

Ethnic Entitled Conflict?
An Ethnic - Based Analysis to Conflict in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

As a phenomenon to be understood, ethnic conflicts in the current world trend are becoming as a force shaping human affairs and create an escalation of threat. Once ethnicity came at the center of politics in country after country, a potential source of challenges formed not only nationally but also internationally as well. The aim of this paper is to explore the implications of ethnicity in severely divided societies; the primary focus is on Sri Lanka. The attempt, based on ethnicity, is to define the nature of Sri Lankan conflict by using some empirical viewpoints and then provide the background, ethnic affiliation and its importance, and, ethnic dynamics throughout the conflict and its escalation, including major actors as well as sources.

1. Introduction

Ethnic conflict is, undoubtedly, a recurrent phenomenon. Especially, in divided societies, this type of conflict is at the center of politics and ethnic based divisions pose challenges to the cohesions of states and sometimes peaceful relations among states may effected. Meantime, ethnic conflict strains the bond that sustains civility and is often at the root of violence that results in looting, homeless, human rights violations, orphans, and the flight of large numbers of people. In divided societies, ethnic affiliations are powerful, permeative, passionate, and pervasive.¹ In this respect, conflict in Sri Lanka is a prolonged, along with stable continuity of the three decade protracted intra-state war, and the efforts that had been made to reach a peaceful settlement reached at last with utter failure. Though the civil war concluded after the military victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who were the prime competent against the Sri Lankan government forces on the battle field, the conflict in Sri Lanka has not been resolved yet due to the heterogeneous nature of ethnicity. Due to this sense, this paper tries to define the conflict in Sri Lanka as an ethnic conflict that caused due to inequalities between two ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamil minorities; the roots of this conflict can be traced back to the years of the British colonization. By holding this considerate, this study identifies and explains the origin and evolution of the conflict since the colonial era, relates with ethnicity, by incorporating actors, causes, as well as dynamics. Furthermore, the focal point in this approach is to show the way how this ethnic level crisis turned into liberation struggle, mirrored the Tamil militants, in fact, this shift made the conflict in another form as protracted civil war.

2. Conceptual framing of Sri Lankan Conflict

Sri Lanka has suffered from one of Asia's most intractable civil wars² throughout its prolonged nature of conflict over the last three decades. However, a large body of scholarly literature exists on the Sri Lankan conflict highly limited conceptually in two ways: problem between an extremist secessionist group and the Sri Lankan state;³ and, a primordial and intractable ethnic problem between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority.⁴

Empirical study regarding the above mentioned two claims made by different scholars from domestic and international is diverse. Hideaki Shinoda argues that the nature of war, due to the prolonged conflict, is different from the understanding by the international observers as the conflict in Sri Lanka is an ethnic conflict.⁵ He pointed that without saying the level of ethnic

mixture between the two competent parties in the civil war, it is hard to admit this conflict as ethnic conflict because, the LTTE was not represented the entire community of Tamils and the Government of Sri Lanka is not represent the Sinhalese community to the detriment of the Tamil community. Therefore, for the Government the war was conducted by the Government against terrorists and not was about majority Sinhalese against the Tamil minority. In turn, a prominent Sri Lankan political scientist Jayadeva Uyangoda firstly admitted that conflict in Sri Lanka is purely 'ethnic' and it is generating and sustaining by structural factors such as, group discrimination, limited access to public resources, and cultural marginalization, those are the key components of the minority experience, thereby, the ethnic conflict produced and caused for the demand for autonomy.⁶ Similarly, David Little also says that conflict in Sri Lanka is "really" ethnic. In his argument, the struggle between the Sinhalese and the Tamils is about the dispute between the two ethnic communities over the political and cultural control of given territory.⁷ Though the major cause of the conflict due to the failure of the centralized Sinhalese-dominated state to respond effectively to minority aspirations, it is an ethnic conflict since it understood one dimensionally as the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict while looking at the historical and contemporary conflicts are interpreted and a mindset in which stereotypes and fear of the ethnic 'other' are bred.⁸ Neil Devotta pointed that the predominance of the two ethnocentric groups, Sinhalese and Tamils, spiraled into a gruesome ethnic conflict however, since 1983 Sri Lanka has experienced a bloody civil war between the majority Sinhalese-led government and the LTTE.⁹

By holding the conflict in Sri Lanka as an ethnic conflict, several expanded related focus has been driven in the academic writings. In that respect, many studies have portrayed on the so-called hegemony of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, generally depicting that the Sinhala majority as a monolithic aggressor and the Tamil minority as a monolithic victim.¹⁰ However, this has examined further by adding the religion of Hinduism, which is practicing by majority of the members of Tamil ethnic group. Even though, this religious conceptualization not to be the central consideration for analyzing this conflict because the dispute itself not to be over religion. Certainly, the conflict has not been about competing converts to Buddhism or Hinduism rather, ethnicity has become profoundly important in distinguishing the both Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups.¹¹

Though certain literatures and scholars attempted on the conflict in Sri Lanka to move beyond ethnic aspect, static Sinhala-Tamil antagonism is still being remained throughout the history; this has incorporated with various powers and dimensions during its process. More importantly, the necessity for reconciliation expected on the ground between the two ethnic groups, addressed above, in the post-war phase. Although the military conflict itself was ceased by the Government of Sri Lanka over the LTTE, conflict itself is not been solved yet because of its nature as 'ethnic'. As a result, it is argued that conflict in Sri Lanka should be viewed through the lens of ethnicity. Under the all above considerations in mind, this paper seeks to develop an analysis of Sri Lankan conflict by focusing on the ethnic aspect.

3. Rationale by naming 'Ethnic Conflict' for the conflict in Sri Lanka

3.1 Ethnic communal content

In order to analyze Sri Lankan conflict by viewing through ethnic lens, it is apparent to begin with the demographic pattern of each ethnic group. This will be included: population figures of the ethnic groups; religion they belong; language they use to communicate; and the geographical areas where particular ethnic communities are concentrated.

3.1.1 Demographic pattern

According to the Census of Population completed in 2012, the total population of Sri Lanka was estimated to be 20 million. The population is classified mainly into four ethnic communities. Very small ethnic communities are not included because the conflict itself mainly between the majority Sinhalese and the first minority, Tamils. The percentage of each ethnic community is drawn here since 1921 till 2012 as follows:

Table. Percentage of Major Ethnic Composition in Sri Lanka

Ethnic Group	1921	1931	1946	1953	1963	1971	1981	2001	2012
Sinhalese	67.0	65.3	69.4	59.3	71.0	72.0	74.0	74.5	74.9
Sri Lankan Tamil	11.5	11.2	11.0	10.9	11.0	11.2	12.7	11.9	11.2
Indian Tamil	13.4	15.4	11.7	12.0	10.6	9.3	5.5	4.6	4.2
Sri Lankan Moor	6.3	5.6	5.1	6.3	6.5	6.7	7.0	8.3	9.2

Sources: Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics, 1921-1981; Sri Lanka Population and Housing Census, 2001; Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics, 2012

The ethnic markers tied with this demographic composition of communities (see the table) variably on language, culture, history, tradition, religion, geographical locality and race. According to the Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics of 1981 till 2012, the largest ethnic group in the nation is the *Sinhalese*, speaks the Indo-Aryan language, *Sinhala*. They are predominantly *Buddhists* and a significant minority is *Christians*. The second largest ethnic community in Sri Lanka is the *Sri Lankan Tamil* who speak the Dravidian language, *Tamil*, and are predominantly *Hindus* and a significant minority is *Christians*. *Indian Tamils* are differentiated from the *Sri Lankan Tamil* by the time of their arrival into Sri Lanka. They are the descendants of Southern part of India brought to Sri Lanka by the British during their colonial rule in Sri Lanka to work on the tea and coffee estates and their language speak is *Tamil* and majority of them are *Hindus*. Finally, *Muslims* are considered as ethno-religious community in the Sri Lankan demographic pattern and practicing *Islam* as their way of life more than a religion. Muslims also speak Tamil, same as ethnic Tamils. All ethnic groups are further diverse in accordance with their areas where they reside. This territorial element also has a strong impact on the prolonged nature of conflict in Sri Lanka. This geographical distribution has estimated in the last Census Report, 2012: Northern part of the island predominantly Sri Lankan Tamils; East comprised with Tamils (40%), Muslims (38%) and Sinhalese (21%); Indian Tamils concentrated in the central hill lands of the nation; and, Sinhalese are located in the rest of the territory of the country, predominantly.

In this broad diversity of demographic pattern with the Sinhalese majority and the three substantive minorities in the Sri Lankan population, it is apparent to portray the ethnic communal content by focusing both the pre and post-independence phase to get a clear understanding about the conflict in Sri Lanka.

3.1.2 Communal content: pre and post-independence era

Although having the claim for first settlers in the island, prior to European colonization, there were no more exact evidences available about the conflict between these ethnic communities during the South India invasions: Pallavas, Pandyas and Cholas, repeatedly occurred over a period of several hundreds. Under these occupations, Tamils and Sinhalese lived together as neighbors in many parts of the country, particularly in the coastal trading areas. Moreover, evidences show that there were intermarriages and trade between these two communities, many shared religious beliefs and customs; in all during this period people would not have necessarily identified themselves as Sinhalese or Tamils. The origin and evolution of identity formation highly evolved with the European colonialism.¹²

The inception of European expansion held in the sixteenth century while beginning with the Portuguese in 1505 when they made a treaty with the king of Kotte.¹³ In 1658, the Dutch replaced the Portuguese as colonial rulers and conquered the coastal areas of the island of Sri Lanka. Their occupation was finally supplanted by the British in 1796; it is then eventually appropriating the whole island under their control in 1815.¹⁴ Especially the British colonial era brought many changes to Sri Lanka, centered on economy, politics, religion and culture. In the economic domain, British imported Tamil laborers from Southern India to work on the plantations. The descendants of this particular group of Tamils, referred as *plantation Tamils* or *Indian Tamils* and differentiated from the earlier settlers, named as *Ceylon/Sri Lankan Tamils* or *Jaffna Tamils*.¹⁵

3.1.3 Ethnic identity formation

The process of constructing identity is so common to all the colonized terrains in South Asia and mark by clear exclusivisation of cultural idioms, symbols, norms and principles, which seek to differentiate a particular group from another.¹⁶ In Sri Lanka, development of Sinhalese and Tamil identities is in part of legacy during the colonial practices. As a result, both the Sinhalese and the Tamils formed and started into practice through revival movements and attempted to define themselves as different from the English colonial rulers, on the one hand, and also to differentiate themselves from the subordinate positions in which the colonial administration placed them, on the other. Amongst the Sinhalese, the revival and nationalist movements emphasized Buddhism and Sinhalese identity. Simultaneously, Tamils in both South India and Sri Lanka proudly rediscovered ancient Tamil literature, Hinduism and pride in their Language, Tamil. This identity related enforcements induced and further developed as a result of British colonial administration. The 'divide-and-rule' classificatory practices and policies created the conditions in which separate forms of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms established.¹⁷ In addition to this, the rigid demand being made for 'traditional Tamil homeland' today comprises the Northern and the Eastern provinces carved out by the British rulers largely from the Kandyan kingdom rather than a unified Tamil political unit claimed to have remained from the beginning of history. The current Northern and Eastern Provinces were established for the administrative convenience of the British.¹⁸ Consequently, when Christian missionaries and their organizations (for instances, Church Missionary Society, Salvation Army, Wesleyan Missionary Society, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Young Men's Christian Association, Yung Women's Christian association)¹⁹ had been driven towards Sri Lanka to spread their faith and denounce local religions, sought as to undermine Buddhism in the nineteenth century and thereby, anti-Christian feelings were aroused. As a result, local

religious elites used the religious-cultural infrastructure to oppose the Christian missionaries. Therefore, Buddhist and Hindu organizations were reacted in a competed manner to propagate their respective religions and promote Sinhalese and Tamil culture, even though those organizations were formed to mediate intra-religious and intra-community disputes.²⁰ This was deepened the conflict between these ethnic groups since both were motivated their actions to protect and proceed their dominant claim and emphasis by having a strong communal sense. Later, grievances of Sinhalese community further expanded when the British divide and rule administrative policies and practices prioritized to Tamils due to their knowledge gained through Christian missionaries funded schools in the Northern Province, which taught many Tamils English. This was promoted the notion that the majority Sinhalese community had to be kept in a weakened state, ensured that the Tamils became disproportionately represented in the civil service.²¹

The emergence of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism is highly associated to colonialism and the cultural, literacy and religious dimensions. The Hindu revivalist movement among the Sri Lankan Tamils reached its peak to fight against Christian missionary strategy and tactics for propagating their religion, education also used as a tool to promulgate. The ways used in the campaign for challenging Christian missionaries, there was little or no trace of hostility to the Sinhalese, or to Buddhism.²² However, the Sinhalese nationalist movement led by Dharmapala during this time was deliberately hostile to the Tamils and to Hinduism.²³ The demand for balanced representation for the minorities in the national assembly made this antagonism. To have a constitutional reform and full independence were being considered between 1943 and 1946, the Tamils formed a political party in 1944, called 'the Tamil Congress' and came up with the balanced representation in the legislature. This scheme engineered by this party's leader G.G. Ponnampalam to prevent Sinhalese for holding more than 50 per cent of the seats and thereby, the other communities would share the balance 50 per cent. Unfortunately this scheme got failure due to the new government enacted the 'Citizenship Act of 1948, after forth of independence. The results of the legislation were, on the one hand, the disenfranchisement of Up-country Tamils, and gave 73 per cent of the seats for the Sinhalese in the legislative council in 1952, and later 80 per cent of the seats, on the other.²⁴

Although the taproots of conflict predated since the pre independence period, numerous problems have formulated and country has been seriously constrained and accentuated due to its sustained nature. Historical construction of identities of the two dominant ethnic communities, Sinhalese and Tamils, post-independence politics and practices also influenced and induced till date.²⁵ Especially, communal cleavages got visible due to the language, education, employment, and resource allocations; those are primarily marginalized and alienated the Tamil population.²⁶ A range of issues and arrangements made in the security of ethnic groups, in the sense of equality, rights, access to economic and political resources, and non-discrimination, and the state security; the security of citizens ensured through laws and state practices. This has created the conflict more durable, resulted to anti-ethnic riots, violence, assassinations, and the protracted civil war.

In this respect, post-independence era ethnic fragmentation deepened by diverted nationalism priority. Sinhala Buddhist nationalism is a cause to contribute to a relative silence on the chauvinism and fundamentalism of minority ethnic and religious groups in Sri Lanka and their contributions to the creation and perpetuation of conflict.²⁷ When the new Sinhala nationalist government got into power under the Prime Minister Bandaranaike (UNP) after defeating the English oriented post-independent Prime Minister Senanayake government, there were mainly two promises made while upholding communal identity during the political campaign: Buddhism would be restored to its rightful position in Sri Lanka, and the Sinhala would become the official language. Therefore, new government had quickly introduced a bill to make the Sinhala as the official language of the country. This made unrest from the Tamil community and therefore, the 'Tamil Federal Party' under the leadership of Chelvanayakam staged a non-violent demonstration (*Satyagraha*) outside parliament, which led to a clash with Sinhala-Buddhist extremist.²⁸

Sinhala nationalism was being extended when the Tamil nationalism started to turn into liberation form of struggle. Mainly, the militant and separatist turn of Tamil nationalism, in turn, threatened the hegemony of the Sinhalese and provoked among them a crisis of identity. Anti-Tamil riots of July 1983 marked a critical juncture in the ethnic relations between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Soon afterwards, war between the Tamil militants and the largely Sinhala government forces escalated into a 'National Security' issue and each community's perception of the other became as enemy hardened with each ambush, assassinations, massacre, bomb explosions, high profile aerial attacks and shelling.²⁹ In addition to this, the Sinhala nationalists often assert their difference from Tamil nationalists by emphasizing that they promote a multi-ethnic heterogeneous Sri Lankan society (as long as the Sinhalese have a foremost position due to their numerical majority), contrary to the Tamil militant who fought for an exclusively Tamil state. This nationalist feeling further spurred due to the Tamil militants attacks and ruthless killing over the Sinhala innocent civilians. Thereby, Sinhala nationalist determined that eliminating 'terrorist' is the right and obligation for all citizens of the nation and this is highly required to regain 'a democratic, multi-ethnic and united Sri Lanka'.³⁰

Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism was used to mobilize the whole ethnic group against external threats when the international forces began to extend their involvement to manage and mitigate the prolonged conflict and civil war. This strong Sinhala nationalist hegemony is still prevailing on the ground, though the protracted war concluded in May, 2009 after defeating the LTTE. This international involvement highly related with the heavy criticism over the Government of Sri Lanka and its military forces in relation to war crimes committed during the last stages of war against the innocent Tamil civilian.

Post-independence Tamils nationalism witnessed when the Tamil nationalist formed a new political party in 1948, named *Ilankai Tamil Arasuk Katchi* (Ceylon Tamil State Party-popularly known as 'the Federal Party', led by S.J.V. Chelvanayakam), after splitting with Tamil Congress due to their alignment with the Government and supported the act of disenfranchisement. The establishment of this party indicated a significant change in the Tamil politics and nationalism and its first national convention in 1951 declared that the 'Tamil speaking people in Ceylon constitute a nation distinct from that of the Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nationhood.'³¹

In fact, the suffering and struggle of the Tamils is a central theme for the origin and growth of Tamil nationalist discourse. In spite of this fact, in May 1972, 'the Tamil United Front' (TUF), which later transformed itself into the TULF, formed and articulated the idea of Tamil nationality and self-determination. In the same year, Federal Party, Tamil Congress and the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) also joined under TUF and issued a six-point plan on May 24, 1972 consisted with six demands: Parity of status for both Sinhala and Tamil language; Citizenship rights for the Up-country Tamil plantation workers; making Sri Lanka a secular state; fundamental rights and freedom of expression; abolition of untouchability; and, participatory democracy.³² However, this plan did not agree by the Government and thereby, it became as precursor for the later demands of separate sovereign nation-state for Tamils.³³

Throughout the process of Tamils nationalism, the claim for an independent Tamil state to regain their 'traditional Tamil homeland' is being justified on the charges that the Sinhalese oppression on the Tamils historically when they are trying to make up a separate nation with the right of self-determination. This strong notion led by the Tamil elites, named as 'Tamil United Liberation Front' (TULF), in 1976 and put forward the *Vaddukoddai resolution* to call for establishing a Tamil separate state.³⁴ The post-1977 era is the most important period in the history of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka because the phase of Tamil militant separatism and the subsequent escalation of the ethnic conflict into a full-scale civil war.³⁵ The Tamil militant group, the LTTE, has engaged in the liberation move towards self-determination for the Tamil minority population in the north-east part of the nation and fought for that goal against the state, which has been dominated by the groups from the Sinhalese majority. Apart from this, the militants involved in the struggle had been Sri Lankan Tamils (the majority was being from Jaffna).³⁶

3.2 Ethnic dimension of conflict: from emergence to escalation

Before discussing about Sri Lankan Conflict, it is apparent to feature the term 'ethnicity', 'ethnic groups' and 'ethnic conflict'. The term 'ethnicity' implies that is a phenomenon determined by a set of givens, such as traditions, customs, language, religion, origin and kinship ties.³⁷ 'Ethnic groups' are distinguished from national, religious and racial groups by cultural distinctiveness associated with a belief in distinctive origin, though any particular group may be both ethnic and national, ethnic and religious, ethnic and racial, or distinctive on multiple dimensions.³⁸ In some countries, ethnic groups compete through overtly ethnic parties and vying for power, in others, a dominant group discriminates against and exploits the others.³⁹ Ethnic conflict appears to be the major source of manifest and direct violence in the world today, particularly in some parts of the Third World where it is associated with decolonization, nation-building and state-building that has largely been at the expense of minorities.⁴⁰ Furthermore, ethnic conflicts frequently give rise to violence by the both majority and minority groups.⁴¹ In addition, ethnic group conflicts would constitute an intermediate group within a nation, but where conflicts could be either international or intra-national or both; if an ethnic group has a cross-border affiliation, then that particular conflict has an international and intra-regional manifestation.⁴²

In this respect, ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, comprised with the ethnic Sinhalese majority and the substantial three minorities, Tamils, Muslims and Indian Tamils, have internal differences and divisions among each other before colonial era, however, a history of colonial and post-colonial nation-state building cemented these groups into distinctive and conflicting ethnic-political identities.⁴³ The origin of the conflict and the treatment of inequality rooted in the colonial practices where the English speaking Tamils had favored positions in the colonial administration, therefore, as a group numerically comprised majority in the total population of the country, the Sinhalese felt alienated within their own country.⁴⁴

After all, the island of Sri Lanka gained independence from British colonial rulers in February 4, 1948 in accordance with the Ceylon Independence Act of 1947 and the state was officially ruled under the democratic principles. However, the Sinhalese nationalist movement influenced the Government and they in turn left the Tamil minority group with a

disproportionate political share. In this stage there were attempts made for generating fairness and equal opportunities among the people, irrespective their ethnicity, to prevent further anti-Tamil feelings. Yet these efforts got failed when the newly elected government proclaimed the 'Sinhalese Only Bill' in 1956. This act was looked as a way for the Government of Sri Lanka to secure the Sinhalese representation in the highest administration by giving the country only one official language, Sinhala. With further disadvantageous committed against the Tamils, which included being denied equal opportunities for education and employment, the mainstream Tamil politicians first demanded autonomous powers for the island's northern and eastern region. Then by the mid-1970s this demand became for a separate state. From a non-violent political movement led by moderate Tamil politicians, the Sri Lankan Tamil movement for equality became subject to pressure and control by radicalized militant youths who advocated armed form struggle to achieve a separate state.⁴⁵ In the late 1970s, the armed forces of the Sri Lankan state were given increasingly draconian powers to search and destroy these newly formed 'terrorists'.⁴⁶ The real ethnic rioting and violence against the Tamils in 1983 by the Sinhalese extremists led to the start of the vicious civil war in Sri Lanka between the Sri Lankan government forces and the LTTE.⁴⁷ Throughout this long process, since the beginning till the cessation of civil war, attempts were made time to time to mitigate the situation and resolve the conflict, however, it was not reach success in all efforts, rather fell into restarting the civil war. The timeline of this protracted war is drawn under four main stages as: Eelam War I (1983-1987); Eelam War II (1989-1993); Eelam War III (1995-2002), and, Eelam War IV (2006-2009). The conclusion of the extended armed confrontation, between the two adversaries, reached at its last stage in 2006 with a full-fledged heavy battle and at last ended in May, 2009, after defeating the LTTE, militarily. The effects of the brutal civil war is massive, mainly, it has taken the lives of over 70,000 people and displaced millions more.⁴⁸

3.2.1 Ethnic-based actors of conflict

Identifying the parties to the conflict is important step prior to understanding their positions, interests, and capacities as well as the level of external support. The growth of relationships between parties and their social context can be examined in terms of short-term and long-term dynamics.⁴⁹ This section dissects the participants of the conflict in Sri Lanka into three, by discussing the major actors involved.

3.2.1.1 Sri Lankan Tamils and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

In fact, from the Tamils the suffering and struggle due to the Sinhalese dominated state practices is a central theme for the origin and growth of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.⁵⁰ However, according to Karthigesu Sivathamby, the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka because of the manner the Government of the country had handled the problems in relation to Tamils; in the manner the popular Tamil response to those moves had manifested, and particularly in the manner militant Tamil opposition had been organized against the Government moves.⁵¹ Therefore, this conflict has internationalized as the problem of the Tamils in Sri Lanka.⁵² As earlier mentioned, the word *Tamil* refers both to the language and its speakers, and when it refers to the speakers it does not reflect them as speakers of a language but refers to them as also an *ethnic* group with an identifiable culture and a consciousness among them that they belong to one group.⁵³ In this sense, it is clear that as an actor being involved in this conflict is Tamils and the LTTE.

In this respect, Sri Lankan Tamil involvement in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict initiated with the traditional *nationalism*, as clearly described in the above.⁵⁴ Although it has rooted in the pre-independence period when the colonial disturbances were usually aligned mainly on religious lines, the post-independence era became as a mile stone. However, the Tamils engagement with this prolonged conflict as an actor can be recognized through the formation of political parties, 'the Federal Party', the TUF and the TULF.

With the support of the moderate Tamil nationalist movement, the TULF, the LTTE was founded by 18-year old Vellupillai Prabhakaran in 1972.⁵⁵ The LTTE organization was established to secure a traditional homeland, or *Eelam*, for the Tamil polity concentrated largely around the North and East parts of the island.⁵⁶ Although there were over 40 Tamil resistance groups were in operation during the early to mid-1970s, by the end of the 1970s only five of them (TELO-Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization, EROS-Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students, LTTE, and, EPRLF- Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front) remained durable and they actively committed to create a separate Tamil state and were involved in assassinations, attempted assassinations, bank robberies, and further criminal activities, as well as fratricidal violence among themselves.⁵⁷ According to an LTTE spokesperson, since their inception in 1972 and July 1978, their score was 20 policemen to kill, together with five politician and five informers.⁵⁸ By the mid-1980s, the LTTE turned against other groups and killed hundreds of their members on the pretext of being the 'sole true representative' and leading light of the entire Tamil people. The Tamil population is supportive to the LTTE, in part through instinct, but also through fear.⁵⁹ After the worst outbreak violence culminated in 'July 1983',⁶⁰ the LTTE under their leadership, Velupillai Prabhakaran, dramatically increased

their forceful acts against Sri Lankan Sinhala government by targeting government security forces, government ministers, and civilians in the North and the South.⁶¹

3.2.1.2 Sinhalese-Buddhists and the Sri Lankan government

The Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka represents the vast majority of the ethnicities. In this respect, Sinhalese believe that the island of Sri Lanka is largely a Sinhalese-Buddhist country and all other ethnic, religious or language groups are alien.⁶² In fact, the Sinhalese-Buddhist ideology has been quite effective in associating the Sinhalese ethnic group with the religion of Buddhism and the politico-cultural history and territory of the island.⁶³ Therefore, the ideology is fundamentally a cultural process associated with Buddhism and its consolidation throughout the land.⁶⁴ In the other sense, religion, language and historical heritage are significant for Sinhala nationalism.⁶⁵

The polity and the idea of 'Sinhala-ness' can be seen as a forcing element behind this national formation. This is being centered on four main themes:

"...Sinhala share a certain biological nature; that they are a 'race'... Indeed, the 1981 census report was the first to treat the Sinhalese as a unity;...one manifestation of this biological community is the sharing of a common language;... 'true Sinhala' also share a common religion: they are Buddhist;...the island of Sri Lanka is in its entirety the land of the Sinhala and of Buddhism: it is the Sinhala-Buddhist nation. The biological people, its language, religion, culture and territory are all intimately linked."⁶⁶

Furthermore, the Sinhala nationalist stand, even till today, is that pre-colonial Sri Lanka prior to the advent of European invaders was a mono-ethnic and mono-religious Sinhala Buddhist state where the ethnic Tamils were migrant aliens. Further they added that Tamils Nadu of India is the 'country of the Tamils' or the 'land of Tamil', not Sri Lanka.⁶⁷

Sinhala nationalist demands have often been described as 'a majority with a minority complex', feeling threatened and unsecured in a regional and global context where nearly 50 million Tamils live across the Palk Strait in Tamil Nadu, India and large numbers reside in Malaysia, Australia, North America and Europe; for the Sinhalese, the island of Sri Lanka is the only place that they have in the whole world.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the Sinhala nationalist claims have so often been pictured as a pursuit of justice for their own security in a postcolonial situation and retrieving power and economic improvement for the deprived Sinhalese. The demand of 50 per cent representation for the minorities in the legislative body for safeguarding their rights made by Tamil leaders before independence was-and still- is seen by Sinhala nationalists as deeply unjust⁶⁹ because they are comprised more than half of the total population, historically.

In the meantime, support by the population mainly divides between two extremely competitive major Sinhalese political parties, the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the opposition United National Party (UNP). These two have great support from the Sinhalese, which is much equally divided between the two parties. Each of this Sinhalese dominated political party normally reaches up to 1/3 of the Sinhalese voting electorates and the Tamil and Muslim minorities usually prefer to vote for their ethnic political parties. When these two major ethnic parties compete for the allegiance of the same ethnic group, any concession by the party in power will be seized upon by the party out of power as a sign of weakness, and again, of "selling out our people."⁷⁰ That is exactly what has been continually happening in Sri Lanka. Indeed, two major decisions have taken by these two different political party leaders during the period when they held power: first, by the UNP government in February 2002 after having several years of 'hurting stalemate' and signed a cease-fire agreement (CFA) with the LTTE, though the CFA was welcome by both sides and laid the foundations for a peace process, it began to falter by mid-2003 and finally collapsed in 2005;⁷¹ second, the SLFP Presidential candidate Mahinda Rajapakse's victory in the Presidential election November 2005 and his determination to defeat the LTTE, thereafter, a full-fledged military offensive had been launched and he made declaration of victory over the LTTE in May, 2009.⁷²

3.2.1.3 The Diaspora

Diasporas is being played an important role in the Sri Lankan conflict, primarily in strategic, political, and economic basis, even after the cessation of civil war, through the means of offering a source of financing to the LTTE when they were holding fight in the battle field, external lobbying towards host countries and, internal influences.⁷³ Though the Sri Lankan diaspora includes with Tamil and Sinhalese ethnicities; focus here solely on the Tamil diaspora since the Sinhalese diaspora has relatively little input in the political realm.⁷⁴ The Tamil diaspora estimated that they are accounts for 23-30 percent of the global Sri Lankan Tamil population of approximately 2.7 million, mostly concentrated in Canada (approx. 300,000), Switzerland (approx. 40,000), Norway (approx. 10,000), France (approx. 40,000), the United Kingdom (approx. 110,000), and

the United States and Australia (approx. 30,000 each).⁷⁵

The establishment of the Tamil diaspora is intrinsically linked to the conflict since the outbreak of the open civil war between Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan state in 1983.⁷⁶ As of 2001, the total number of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora was estimated at 600,000-800,000, accounting for approximately one-quarter of the global Sri Lankan Tamil population.⁷⁷

Diaspora, as a central player in the Sri Lankan conflict, extended its contributions by providing money for weapons and through Tamil organizations, provided the political advocacy in Western countries in support of the struggle for an independent state of *Tamil Eelam*.⁷⁸ During the heavy battle in the last stages of war, which claimed over 100,000 lives, the diaspora contributed an estimated \$200 million a year to the LTTE.⁷⁹

3.2.2 Ethnic-based causes in the conflict in Sri Lanka

The causes of the conflict have structural conditions and socio-psychological factors.⁸⁰ According to John Paul Lederach, the structural condition or dimension highlights the underlying causes of conflict and the patterns and changes it brings about in social structures. Further he added that this may encompass with the issues such as human needs, access to resources, and institutional patterns of decision making.⁸¹ In a socio-psychological dimension, the major cause for the struggle may be based on feelings of deprivation, injustice, inequality, and frustration beyond incompatible roles and positions.⁸² Especially, many conflicts of injustice are rooted in a history of colonialism, ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, or human rights abuses.⁸³ The denial of identity, security, and recognition is a critical and fundamental concern for most of the intractable conflicts, such as Northern Ireland, Palestine, Chechnya, Nepal, Tibet, and the Muslim regions of China.⁸⁴ More often, people are threatened under circumstances of oppression, discrimination, and isolation, therefore, the process of conflict resolution should bring about social, economic, and political changes that cater to human needs; institutions also can be adopted to satisfy the essential human requirements.⁸⁵ In this sense, conflict in Sri Lanka has its causes both structural (political, legal and judicial, economic, social and cultural) and psychological. As a result of these two conditions, triggering events also happened to lead the conflict for further prolonged.

3.2.2.1 Structural conditions

Political causes

Structural issues in the political aspect, in general, related to the distribution of state patronage and the Government policy over issues such as official language, regional devolution, demographic encroachment and the availability of university places and public sector employments.⁸⁶ Especially, inadequacies practice by the Sri Lankan government in the democratic politics lies in the system of governance. This was initiated before independence by the colonial administration under the constitutional experiments on the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931 and the Soulbury Constitution of 1947 and sought to bring in majoritarian representative system in a multi-ethnic society.⁸⁷ Before this, the colonial administration had encouraged a system of equal communal representation in the largely nominated legislative councils.⁸⁸ In this respect, democratic practices in the political domain during the post-colonial years saw an increasing assertion of the Sinhalese community which progressively shut one door of privilege after another on Tamils and took every step to cut down their disproportionately high presence in bureaucracy and administration.⁸⁹ This situation has been strengthened by the existing presidential system of government, which has created an exceedingly centralized state structure and provides broad institutional framework for the centralization of security decision-making structures.⁹⁰

Furthermore, Tamil-Sinhala political divide was represented in the existence of Tamil political parties throughout 1950s and 1960s, also became as a cause, lobbied for greater federalism, language rights and economic concerns.⁹¹ In the mid-1970s, Tamil politics became radicalized due to the continuous political and cultural marginalization by the Sinhala state. By the late 1970s, the Tamil politics had converged into the demand for separate state of Tamil Eelam.⁹²

In the meantime, the provincial council system has not been functioning since 1990 in the Tamil majority residing Northern and Eastern provinces, where the devolution of power is required and claimed. The main purpose for created provincial council system was to provide a political-institutional framework to accommodate Tamil minority demands for regional autonomy. In fact, this system of devolution was also expected to act as an effective alternative to secession, however, the provincial councils were not given any direct powers concerning security, especially the central government has not devolved police powers to the provincial councils. In a bitter dispute between the provincial administration of the North-East Province, the central government, the President of the country, dissolved the elected council and brought the province under the direct rule of the central government in 1990.⁹³

Legal and judicial causes

The Soulbury constitution of 1946, which advocated territorial constituencies, gradually made the elites of the both Sinhalese and Tamil communities aware of their respective numerical strengths and weaknesses. Due to this cause, by the time of British departure from the scene, the power struggle between the two ethnic groups had already begun.⁹⁴ In the post-1970 era, the Sinhalese established parliamentary majorities and ratifying two constitutions, in 1972 and in 1978, without Tamil input or representation. The 1972 republican constitution was replaced by the second republican constitution of 1978. The latter constitution was based on the model of Fifth French Republic and introduced an executive presidency with a diminished role for the Parliament. Chapter VII, article 30 (1) in the constitution declares the power of president: "president of the republic of Sri Lanka, who is the head of the state, the head of the executive and of the government of the armed forces." According to article 33 (e), the president could also have the right to declare war and peace. There were no major changes concerning the status of state religion and language. The official language was still Sinhalese while the Tamil language classified as a national language. The special treatment of Buddhism was still present in the constitution of 1978. Although the 1978 constitution made a provision including Tamil as an official language, the marginalization of the Tamil ethnic group had reached its boiling point.⁹⁵

In the meantime, implementation of both the Emergency Regulations and the 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) also causes for the conflict in Sri Lanka; have often coincided with sporadic outbursts of violence in the conflict. The extended periods of enforcement of both of these legislative instruments, combined with the sweeping powers that such regulations confer upon the Sri Lankan government security forces, have plunged the country into a permanent human rights and civil liberties crisis, creating gaps and shortcomings in accountability and oversight of the country's security sector.⁹⁶ Both legislations give the security forces wide powers to search, detain and arrest without a warrant any person suspected of committing certain offences under the criminal code. While authorizing indefinite detention without trial, the regulations oblige anyone who is detained to answer questions. These questions posed by the security forces usually presented in Sinhala language even to Tamil speakers. Furthermore, any confessions and statements extracted under such conditions are admissible in legal proceedings, and there have been cases where suspects have signed confessions in languages they cannot read or write.⁹⁷ As a result, the Sri Lankan Sinhalese military came to be viewed as an occupying force and its violation of civil rights led to further alienate the Tamil population.⁹⁸

Similarly, Sri Lanka's post-independence judiciary never thought of itself as an institution to protect minority ethnicity rights.⁹⁹ In two major cases involving the protection of minority rights, the citizenship legislation of 1949 and the official language legislation of 1956, the Supreme Court refused to exercise its powers of legislative review, thereby the political agenda of Sinhalese majoritarian nationalism confirmed.¹⁰⁰ These all made Tamils to felt that the Government and the judiciary were denying them their cultural heritage and identity, and those acts would prevent Tamils from enjoying all rights as citizens of Sri Lanka.¹⁰¹

Economic causes

The period of transition in the economic system from a laissez-faire plantation export economy to a public-sector based import substitution economy in the late-1950s gave birth to the contemporary ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.¹⁰² The growing pervasiveness in this situation throughout the 1960s and 1970s caused economic circumstances, such as environment that affected all communities more or less equally and magnified the division between these ethnic groups.¹⁰³ Furthermore, regional development during this period created greater inequalities in the North relating to the unequal distribution of public sector projects and the acceleration of demographically sensitive irrigation; resettlement schemes also led the long-standing Tamil grievances.¹⁰⁴

The trend had been changed in 1977 with the landslide victory of the UNP Presidential candidate Jayawardene and he created history in post-independent Sri Lanka by changing the political system of the country toward a centralized power system and introduced economic liberalization policies that were contrast to the import-substitution policies of the previous coalition government led by the Bandaranaike government from 1970 to 1977. As a result, free market economic system was introduced and local and foreign companies imported goods and services and set up their productions and manufacturing plants.¹⁰⁵ The impact of these economic policies and activities generated inequalities and loss therefore, the ethnic conflict further exacerbated. The direct consequence of the policies of economic liberalization policies introduced in 1977 therefore, the Tamil people in the Jaffna peninsula highly affected. Most importantly, rural social policies were dramatically withdrawn and all import controls were removed without any compensation.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the expanded flow of external financial assistance and its benefits were skewed in favor of the Sinhalese (later this assistance of foreign donor money operated for war with the LTTE). This state patronage for specific ethnic group fuelled communal tensions.¹⁰⁷ At last, economic marginalization also

became as a prime cause resulted in youth uprising and fought against the Sri Lankan government.

Social causes

Prior to independence, Tamils were able to take full advantage of the education sector and, concomitantly, enjoyed employment opportunities, mainly within the government sector. This privileged status of Tamils in education and employment made Sinhalese unsatisfied. In early 1960s, legislation to nationalize all secondary schools carried out and came to affect large number of (Christian) mission schools, particularly in the Tamil provinces in the Northeast of the island. Tamils, particularly in Jaffna (city in the Northern Province), lost one of their most important sources of income since private schools were forbidden to charge fees. Moreover, Sinhalese-led government had taken education decisions discriminately regarding university placement.¹⁰⁸ As a result, a new “standardization” policy was adopted in 1971 to ensure that the number of students qualifying for university entrance was proportionate with the number of students who take the entrance examination in the university in Sinhalese language so that the Tamil students must to score higher than Sinhalese students to gain admission to universities, especially to the faculties of medicine and engineering. The Standardization of marks and the imposition of district quotas had unfavorable impact on the share of Tamils admitted in science faculties. The proportion of Tamils in university dropped dramatically due to quotas in university admissions.

Furthermore, pre 1977 settlement policy of the Government also became as a key factor for the conflict in Sri Lanka. Under the policy of land colonization, the Sinhalese settlers were chosen from non-Tamil areas and settled with government assistance in border areas while displacing the Tamil occupants of land in some instances.¹⁰⁹ The huge increase in the Sinhalese settlers in the Tamil region exaggerated Tamil grievances. According to Thangarajah, “Tamils began to see themselves as a threatened group in view of the potentially motivated Sinhalese settlers (and with the establishment of police units in the newly re-settled areas) a definite path towards militarization of the society from peasant to frontiersmen begins.”¹¹⁰

Cultural causes

Sri Lanka’s history is contested in the beginning with the Sinhalese and the Tamils by having different interpretations about who were the first to settle the island of Sri Lanka. Most Sinhalese demand an Aryan and North Indian pedigree, settled in the island around 600 B.C.E. By contrast, the Tamils are of South Indian origin and claim always to have lived on the island. This is conceivable given that the distance is only twenty-two miles from South India and the Northern, most Tamil areas in Sri Lanka. The Tamils subsequently demand that the North and the East is their traditional and historical homeland, while the Sinhalese claim that the entire nation is *Sihadipa* (the island of the Sinhalese) and *Dhammadipa* (the island ennobled to preserve and propagate Buddhism).¹¹¹ However, it is not possible to know with certainty whether the Sinhalese or the Tamils first settlers in Sri Lanka. Simultaneously, the early settlers into the nation almost appropriately would not have identified themselves as Sinhalese or Tamils; it is clear that the early settlers came from India.¹¹²

3.2.2.2 Psychological and perceptual factors

Along with the above mentioned structural causes and created insecurities, competing security dilemmas between these two ethnic groups also play a significant role in terms of orientations towards this conflict. Both Sinhalese and Tamil parties perceive themselves as defenders against aggressive opponents. The Sinhalese see themselves as guardians of Buddhism whereas the LTTE obviously view themselves as the ultimate liberators/guardians of Tamil rights; therefore, the LTTE perceived that military revolutionary response is an appropriate form of conflict resolution or transformations.¹¹³ Furthermore, Sinhalese majority perceives an acute sense of threat to their identity in equitably co-existing with the minority community due to their historical experiences since the colonial era.¹¹⁴ In fact, the British “divide-and-rule” policy favored the minority Tamils, thus, when Sri Lanka was granted independence, the majority Sinhalese took it upon themselves to reclaim their ethnic heritage and reassert their position as the majority.¹¹⁵ In terms of insecurity to both communities, the Tamils felt threatened by the Sinhalese majority, whereas the Sinhalese felt insecurity by the large numbers of Tamil-speaking Hindus (60 million plus) throughout Southern India.¹¹⁶ Therefore, as earlier mentioned, Sinhala nationalist demands have often been described as ‘a majority with a minority complex’, feeling threatened and unsecured in a regional and global context, including Tamil Nadu in India, Malaysia, Australia, North America and Europe, while for the Sinhalese the island of Sri Lanka is the only place have in the whole world.¹¹⁷ In the long run, these collective fears from the both Sinhalese and Tamils also lead to an escalation of conflict in Sri Lanka, as a result, it has heightened inter-group animosity, group-level distrust and imposes barriers on reconciliation.

In addition, among the Sinhalese many feel that the Tamils made unfair demands on the Sinhalese polity since the past, most importantly, as earlier mentioned, the long history of excessive demands by Tamil nationalists, beginning with G.G.

Ponnambalam request for “50-50” power sharing immediately following independence in 1948¹¹⁸ and concluding with the demand for a separate Tamil state, first by the TULF in the 1976 Vaddukoddai Declaration, then in the subsequent armed struggle. These also have contributed to a feeling among much Sinhalese population that the Tamils are unreasonable on the ethnic issue,¹¹⁹ therefore, it led the denial that the Tamils are a constituent people of Sri Lanka, the refusal to accept their claims of discrimination and cynical quests for power¹²⁰ and thus, they have more troubling and explicitly exclusionary vision of the country as culturally Sinhala and Buddhist tradition. This cultural practice that comes from this tradition is argued by the majority of Sinhalese to give the state the right to institutionalize those practices in the political system and the people as a whole.¹²¹ In turn, Tamils feel that as citizens of the country they have equal rights with others and they should not being treated as minority in a Sinhala and Buddhist island.¹²² In sum, enemy feeling and dynamics, due to victimization, historical enmity, and inter-generational transmission of hostility, fuel the conflict and develop sharp divisions and a distinct polarization between these ethnic groups.

3.2.2.3 Triggering events

As earlier mentioned, introduction of the act in 1956, to make the Sinhala as the official language of the country, deteriorated the relations between the Sinhalese and the Tamil communities mainly due to the exclusion of Tamils from government jobs, a major source of employment;¹²³ the Tamil community caused unrest. Therefore, the ‘Tamil Federal Party’ under the leadership of Chelvanayakam staged a non-violent demonstration (*Satyagraha*) outside parliament which led to a clash with Sinhala-Buddhist extremist.¹²⁴ This was the first serious ethnic riot between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, one which caused many deaths and damages; Tamils were attacked, raped, humiliated, and their homes were ransacked and burned. Approximately 300 to 400 people were killed,¹²⁵ and 12,000 Tamils fled their homes in Colombo¹²⁶ and other parts of the south to find safety in the Tamil majority living Jaffna; this was a form following by future decades those violent attacks on the Tamils in the South forcing them to flee to the North. In fact, this pattern and purpose of attack on the Tamils led to a growing perception that there were two separate states on the country, the Sinhalese South and the Tamil North.¹²⁷

In 1981, again a serious communal rioting broke out. Army and police participated in burning down the public library in Jaffna, had the repository of 100,000 irreplaceable rare and ancient Tamil manuscripts.¹²⁸ This was looked and believed by the Tamil civilians as a violent symbolic attack by the Government forces on Tamil language and culture and they could not be guaranteed safety by the Sri Lankan government, thereby, the Sinhalese police and army in the Northern Province were seen as enemy occupying forces.¹²⁹

The July 1983 riots against the Tamils were became as a significant turning point in the Sri Lankan conflict, in one hand, and internationalizing the conflict, on the other hand. That month, the LTTE ambushed an army patrol in Jaffna and killed 13 Sri Lankan government soldiers, in response, the Sri Lankan army killed more than 50 Tamils in the Northern Province, but it was the LTTE attack on the 13 soldiers as the media and the Government focused on. When the soldiers’ remains were returned to Colombo, South, the anti-Tamil riots erupted. Violence exploded in Colombo and systematically targeted Tamil residential areas, businesses and set on fire, looted, destroyed and murdered. The mobs of Sinhalese, engaged in attack for about a week, had electoral rolls that identified the Tamil properties, provided to them by people allied to the government, including government ministers.¹³⁰ The violence spread to Trincomalee, Eastern part of the country, and continued for more than one month, resulted with assault, rape, kill the Tamil civilians, however, the police did not intervene to protect them.¹³¹ Impact of the events of July 1983 on Tamils estimated that 3000 were killed; nearly 70,000 became as homeless in Colombo and more in other cities and towns due to their flee to Jaffna, among them many of them joined the LTTE and other militant groups and others sought refuge overseas; more than 100,000 Tamils refugees fled to Tamil Nadu, India, by boats and several thousand others sought refuge in many countries around the world, including England, Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Switzerland and several other countries in Europe;¹³² 18,000 households were affected; 100 industrial plants were severely damaged; 150,000 became jobless; and, millions of dollars’ worth of properties were destroyed.¹³³

In turn, since 1983, the LTTE started to reciprocate in kind. In 1985, the LTTE massacred 120 civilians, including Buddhist monks and injured 85 in Anuradhapura which is the most sacred city to Sinhalese Buddhist. Between 1990 and 1995 there were 56 LTTE attacks in the capital and its suburbs, costing 1,607 civilian lives.¹³⁴ In 1996, suicide bomb attack was made on the Central Bank building in the heart of Colombo, kills more than 100 and injures 1,400. After one week of this event, in the south of Colombo, alleged LTTE bomb blasted in a railway station and killed 70 innocent civilians. Other suicide bomb attacks committed: on Sri Lanka’s holiest Buddhist shrine, Dhaladha Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth) in 1998 and killed 17 people; and, on Bandaranaike International Airport, costing 14 lives.¹³⁵ There were over 240 suicide attacks took place before 2001. Political assassination also committed by the LTTE, including three heads of state, Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi (1991); Sri Lankan President, Ranasinghe Premadasa (1993); and, former Prime Minister, Gamini Dissanayake

(1994).¹³⁶ In 1999, the LTTE attempted to assassinate Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, however she narrowly escaped from target.

In sum, due to the all above causes, structural, psychological, and triggering events, the minority as well as majority ethnic community members believe that there is a great insecurity prevails in their own country. Though the majority ethnic group has its own arguments and claims regarding their insecurity due to their larger victimization and causes created insecurity, the Tamil minority group greatly feels that their needs, interests and concerns are being deprived and unsecured by the Government and its institutions, belong to the majority community. They are highly required and demanded for equality, protection and promotion of human rights, as well as the guaranteed identity as a different community that has its own history and uniqueness recognized. In conclusion, the perception of the insecurity throughout history has led both the ethnic groups into conflict and protracted civil war, though the effect varies.

4. Conclusion

Conflict and Civil war in Sri Lanka is marked by several causes and effects, involving with various actors, for nearly three decades. Wide argument exists as one sided that conflict in Sri Lanka is not ethnicized. Similarly, the current Sri Lankan government is also strongly stated that conflict in Sri Lanka is no more in the island after the defeat of the LTTE. However, the reality on the ground is quite contradictory that the demand for their rights and resolve the causes for the prolonged conflict still active from the Tamil ethnic group as they assert that they are not being treated equally with majority and are being victimized by the Sinhalese dominance, systematic discrimination and marginalization via various means. In fact, continuous nature of these circumstance, since the emergence, lead their grievances from non-violent into violent form and get rid from their under privileged status. This is resulted with the eruption of protract brutal civil war between the Government forces and the Tamil militants, the LTTE. After the military defeat over the LTTE in 2009, country has been posed into post-war rebuilding process however, the negligent feeling for resolving this conflict, based on ethnicity, still out of frame. Due to this respect, this paper attempted to focus on the ethnic dimension and its implication to the conflict in Sri Lanka.

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