

## ABSTRACT

Bilateral ties between Sri Lanka and its northern neighbor India is paramount important and significant for both countries as the development of these countries are bound with each other. The implication of such a close proximity is development of both countries depends on the other. Both India's and Sri Lanka's foreign policy assertiveness, stimulated by domestic dynamism and outside influence, makes many trust that the above factors influence and compel their relationship. The "trivial politics" in Tamil Nadu are inevitably entwined with the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka. The main objectives of this study were to determine the factors influencing Tamil Nadu politics towards Sri Lanka, to determine the geopolitical implications to Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu politics, to identify the strategies adopted by the Government of Sri Lanka to mitigate geopolitical implications of Tamil Nadu politics, and to suggest new strategies that could be implemented by the Government of Sri Lanka in this regard. The research methodology adopted in this study consisted of mixed research methodology in which both qualitative and quantitative data was collected from primary as well as secondary sources. The primary source from which qualitative and quantitative data was obtained for this study consisted of an interview survey, whilst secondary sources from which data for the study was obtained consisted of previous research studies, magazine articles, published interviews, etc. Sample for the study consisted former ambassadors, deputy ambassadors, defense attachés, and deputy attaches who had served in the Sri Lankan embassy in New Delhi. Quantitative data obtained from interview survey was analyzed using simple statistical methods, whilst the qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings from the data analysis revealed that Tamil Nadu politics towards Sri Lanka are caused by five key factors i.e. concern for the welfare of Sri Lankan Tamils, self-interest and ambitions of Tamil Nadu politicians, commercial and economic considerations of Tamil Nadu, Indian Central Government policies towards Sri Lanka, and external influences on Tamil Nadu. In terms of concern for the welfare of Sri Lankan Tamils, findings indicate that marginalization of Tamil and other minority parties in the country due to land, religion, language, and educational policies introduced by post independent governments resulted in concern in Tamil Nadu regarding the welfare of Sri Lankan Tamils. This concern evolved into massive protests and demands for India to intervene in Sri Lanka after the Black

July riots. In terms of the self-interest and ambitions of Tamil Nadu politicians' findings from the study revealed that Tamil Nadu politicians have capitalized on the genuine sympathy and concern of the subcontinent Tamil population for their brethren across the Palk Strait to achieve their own narcissistic political ambitions. Findings from the study also revealed that economic issues such as Sri Lanka taking action against Tamil Nadu fishermen poaching in its waters has resulted in Tamil Nadu politicians retaliating by engaging in intense anti-Sri Lankan politics aimed at pressuring the Indian Central Government to reduce cooperation and engagement with the Sri Lankan government. In terms of geopolitical implications to Sri Lanka caused by Indian Central Government policies, findings suggest that Indian government interest in ensuring that Colombo aligns with its own economic and political interest have resulted in the Central Government overtly and covertly encouraging anti-Sri Lankan rhetoric in Tamil Nadu to prevent Sri Lanka from aligning with anti-Indian countries such as Pakistan. Analysis of the geopolitical implications to Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu politics indicates that these implications are mainly implications to the national security and economy of the country. In terms of national security, a key implication is the possibility of the LTTE or a similar separatist group could emerge in the future due to the support and encouragement from Tamil Nadu politicians with ambitions to create a grand Eelam in South Asia. In terms of economic implications, Sri Lanka could face significant financial and commercial implications due to Tamil Nadu politics. These significant implications are on account of the fact that India is Sri Lanka's main trade partner, one of its main sources of foreign direct investments, one of its main donors, one of its main export destinations, and its biggest international tourism market. Findings from this study reveal that the main strategies adopted by the Sri Lankan Government to mitigate the geopolitical implications of Tamil Nadu politics include the adoption of a non-aligned foreign policy, maintaining a good bilateral relationship with India, and partnering with India to develop socioeconomic conditions in both countries. These strategies have proven to be successful, as economic, defense, and other bilateral cooperation between India and Sri Lanka has improved exponentially despite increased rhetoric anti-Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu after the completion of the civil war in 2009.