

Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka: The Question of India's Implications

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ABSTRACT

From the identity and population displacement perspective South Asia has a long and unique history. Ethnicity refers to a sense of the unity of identity and culture of a particular group. The question of Identity becomes an important factor for '*locating oneself in society*' in contemporary world society. The attitude of identity represents the image of 'Self' and 'others'. This idea is complex and analyzed distinctively in various contexts. Ethnic problem rise in national and international politics in various ways: a) Civilization of Clashes, b) Tribalism, c) Resource Scarcity, d) Over-population.

Political identity of each group becomes an important political phenomenon of developing nations in the 20th century. Sri Lanka is a multi – ethnic, multi – religious and multi - lingual nation in the South Asia. Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka is a portion of land extending from the mainland of India separated by Palk Strait and almost surrounded by water. In the third world nations it is a unique state which occupied the different characters of regimes: authoritarian, fascist and democratic. The ultimate goal of its authoritative political system with centralized presidentialism is to establish the stable society in the state.

In my paper I want to explore the root causes of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and point out the various ways in which this civil conflict/war posed the menace to the Indian national security. The ethnic crisis between Sinhala and Tamil nationality has an implication for India's security due to the existence of Tamil community in Tamil Nadu of India.

1. Introduction

South Asian societies have been characterized by identity. Geographically this region is very important for trade and investment in the world. This region not only connects with the Asia and Europe but also connects the routes of transaction between Europe and South East Asian nations. The south Asian nations have been suffering from the crisis of nationality due to existence the multi-ethnicity, multi-religion, multi-cultural and multi-lingual. Identity becomes an important issue for South Asia after the post-colonial period. Ethnic identity can be considered as shared heritage, common traditions and values, similar history, behavior and common language and area of origin. In this sense the question of identity becomes an important factor for '*locating oneself in society*' in contemporary world society. The attitudes of identity represent the idea of 'Self' and 'Others'. The sense of identity becomes a phenomenon of fundamental practices and basic rights arose in contemporary world societies. India and Sri Lanka are not out of these problems.

The concept of Diaspora has been upholding a new dimension of ideas and segment in the area of cultural studies. This term has been identified as a representation of 'hybridity' in this field of study. In this connection the scholar of social science would like to emphasize on the various dimension of migration and immigration in the study of culture and identity such as Korean groups in Japan, Indians in Sri Lanka, Irish in England, Algerians in France, and Palestinians in Jordan due to the commonness of boarder from their original homeland.

2. Methodology

The present study has been based on the inter-disciplinary. It includes the dynamics of politics in Sri Lanka. Descriptive-analytical method has been used for the analysis of the work. The historical-analysis is used for the analyses of different aspects of marginality in Sri Lanka. The historical method seeks to focus and analyze the political significance in this society. On the other hand internet source is the valuable source to trace the problems.

3. Ethnic Demography in Sri Lanka

Diaspora is a complex concept. Diaspora means that a group of people living together outside of their homeland with their original culture and traditions. Diaspora is the consequence of migration and it can be considered as monolithic one. Sri Lanka is a diamond in Indian Ocean. This island is a coexistence of different types of ethnic groups differentiated by their languages, cultures and customs. Indo-Sri Lankan link developed through the Buddhism in 250-210 B.C.E. and another dimension is that ethnic proximity. Therefore traditional linkage between Indo-Sri Lanka had been influencing to each others. The ethnic conflict has tremendous implications for India's security system due to the existence of Tamil community in Tamil Nadu in South India. This paper will analyze the need of India's involvement in civil war of Sri Lanka. The paper tries to explore the answer of the following questions: a) how did political fragmentation emerge with ethnic differences since independence of Sri Lanka? b) Why did civil war come into existence in Sri Lankan society?

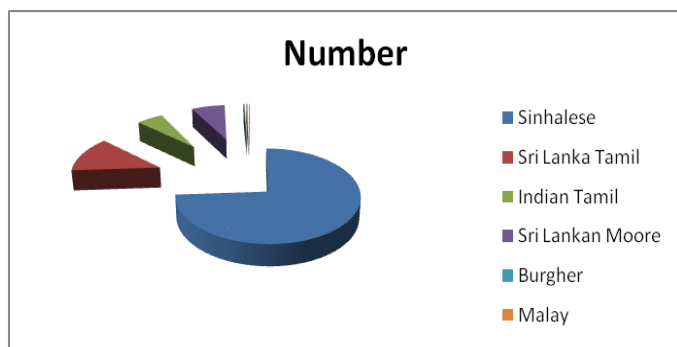
Sri Lanka is known by different names. According to Mahavamsa legendary prince vijaya called the Land

'Tambapanni'. In Mahabharata and Tamil this island is called as 'Lanka' and 'Elam' respectively. Greek geographer named it 'Taprobana'. Parsians and Arabs called it 'Serendipty' which is derived from the word 'serentivu'. Portuguese Empire named the island 'Ceilao' in 1505. The British colony had given the name of island as 'Ceylon'. Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka is a semi-presidential system which documented long historical spans of 3000 years. It is a variety of traditions like customs, religions, beliefs and cultures. These distinct ideologies had been considered as autonomy in its own self and the cultural diversities have led to the ethnic identity.

Table-1: Population of Sri Lanka, 1981.

Ethnic People	Number	Percentage
Sinhalese	10979561	74.0
Sri Lanka Tamil	1886872	12.7
Indian Tamil	818656	5.5
Sri Lankan Moore	1046926	7.0
Burgher	39374	0.3
Malay	46963	0.3
Others	28398	0.2
Total	14846750	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing, 1981, General Report.



The most important ethnic group in Sri Lanka is *Sinhala* who are majority in number. The Sinhala ethnic people are about 74%. They traditionally migrated from North India at the time of 500 B.C.E. They are Indo-Aryan ethnic group. They were intermixed with original inhabitants of Sri Lanka proto-Australoid and become mixed group (Silva: 1997). The Sinhala identity is based on two ways: i) Language, ii) Buddhist religion. There are two types of Sinhalese found in Sri Lanka; a) Low country Sinhalese b) Kandyan Sinhalese. Low country Sinhalese are greatly influenced by Western culture and modernity. On the other hand Kandian Sinhalese are conservative in nature. They had been trying to maintain their traditionalism and cultures. But internal migration has erased the differences between low country Sinhalese and kandian Sinhalese.

The second ethnic group is Tamil group. They arrived in Sri Lanka at the time of colonial period. Tamils are basically Hindus and Christian. There are three sub-groups in Tamil community which is based on language, cultures, customs and regional ways: firstly, Negombo (Puttalam) Tamils are found in western part of Sri Lanka, secondly, some parts of Tamils are from eastern territory of the country and lastly, Jaffna or Northern Tamils are from Northern area of Sri Lanka. Tamil peoples are majority in numbers in the North-Eastern province of Sri Lanka.

The other ethnic groups are Moors who become third largest ethnic group in Sri Lanka. They believe in Islamic religion. All Islamic communities are called as Moors by the Portuguese. They are highest in number in the areas of Ampara and Trincomallee. They settled in Sri Lanka between 8th and 15th century for Trade and Business. Their speaking language is Tamil language and they follow Islam as their religion. Their occupations are basically agriculture, fisherman and trade. Some Islamic people like Memons, Bohras, Khojas etc. came from India basically Kerala and Tamil Nadu states and Malays at the time of Portuguese and British colony for trading purposes. Memons, Indian Muslims, came from Sindh (Pakistan) in 1870s. Bohra are called Dawoodi Bohra. Muslims are third largest ethnic group in Sri Lanka, as per census report in 2012. They constituted their population in Eastern province – 5, 69,182, Western province 4, 50,505, Northern western 2, 60,380 and Central province 2, 52,694.

It is necessary to analyze another two small ethnic groups a) Burghers and b) Vaddas. The Burghers are Eurasian ethnic group in Sri Lanka. They have been belonging from the family of Portuguese, Dutch and British. They lived in highly sophisticated area of Sri Lanka like Colombo, Gampaha, Trincomallee and Batticaloa. The Burgher derived from the word Burger means 'citizen' or 'town dwellers'. Their language is English and their local languages are Sinhala and Tamil. They are colonial mixed blood among Portuguese, Dutch and English. Vaddas are proto-Austroloid people. They are indigenous resident of Sri Lanka. They speak Sinhala and Tamil. People of Vaddas are gradually absorbed by Tamil and Sinhala. Their occupation is hunter-gathers and agriculture. East coast Veddads lived long as sea fishing.

4. Political Fragmentation and Identity in Sri Lanka

The British government transferred the political and administrative power to the dominant elites who were Sinhalese large in numbers. They were loyal to the colonial administration and British rulers. This history undermined the concept of national unity and established the history of majority domination over minority which is called as *Politics of Elite's Domination*. Sinhalese domination, represented as majority rule, comes into existence in the island. In this type of unfolded history Sri Lanka stimulated the state policy with democratic ideas which produced the ethnic divisions among groups, political fragmentations and social divisions. The history of ethnic conflict developed in Sri Lanka with emergence of Identity instead of nation building which is differentiated from state building.

The Donoughmore Constitution and its executive committee had some limitations for the formation of political parties in Sri Lanka. It is found six political parties by the years of 1946. The first political party was 'Ceylon Labour Party' (1946) which was under the leadership of A.E. Goonesinha (Alexander Ekanayake Goonesinha) who is called as the *Father of Labour Movement*. He organized first trade union in Sri Lanka by the year of 1922 with the 25 members. By the year of 1940s another three political parties were found in that time; Lanka Sama Samaj Party (LSSP), Communist Party (CP), and Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India (BLPI). These political parties were based on the Marxist ideology. LSSP was formed in 1935 aimed at

independence and socialism. LSSP is the first Marxist political party in Sri Lanka. Communist party was playing crucial role in the field of trade union. It was the communist youth federation. In 1942 BLPI was formed under the leadership of Dr. N.M.Perera after the split of LSSP.

Professor Chandra Richard De Silva rightly pointed out that "Meanwhile personal and doctrinal dispute within the LSSP led to a split in leadership between those led by Dr. Colvin R.de. Silva who organized themselves under the banner of Bolshevik-Leninist party of India (BLPI) and those who remained under Dr. N.M.Perera in reconstituted LSSP. The three Marxist parties were thus immersed in bitter factional struggles at the eve of Independence. All three parties, however, were openly critical of parliamentary institutions and advocated revolutionary goals and means. They openly proclaimed the need to organize their followers for extra parliamentary activities". On the other hand sectional groups were found as political parties like Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC), All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) etc. ACTC was formed in 1944 under Ponnambalam (Ganapathipillai Gangaser Ponnambalam) represented Tamil rights in Ceylon. ACTC demanded 50-50 representations in parliament (50% for Sinhalese and 50% for other nationalities). This demand was rejected by the British Governor General Lord Soulbury and considered this demand is as 'a Mockery of Democracy'.

A new political dimension started in Sri Lankan political system called as parliamentary system of British model. This model motivated new political groups. The most influential political party United National Party (UNP) was established in 1946 under the leadership of Don Stephen Senanayake. On the other hand Ceylon India Congress (CIC) reformed itself 'Ceylon Workers Congress' (CWC) in 1951 under the leadership of Savumiamoorthy Thondaman. CWC is the largest Trade Union in the country. Thondaman was the president and A.M. Aziz was general secretary. But A.M. Aziz formed a separate congress known as Democratic Workers Congress in 1956. The most important political party was United National Party (UNP) which was formed under the leadership of Don Stephen Senanayake in 1946. It was composed with three communities: Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim.

Party system has been multi-dimensional and crucial period since 1950. There were two dominant political parties United National Party (UNP) and Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP). United National party included S. W. R. D Bandarnaike and Senanayake's son Dudley. Since the independence of Sri Lanka they hold the Prime Minister's office. UNP party is composed with Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities under the leadership of Don Stephen Senanayake. On the other hand Federal Party was formed under the leadership of S. J. V. Chelvanayakam after the split of G.G. Ponnambalam's Tamil Congress (1951). Federal Party under the leadership of S. J.V. Chelvanayakam demanded that only federal system of Government can safeguard the rights of Tamil in Sri Lanka. In 1951 S.W.R.D Bandarnaike formed the new Political Party SLFP based on left ideology with the split of UNP. S.W.R.D Bandarnaike emphasized on left ideology and has been considered as a founder of Sinhala nationalist Sri Lankan freedom party. The important political groups like Janatha

Vimukhi Peramuna (JVP), Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) and Sri Lanka Muslim congress (SLMC) had been very playing very crucial role in the ethnic demography of Sri Lanka. JVP was formed in 1965 for attaining a socialist revolution in Sri Lanka under the leadership of Rohana Wijeweera. The ideology of JVP is based on the ideas of Marxism. In 1990s JVP become popular in Sri Lanka. In 2004 it obtained 45.6% vote and 39 seats out of 225 seats.

5. Reason for the Ethnic Crisis

The policy of the legality of Official Language Act, 1956 becomes new type of political dimension in Sri Lanka. In 1956 the Sinhala language had been considered as official language of Sri Lanka. As consequence of the legality of Sinhala language the Sinhala people were in favour of new constitution. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party got opportunity in 1970 and formed United Front coalition (SLFP, CP & LSSP). This coalition won 115 of 151 seats in the lower house with help of the support of Sinhalese – Buddhist people. The SLFP leaders were in favour of republican structure. The existing political structure needs a new constitution for radical change. So ethnic stereotypes persuade the ethnic movement and at the same course of time political structure influence the establishment of the ethnic identity. As Sinhala people are majority in number, Sinhalese dominate both major parties UNP and SLFP. The political process of this country has been dominated by another Tamil speaking ethnic people. Pluralism denotes the existence of considerable and somewhat autonomous, associational activities. It does not mean ethnic diversity, although a pluralistic order would enable citizens to affirm ethnic difference (Hasan, 2002: p399).

In 1950s and 1960s the political structure of Sri Lanka was formed on the basis of the tendency to equate Sri Lanka with Sinhala. Sri Lankan Freedom Party Was in favour of self – Government like Swiss cantonal model. The provincial and regional units should be governed by the local government which can diminish the movement of regionalism and demand of separateness. Implementation of Sinhala language as administrative language is responsible for the Tamil separateness and regional identities. In consequence the political segment involved with the solution of ethnic differences.

The LTTE was established in 1976 under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran for the restoration of Tamil rights and autonomy. It is not a political party, but a Military organization demanding a separate state for Tamil people in North Eastern area of Sri Lanka. LTTE has considered as non-state armed groups. In early 1970s Tamil people were deprived in the educational sector and Job or employment sector. In this respect LTTE people in the northern eastern areas like Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Vavunia, Mannar, Anuradhapura, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Ampara. On the other hand the SLMC is a political party which represented Muslim minority Voice. It was established at kattankudy in 1981. The Muslim people in Sri Lanka supported the SLMC party for their existence. In 1980s these three ethnic groups like Sinhala, Tamil and Muslims faced different types of clashes.

The Sri Lankan ethnic war is to be understood as civil war between majority Sinhala and minority Tamils who are largest

ethnic groups in the country. It is pointed out that the poverty and marginality are outcomes of civil war in the society. In this writing I want to explore the connection and differences between poverty, ethnicity and marginality. It is an analytical distinction between poverty and ethnic identity.

After 1980s the Diaspora is considered as allegorical designation to identify a section of people as refugees, immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities. In 1990s the concept of Diaspora is analyzed as an idea of homeland and ethnic community. In the phase of postmodern era Diaspora is conceptualized as displaced and created phenomenon in a transitional situation. But in the 21st century this idea is nativism and homeland becomes more powerful. The concept of *self* and *other* represent the concept of social domination over the minority by the majority people. This perception indicates the marginality in the society. In this phase of globalization the notion of Diaspora is a critical realization of relationship between home land and host land.

Ethnic crisis raised in 1956, 1957, 1959, 1961 and 1974. There were different ways of discriminations in specific areas of political, social and educational policies after 1970s. After 1970s policy of discrimination and racial differentiation has been considered for the admission in the sphere of educational system. The policies lay down by the Government of Sri Lanka has been representing the worse in manner. Tamil people got deprive from the state building instead of Nation Building. The deprivation policies were:

1. Deprivation or unequal opportunities in Government employment or Government corporations to Tamil people.
2. The Governmental text books had been changed for the establishment of propaganda against Tamil nationality and Tamil loyalty.
3. Tamil areas in Sri Lanka were under the crucial control of Police and Armed forces of the state.
4. The Government had restricted the right of peaceful assembly of Tamil people in the territory of the state.
5. No Tamil leaders have the right to leave the country. Many Tamil people were confined within the country.
6. There are no fundamental rights for minority groups in constitutional provisions.
7. Arbitrary arrest and detentions of Tamil people.
8. Constitutional provision for fostering and the establishment of religion Buddhism.

6. India's Involvement

India has been a powerful dominant country in South Asia and a neighbour of Sri Lanka. India's involvement in the Sri Lankan civil war is related to the different ways and inspired by various factors. India considered her as the security manager in this specific region due to its geographical proximity. India realized the development of civil war in Sri Lanka due to existence of Tamil multitudes in Tamil Nadu. In this context the India's involvement is necessary for the resolution of the conflict in Sri Lanka. 2. There is a relationship in ethnic people among 55 million of southern Indian state Tamil Nadu with the Tamil people in northern and east Sri Lanka. The two Tamil ethnic groups had been separated by the Palk Strait. But their

common cultural, linguistic and religious ties come to the closeness. India realized that the problem may be solved within the constitutional framework. India's perception is that the constitutional arrangement or framework may maintain the territorial integrity and ethnic unity. The Elam movement in Sri Lanka may affect the whole region of South Asia. India feared that violent separatist movement may be spread out in the different areas of said region.

In this circumstances India has modified its foreign policy for the establishment of peace initiatives in Sri Lanka. Three states India, Pakistan and China are important regional partners in this region. They had been interconnected by the web of political, economic and cultural nature. The Hindu Tamil people got the sympathy from Indian Tamil Hindu. *"India's involvement in Sri Lanka was unavoidable not only due the ramifications of Colombo's oppressive and discriminating policies against its Tamil citizens, but also in terms of India's (own) national security concerns..."* (Dixit, 2002). The main factors are: a) Geo-Political Factor, b) Tamil Nadu Factor, c) Involvement of Western Powers and Anti-India Powers. These factors were main issues for the interference of India in the Sri Lankan ethnic problem. These issues compelled India to interfere in this problem. Tamil living in Sri Lanka and on the Indian mainland have maintained regular contacts all through history, although interaction in pre-modern times between the two groups was not so frequent (Ahmed, 1996: 258).

At the time of British rule there was a recruit of Tamil people from the mainland of India for the plantation in Sri Lanka. Geo-Political proximity became influential factor for the India's intervention. On the other hand the Western powers like USA, Israel, Britain and anti- India powers like China, Pakistan involved in the Sri Lankan problem. This involvement compelled India to take a necessary strategic approach towards Sri Lanka. As Sri Lanka took westernized foreign policy, India made a strategic policy towards Sri Lanka. The Tamil Nadu factor had been playing crucial role and compelled India to involve in the Sri Lankan problems. Sri Lankan Tamil and Indian Tamil people had been same cultural affinity and ethnic lineage. Therefore Tamil people could not tolerate the hardship and violence against the Tamil affinity. Tamil Nadu of India pressurized on central government of India to take initiatives for the eradication of their sufferings and atrophied.

7. Conclusion

Finally, it seems that India's intervention in Sri Lanka had been logical to resolve the conflict in the country as India is considered as a regional power in South Asia. An agreement between Sri Lanka and India government in 29th July 1987 was an important milestone for the establishment of the involvement of India in Sri Lankan civil war. It had strongly supported the Unity and sovereignty in Sri Lanka. It validated the recognition of multi-ethnicity and multi-religious nature of society.

In the phase of globalization the idea of growing settlement and sentiment become important for the ethnic groups. The colonialism had critically constructed the institutions of state and its subjects. The concentration of power and administration led the unworthy condition of the state after the post colonial period. The decentralization of power needs to be implemented at all

levels of society which may ensure the greater participation of people in decision making processes. Nation building process is necessary to refute the ethnic crisis and ethnic violence instead of state building. From this point of view it has been pointed out that nativism and celebration of identity need to be appreciated. The concept of Nativism is to analyze the alternative understanding of difference between Western and Eastern culture. Western modernity has erased the autonomy of micro-identity in non-European world. Negotiated understanding may promote the understanding of complexities of non-European societies or the third world societies.

Sri Lanka faces the various types of challenges in the post-war reconstruction society. In this circumstances, India's relations with its neighbouring countries impacts on the regional relations in South Asian nations. So the Indo-Sri Lankan relationship depends upon the geographical proximity. So the

geographical proximity has been playing the important role for determining the nature of the Indo-Sri Lanka relationship. India is a dominant power in South Asia. India realized the crisis of Sri Lanka's civil society due to geographical proximity. India considered herself as a security manager in the south Asian region. Because India thought that separatist movement in Sri Lanka may inspire the separate national movement in Tamil Nadu on the basis of identity, language, and culture. It can lead to the instability and hamper the unity and integrity of India. India realised that existence of any power in South Asia is to be considered as a great threat to the Indian security as well as regional security of South Asia. So peace building process is to be developed through the healthy civil society. It will be based on greater participation in decision making, protection of people, administrative accountability and efficiency, decentralization of power and public communication between state and society. It may lead to resolution of conflict.

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