

Indo-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations: Analytical review on Political & Cultural Relations Since 2005

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Abstract— *In ancient history, India and Sri Lanka maintained close relationship with each other's due to closed geographical proximity. Meanwhile religious and political ideology brought important factors to determine bilateral relations between both countries. In modern international relations both countries maintain close relationship with each other's in Political and Cultural arena. Thru the political and cultural interdependency India has become a key player in regional and international development scenario. Indo-Sri Lanka Political and Cultural relations mark critical point since the beginning of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Sinhala Tamil ethnic conflict which is protracted internal war made more Indian involvement to Sri Lanka in past three decades. Under His Excellency the President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Indo-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations began into develop interdependency with each other's. Moreover India becomes more influence party to determine Northern and Eastern development over Sri Lankan Tamil community during Eelam War IV and post war era.*

Keywords—Post-War Development, Political Relations, Ethnic Sensitivity

I. INTRODUCTION

During the western colonization in Asian content, India and Ceylon were under British Raj nearly hundred and thirty years and got independence during same time. During the colonial period both countries faced political & cultural threat to their own regimes due to British administrative framework & missionary in Asia. During the post-colonial era both countries maintained close relationship within the international system due to their bond to commonwealth organization and ethnic sensitivity towards each other's.

Since the independence, Dominion of Ceylon (DoC) mainly focuses on regional powers to determine

Ceylon foreign Policy in Post-Independence era. During the post-colonial era Ceylon-India maintain close relationship within the international system due to their alliance to The Commonwealth Nations and ethnic sensitivity towards each other's. Since 1980, Indo – Sri Lanka political and cultural relations mark critical point due to beginning of ethnic war in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan ethnic conflict which is protracted internal war made more Indian involvement to Sri Lanka. In 1987 Indian government intervention to Sri Lankan air space created high pressure on both countries bilateral relations and it has indicated Indian sensitivity toward Sri Lankan Tamil community. As a result of that, GoSL forcefully signed Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in July 1987. There are two major implementations under Indo-Sri Lanka accord. One is adjoin north and eastern provinces and allow Indian Peacekeeping Forces (IPKF) to enter Jaffna Peninsula. Thru that, Indian government believed separation of power will secure Tamil political rights and eliminating LTTE in northern area will secure peaceful living situations for Tamil community in Sri Lanka.

II. INDO-SRI LANKA POLITICAL RELATIONS

Under His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksha, Indo-Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations began into develop interdependent with each other's. Manifesto of Presidential campaign called "Mahinda Chinthana" mentioning about Sri Lankan Foreign policy toward India was based on two priorities. One is acceptance of Indian supremacy over Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and other one is friendly-cooperative approach to conduct bilateral relations. To re-establish the faithful image of Sri Lankan New Government President Mahinda Rajapaksha decided to conduct his first visit to India on December 27-30, 2005. During his visit he met Indian President Abdul Kalam and he explained importance of Indian role in establishing peace and

eliminating terrorism in South Asia (Daily News, 2005)

A. Political Relations 2005-2009

During 2005-2009 Indo-Sri Lanka political relations relayed on Sri Lankan internal war and Indian response over that. Because of that Sri Lanka developed close high-end political relations with India during the period of North and Eastern Humanitarian missions. Especially in the beginning of Mavil Aru Humanitarian Mission. Sri Lanka sent top diplomats to explain GoSL strategic plan to GoI to avoid unnecessary regional influence. Especially during 14th SAARC Summit in New Delhi on 2007 March 29th-to April 04th President Rajapaksha explains his strategy based on Eastern Province developments and establishing peace in Sri Lanka to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. While Northern and Eastern humanitarian missions and Sri Lankan diplomatic mission continually share recent update with Ministry of External Affairs in India to get political and military advice till 2008. Soon after the Northern victory Indian the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha conduct legislative session to discuss Sri Lankan internal political issue and due to Tamil Nadu pressure, Central Indian Government decided to halt their military and political support in top level and advice GoSL to conduct missions in proper manner. Meanwhile India request GoSL to resolve issues in thru discussion and avoid unnecessary human sacrifice. To response that President Rajapaksha during his visit to India in October 27, 2007 clarifies Sri Lankan government always use open discussion to resolve ethnic issue (Hindustani Times, 2007). Moreover During 15th SAARC Summit in Colombo President Rajapaksha explain South Asian leaders about necessity in eliminating terrorism in South Asian region and Stand against for terrorist activities in region (Piru, 2008).

During the last stage of war, Sri Lanka got more pressure from western countries to move on peace process rather engaging war with LTTE terrorists. But as always GoSL explain necessity in eliminating terrorism to archive positive peace in conflict affected area (Hansard, 2009). Moreover western countries especially USA and UK requested India to immediate mediation to last stage of war and pressure GoSL to move toward peace talk process. Meanwhile Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee visit Sri Lanka as a Special Indian envoy

to discuss war strategies and explain GoSL solution for ethnic war in Sri Lanka (mea.gov.in, 2009).

GoSL military victory over LTTE make more complex situation between two parties. In military, Sri Lankan armed forces showed their high capability in counterterrorism activities and made indirect challenge to Indian hegemonic power in region. Because in between 1987-1990 powerful IPKF fail to eliminate LTTE in Northern Province but twenty years later GoSL armed forces archive target with minimal casualties. Politically, it makes huge internal and external pressures from western alliance as well as Tamil diaspora based on Indian actions over last stage of war.

B. Political Relations 2010-2014

During post internal war era, India continues its political review on Sri Lanka and asks to move forward on Political solution. The intention of preventing negative impact, GoSL established Lesson Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) appointed by President Mahinda Rajapaksha to fact finding mission on Internal war and also addressed international allegation about war crimes. After two years, conducting a long mission, LLRC released their report in public in December 2011 and GoSL prepared National Action Plan to address LLRC recommendations with a lot of international and regional pressure. Consequently, GoSL proved international and regional community, that it has a peace building plan to establish positive peace in war affected areas and other parts of the country (Piru, 2012). Meanwhile GoI continue his support to GoSL over Resettlement and Rehabilitation programme. Apart from that GoI become a main facilitator to "Northern Spring" (Uthuru Wasanthaya) and "Reawakening of the East" (Nagenahira Navodaya) programmes. In addition to that President Rajapaksha during his visit to India in June 2010, explained GoSL move forward with LLRC recommendations but priority is providing basic needs to internal refugees. India donated USD 105 package for relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction to President Mahinda Rajapaksha during his visit to India on 10-11 June 2010 (cgijaffna.org, 2014).

Furthermore, GoSL took actions to remove land mines in Northern Province to make living more comfortable. The homeland concept was strongly affected on traditional people who believe their land is everything for them and motivation form

South Indian politicians create mass impact on resettlement plan. As a result of South Indian pressure GoSL announced sensitive security areas such as army camps and tactical areas can't be given for their original owners due to security matters. Apart from that, due to lack of legal evidence some people lost their lands and some of them were taken over by the government to deploy investment projects and handle ground facilities in Northern Province. With the intention of avoiding such kind of situation, GoSL established special land despite resolving commissioner to speed up on ownership matter and a resettlement issue which was highly appreciated by Indian political leaders lately (Piru, 2012).

Indo-Sri Lanka Political alliance marked a lapse during 2011 war crimes allegations. Mainly South Indian communities' continually demanded international investigations against GoSL and pressured central government to stand against Sri Lanka in international stage. Meanwhile in 2012, USA and western countries brought a resolution against Sri Lanka to United Nation Human Right Council (UNHRC) and created a dialogue against Sri Lanka in international stage. Consequently, UNHRC conduct session about "Promoting reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka" and open stage for war crimes discussion. During the UNHRC 19th Session Indian government politically moved with Sri Lanka and it reduced the international pressure on war crime investigation. Meanwhile India has prominently become a major key player in international stage during UNHRC. South Indian involvement dramatically created a massive damage for moral willingness for peace and integration in Sri Lanka. Therefore multilateral cooperation's and INGO's involved in internal issues because it was affected to investment and cross cultural integration as well as post war reconstruction progress (Douglas Keh, 2012).

To ensure political security among Tamil community and secure faith with Indian government, GoSL lunched the All Party Representative Committee (APRC) to provide a better political solution. But at the beginning major Tamil community representatives such as Tamil National Alliance (TNA) withdrew from APRC without granting proper chance of dialogue with Tamil People. Moreover GoL request GoSL to transfer power in to local authorities' especially in local government and held a Northern Province

election to prove the government accountability. To establish the democracy GoSL held a local government election in northern and eastern province to secure political rights. Completing first half of grass root level democracy and peace building, it created ad hoc for long hated political insecurity and resolved major root cases for conflict. Apart from that President Rajapaksha gave his assurance to India about the implementation of 13 amendments without any doubt and gave political solutions for Tamil minority (Piru, 2011). Then he assured Indian government about Northern Province elections in September 2013 (Asian tribune, 2013). Those actions helped to build up positive attitude on democratic movement in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately after announcing Northern Province election, some political parties as well as Buddhist monk organizations came forward to remove 13 amendments and to remove land and police power in provincial government which was created under Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement in 1987. The Situation became more critical when Sinhala community rose against 13th amendment because they felt political insecurity among land and police powers. On the other hand Tamil diaspora and Indian political parties questioned about Sri Lankan accountability to peace and international community.

As a result of India became an aggressive regional power to deter Sri Lankan position in international stage. Especially Indian Congress Government considers Tamil Nadu and Chinese involvement as a defensive factor for Indo-Sri Lanka relations. Therefore Sri Lankan Diplomatic missions conduct negotiations with different layers of Indian diplomats and re-established the faithful image of GoSL to Indian Congress Government. Somehow in 2014 Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral relations make positive impact on each other's. Especially during the UNHRC 25th Regular Session when USA brought strong proposal to UNHRC and requested to conduct international independence investigations on war crimes committed during the internal war. On that time India was absent in position and provided an opportunity to GoSL to adjust their foreign and internal policy toward India.

During the 2014 Indian election campaign Sri Lankan war crimes was a main theme to South Indian politicians for grabbing ethnic votes for their parties. But at the end of the election Indian Congress Party was greatly defeated by Bharatiya

Janata Party and former Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi became the new Indian Prime Minister for next four years with great foreign policy. Recent regime change in India provides a wide perspective to continue Indo-Sri Lanka relations with deeper approach.

III. INDO-SRI LANKA CULTURAL RELATIONS

Indo-Sri Lanka cultural relations mainly ties with Buddhist and Tamil culture developments. Especially since 2005 both religious development programmes runs thru diplomatic missions and provide more political and administrative backup to carry out them. For example SAARC cultural programme and Education development process was suddenly accelerated by both government and developed cross culture activities for further mediation process. Thru establishing South Asian University, New Delhi in 2010 provided more opportunities for SAARC as well as Sri Lankan academic community to improve cultural as well as educational ties with India. Moreover Indian government provided security and facilities for Sri Lankan pilgrims to India and secured their economic interests as well. For example GoI provided a cultural guide line to all Sri Lankans, especially those who went to India thru South Indian hubs during 2009-2014. Because on that time South Indian politicians demanded another bloodshed between ethnic communities in Sri Lanka thru attaching Buddhist pilgrims in South Indian areas (Priu, 2013).

As a result of bilateral request between Sri Lankan and Indian executive authorities, GoI provided a great opportunity to Sri Lankan Buddhist community thru facilitating Exposition of Sacred Kapilavastu Relics in August 2012 (High Commission of India, 2012) thru that India has positively built up their cultural relations from grass root level. Moreover Indian government provided financial assistance for Northern Province religious and cultural centre rebuilding programmes especially Tamil and Hindu populated areas. Under the Indian Centre for Cultural Studies (ICCR) India promoted Buddhist International Performing Arts Festival in New Delhi in 2012 April and helped to build strong cultural bond between two countries.

IV. CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ISSUES

A. *Resettlement and War Crimes*

During last six years we can identify two major political issues between Sri Lanka and India. First one is relating on IDP settlement and ethnic right on Northern Tamil community. During the last stage of internal war Sri Lankan defence forces rescued 145,674 civilians and settled them over government maintained IDP camps (Defence.lk, 2009). GoSL maintained IDP issues as their top priority under certain limitations. Unfortunately those limitations make uncomfortable situation to GoI and they pressurize top level diplomats as well as President Mahinda Rajapaksha regarding above issues. After the internal war, many western countries claim GoSL committed crimes against humanity during the last stage of war. As a result of that international community brought resolutions called "Promoting reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka" under UNHRC A/HRC/RES/19/2 and UNHRC A/HRC/RES/22/2 (UNHRC Season 19, 22, 2012/13). In 2012 GoI support Sri Lankan commitments over accountability in resettlement but in 2012 Human Right season GoI decide to vote against Sri Lanka. Indian support over UNHRC resolution on Human Right issues has significantly damage core value of bilateral relations between two countries. Soon after UNHRC except top level, all others local parties blame each other. Especially Sri Lankan politicians and diplomatic community claim India has violated Non Alignment policy and those action is similar to Indian invade in Northern Area on 1987.

Thru reviewing the Indian strategies for Sri Lankan Internal issue between 2005-2009, we can identify that India always supported for political solution rather than military solutions for ethnic issue. Moreover Indian Solution for Sri Lanka was greatly influenced by Tamil Nadu politicians as well as International Tamil Diaspora. Thru that GoI has significantly accept non state actors influence on foreign policy decision making process and accepted the interdependency between state and non-state actors.

B. *Illegal fishing Issue*

After the internal war, GoSL encouraged fishing in Northern and Eastern areas. As a result of that more local fishermen got involved with large scale fishing and other naval natural resources gaining in Mannar and Kachchativu areas as they are very rich

over natural sea resources. Due to minimal pressure on border patrol, Indian fishermen reach to Sri Lankan naval borders to catch fish due to rich natural resources. Those actions create pending questions for both governments. After lot of complains against Indian illegal fishing boats and their large scale resource poaching GoSL decided to take strong actions against those who are violating the territorial borders. Later Sri Lankan Navy conducted the border patrol to catching illegal fishing boats and charged several Indian nationals over illegal border crossing. Meanwhile Tamil Nadu state government pressured Indian central government on above actions and demanded immediate diplomatic actions against GoSL. In 2011 Hon. Rajitha Senarathna, Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development, Sri Lanka held diplomatic talk with Indian Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Sharad Pawar regarding illegal attempts to Sri Lankan territorial water and avoid unnecessary issues between both countries (Sundaytimes, 2011). But Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalithaa Jayaram requested central government to immediately withdraw The 1974-1976 Traitorous Agreements and claim their territorial right over Gulf of Mannar, the Palk Bay, and Palk Strai. Thru this Tamil Nadu became a key factor to determine Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral relations as well as a spoiler. Over this incident Indian External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna clarified Sri Lankan right over Katchatheevu Island cannot be abrogated due to the Indian respect over solemn agreement (Lok Sabha, 2010).

This situation has grown during 2014 and Tamil Nadu continually said Sri Lankan Navy has illegally arrested Indian nationals in international water and some of Indian fisherman was killed during the raid (NDTV, 2013). Territorial claims over Mannar and other northern areas deeply impact to the local and international relations due to its sensitivity on national and international economic as well as politics.

In early 2014, President Mahinda Rajapaksha decides to mediate international territorial claims and try to provide high level political solutions for these issues. Moreover Recent regime change in India has provided a new approach to enter the top level diplomatic talk between national leaders and GoSL has officially decided to show positive approach to Indian government thru releasing Indian fisherman who's currently under Sri Lankan

Navy arrest. This incident was carried out while President Mahinda Rajapaksha visited New Indian Prime Minister Sworn ceremony in New Delhi.

Thru examine the context we can properly identify previous diplomatic negotiations failed due to two reasons. One is involvement of low level diplomats and other one is lack of confidence between two parties. Especially during Indian Congress government attitude toward Sri Lanka has negatively grown up in political arena due to issues in post war reconstruction progress and War crimes over last stage of war. President Mahinda Rajapaksha involvement has proven top level discussion regarding the issue will provide more secure base for both national interest over each other's.

V. CONCLUSION

In the conclusion researcher can mainly identify Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral relations rely on state actors as well as non-state actors such as Tamil Nadu and Tamil Diaspora. Moreover the positive steps taken by Gol and GOSL in a friendly approach with each other and their expectations to take more actions in near future should be highly appreciated. Both parties' unwillingness to be more flexible on negotiation terms and their preference to settle matters with win-win situation would cause issues. The issue of their unwillingness to negotiation could be avoided by following a co-operative approach by both parties and respecting each other's ideas. However, it is proved that lack of co-operation and confidence has become a barrier for development for bilateral relations in wide aspect.

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