 visit. Four agreements that expanded bilateral cooperation on visas, customs, youth development, and the construction of the Rabindranath Tagore Memorial were inked during the visit. The visit highlights cultural links and New Delhi's larger maritime policy while reexamining the historical relationship between India and Sri Lanka. Positive security cooperation and yearly bilateral defense talks have been established between the two nations. Nonetheless, considering comprehensive security arrangements and geographical, cultural, and interpersonal interactions, India and Sri Lanka should enhance their trade, commercial, and diplomatic relations.

India's foreign policy towards Sri Lanka has been influenced by two factors. The first is the domestic political scenario in India, which is closely related to the Tamil Nadu factor. The political contribution of the Congress party is not undermining India's political stability, as was seen in the 2011 Tamil Nadu assembly elections. China and Pakistan provided military support, including arms and training, to the Sri Lankan armed forces during the civil war. After the war, bilateral relations between Sri Lanka and Pakistan developed rapidly, with Pakistan being a major arms dealer and training Sri Lankan military and intelligence officers.

Mentioned in the Rameswaram inscriptions, the 285-acre island of Sri Lanka is believed to have been ruled by Kachathivu, Sri Lanka. The island, formerly ruled by Ilandasa Island, was disputed between Ceylon and India in the 1920s, but a border agreement was reached in 1921.

The Indo-Sri Lanka Maritime Agreements of 1974 and 1976 ended a long-standing dispute between India and Sri Lanka over Kachathivu, an island claimed by both countries since 1921. Despite the agreement, Indian fishermen were allowed to enter Kachathivu and dry their nets for the annual St. Anthony festival. The agreement emphasizes the right of navigation and respect for international law. Indian pilgrims and fishermen can enter Sri Lanka's historic site of Kachathivu without a visa or travel document. The agreement did not mention the fishing rights of Indian fishermen. The island was handed over to Sri Lanka due to contempt of court, but the legality of the transfer was challenged in the Supreme Court of India. Under the RTI Act, 2005, BJP chief K.K. Annamalai claimed that the DMK government in Tamil Nadu accepted the Centre's decision to sign the pact and that Karunanidhi was in favor of the pact.

India-Sri Lanka Maritime Disputes



India-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary

The Foreign Secretaries of Sri Lanka and India exchanged correspondence and executive orders on the Kachathivu issue, leading to negotiations and an agreement that resolved the maritime boundary dispute between the two countries. In the 1990s, the number of bottom trawlers operating in the Indian part of the Pulk Strait increased, leading to calls for the return of Kachathivu and the restoration of traditional fishing rights. The Sri Lankan government informed the Tamil Nadu government in 2010 that Kachathivu was under their jurisdiction and that Indians were not allowed to fish there. The Tamil Nadu government filed a petition in the Supreme Court in 2011 to declare the Sri Lanka India Republic Agreements of 1974 and 1976 and the Sri Lanka Agreement unconstitutional. The central government of India clarified that no territory was ceded or sovereignty relinquished, and the dispute was resolved through a 1974 treaty. In 2016, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa pressed for the return of Kachathivu. Kachthivumattar, a disputed island in Tamil Nadu, is once again all set for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised the issue of Kachathivu and claimed that the Congress had cruelly abandoned it. Despite signing the initial pact of 1921, the state BJP and AIADMK criticized the DMK and

Congress. The island was given to Sri Lanka despite DMK's objections. Fishermen's associations boycotted the event to express their displeasure over the detention of Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan government. Now the Congress and the DMK have been accused of match-fixing and the surrender of Kachativhu. Jeevan Thondaman, minister of Tamil origin in the Sri Lankan cabinet, said there had been no official communication from India on the Kachativu Islands issue, adding that if there was any such communication, the Ministry of External Affairs would respond.

## Conclusion

India and Sri Lanka should also work together on protocols adopted by their patrol navies. From this point of view, India should improve its bilateral relations with Sri Lanka in the areas of trade and investment, education etc. Sri Lanka had a Rajiv Gandhi-led government during the crisis, but times have changed and there is no doubt that serious efforts can be made to gain the Sri Lankan government's trust with India by controlling militancy and trade activities. Undoubtedly, this holistic approach includes efforts to foster better understanding between the two sides with new leadership and new approaches. They should try to achieve dialogue in the fields of science and technology, skill development, investment, education etc. India's intervention is needed to solve the problems of fishermen in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. New Delhi should work with the Sri Lankan government to protect their rights and implement long-term policies for Tamil welfare. A ban on Indian fishing vessels off the central coast and the establishment of palakbe authorities in New Delhi and Colombo could also help. This bilateral initiative could potentially improve India's internal and national security.

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