Chapter Three
Ethnic Conflict and National Security Dilemmas of Sri Lanka

Introduction

Several problems can be formulated concerning the national security dilemma concerning the small states of the world. As a small state, Sri Lanka is facing a complex security problem. More than anything else, the political, social, and economic development of the country has been seriously constrained by ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamil ethnic groups. In the aftermath of July 1983 violence, the Tamil militancy entered a new phase of violent separatist struggle which vociferously advocated for the complete division of the state on ethnic-regional lines.¹ The unprecedented nature of the July 1983 riots envisaged the beginning of an unending cycle of violence in Sri Lanka. The Tamil militants began an armed insurrection against the state, which tried to emphasize the Tamil interests. The GOSL and the Tamil militants, in their search for a military solution to the ethnic conflict have further accentuated the crisis. In this context, this chapter will be an attempt to deal with all the above under the major themes of:

01. National Security Issues of Sri Lanka
02. Historical Background and Key Issues of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka
03. Rise of Tamil Separatist Struggle
04. Role of the Muslim Community
05. Role of Sinhalese Patriotic Groups
06. Role of Buddhist Monk in the Ethnic Conflict
07. Role of the Sri Lankan State
08. Post-Civil War Security Dilemma of Sri Lanka

3. 1. National Security Issues of Sri Lanka

In matters of defence and security, Sri Lanka had a close collaboration with the British right from the pre-independence period. Just before independence in 1948, Sri Lanka entered into an agreement with Britain, which was an essential part of an independence settlement. According to this defence and external affairs agreement, the governments of the two countries undertook to ‘give each other such military assistance for the security of their territories, for the defence against external aggression and for the protection of essential communications as it may in their mutual interest to provide’.²

Under this agreement the GOSL was required to grant the United Kingdom government all necessary facilities such as the use of naval and air bases, ports, military establishments, use of telecommunication facilities, and control and jurisdiction over the members of the forces. Another important provision in the agreement was the British assistance for the training and development of Sri Lankan armed forces. This agreement was intended to be operational in warlike situations as well as under normal circumstances. Therefore, on the eve of independence, the settlement envisaged a general continuity in the relationship between the two countries afterwards.

After independence, the GOSL continued to have close collaboration with the British in matters of defence and security. For the British, the basic interest in Sri Lanka was the strategic value of the island-nation in the Indian Ocean region. On the other hand, the Sri Lankan leadership without any articulated defence policy saw the defence agreement as the best guarantee of both security and independence of the country against any possible internal or external threats. In the light of this, during the

fifties Sri Lanka pursued a pro-western policy in matters of defence and foreign policy, which isolated it from her Asian neighbours, in particular India.

However, from the point of view of the ruling elite, the actual threat to their rule came from India as well as from certain domestic disruptive forces like the working class movement. Hence, in 1953, in the wake of the trade union strike, the army was called to help the police to check the chaos and instability. That was the first occasion for the test of the security forces to respond to a volatile situation. However, still there were some failures, and according to a Commander ‘there was not sufficient cohesion between army and police in operation’.  

Interestingly, the security threats that the Government of Ceylon faced in the first decade of independence were not of a formidable nature till the abortive coup attempt of 1962. The coup attempt was the joint effort of some regular army officers, police officers and volunteers who had planned to seize control of major government installations and arrest leading ministers and certain officials in order to overthrow the elected government. However, the coup attempt was aborted with the arrest of a number of respected police officers.  

In this background, the coup attempt of 1962 was the most decisive event in determining a fundamental change in the relations between the government and the security forces and also in transforming the composition of the officer corps in the forces. After the coup attempt, the concerned officers were purged and gradually by the mid-sixties, the security forces and the police were overwhelmingly Sinhalese and Buddhist in composition.

---

In 1965, another abortive coup was staged by ‘some senior non-commissioned officers in the army to topple the government of the time’. This time the army commander, Major General Udugama was arrested for suspected complicity in the plot but later acquitted. Some other junior officers and non-commissioned officers were prosecuted for their involvement in the coup, which showed the discontent within the armed forces.

Further, the first major security threat to the government of independent Sri Lanka came in the form of youth insurrection in 1971. Commonly known as the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) rebellion, this leftist uprising severely eroded the ability and resources of the security forces to meet the concerted attacks spread over a large part of the island. This rebellion was the culmination of a radical movement of the middle-class discontent youth and unemployed graduates mainly from the south who had argued for a Marxist revolution in the society. In the light of the growing disparities in socio-economic conditions and the consequent bleak future the educated youth were facing, this movement envisioned a radical transformation of the society.

However, this uprising was seen as a major threat to national security and therefore the government moved to declare a state of emergency. It suffices to say that the insurrection of 1971 was a watershed in the history of Sri Lanka. It however exposed the weakness in the internal security apparatus of the state, where the army was called to act as co-ordinator of the civilian administration. The failure of the police to resist the JVP meant that ‘from then on the police have been politically and militarily dependent on the army’. As a result, in the aftermath of the insurrection, steps were taken to modernise, upgrade and expand the armed forces.

---

The JVP uprising was a turning point by which the insurgency-related violence commenced in the history of Sri Lanka. This tactics was later adopted by the Tamil militants. During the seventies, the Tamil youth movement had started primarily as a result of the discrimination in education and employment opportunities. These youths became radicalised in the process and took to insurgency against the government. However, in the aftermath of 1983 riots, the Tamil militancy reached its peak with the launching of attacks on the government security forces, which became a serious threat to the security and stability of Sri Lanka.

3. 2. Historical Background and Key Issues of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka

Since the 1950s the communal tension and rivalry have marked the politics of Sri Lanka. By the early 1970s the demand for a separate Tamil state had surfaced and the terrorist acts attributed to Tamil separatism, which began to appear in the Northern part of the country. Communal riots of 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983 undoubtedly widened the gulf between the two communities and heightened the Tamil sense of grievances and victimization. According to some academics, the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka is the outcome of fundamental demographic, socio-cultural, religious, linguistic, economic and political issues that have foundations in the history of the island. Referring to this list of causes, one can divide the core issues underlying the Sri Lankan conflict into two major categories:

1. The issue of ideological connotation, and

2. The issues of material significance.

The issues of ideological connotation of the conflict encompasses the ethnic identity, history, religion, tradition and language whereas the material issues include the

---

elements of economic and political significance, such as education, employment, land
tenure, demography, voting and citizenship rights, etc. Bruce Kapferer explained the
ferocity of the ethnic conflict in postcolonial Sri Lanka as a product of history,
mythology and tradition passed through generations.\textsuperscript{9} According to his view, the
ethnic crisis is not a product of modernity but only an outcome of a \textit{long-standing
ethnic rivalry} between the two ethnic groups. Moreover, some analyses have
categorised Sri Lanka ethnic conflict as a \textit{religious} or a \textit{language-based} conflict. For
example, Sri Lankan conflict has been identified as one of six conflicts in which
religious intolerance has been a significant, if not the most compelling factor.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{3. 2. 1. Issues of Ethnic Identity in Sri Lanka}

From the point of view of ethnic identity the cause of the conflict in Sri Lanka
lies in the historical construction of the identities of the two dominant communities,
viz., the \textit{Sinhalese} and the \textit{Tamil}. As Nissan noted, the Sinhalese and the Tamil
identity is the basic foundation for the conflict.\textsuperscript{11} Moreover, Robert Norton pointed
out that the revival of Sinhala-Buddhist identity later turned into a force in the inter-
ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{12} In addition to this, the colonial and post-colonial
politics also influenced the revival of ethnic identity. One such practice was the
contradictory colonial border demarcation and the re-demarcation of power.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{9} For more details see, Bruce Kapferer (1988), \textit{Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence,
Intolerance and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia}, Washington: Smithsonian Institution
the Politics of the Kandyman Kingdom 1739-1815”, in M. Robert (ed.), \textit{Collective Identities,
Hurst, p. 03.
\end{footnotesize}
It is believed that the initial revival of the Sri Lankan Tamil identity was a reaction to the foreign cultural hegemony.\textsuperscript{14} The argument suggests that the process of political mobilisation began in South India and extended to the Tamil communities of Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{15}

The Tamils hastily began to seek their historically shared identity in the land. While identities became increasingly entrenched, inter-ethnic relations drastically deteriorated. Ethnic violence became a constant and regular feature in the politics of the island. Pressure groups from both communities became beneficiaries of the developments. Inability of the political elite to find a lasting solution to the growing ethnic crisis aggravated the situation. Widespread political violence became an integral part of the island politics thereby widening the gap between the two warring communities. As a result the hostilities became permanent and systematically cemented by historical, cultural and socio-economic reasoning. Both communities began to unearth historical evidence to confirm the differences between the two communities.

3. 2. 2. Impact of the British Colonization

During the British rule, there were major changes in the Sinhalese-Tamil relationship. Those changes can be seen through various aspects, like political representation, political and economic mobilization, constitutional changes, introduction of the universal franchise and many other as such. As representation in the legislative council set up by the British in 1831 was based on the principle of communal representation, the governor nominated the member of the Sri Lankan elite to represent the Burghers, Sinhalese, Indian Tamil, Moor and the Malaya

\textsuperscript{15} Jonathan Spencer (1990), \textit{Sri Lanka: The History and Roots of the Conflict}, London: Routledge, p. 03.
communities. The British somehow preferred communal representation of the various communal groups of the island. In fact, under the communal principle, Tamil elite groups received substantial representation in the legislative council. In 1911, the legislative council was enlarged to include some ‘unofficial’ members and, with it a new platform came to be provided for the articulation of demands for further participation. The Sinhalese and the Tamil elites though were separate in their ethnic loyalties and identities, but it was ‘temporarily subsumed by the desire for political consolidation’. As a result, in the 1912 election to the Legislative Council, a Tamil named Sir P. Ramanathan got elected with the support of the majority Sinhalese.

As a result, the local elite groups from both major ethnic communities were able to create at least a semblance of unity and amicability that was reflected in the foundation of the Ceylon National Congress (CNC) in 1919. But the CNC was a purely elitist organization that was comprised by the Sinhalese, the Tamil and the Moors, etc., and had little mass involvement. The main objective of the CNC was to win greater power for local representatives and to achieve the ultimate goal of independence from the colonial rule.

It is important to mention here that the constitutional reforms of 1920 seriously affected the unity among the Sinhalese and the Tamils on the whole. It introduced territorially elected representation and enlarged the legislative council with an unofficial majority. This made the Sinhalese think in terms of their numerical strength and the need to appeal to their own constituencies and electors. Hence, during the 1920 election, the Tamils broke away from CNC and formed their own separate political group. Thus, the introduction of ‘territorial representation, the elective principle and segregated formations gave rise to mobilisation of the

---

respective ethnic communities for political purposes’. Gradually, with the constitutional reform process gathering momentum after 1920, the Tamils constructed a new self-image as a national minority.

Gradually, it became clear that the Sinhalese and the Tamil leaders were not inspired by any selfless desire to create a common nationalism out of the cultural diversities of the island. In the meantime, the constitutional reform in 1923 was introduced in response to the agitation of the CNC, which sought provisions to enlarge the number of unofficial members nominated on territorial basis. However, the introduction of the territorial representation sent an alarming signal to the Tamil elites. The Tamil leadership under Ponnambalam Arunachalam spearheaded a campaign to oppose territorial representation on the grounds that the system disadvantaged the Tamils. In fact, it was over this issue that Ponnambalam Arunachalam left the CNC to form a sectarian political organization called the Ceylon Tamil League (CTL). This was the first rift between the two communities and it occurred as a direct result of constitutional reforms relating to the representation.

Meanwhile, the Tamil leadership was fearful of the forthcoming self-government of the island. It maintained that the self-government would be tantamount to the replacement of the British rulers by the Sinhalese who represented the majority of the island. Ever since, the Tamil leadership began its overt manifestation of fair political representation as a minority in the multi-ethnic setting of the island.

In the meantime, the Donoughmore Constitution (1931-1946) introduced several vital reforms towards self-rule. Moreover, it had significant impact on the ethnic relations of the country. The abolition of communal representation and the

---

introduction of universal adult suffrage can be seen as important elements in this regard.\textsuperscript{19}

The British considered the communal representation as destructive and detrimental to the communal harmony and a serious obstacle to national integration. However, some Tamil political leaders being dissatisfied with the provision of the Donoughmore Constitution refrained from contesting the 1931 elections as a protest against the British rule. Also some Sinhalese leaders were dubious about the new franchise as they were willing to support it in exchange for the abolition of the communal electorates.

For those who believe that the process of democratisation provokes ethnic conflicts, pre-independence Ceylon can be a good example. The Tamils believe the introduction of the universal franchise, paradoxically served as a primary cause creating a gulf between the two ethnic groups in the island. In a country where two thirds of the population were Sinhalese the universal franchise and the system of single member constituency proved to be the major device for bestowing political authority of the majority community. At the same time, within multi-ethnic setting the same principle led the minority to a vulnerable position. Having realised the implications of the universal franchise the Sri Lankan Tamil political elites demanded adequate constitutional guarantees to ensure the minority rights from the British.\textsuperscript{20}

It is important to mention here that the introduction of the universal adult franchise had a direct impact on the Indian Tamil community. The universal adult franchise empowered the hitherto neglected plantation Indian Tamils who even outnumbered the Sri Lankan Tamil population at that stage. Understandably, the


enfranchisement of the Indian Tamil population evoked apprehension in the Sinhalese political leadership leading to the scrapping of the voting and citizenship rights of the Indian Tamils.

On the other hand, the universal franchise empowered the rural communities and diminished the political authority of the urban English educated elite. With the inclusion of the rural masses into the mainstream political process the Sinhala and the Tamil political elites realised the potential power of communal politics for advancing their ambitions. The expansion of political power to rural communities deepened the communal division and led the island towards the ethnic conflict.21

In fact, the Donoughmore reforms corrected the communal ratio in the political representation. After the reforms, the majority Sinhalese community gained its due share in the legislative council. For example, in 1931 the Sinhalese secured 38 seats out of 50 elected to the legislative council. However, at the same time the Donoughmore reforms brought drastic changes in the hitherto political representation in the ethnic communities. If the Tamil-Sinhalese ratio in the legislative council was 1:2 until 1931, after reforms the ratio became 1:5. The changes were stunning for the Tamil politicians boycotted the election in 1936, which resulted the Sinhala dominated Board of Ministers popularly known as the Pan Sinhalese Ministry.

The developments inevitably exacerbated the hostility among the Tamil leaders. The subsequent formation of political organizations along ethnic lines further divided the two communities. Establishment of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) by the Tamil politicians was responded by the formation of the Sinhala Maha Sabaha (The Great Council of the Sinhalese). These organizations were to become

important vehicles of ethnic based political competition and mobilisation in the subsequent years.\textsuperscript{22}

Gradually, the country moved towards self-rule with the drafting of a constitution by the Lord Soulbury Commission on Constitutional Reforms. The Tamil elite found the reforms towards the self-rule making them increasingly disadvantage. They accused the British government of being biased towards the Sinhala community.\textsuperscript{23} The Tamils also criticised the Sinhalese for forging a secret deal with the British colonial rulers to enhance their control in the parliament.\textsuperscript{24} The Soulbury Commission appointed to implement further reforms towards the self-rule, invited various proposals over political representation. The most important proposal that the Commission dealt with was the one put forward by G. G. Ponnambalam, the leader of the ACTC. The proposal commonly known as the \textit{scheme of fifty-fifty} demanded an equal representation of all minority communities with the majority Sinhalese.

The fears of Sinhala domination was so intense that the Tamil Congress leader G. G. Ponnambalam advocated that one-half of the seats in the new legislature be reserved for the minorities in the parliament in order to secure minority representation in the legislature, so that the Sinhalese majority would not hold more than fifty per cent of the seats in the legislature. As expected, the proposal provoked stiff resistance from the Sinhala polity.\textsuperscript{25} On the contrary, the proposal of \textit{balanced representation} or \textit{fifty-fifty} scheme by G. G. Ponnambalam greatly agitated the majority-minority

relationship. In the later years, it was cited by many academics ‘as the beginning of contemporary communal problems in Sri Lanka’.  

Moreover, the British government rejected the proposal and established a single vote parliamentary system adopting the territorial representation in place of communal representation. The Soulbury Constitution assured the minorities that with the adoption of certain provisions like constitutional safeguards against discrimination, the creation of multi-member constituencies for minority areas, which provided for additional minority representation in the legislature and the formation of electorates based on the area as well as the population of provinces; the rights of the minority would be protected.  

3. 2. 3. Language Issue in the Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict

In the context of ethnic conflict of Sri Lankan, language played the most ‘pivotal role’ since 1956. According to K. M. de Silva, post independence Sri Lanka provides a classic example of the destabilising effects of conflicting linguistic nationalism, that is to say nationalisms based on language, on a multi-lingual society.

From the British colonial period to 1956, English was the administrative language of Ceylon. But there had been a significant disparity between the number of vernacular speakers and the English educated locals. By the time of independence, the English educated local elite groups made up to only 7 per cent of the total population.

But being the administrative language, English was one of most important assets for

---

socio-economic gains. Meanwhile, the disparity of the English speakers in the Sinhalese and the Tamil communities has been considerable.

As a part of the anti-colonial movement there was a pressure to replace English by the vernacular language. The first spur of this movement surfaced in 1944, when the Marxist parties launched a strong campaign against English demanding to reinstate Sinhalese and Tamil as state languages. Western educated local societies considered English as a means of the imperial subjugation. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike pointed out that, ‘it is necessary to bring about that amity, that confidence among the various communities which we are all striving to achieve within reasonable limits. Therefore, I have no personal objection to both languages being considered official languages, nor do see any particular harm or danger or real difficulty arising from it’.  

In the initial years of independence, the new government headed by the UNP leader, D. S. Senanayake pursued a policy, which emphasized the common interests of the various ethnic and religious groups of the island. He sought a reconciliation of legitimate interests of the majority and the minorities within the context of an all-island polity. But the first major challenge to this task emerged when S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike broke away from the UNP and formed the communally oriented Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which espoused Sinhalese nationalism. For mass appeal, Bandaranaike castigated the British rule and launched a ‘Swabhasha’ movement, which advocated that both Sinhalese and Tamil would be elevated to the status of the ‘Official Language’ instead of English.

31 See, Government of Ceylon (1936), Hansard (State Council), 01: Col. 881.
32 Government of Ceylon (1944), Hansard (State Council), 01: Col. 817.
Gradually, sensing the rise of Buddhist revivalism in the society, Bandaranaike championed the cause of ‘Sinhala Only’ as the ‘Official Language’. He could recognise the power of language as an aspect of ethnic identity and used it effectively to achieve his political ambitions. Thus, the stage was set for a confrontation over language by ‘the combination of two circumstances the unique position held by the English language, which provided those educated in that language with a tremendous occupational advantage and high social status, and the existence in Lanka of more than one indigenous language’.  

Hence, the language-instigated problem was closely inter-linked with the call of Sinhalese extremists, who warned of the danger of the Sinhalese domination by the English-speaking Tamils and others. The religious fervour being the prime determinant of change, language acted as its sharp cutting edge. To the Tamils, the language dispute epitomised the majority, which could lead to the undermining of Tamil language and culture in Sri Lanka and the ‘eventual extermination of the Ceylon Tamil community as a destructive and unique ethnic entity’. So a part of the Tamil community supported the Federal Party under the leadership S. J. V. Chelvanayakam who advocated for a Tamil linguistic state within a federal union of Sri Lanka.

The ‘Sinhala only’ language policy was enacted into law by the Mahajana Eksath Perumuna (MEP) government as the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956, which proclaimed the Sinhale language as the one official language with little provisions for Tamil speaking people (See Appendix II). So the Official Language Act, despite the promises made by Bandaranaike in the MEP manifesto, did not contain any special provisions that granted concessions to the Tamil minority for administration in the Tamil areas and for correspondence with government.

34 - Ibid -, p. 528.
departments.\textsuperscript{35} For the Tamils, the language issue was very vital to their future, which can be understood by the expression of one Tamil member who explained in Parliament, ‘\textit{We speak often and repeatedly about language because that is so fundamental to us. Language today is the basis of our culture and our nationality}’.\textsuperscript{36}

The manner in which the language issue was formulated and expounded by the Sinhalese politicians, both within and outside parliament, ‘\textit{threatened their very existence as a recognizable national minority}’.\textsuperscript{37} To show their disapproval of the passage of the discriminatory ‘\textit{Sinhala only}’ Act, the Tamil Federal Party staged demonstrations against Gal Oya colonization scheme in Amparai district.\textsuperscript{38}

In order to avert the language issue, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike agreed to negotiate for a political settlement of the problem. So, a series of meetings were held between the government and the Federal Party being led by S. J. V. Chelvanayakam. These discussions resulted in an agreement, popularly called ‘\textit{The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact}’ (See Appendix III). It recognized Tamil as the language of a national minority and made provisions for its use as the language of administration in the predominantly Tamil areas of the northern and eastern provinces, without altering the position of Sinhala as the only official language of Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{39} The fact further provided for some decentralization of power through constitution of regional council. Soon after the conclusion of the agreement, agitation of a viciously communal character broke out with both Sinhala and Buddhist extremist leaders coming out strongly against its provisions. Hence, Bandaranaike realizing the opposition from the

\textsuperscript{36} Government of Ceylon (1960), \textit{Parliamentary Debates}, House of Representatives-Ceylon, 39, Col. 409.
\textsuperscript{38} For details see, Chapter Three of this Thesis.
Buddhist clergy and Sinhalese extremist forces as well as from UNP delayed the implementation of the agreement, which never came into force.

Moreover, the Tamil Language (Special Provision) Act of 1958 was passed to allay the fears of the Tamil community (See Appendix IV), under fierce protest of Sinhala political and religious groups. But the Act was abrogated resulting in a series of violent acts and riots. The Bandaranaike government imposed emergency to quell the communal riots in 1958 and enact the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No. 28 of 1958. It allowed for the use of Tamil language in matters of government business transaction and for prescribed administrative purposes in the northern and eastern provinces without prejudice to the use of Sinhala. But this Act could not come into effect due to the opposition from the Sinhala extremists and the subsequent assassination of Bandaranaike.

The new SLFP government led by Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike implemented the original language policy making Sinhala the only official language and ignored the provisions of the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958. In response to the Sinhala Only language policy, the Tamils led by the Federal Party launched a major civil disobedience movement and as a result in the north and east, the activities of the government came to a halt. The Federal Party defied the government orders for establishing a separate postal system in the Tamil speaking areas. The government in response arrested the extremist Tamil leaders and banned the Federal Party with the imposition of emergency. In 1961, with the declaration of emergency, the armed forces were sent to the northern districts to break up the extremist Tamil campaigns and maintain law and order.

During the period of Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake (1965-70), a framework was developed to address the Tamil language grievances. The proposal
known as Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact was to give the Tamil language equal status providing legitimate rights for its use in the administration and the jurisdiction within the Tamil speaking areas of north and the east of Sri Lanka. Nonetheless, the Prime Minister withdrew the pact under the pressures of the opposition political parties.

In addition to this, the enactment of the new Republican Constitution of 1972 by the SLFP led United Front (UF) government expanded the status of the Sinhala language as the official language, while the Tamil language was declared as a language of legislation and court. Despite the fact that the Tamil language was granted considerable recognition in the administration and jurisdiction by the Constitution of 1972 the pre-eminence of the Sinhala language was effectively retained. With rapidly deteriorating ethnic relations and increasing ethnic violence, the UNP government enacted the 1978 Constitution, declaring both Sinhala and Tamil as official languages and recognising them as national languages of Sri Lanka.\(^{40}\) Furthermore, the English language was introduced as a link language. While Sinhala and Tamil language were declared as official languages, Tamil was assigned the sole language in the northern and eastern provinces. By doing so, the government attempted to reassure their commitment to preserve, promote minority languages. During the period of President R. Premadasa, the Official Languages Commission was established to implement and monitor the progress of the language policy. However, the recognition of Tamil as an official language in the education, employment and governance has not been able to stop the militarization of the Tamils.

---

3. 2. 4. Issue of Education in the Ethnic Conflict

The university entrance has always been highly competitive in Sri Lanka. The competition is particularly intense for faculties like medicine and engineering. In the 1970s, amidst intense competition, Sinhalese began to accuse the Tamils for occupying disproportionate share in the higher education, particularly in the fields of medicine and engineering. Statistics showed that the ratio of Tamil students entering into the medical and engineering faculties was substantially higher than the other ethnic groups. Sinhala nationalists began to demand justice for majority ethnic group pressurising the government to redress the disparity. At the same time, there were various other accusations against this discrepancy. In some cases, Tamils teachers were also accused of being biased towards Tamil students, and even over marking them to increase their numbers in admission.

In order to address this issue, the GOSL introduced a district quota system and a system of standardisation in the early 1970s allocating certain quota for ethnic groups. The measure of the Government also motivated the expansion of chances for the rural students to enter the university system. The number of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslim students entering universities from remote and backward areas of the island increased tremendously. It suffices to say, Tamils strongly criticised that persons taking the examination under this system in the Tamil language were required to achieve a higher score than those taking the examination in Sinhala in order to gain admission into the university. Further, they criticised the introduction of district quota system based on the percentage of total population residing in a district, which led to a sharp decline in the admission of Tamils to different professional courses. As for Sri
Lankan Tamils, this was another attack by the Sinhalese majority community as an attempt to marginalize the minority.\textsuperscript{41}

Even though, the Tamil minority strongly criticised the action of the government as discriminatory against them, the Sansoni Commission that was convened to investigate the issue indicated that even with the new system the Tamil community received a fair share of university entrance according to the population ratio.\textsuperscript{42} However, the statistics indicated that the proportion of Tamil students entering into the engineering courses dropped from 48.3 per cent in 1970 to 16.3 in 1974, while the proportion of Tamil medical students dropped from 48 per cent to 26.2 per cent. The overall number of Tamil students in science faculties dropped from 35.5 per cent in 1970 to 21 per cent in 1973. At the same time, the number of Sinhalese students for the same period rose from 75.5 per cent in 1974 to over 80 per cent in 1975.\textsuperscript{43} From the Sinhalese point of view, the educational reforms balanced out the population ratio in the university admission. But for the Tamils, the standardisation and quota system harmed the Tamil community.

It is important to mention here that it is generally believed that university entrance issue caused a tremendous harm to contemporary ethnic relations in Sri Lanka. Further, the way by which the government handled the university issue gave an opportunity for Tamil nationalists to use the reforms as anti-Tamil. According to C. R. de Silva, the question of university admission is clearly one, which mobilised youth in Jaffna and prompted the Tamil United Front (TUF) leadership to declare in

favour of a separate state. With the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka taking more gloomy forms, politicians realised the significance of the university admission issue. In order to address this issue, successive governments have attempted to resolve the ethnic antagonism. Among those attempts, the government have established a number of national universities including in Tamil speaking areas. It has also introduced the Z-core System to ease the competition in the higher education echelon.

3. 2. 5. Problem of Employment in the Sri Lanka

With the reforms of the education in the 1960s, it extended to the uneducated Sinhalese masses of the rural regions. In reality, the English education had been the most prestigious. English education gave the best chance to find jobs not only in the public sector but also in the private. Meanwhile, the economy of the island could not accommodate increasing numbers of educated Sinhalese youth. The Tamils had better chance in getting jobs in the colonial schools with their English education. This disparity in employment, advantaging the Tamil group, once again provoked discontent in the Sinhala community, demanding the government to rectify the injustice. According to Marshall R. Singer, under the Bandaranaike language policy they (Tamils) had have allowed to study in Tamil language in schools in Tamil dominated areas, which included Jaffna University. However, jobs for ‘Tamil Only’ educated youth were no more plentiful than for ‘Sinhalese Only’ youth. Nationalist Sinhalese portrayed the issue as a grave injustice for the Sinhala community. However, the Tamils argued that the actions taken by the government resulted for the decline of Tamils in certain professions. The reforms that were implemented by the United Front government (1970-77) believed to result in a decline of Tamil

representation in the administrative services. In addition to this, the Committee for Rational Development Report (1983) revealed that the tendency of declining Tamil representation in the public sector was significant.46

Since 1980s, the GOSL has taken more positive actions to introduce the equal opportunities for the ethnic communities in employment. Among them, ethnic ratio has been established as compulsory element in employment. But Tamils strongly criticised the government policies on employment. It is very important to mention here that the ethnic conflict has made it difficult for Sri Lanka to expand economic development and generate more employment opportunities since 1983.

3. 2. 6. Issue of Colonisation in the Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict

In the 1930s, resettlements of peasants in the north-central plains were envisioned to address the socio-economic challenges of the post-independence Sri Lanka. Resettlement of the population in the dry zone also coincided with the concurrent reawakening of Sinhala nationalism that emphasised on the past glory of the island in the aftermath of the colonial rule. Later on, the colonization process and constructions are believed to be a serious cause of the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka.

After independence, the government of Ceylon launched series of resettlement programs settling people from the overcrowded southern provinces and the hill country in the north central plains. The resettlement programs focused on the development of major river basins like Gal Oya, Padaviya and Kantale as well as the restoration of a number of tanks in the north-central territories. The state promoted resettlement program from its very inception, which came under criticisms from the

Tamil political leaders blaming that the colonisation schemes were deliberately interposed so as to break the geographical contiguity of the two Tamil provinces.47

It suffices to say, the fears of Tamil political leaders were based on the fact that the increasing Sinhalese migration could distort the original demographic picture in the region where the Tamils were in majority. These apprehensions were reiterated in the political demands by the Tamil leadership.48 Federal Party opposed to the resettlement program and demanded the termination of it in the Federal Party agenda when it first launched in 1949. Since then, all Tamil political parties have considered colonisation as a critical issue in the inter-ethnic relations. The TULF and the TUF described colonisation as one of key issues to be addressed in any settlement of the ethnic conflict. Forcible occupation of the Tamil traditional homeland by Sinhalese is also central to the LTTE insurgency.49

Some academics are against the Tamil political leaders and they argue that the colonisation led to a rapid distortion of the Tamil demographic pattern. According to Gerald Pieris, the government sponsored settlement programs did not involve traditional Tamil areas. In his opinion, traditional Tamil settlements were confined to the coastal areas, whereas extended Sinhala settlements had been in the island territories of the island for a long time. His principle argument is that there had been Sinhala settlements in the north central plains long before the colonisation process began. Moreover, the resettlement schemes had allocated lands to all three ethnic communities in fair proportion, thus the resettlement program did not distort the demographic make-up of the area.50 But the resettlement policies inevitably became a

49 - Ibid -, p. 572.
political thorn of successive Tamil political parties.\textsuperscript{51} Analysing the demographic changes after the colonisation program Robert N. Kearney stated that the north and east, the areas of Traditional Tamil Homeland, have undergone major shifts in ethnic composition over recent decades.\textsuperscript{52}

3. 2. 7. Issues of Constitutional Reforms

At the end of Second World War, Sri Lanka moved towards self-rule with the drafting of a constitution by the Lord Soulbury Commission on Constitutional Reforms. The Tamil elites found the reforms towards the self-rule, making them increasingly disadvantaged. Then the Soulbury Commission proposed to create multi-member constituencies for the selected areas that would provide additional minority representation in the legislature and the formation of electorates based on the area as well as on the population of the province, which envision an additional constitutional safeguard to the minority constituency. In 1972, the SLFP led the UF government amended the Soulbury Constitution of 1947 and changed the name of the country from Ceylon to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. The first step taken in this direction was the adoption of a new constitution in 1972, reaffirming the position of ‘Sinhala’ as the only official language and conferring special status on Buddhism. In the new constitution, an important clause was incorporated declaring ‘it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism’.\textsuperscript{53} This aroused the Tamil suspicions of being relegated to second-class citizens by the new provision. Moreover, introducing the new Republic Constitution in 1972, the UF government removed the Section 29 of the Soulbury Constitution in 1947, which ensured the rights of the

minorities in Sri Lanka,\textsuperscript{54} saying it was ambiguous and inappropriate. It also introduced a list of fundamental rights instead of constitutional safeguards to the minority in the Soulbury Constitution. Sri Lankan Tamils considered the abandonment of the provisions as a serious neglect of their constitutional rights.

With rapidly deteriorating ethnic relations and increasing ethnic violence, the UNP government enacted the 1978 constitution, declaring both Sinhala and Tamils as official languages and recognising them as national languages.\textsuperscript{55} Furthermore, English was introduced as a link language; a measure taken to provide an additional advantage to the Tamil speaking population. While Sinhalese and Tamil languages were declared as official languages, Tamil was assigned the sole language in the northern and eastern provinces. The recognition of Tamil as a national language has been interpreted as acceptance of "the Tamil community as a distinct nationality with its own language and culture".\textsuperscript{56}

The enlargement in the scope of fundamental rights and the inclusion of nine basic rights and freedoms in Section 14 (1) of the Constitution in 1978 made certain changes with respect to restrictions in "the interest of racial and religious harmony".\textsuperscript{57} The most significant innovation is the conferment of the rights to seek a remedy from the Supreme Court on any violation of a fundamental right. This represents a departure from the Constitution in 1972. The Tamils however demanded for the special constitutional safeguard to the minorities instead of fundamental rights of the Constitution of 1978.

\textsuperscript{54} Government of Ceylon (1947), Soulbury Constitution, Colombo: Government Print, Section 29.2 & 3.
In addition to this, the Sri Lankan state steadily ascended to be a Sinhala-Buddhist state, losing its secularity, which is one of the basic features of a liberal democracy. Even in the constitutional reforms of the 1978 the clause on the 'foremost status of Buddhism' was not removed. In this context, Sri Lankan Tamils considered constitutional reforms in 1978 as a serious neglect of their constitutional rights.

3. 3. Rise of Tamil Separatist Struggle

According to the Tamil separatists, the continuous discrimination and victimisation of the Tamils in all spheres of life and society compelled them to adopt a new strategy to demand for a federal state, which in due course of time culminated in separatism. Hence in May 1972, all the Tamil parties including Federal Party, the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and the Tamil Congress came together and formed the TUF. In its Trincomalee Conference, the TUF adopted a vague six-point programme that included the demands of:

1. A defined place for Tamil Language;
2. Sri Lanka should be a secular state;
3. Fundamental rights of ethnic minorities should be embodied in the constitution and made enforceable by law;
4. Citizenship for all who applied for it;
5. Decentralization of the administration; and
6. Abolition of the caste system.

These proposals on the face of it meant nothing to the Tamil people because for them, ‘qualitative equality with the Sinhalese and the results that would flow out from this were important issues’.58 The Tamils in rejection of the new constitution of 1972,

went on ‘to develop their ideas of sovereignty and self-government through a federally constituted state or if need be, through a separate political entity’.

Initially the major objective of the TUF was to secure regional autonomy for Tamil areas. But in course of time, its extremist youth members demanded for an independent Tamil State and popularised it as the ‘Eelam’. Because the extremist Tamil youths, who suffered most due to the discrimination in matters of education and employment, were frustrated and desperate, they questioned the effectiveness of the conventional tactics employed by the older generation of leaders to secure the legitimate rights of the Tamils. According to Marshall R. Singer, young Tamils were increasingly frustrated with Tamil politicians who had not been able to deliver federalism, which would have granted them some degree of control over their own destiny, at least in Tamil areas. Moreover, there were negotiations between the Tamil and the Sinhalese leaders to deal with the pressing problems relating to the colonisation of Tamil districts, education and employment opportunities as well as the use of the Tamil language for regional administration. Therefore, the extremist Tamil youths led the call for separation and boycotted the schools and colleges. Thus, the beginnings of the Tamil separatist movements can be traced to March 1973, when many extremist Tamil youths were arrested for staging black-flag demonstrations during the visit of cabinet ministers of Mrs. Bandaranaike to Jaffna. In the subsequent months, the policy of arrest and detention of extremist Tamils using the emergency powers of the government further provoked the extremist Tamil youths to retaliate and confront the government. According to James Manor and Gerald Segal, the Tamil separatist guerrilla emergence was largely a reaction against the policies of the

government of Mrs. Bandaranaike after 1972.\textsuperscript{61} In the process, the extremist youths became a powerful political force to compel the TUF to reconsider: its long-cherished objective to establish a federal system of government.\textsuperscript{62}

As the extremist youths pressed for a drastic solution in the nature of ‘an independent Tamil state’, the leaders responded by recasting the TUF as the TULF and reiterating its call for the establishment of the secular state of Tamil Eelam on May 14, 1976. In this context, the party representing the Indian Tamils, the CWC did not give its support to the separatist movement. But it was willing to support the TULF as long as its main objective was to establish a linguistic state within the framework of a federal system of government. Hence, it drew the line when it came to the call for an independent Tamil state. Under the TULF, the extremist youth movements most of which were underground organisations with links to Southern provinces of India, gradually embraced violence as the only means to establish an independent Tamil state. In response, the government imposed restrictions on the activities of extremist Tamil youths. Despite the strictures, the Tamil militants organised a series of violent acts against the police, military and others, whom they considered to be traitors to the Tamil cause.

In this process, after five years of emergency rule and its attendant repression, the parliamentary elections of 1977 were focused on the need for guarantees of personal liberties, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, control of police excesses, support for the rule of law, the independence of judiciary and repeal of the existing penal laws. The TULF fought the elections with the call for a separate state of ‘Eelam’. It elaborated on the structure of the Eelam state, its citizenship, its official language policy and its other economic and foreign policies in the election manifesto.

As a result the TULF swept the polls in the north and east, which gave a signal to the government that sizable numbers of Sri Lankan Tamils were behind the demand for the creation of a separate state. Nevertheless, many Tamils hoped that if the UNP would take appropriate measures to redress the Tamil grievances as promised in its manifesto, the need to establish a separate state would not arise. But their hopes were shattered, one month after the elections when the extremist Tamils in the Jaffna peninsula started violent acts, which spread to other parts of the island too. It was only in April 1978, that a Tamil militants outfit in the name of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) claimed responsibility for the killing of a well-known police inspector who was instrumental in the arrest of some Tamil youths for certain violent acts.

Concerning the numerical strength of the militant groups, it has been difficult to come up with any meaningful explanation, as there are variations in figures for different insurgent groups (See Appendix V). It can be said that the guerrilla were unable to increase their numbers substantially until the July 1983 riots which ‘radicalized large sectors of the Tamil community, especially the youth and provided abundant, motivated manpower’. But the main problem among the Tamil militants has been one of unity and co-operation for which they have not been successful in their separatist struggle. Still the continuous struggle of the militants proves the motivation and professionalism of the militants as it has brought about ‘a military stalemate which is a victory in a nearly’. The justification of the demand for separate state is nearly the same for all groups who want to free the Tamils from the Sinhalese suppression.

---

63 Thomas A. Marks (19860, “People’s War” in Sri Lanka: Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency”, Issues and Students, 22(8), p. 73.
According to Dagmar Hellman-Rajanayagam, the LTTE have raised a violent struggle with the call for a ‘separate state’, which highlighted the suppression of Tamils whose ‘homeland, language, tradition and culture of its own, all of which are threatened by the racist Sinhalese government in Sri Lanka’. Hence, as it has been discussed in the previous chapter, the Tamil have sought for an independent state of ‘Eelam’ constituting the areas in the north and east, which was based on the concept of the traditional homeland of Tamils. This has given a new dimension to the Tamil separatism in the multi-ethnic pattern of Sri Lankan state.

3.4. Role of the Muslim Community

The third large ethnic group, the Muslims, are of heterogeneous origin. They represent about 8 percent of the 20 million populations of Sri Lanka. Muslims speak Sinhalese when living in districts where the majority of people are Sinhala-speaking and speak Tamil when living in districts where the majority are Tamil-speaking. The language spoken in many Muslim households is Tamil. A particular brand of Tamil ethnic opinion has attempted to assimilate Muslims into a larger Tamil identity, which they termed ‘Tamil speaking people’. They have attempted to define the Muslims as a religious sub-group within the Tamil ethnic group.

Since the language issue was a burning problem of the island in 1956, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party government led by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike tried to win over the support of the Muslims. It is of importance to mention here that the Muslims of Sri Lanka have never involved themselves in any conflict concerning the language

---

Moreover, the Muslims are trying to survive by joining the Sinhalese. The geographical distribution of the community within Sri Lanka, coupled with their trading and commercial interest, persuade them to adopt a pro-Sinhalese attitude in an independent Sri Lanka. By supporting the new constitutions introduced in 1972 and 1978, they indicated their willingness to participate in the mainstream of politics.

It is important here to mention that the Muslims are not in a position to deem themselves as a section to join hands with the Tamils to fight for their nation against the Sri Lankan state. As a result, when ethnic tension expedited by July 1983 riots the Tamils was allowed running free terror against the Muslim community. After the LTTE declared the ‘Second Ealam War’ they began a process of ethnic cleansing of Northern and Eastern Sinhalese as well as Muslims. Successive Muslims massacres in the Northern and Eastern provinces by the Tamil militants had shocked the Muslims and further increased their suspicion on the Sri Lankan Tamils. In this broader context, in order to safeguard their interest in the resolution of the ethnic conflict the Muslims demand unification of the Muslim-majority areas of the North and the East to form a Muslim-majority territory. Moreover in mid 1986 the Muslim community unanimously agree for a separate Provincial Council for the Muslims.

3. 5. Role of Sinhalese Patriotic Groups

In post independence Sri Lanka, apart from the Tamil extremist groups, numerous extremist Sinhalese organizations have mobilized against the peaceful solutions to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. They most certainly are among the

protagonists promoting the nationalists ideology.\textsuperscript{69} In this regards, the two most prominent political parties are the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-the People’s Liberation Front-and the Jathika Hela Urumya (JHU)-the National Heritage Party.

The JVP (the People’s Liberation Front) which is known as a radical-Sinhalese nationalist party was founded in 1965 with the aim of providing a leading force for a socialist revolution in Sri Lanka. After the defeat of the 1971 and 87/89 unsuccessful insurrections, the JVP re-entered the democratic political process in 1994 and is presently a leading nationalist party.\textsuperscript{70} The JVP is anti-LTTE and totally against changing the unitary setup in Sri Lanka to a Federal system as recommended by India. It depends on Sinhalese chauvinistic utterances to win the hearts of lower and middle class Sinhalese to beef up their vote bank. Apart from the JHU, the JVP founded and led a Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalist movement called the Patriotic National Movement (PNM).

The JHU is a political party in Sri Lanka which is led by a group Buddhist monks.\textsuperscript{71} The JHU was launched in February, 2004 by the lay-based, secular Sinhala nationalist political party Sihala Urumaya. Party founders of the JHU argue that while the Sri Lankan Tamil, Indian Tamils, and Muslims all have political parties along ethnic lines, the Sinhalese alone did not. Thus the JHU leaders claim that they are forced to organise to prevent the ultimate betrayal of the Sinhalese people, and they promise to ensure that the aspirations of the majority Sinhalese. The main goal of the


\textsuperscript{70} For more details see, Jagath P. Senaratne (1997), \textit{Political Violence In Sri Lanka, Riots, Insurrections, Counter-insurgencies, Foreign Intervention}, Amstterdam: VU University Press, pp. 103-143.

JHU is to create a block in parliament to protect and propagate Buddhist interests.\textsuperscript{72} Further, it shares its belief that, given the island’s 2500-year-old civilization, the people should embrace its roots and seek to reinstitute cultural nationalism. By and large, the party maintains a Sinhala Nationalist stance in its politics and advocated wiping out the Tamil tigers by force.\textsuperscript{73}

It is important to mention here the JVP and the JHU supported a military solution to the ethnic conflict. The JVP and the JHU railed against any ceasefire agreement between the government and the LTTE, and demanded that the civil war be prosecuted more forcefully until the rebels have laid down their arms and renounced separatism. Both parties campaigned against the Norwegians who operated as peace brokers. The People’s Alliance under the president ship of Chandrika Bandaranayake Kumarathunga and the JVP jointly campaigned against any interim administration for North East, claiming it would be a first step towards a separate Tamil state. Further the JVP and the JHU opposed a negotiated settlement to the long term ethnic conflict.\textsuperscript{74} They oppose attempts to accommodate to minorities and are hostile toward devolution power.

In addition to this the JVP and JHU infiltrated the armed forces and commands strong support among the military’s rank and file. Both parties launched fundraising and poster campaigns to support the war. Moreover, party leaders visited military camps to deliver morale-boosting speeches even though the JVP is not part of the present government. It is vital to point out here both the JVP and the JHU wants to


maintain Sri Lanka’s unitary constitution with meagre devolution of powers as a solution to the present ethnic conflict.

3. 6. Role of Buddhist Monks in the Ethnic Conflict

Sri Lanka’s estimated 25,000 Buddhist monks take great pride in working to preserve the purity of the Theravada strain of Buddhism that emerged in Sri Lanka some 2,300 years ago. Historically, in Sri Lanka Buddhist monks have been the symbol of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. And also they are heavily influenced by modern Sinhala nationalist ideology. Since independence, some Sri Lankan Buddhist monks have been active in the political arena whenever they felt it appropriate, particularly on issues relating to the primacy of the Buddhist faith and the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

From the independence, a number of prominent monks were among those who were most critical of the idea of a peaceful solution for the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. It is noteworthy to mention here the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact of 1957 was spoiled by Buddhist pressure groups, led by the monks. In 1965, the Senanayake-Chelvanayagam Pact was similarly abandoned, having been opposed by leading Buddhist monks. Further, with the help of the SLFP, most prominent monks offered powerful resistance to the peace accord during the Thimpu talks in 1985. In addition to this, during the Thimpu talks, a number of prominent monks held separate discussions with the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) party, although the outcome of those meetings remains unclear. Moreover, the Indo-Lanka Accord and present of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) of 1987 were strongly opposed by

---

many leading Buddhist monks, on the grounds that it would endanger the sovereignty of Sri Lanka. Among efforts to achieve peace were made by President Kumaratunga’s administration in 1997, the devolution proposal-known as ‘the Package’-was strongly criticized by many leading Buddhist monks. But a group of monks travelled around the country to explain the idea of devolution.

Further, the JHU leader and his fellow hard-line monks urged the president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, to keep the promise upon which he came to power to crush the Tamil Tigers with military force in late 2005. Further, the JHU monks have used their power to argue vociferously against power sharing which is necessary for peace for the Tamils in the north and east. All the same, influential Buddhist leaders consistently and loudly opposed government talk of granting the LTTE significant political autonomy in the north.

It is important to mention here that most Buddhist monks are known for their love of peace. Further, there is a Sri Lankan Buddhist constituency, including Buddhist monks, who are dedicated to bring about harmony among the various nations and communities through an honourable peace, which gives recognition to the just rights of the national minorities.78

In this background of the Tamil separatist struggle, it is pertinent to study the response of the extremist Sinhalese and Tamils political leaders as a counter to terrorism/ separatist violence, which seriously undermined the security and stability of the Sri Lankan state.

3. 7. Role of the Sri Lankan State

In the aftermath of July 1983 riots and subsequent rise of Tamil insurgency, the armed Tamil groups abducted and killed government security personnel and politicians who were against them. Sometimes they killed their own Tamil people whom they considered as government informers or in opposition to them. They also destroyed and damaged public property and killed the Sinhalese ordinary civilians who lived not only northern and eastern provinces but also other parts of the Sri Lanka. In this cycle of violence, the common masses were the worst hit with no guarantee of life and property. And also the Tamil guerrillas carried out their military activities against the Sinhalese and Muslims by clearing areas of Sinhalese and Muslims population and establishing their military camps in those areas. Particularly in the Tamil areas of the north and the east as well as certain southern parts of the island, thousands of houses, community centres, temples, vehicles, schools, libraries and state buildings have been destroyed by the Tamil militants. 79 These were some of the security measures intended to mobilize the army to restrict and stop the movement of Tamil guerrillas and to identify them. Gradually the Ministry of National Security started security operations against the Tamil separatists in the north and the east. The Tamil guerrillas with their ‘hit and run’ tactics and suicide attacks had inflicted serious losses on the security forces who could not meet the situation. 80 In the meantime, the GOSL initiated the peace talks with the Tamil militants to find a peaceful solution for the conflicting demands. But political and military rivalry between the GOSL and the Tamil militants has long hindered peace effort. 81

79 For more details see, Asoka Bandarage (2009), Op. Cit, pp. 97-175.
In February 2002, having fought each other to a standstill over the course of more than a decade, a ceasefire agreement between the GOSL and the LTTE was brokered by the Government of Norway, which subsequently headed a largely Scandinavian mission, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), tasked with monitoring the ceasefire. The 2002 ceasefire agreement raised hopes both domestically and internationally that an end to Sri Lanka’s internal conflict.\footnote{Asoka Bandarage (2009), \textit{Op. Cit.}, pp. 182-187.} A crucial component of a durable peace would be genuine political autonomy for the north and east of the island. However, by the end of 2003 mutual mistrust and intransigence had led to the stalling of peace talks. What followed over the next five years was the slow death of the ceasefire agreement and the so-called ‘peace process’. The international community made efforts to prop it up but neither party showed much confidence or faith in these efforts. Indeed, key stakeholders came to be accused of taking sides in the conflict.

Levels of violence steadily increased between 2004 and 2007. While for a long time it looked as if there had simply been a return to the military stalemate between the Government and the LTTE, in retrospect the advantage was clearly shifting in favour of the Government. In 2004 the LTTE suffered a major split. President Mahinda Rajapakse, who was elected in November 2005, appeared increasingly intent on achieving a military victory over the LTTE.\footnote{Amita Shastri (2009), \textit{Op. Cit.}, pp. 93-95}

On 16 January 2008 the Government formally pulled out of the 2002 ceasefire agreement. It took a year for its strategic and military advantage to tell. In January 2009 the Sri Lankan armed forces achieved a decisive breakthrough in the north. There were reportedly around 250,000 civilians in the area, with dozens allegedly being killed every day. The GOSL largely ignored growing international
condemnation of its failure to protect the civilians caught up in the fighting. The LTTE was accused of using civilians as ‘human shields’, both parties to the conflict were accused of committing war crimes. The end finally came on 18 May, when the last piece of territory was claimed. Most, if not all, of the LTTE’s leadership, including its commander in chief, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, were killed.  


In his speech to Parliament, on 19 May 2009, President Rajapakse formally declared the GOSL victorious and the conflict finally over. At a Victory Day parade held on 03 June 2009 to mark the end of what some have called “Eelam War IV”, the President declared that ‘It is now the time to win over the hearts of the Tamil people’.  

Since the fighting ended, there have been growing calls for an independent war crimes investigation into allegations of war crimes committed in the final stages of the war between security forces and the LTTE last year. On 18 May 2009 the EU called for an independent war crimes inquiry. The US has added its voice in support of these calls. However, at a special session of the Human Rights Council on Sri Lanka which took place on 26-27 May 2009, western attempts to include such a call in the final resolution were comfortably defeated by Sri Lanka and its allies including China, Russia and Vietnam. In this regard, the GOSL has said that its own courts will investigate any allegations of war crimes. Further, on 07 February 2010, Sri Lanka’s Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa told a foreign news channel that his

country would not allow even the UN to investigate the alleged war crimes committed during the last phase of the Eelam war.⁸⁸

In addition to this, major international concerns have continued to be raised about the conditions being experienced by the estimated 250,000-300,000 IDPs in camps, which in the final days of the conflict were overwhelmed by a surge of arrivals, and the inability of international humanitarian organisations to gain access to these camps.⁸⁹ On 20 May 2009 it was reported that the ICRC had suspended its distribution of humanitarian aid to the camps due to official obstruction. There have been reports of abductions of children from the camps and the ‘disappearance’ or murder, possibly by paramilitary groups operating within the camps, of LTTE cadres who are currently being held in them.⁹⁰ Once they have been identified, the authorities are sending LTTE cadres to separate camps where they will undergo “rehabilitation”. The Government has said that about 2,000 people have so far identified themselves as LTTE members.⁹¹ There have been accusations that the authorities are treating every civilian in the camps as a possible LTTE suspect.⁹² There have also been reports that international humanitarian aid workers in the north continue to be harassed by the authorities, including through the non-extension of visas.

---


Since the decisive military victory over the LTTE, Sri Lanka has made little progress in reconstructing its battered democratic institutions or establishing conditions for a stable peace. However, numerous analysts have argued that the 13th Amendment is an inherently flawed basis for a credible and durable deal on autonomy, agreed only reluctantly by the government of the time. Certainly, many on the Tamil side, including the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), whose foes claim is the ‘political wing’ of the LTTE, argue that there is a pressing need to go beyond the 13th Amendment in important respects.  

Further, the LTTE’s head of foreign relations announced that the organisation would henceforth pursue its political goals by peaceful means. But the Government has rejected any role for the LTTE in future Sri Lankan politics and has called on the international community to assist it in closing down the LTTE’s global networks so that the organisation cannot be revived.

Once civil war ended, President Rajapaksa announced the presidential election instead of bring a long term political solution for the ethnic conflict. Most crucial presidential contest in post war Sri Lanka on 26 January 2010, Rajapakse, who ran for his second term in office, garnered 57 percent of registered votes nationwide. The opposition contender, former Army commander Sarath Fonseka, one of key architects in the recently concluded war against the LTTE, received 40.15 percent of the votes. He was supported by a coalition of major UNP, JVP, TNA and smaller Tamil and Muslim parties.

It is true several countries including the USA, Norway and has been quite unhappy with the Rajapaksa regime on two counts: its indifference to the USA and Norway concerns over gross human rights violations, and its contacts with the anti-

---


US club. In this context, Rajapaksa’s government expressed that the USA, Norway and some Western countries supported Fonseka in the presidential election to defeat the Rajapakasa’s regime. Apart from this, the minority populations voted mostly for Rajapakse’s challenger-Sarath Fonseka-in hopes that a victory for the latter would mean the fulfilment of their aspiration for equal recognition in a country that has been seen deep divisions between ethnic groups. According to some analysts, Rajapakse’s victory is a deep blow to the minorities, for their hope for change has been rejected.95

Since the presidential election campaign, Fonseka has become one of critical characters in the both domestic and international political arena because he has divulged certain sensitive information on war crimes in Sri Lanka to the public and spoken about them in public meetings. Further, he accused the defence secretary of Sri Lanka, Gotabaya Rajapakase, of doing certain war crimes during the final place of the war. After the presidential election, the Criminal Investigation Department of Sri Lanka (CID) began its new investigations on claims made by several ministers of Rajapakse government that Fonseka was planning a coup to remove Rajapakse in case of close election results on 26 January 2010. In connection with this investigation, On 08 February 2010, Fonseka was arrested at his office in Colombo by Military Police, and taken into military custody.96 International community including the leading human-rights organisation has condemned the GOSL for what it called the post-poll ‘crackdown on political opposition’.97

The ends of the violent civil war, the dramatic demise of the LTTE, and presidential election have created a significant political disequilibrium in Sri Lanka.

The signs of the war-coalition disintegrating from within are an indication of how the establishment of a new post-civil war political equilibrium has come to the centre of Sri Lanka’s national security agenda. The forthcoming parliamentary election will provide opportunities for the political actors to forge new alliances and redefine the power bloc to manage the post-civil war Sri Lankan state. The civil war is over, but the trajectory of the island’s post-civil war politics is still in the process of being formed.

**Conclusion**

The ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka has brought a cycle of violence in which innocent civilians and public properties have been the target of both the Tamil militants and the security forces. The determination of the GOSL and the Tamil militants to deal the ethnic conflict as a ‘security problem’ has further aggravated the conflict. In the management of security, the process of militarization that has been accelerated in a small state like Sri Lanka has serious economic and political consequences. It may lead to weakening of the democratic political structure of the nation, thus contributing to increasing political instability. In this context, the next chapter will be an attempt to deal with the regional dimensions of the security crisis of Sri Lankan, focusing on India.