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ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA: OBSTACLES TO THE PEACE PROCESS

Sisira Kumara Edirippulige

Abstract

The complexity and magnitude of the Sri Lankan conflict have grown over the last five decades, making it one of the most protracted and devastating conflicts in the world today. With the prolongation of conflict, the chances for establishing peace have become distant, the gap between the two communities has widened, and new elements have been introduced to the conflict.

The impediments to the establishment of lasting peace on the island encompass both domestic and external factors. Among the large variety of such factors, this study has focused on but a few. The analysis of the domestic factors dwells on the nature of the existing political structure, the characteristics of devolution, and the sources of violence. The examination of the external factors addresses the significance of geopolitics, the role of the Sri Lankan diaspora and the role of the international community.

The exploration of the failure of the peace process in the island points to a combination of internal and external factors that impede the establishment of a liberal democratic political structure. Despite its reputation as a Third World democracy, the Sri Lankan polity has, since independence, increasingly developed into an illiberal democracy. Although possessing nominal features of a democracy, the Sri Lankan political system is saturated with highly undemocratic elements. Amongst these elements, the ethnocisation of the society, confrontational politics and violence are specifically addressed by this study. Moreover, this study contends that the deepening ethnic crisis is a direct result of the failure of outside actors to promote democracy in the island. Having been a victim of the Cold War neglect, Sri Lanka’s continued isolation in the post Cold War era is largely due to its geopolitical position. Finally, the study identifies the contemporary role of diaspora communities as a severe hindrance to a lasting peace in the country. Apart from material contributions, the divided diaspora communities are a major source of illiberality, and this reflects upon the peace process in various ways.

Thus the analysis concludes that lasting peace in the island is possible only through the promotion of genuine liberal democracy, both within and from the outside. Now more than ever before, the new realities of the post-Cold War era provide an atmosphere conducive to such a process.
Acknowledgments

First of all, I wish to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Rouben Azizian who has been my supervisor for this work. I have profited immeasurably from his knowledge, generosity, and patience throughout this study, particularly at difficult times. I am also greatly indebted to him for the knowledge and training I acquired throughout this research. Apart from that I want to thank the Head of the Department of Political Studies, Prof. Barry Gustafson, and former Head of the Department Prof. Andrew Sharp for their constant help and encouragement in my work.

Also my sincere thanks must go to the Peace and Disarmament Education Trust (PACDET). Without their generous assistance this study would not have been possible. In particular, my gratitude is directed to the Public Advisory Committee on Disarmament and Arms Control (PACDAC) for awarding me a scholarship and thus enabling me to take up the challenge of this project.

There are many, who I must thank outside New Zealand. Particularly, I need to express my great appreciation to Prof. George Cooray and Dr. Jayadeva Uyandoga from the Department of Political Science, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, who patiently helped me during my two field trips. Apart from that, I thank the staff of the libraries at the Universities of Colombo, Peradeniya and Sri Jayawardenapura, Centre for Ethnic Studies, Centre for Policy Alternatives, Marga Institute, HARTI, Centre for International Studies at BMICH, who allowed me to use the valuable material and assisted me in various ways. Also, I need to thank D.G.P. Seneviratne, the former director of the Agrarian Research and Training Institute, Colombo, for his constant support, and advice. Similarly, I would like to thank the members of both the Sinhalese as well as Tamil communities residing in New Zealand and Australia for their help and support given during my surveys.

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must also go to Ray Oliver from New Zealand Post, who has been my continuous employer throughout my studies. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the enormous debt that I owe to my parents for all their help and support with numerous pursuits in my life.

However, if there is someone who fully deserves the dedication of this work, it is my loving wife and wonderful daughter, for whom I lived and began this work at one stage, in order to live life further. So, I dedicate this work to Evachka and Vladik as an appreciation of their love, help, support, encouragement, understanding, and the tremendous sacrifice made for this work and for my life.

Auckland, September 2000
To Evachka and Vladinka
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<tr>
<td>ACFOA</td>
<td>Australian Council for Overseas Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTC</td>
<td>All Ceylon Tamil Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIADMK</td>
<td>All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>All Party Conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>Bharatiya Janatha Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNC</td>
<td>Ceylon National Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPSL</td>
<td>Communist Party of Sri Lanka</td>
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<tr>
<td>CTL</td>
<td>Ceylon Tamil League</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWC</td>
<td>Ceylon Workers Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDC</td>
<td>District Development Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMK</td>
<td>Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPA</td>
<td>District Political Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUNF</td>
<td>Democratic United National Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENDLF</td>
<td>Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPRLF</td>
<td>Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EROS</td>
<td>Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETA</td>
<td>Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Separatist Movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBI</td>
<td>Federal Bureau of Investigations</td>
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<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Federal Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>FPSL</td>
<td>Friends for Peace in Sri Lanka</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICRC</td>
<td>International Committee of Red Cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPKF</td>
<td>Indian Peace Keeping Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRA</td>
<td>Irish Republican Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>JVP</td>
<td>Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (Peoples Liberation Front)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td>Jathika Sevaka Samgamaya (National Workers Union)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KLA</td>
<td>Kosovo Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>LTTE</td>
<td>Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSSP</td>
<td>Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Lanka Socialist Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEP</td>
<td>Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (Peoples United Front)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAM</td>
<td>Non-Aligned Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NLSSP</td>
<td>Nava Lanka Sama Samaja Party (New Lanka Socialist Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NMAT</td>
<td>National Movement Against Terrorism</td>
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<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>People’s Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDFLP</td>
<td>Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFLP</td>
<td>Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO</td>
<td>Palestinian Liberation Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLOTE</td>
<td>Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAW</td>
<td>Research and Analysis Wing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAARC</td>
<td>South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Sri Lanka Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLCP</td>
<td>Sri Lankan Communist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLFP</td>
<td>Sri Lanka Freedom Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLMC</td>
<td>Sri Lankan Muslim Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLPP</td>
<td>Sri Lanka Peace Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPUR</td>
<td>Society for Peace Unity and Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELO</td>
<td>Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTH</td>
<td>Tamil Traditional Homelands</td>
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<tr>
<td>TUF</td>
<td>Tamil United Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>TULF</td>
<td>Tamil United Liberation Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>UF</td>
<td>United Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ULF</td>
<td>United Left Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHRC</td>
<td>United Nations Human Rights Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNP</td>
<td>United National Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USLA</td>
<td>United Sri Lanka Association (New Zealand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTHR</td>
<td>University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Its twenty-five hundred years of written history, and the abundant ruins and archaeological artifacts, are testimony to the great technological and philosophical civilisation that once thrived on the island. Perhaps it is the density of all these factors that makes Sri Lanka unique; in almost half a century of travel, I have not come across another land which concentrates so much intensity and diversity into so little land mass. Ironically, it is this very density and multiplicity that now threaten to tear apart that once idyllic nation. ¹ Arthur C. Clark.

INTRODUCTION

As humanity steps into a new millennium, many traditionally-considered evils have become spectres of the past. Colonialism, which left deep traumas in various societies, has almost disappeared, at least in its direct and most overt form. Communism was also perceived by many to be an evil that haunted the world throughout the past century. With the fall of the communist camp, that bogey also evaporated into the past, creating widespread optimism for harmony. However, despite that optimism, many states enter the new millennium with caution and uncertainty. Despite the disappearance of conventional evils, many societies around the world are plagued today by conflict and turmoil, dampening that early expectation for peace and harmony. The majority of these conflicts have direct links with ethno-national identities which have, at times, been considered to be an obsolete phenomenon.

Over the last few decades, a conflict between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka has turned into one of the most devastating intrastate strifes in the world. According to recent classifications, the war in Sri Lanka has been rated as one of sixteen major wars waged in the world.² The ethnic war in Sri Lanka has now become the longest-running armed conflict in South Asia. Having emerged as a

dispute between the two major ethnic group elites, the conflict has virtually destroyed relations between the two communities. While warfare has turned the North and the East of the island into a virtual battle-field, the implications of the ethnic conflict can be seen in every corner of the country. According to official statistics, the war has already claimed more than 70,000 lives.\(^3\) The consequences of the prolonged ethnic war have been devastating for many people. Victims of the war belong to both parties. It is believed that the number of people displaced in the conflict is well over one million.\(^4\) Many Tamils, Sinhalese, and Muslims, from the Northern and Eastern parts of the island have been compelled to settle in other parts of the country, while some have sought refuge in neighbouring India, or other countries of the world.\(^5\) Those who have nowhere to go have been confined to refugee camps, churches, temples, schools, or even to sheds in the jungle under indescribable conditions.

The economy is another principal victim of the ethnic war. Major sectors of the economy such as industry, agriculture, fishing, tourism, and development projects as well as business activities have all been adversely affected by the unstable political situation.\(^6\) Areas such as international tourism, which had become primary sources of foreign currency for the developing economy, have been seriously damaged by the prolonged war and widespread terrorism.\(^7\) The overall result is the steady decline of people’s living standards.\(^8\) A dramatic rise of the defence budget is a direct result of

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\(^1\) Transformation of Warfare, hosted by New Zealand Military Studies and University of Massey, Palmerston North, August 1999.


\(^6\) The bomb blast near Taj Samudra Hotel and the Galadari Meridian injured significant number of foreign tourists from around the world in 1997, and the bomb blast at prime tourist attraction of the temple of the tooth relic in Kandy in 1998 caused serious damage to the industry. Apart from that there were many other attempts to disrupt the economy: a recent report revealed the LTTE is planning to destroy some vital irrigation structures. See Sangeeva Bandara, ‘The LTTE try to explode Senanayake Tank’, *Lakbima*, 6 June 1999. Other reports indicated the Sri Lankan Tea industry was targeted. SL Net News Report, http://www.lacnet.org/slnet, 6 July 1996.

the escalating decade-long war. Simple figures show the extent of this increase. In 1983, the government spent only 1.3 billion rupees for defence. That amount had increased to 45 billion rupees in 1999. The escalating war does not allow the government to review its defence budget, which further exacerbates the socio-economic problems in the island.\textsuperscript{9}

Over the past decade the noticeable tendency towards militarisation in Sri Lanka has become an intrinsic part of the ethno-territorial problem.\textsuperscript{10} The Sri Lankan defence forces have been transformed from a ceremonial army to one of the biggest armies in the Third World.\textsuperscript{11}

In the environment of this protracted ethnic conflict, human rights have been a precarious matter. Various human rights groups, such as Amnesty International, ICRC, and numerous UN working groups have continuously revealed horrible facts about human rights abuses committed by both parties in the conflict.\textsuperscript{12} Sri Lanka has come under the spotlight regarding issues such as children and women in warfare, forcible recruitment, and extrajudicial killing and detention, all issues that human rights groups have raised.\textsuperscript{13} Such a brief list is by no means adequate to describe the magnitude of the horror and destruction caused by the protracted war in Sri Lanka, a war with its roots in ethnic conflict. In contemplating the conflict, the obvious question is that of why is this happening. The massive literature on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict suggests that this basic question is central to any investigation of the causes and character of the protracted conflict.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{9}A government defence spokesman has reported that under the current situation the defence budget will absorb an additional 17 billion rupees. \textit{SL NET News Report}, 22 May 2000.
\textsuperscript{11} According to an estimation by \textit{Asia Week} Sri Lanka has the 34th largest army in the world. \textit{Himal} vol. 12, no. 2, April 1999, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{13} It is estimated that in 60 countries over 300,000 children have been abducted or forcibly recruited by rebels and are engaged in fighting wars. Sri Lanka is cited in the list of those countries. ‘Children under Arms-Kalashnikov’s Kids’, \textit{Economist}, 10 July 1999, p. 15. International human rights groups such as Save the Children and Amnesty International as well as UN and UNICEF have repeatedly condemned the LTTE recruitment of children in the war. Olara Otunnu, the UN’s Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflicts, called the use of children in the war as ‘an abominable crime on the eve of a new millennium’. Reports of the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), UTHR(J), have revealed astonishing details of children and women in the war.
\textsuperscript{14} It is believed that over 40,000 articles and monographs have been written on the Sri Lankan conflict.
The most fundamental explanation for the emergence and persistence of the conflict has been based on ethnic identity.\(^{15}\) According to this socio-anthropological approach, language, religion, culture, values and other features divide the two communities and are the principle force in the conflict. Those who approach the conflict from this perspective believe that nationalism, specifically Sinhala nationalism, has been a product of invigorated identity, which emerged in modernity as a destructive force.\(^{16}\) Bruce Kapferer, for example, explains that:

‘Sinhala nationalist ideology may be modern, but it retains a continuity with the past that is born from the ontological commitments of the monks of the past.... ...The ideological distortions of the past have become the foundation of the ideological distortions of the present’.\(^{17}\)

While those commentators tend to connect the ethnic conflict more with the inherent characteristics of identity, others place the responsibility more specifically on history. As one commentator concisely put it, ‘the problem is deeply rooted in the past’.\(^{18}\) Various analysts have regarded history as a principal element in the ongoing problem. It must be noted that the degree of emphasis on history may differ from one commentator to other, but an historical interpretation emerges as the dominant approach to the understanding of the conflict.\(^{19}\) The bottom line is that there are two contradictory versions of history, presented by two groups of analysts, each arguing their exclusive veracity.\(^{20}\) According to some analysts, the historical processes of modernity established the foundation for ethnic confrontation between the two communities. In this regard, the colonial regime has been identified as a tremendously


\(^{17}\) Kapferer, *op.cit.*, p. 82.


\(^{19}\) See K.N.O. Dharmadasa, *op.cit.*, pp. 22-27.

important phase which transformed a whole array of inter-ethnic relations. In Gunasingam’s view:

‘a turning point in Sri Lanka’s history is considered to be AD 1505, the year in which Portuguese first arrived in the island. Until this time, Sri Lanka had been ruled by native kings, and for brief periods by Indians, in particular, South Indian overlords. When Portuguese arrived, there were three independent kingdoms - the kingdom of Kotte, Kandy and Jaffna.’

According to this view, colonial rule laid the foundation for future conflict by distorting the traditional ethno-territorial map. Several excellent works devote extensive attention to the role of colonial rulers in heightening ethnic identities in various ways. This has been a popular explanation for the rise of nationalism in both Sinhalese and Tamil groups the during colonial rule as well as for the persistence of ethnic conflict in the island - extending to the present.

According to other commentators, the most compelling factors in the ethnic conflict are the material ones. The advocates of this position argue that it is due to various material impulses that communities became rivals and confrontations were triggered. There is no doubt that the material and ideological grounds are inter-related and cannot be totally separated. However, according to those analysts, the most important factors are economic, and related to resources, and the fruits of social life. Although

21 Gunasingam, op.cit., p. 2.
such compulsions are associated with both communities, this argument usually outlines the link between Tamil nationalism and material deprivation.25

Thus, the diversity in the analysis of the ethnic conflict over the past few decades has managed to capture a wide variety of issues and to consider the problem from various angles. The profile of academics engaging in such an analysis is wide and includes historians, political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists. In addition, many policy-making authorities and agencies have engaged in an investigation into the causes and nature of ethnic conflict, seeking an avenue to much-needed solutions.26 True, ethnic identity is inherently entwined in history, myths, territory and many other elements and these have been a significant component in the current problem. At the same time, various issues related to education and employment are closely related to the escalating nature of the ethnic conflict on the island. Over the past few decades, there have been considerable attempts to address these fundamental issues. Controversial issues such as language, education, employment and religion have, clearly, been the focus of policy makers at various times. Equally, it must be noted that in these domains significant measures have been taken in an attempt to avert conflict. The simplest example of this is perhaps the language issue. Language has been one of the fundamental issues in the Sri Lankan conflict. Over the past five decades, the language issue has been so repeatedly addressed that, as K. M. de Silva aptly noted, it has come ‘full circle’.27 Despite such measures and policy changes, the conflict has steadily escalated. This raises the question as to whether there is some greater issue, over and above those obvious factors, keeping the conflict alive and impeding the establishment of lasting peace.

Indeed there have been several valuable attempts to explain the origin and the persistence of the ethnic conflict through the political prism. A. J. Wilson, in his ‘Break up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese - Tamil Conflict’, for example, shed much needed light on the political aspects of the ongoing conflict. Other authors including S. J. Tambiah, K. M. de Silva, C. Manogaran, Rajiva Wijesinha have also made a

26 Personal communication with officers at the Centre for Policy Alternative and the Marga Institute, Colombo, November 1997.
significant contribution from this perspective.\textsuperscript{28} In most cases, analysts focused on particular elements as the primary cause of the conflict. For example, Wilson reiterates that the most significant factor in the failure to implement reforms is the lack of commitment by the Sinhalese political leadership, who dominate Sri Lankan politics.\textsuperscript{29} According to Tambiah, the tragic fate of reconciliation schemes has also been determined by elitist attitudes.\textsuperscript{30}

However it is essential to find a more comprehensive and encompassing framework to explain the origin and the persistence of the Sri Lankan conflict. Rather than approach the conflict from the perspective of selective elements such as history, identity or material basis, an analysis of the political system and the nature of democracy may provide a better and wider picture of the causes of the conflict, as well as the impediments to peace. Such an approach is possible now, in the post-Cold War era, when the political systems of developing countries are assessed more critically.

As noted above, the post Cold War era not only generated a new interest in democracy, but has also placed stark questions before the existing democracies, challenging their quality, capacity and credibility. Indeed Sri Lanka, as many other similar post-colonial independent states, has been traditionally considered to be a democracy. Certainly, this acceptance and recognition was not without foundation. Sri Lanka has been functioning as a democracy according to conventional tenets. It has had a parliament, a multi-party political structure, regular elections, universal franchise and many other features that are generally regarded to be fundamental elements of a democracy. Many academics and politicians paid tribute to the country’s nurture, honour and promotion of democratic principles in its governance. As prominent Sri Lankan historian K. M. de Silva asserted, although today Sri Lanka is ‘better known for the destructive effects of prolonged ethnic conflict, it remains a functioning democracy and one of the few post-colonial states with an unbroken record of democratic rule.’\textsuperscript{31} Sri Lanka can boast several achievements as a


\textsuperscript{29} A.J. Wilson, Break up of Sri Lanka, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{30} See S.J. Tambiah, op. cit., pp. 73-80.

democracy. If the white-settler colonies that later became Dominions are excluded, Sri Lanka was the first British colony to exercise universal suffrage, more than two decades before the world’s largest democracy, India did so.\textsuperscript{32} Furthermore, in 1956 Sri Lanka was the first country in post-colonial South and Southeast Asia to replace a ruling government by electoral ballot. This tradition, where each ruling political party was periodically replaced in the general election continued until 1977.\textsuperscript{33} It was generally assumed that by establishing these components of Western democracy, Sri Lanka ‘developed into a genuine multi-party democracy’.\textsuperscript{34} In addition, Sri Lanka was proud to be the world’s first country to be governed by a woman Prime Minister particularly, as it appeared and affirmed that gender disparities, one of the traditional evils in the East, had little relevance in Sri Lankan society. Thus, in the past, the quality and the credibility of Sri Lankan democracy could not be questioned, due to these features. Furthermore, in a Cold War context, a democracy like Sri Lanka’s was highly acceptable as opposed to socialist states. Compared to authoritarian socialist states, dominated by one party, democracy in Sri Lanka was much more humane and much more progressive. In addition, the Cold War bipolar realities meant that Western democracies were cautious not to antagonise any state with inclinations towards democracy, regardless of their essential quality.

It is only now as a result of the post-Cold War transformations that the world has recognised the existence of a variety of inherently different democracies, querying their quality and credibility. In the absence of ‘the evil Communism’, democracies that were previously approved of have come under the spotlight for their inhumane and undemocratic nature and behaviour. The comparison is now made not with authoritarian communist states, but with relatively developed Western democracies. In such comparisons, many of those previously acceptable democracies are assessed as highly undemocratic, despite displaying the primary markers of democracy. Recent developments in Fiji, or Zimbabwe demonstrate that an established parliamentary democracy, multi-party elections or universal franchise are no longer accurate tools with which to measure the degree or quality of democracy of a given nation. As Samuel Huntington stated:

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 99.
'elections, open, free and fair, are the essence of democracy, the inescapable sin qua non. Governments produced by elections may be inefficient, corrupt, shortsighted, irresponsible, dominated by special interests, and incapable of adopting policies demanded by the public good. These qualities make such governments undesirable but they do not make them undemocratic.35

It becomes increasingly evident, that the status of democracy does not, solely, guarantee that the people, and groups within ‘democratic’ societies will enjoy freedom and justice. Fareed Zakaria points out that there are 118 democratic states out of a total of 193, which makes for an overwhelming majority of people living in a democratic environment.36 However, can we assume that all those states create a desirable atmosphere for people’s freedom and prosperity? How many of those democratic states breach fundamental human rights after being empowered by the popular will? Many democratic states have amended constitutions in order to extend their term in the parliament. In his insightful analysis of the prevailing state system, Zakaria points out,

‘illiberal democracy is a growth industry. Seven years ago only 22 percent of democratising countries could have been so categorised; five years ago that figure had risen to 35 percent. And to date few illiberal democracies have matured into liberal democracies; if anything, they are moving towards heightened illiberalism. Far from being a temporary or transitional stage, it appears that many countries are settling into a form of government that mixes a substantial degree of democracy with a substantial degree of illiberalism.'37

The Western community’s ideological obsession with communism resulted in a disregard of such realities, and this neglect, in turn, prepared the ground for states to evolve into quasi-democratic monsters where human rights, civil rights and minority rights were heavily endangered. Indeed, many democracies in which ethnic minorities

36 Fareed Zakaria, ibid., p. 23.
37 Ibid., p. 24.
were heavily suppressed have turned into what some analysts call 'ethnic democracies'. The paradoxes of democracy allowed these states to present themselves as genuine democracies where multi-party systems were well established. But behind that democratic façade those states arose as genuine tyrannies of the majority, where minorities were effectively subjugated.

However, the new trend emerging in the contemporary world is to put the quality of political systems under severe scrutiny. There is a developing consensus that it is not simply token procedural elements which make a state democratic, but rather its essential goals and actions. As Zakaria pointed out, democracy is not measured by 'the procedures, but by the goals of the government.' Therefore, a primary objective of this study is to scrutinise the prevailing political system in Sri Lanka. The chief area of investigation, however, is the origin and persistence of the long-drawn ethnic conflict and the continuous failure of the peace process, which is undoubtedly one of the main features of Sri Lankan political developments since independence.

An investigation into the quality of democracy in Sri Lanka will shed a new light on the political process in the post colonial period. As it has been noted, Cold War realities were largely responsible for the gradual evolution of the Sri Lankan polity into an ethnic state, under the cover of a democratic façade. This was also the case in many similar Third World countries. Thus, one of the principal contentions here is that the steady emergence of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is primarily an outcome of the duplicity of the existing democratic structure.

Without doubt, devolution of power is one of the primary elements of a liberal democracy, and is widely recognised to be a device of delivering liberty, quality and justice at a grass roots level. The need for the devolution of power had been recognised by the political leaders of Sri Lanka since independence. At various stages, Sri Lankan leaders have proposed legislation for power sharing arrangements, with the regions and the politicians seeking devolution as the most reliable device to diffuse the rising tension within ethno-territorial units. The failure of all the schemes for devolution evokes a stark question. Despite a constant and conscious attempt to

39 Ibid., p. 25.
implement the devolution of power to resolve the rising ethnic conflict, why has Sri Lanka failed to benefit from such a genuine liberal democratic device? Even today, despite strong faith in devolution as a reliable solution to bring peace, Sri Lanka has not been able to implement power sharing as a means to bring about a resolution of the conflict.

The past and existing quasi-democratic political framework has been the most serious impediment to implementing power sharing schemes and thereby diffusing ethnic tension. Even though Sri Lanka has been functioning as a multi-party polity, in its substance political competition has been strictly confined to two majority parties. On the one hand, it provided the impression of a democratic process. But on the other hand, it has been the most serious obstacle to possible schemes of reconciliation, and has steadily divided Sri Lankan society along ethnic lines. It is hereby contended that the quasi-democratic multi-party system prevailing on the island in fact, has been a fundamental impediment to the implementation of devolution.

The final component of the analysis of the Sri Lankan domestic political structure deals with violence. Even a cursory study of Sri Lanka’s post-colonial history would stun a student with the pervasiveness of violence. From the very outset of independence, Sri Lankan history has been saturated by violence, emanating from and affecting, all sectors of society at the same time. Paradoxically, despite this pervasive violence, Sri Lanka’s standing in the international community as a democratic nation has not been severely tarnished, although the scale and magnitude of violence in Sri Lanka was comparable with any openly undemocratic and authoritarian state. It is argued here that the existence of those two incompatible elements, violence and democracy, side by side, makes the status of Sri Lankan democracy highly ambiguous. This study will cover not only violence related to ethnic conflicts, but also make a brief comparison to violence emanating from various sources. Doing so will confirm that the continuous prevalence of violence has been a direct and clear result of the quality of Sri Lankan democracy. At the same time, it will be argued that today Sri Lanka is experiencing a boomerang effect of violence, and in this way violence has become one of the most serious impediments to the reinstatement of democracy.

There have been a considerable number of studies dedicated to various international aspects of the Sri Lankan conflict, and its peace process.\textsuperscript{41} Not

surprisingly, the majority of them attempted to elucidate the tremendously disputed, and still controversial Indian relation to the island’s conflict. Those studies have certainly broadened the understanding of the complex nature of the conflict, as well as the past and present impediments to the peace seeking process. However, beyond the Indian involvement, little attention has been paid to extract the dynamics complicating the ongoing conflict and severely hampering the peace process. Again, the end of the Cold War provides us with new analytical tools and less ideologized approaches to the international impediments to conflict resolution in Sri Lanka. This study focuses on three under-researched external factors, affecting the establishment of a lasting peace in the island: (a) geopolitical impediments, (b) the role of ethnic diasporas, and (c) the role of the international community.

The role of geography in the political order of an individual state, a region, or the international community at large, has long been a subject of academic interest. With the demise of the bipolar world order and the establishment of what some analysts call a New World Order/Disorder, interest in the study of geopolitics has considerably increased. Understandably, the massive interest in geopolitics can be explained by the change of the players in international relations, their role and influence at regional and global levels. Post-Cold War history has presented ample evidence that former geopolitical realities are no longer valid. Thus, one of the primary questions underlying this current investigation is that of how these massive global changes have affected Sri Lanka’s internal political order, its governance, and most importantly, its protracted ethnic conflict.

It is no longer a secret that the continuing neglect and isolation by the international community has further expanded the destruction and human suffering in some domestic conflicts. Among the many conflicts in the Third World, the Sri Lankan conflict falls into that category where continuing isolation and marginalisation have been a primary feature. This thesis investigates the reasons why the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict still remains under a shadow. Does the answer to this question lie in its geo-

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political realities? Has the Sri Lankan conflict, despite its scale and magnitude, been marginalised because it is strategically irrelevant to the great powers?

It has been contended that the dominant role of India in the island’s conflict was purely a result of Cold War geo-politics. The Indian role in South Asia was taken for granted in a context of bipolar competition, where no party wanted to antagonise that influential and potent regional power. The Cold War world effectively sanctioned the Indian involvement in Sri Lanka’s conflict, with little concern for motivations or possible consequences. The result has been serious and far reaching. In regard to the premise of the promotion of democracy, the Cold War explicitly and understandably forestalled the scrutiny of Indian involvement in the Sri Lankan conflict. In a global environment of bipolar competition, regional actions in pursuit of hegemonic ends were overlooked by the international community.

Nevertheless, the remaining question is one of why - if a post-Cold War world order has significantly transformed the extant actors and their roles - do certain conflicts still remain unattended? Furthermore, with regard to the Sri Lankan conflict specifically, should the Indian domination over Sri Lanka, which still prevails, be understood as a result of the Cold War continuing in South Asia? It is becoming increasingly evident that the post-Cold War changes in the global geo-political environment are partial and selective. While certain parts of the globe have been fortunate to benefit from the demise of the bipolar world, again due to geopolitical factors, other states remain stuck in the realities of the past. From this perspective, the thesis investigates the question of whether Sri Lanka remains a victim of those same geo-political realities which have complicated and prolonged its domestic conflict, hindered a possible resolution.

The second component of the analysis of international dimensions of the conflict will deal with the role of ethnic diasporas. The subject of diasporas is currently attracting new interest, due to the spread of ethno-secessionist movements and the increasing impact made by expatriate communities on them. The Sri Lankan case is, in that sense, no exception. There is a noticeable increase in attention given to diasporic communities, and their role and influence are recognised both in academia and in policy making. An important contribution has been made by Rohan Gunaratna,

who examines emerging new tendencies within the diasporic communities in the context of an escalation of ethnic war. On the other hand, governments and various related agencies have demonstrated an unprecedented interest in expatriate communities, and indeed such agencies have taken a variety of steps in order to deal with challenges that these communities pose. In general, however, the interest is fairly recent and in the academic domain, particularly with regard to Sri Lanka, the subject of diasporas is largely under-researched. It is clear that the main focus, of both academics and policy makers, has been on the partisan role of diasporic communities. That partisan role of diasporas has certainly become a formidable force for recent secessionist movements. Diasporic communities are the principal material contributors to separatist movements, and as such, have emerged as an indispensable component in those movements today. Following a principal analytical model of the promotion of democracy as a mode of conflict resolution, it is a contention of this thesis that the role of diasporas in that respect can not be understated and neglected. Currently, diasporas are the prime medium for the internationalisation of domestic conflicts, and are one of the most powerful forces in the extension of non-democracy. They are not only the main vehicle for presenting ethno-nationalist causes to the outside world, but are also the extended device of ethnic warfare. This study therefore explores how the Sri Lankan diasporas have been instrumental in extending illiberal democracy both through the state and through the ethno-secessionists, further escalating the conflict.

The third and final element of this analysis will deal with the role of the international community in the Sri Lankan conflict. Indeed the debate over the role of the international community in internal state affairs is by no means new to political scientists. Nevertheless, the relevance of the subject has reached its culmination with the post-Cold War developments. Indeed, these new developments have raised several critical questions for the states as well as for the global community as a whole. For example, questions arise as to what the responsibilities of the international community in regard to individual states are, how it must act and react to various

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internal conflicts, and who is responsible for making decisions about such actions?\textsuperscript{48} This wide range of questions directs attention to some newly emerging tendencies within the international community, and makes it necessary to explore the way these developments reflect on the Sri Lankan context. The studies of the Sri Lankan conflict from an international perspective have primarily been confined to select topics.\textsuperscript{49} For example, the discussion of international involvement in conflict resolution, particularly with regard to third party intervention, has understandably been confined to a discussion of Indian involvement. Indeed, India has been the only state that put forward peace initiatives, as well as carried out a military intervention in the island’s conflict. At the same time, there have been no attempts to find the reasons for such a lack of initiatives from the wider world. Furthermore, it is even more relevant to dwell on such an exploration when the international community has displayed a clear concern regarding the protection of human rights. The question has been raised by various parties across the world as to why the international community is so selective in regard to human rights.

Apart from human rights and democracy, another factor attracting international attention to grave ethnic conflicts around the world is terrorism. Ironically, it is not the human suffering caused by terrorism which has grasped global attention, but rather the growing threat that international terrorism poses to the wider world. In that sense, terror has been able to touch the international community at a more profound level than the issues of human rights and endangered democracy. If the violation of human rights is a clear indication of non-democracy, the world community’s continuous inaction and relegation of conflicts, such as that in Sri Lanka, remains inadequately explained. On the other hand, as past experience has proven, the passivity of the international community not only breeds illiberal democracy within


such states, but also permits intervention by illiberal democracies with ambiguous agendas which further escalates conflicts.

The thesis is comprised of two major parts. Part One will be dedicated to the conceptual analysis of relevant aspects. Part Two will deal with the analysis of a case study – Sri Lanka.

Hence, the First Chapter of Part I will briefly deal with the general concepts of ethnic conflict, ethnicity, and nationalism, and will focus on the ways in which these issues may hamper social harmony. The validity of ethnicity as a basic factor of group consolidation, and its salience in plural societies will be investigated. This will include a consideration of the ways in which ethnic identity may be validated in order to gain political control. The focus will be on understanding the general tendencies of the Third World in relation to these concepts, in order to make parallels with the Sri Lankan case. Thus attention will be paid to the main features and characteristics of ethnic conflicts in the contemporary Third World, such as the daunting nature of ethnic war, militancy and terrorism. Chapter Two of Part I will consist of an examination of the assumptions and concepts related to liberal democracy and its variables. This discussion attends to the ways in which the basic tenets of liberal democracy may be contradictory in plural societies. Individual and group liberties, society, the state and its controversial role with regard to liberty and equality, provide useful sites from which to discuss the practices through which the state can manipulate the tenets of the liberal democracy. Applying those conceptual assumptions further, a brief examination of the process of democracy in the Third World - emphasising the South Asian context - will be undertaken. As an important element of discussion, significant attention will be paid to theories of devolution since this has an inherent relation to the case study. Chapter Three will be devoted to international perspectives on ethnic conflicts. Attention will be paid to such aspects as controversies within the international community in relation to ethnic conflict resolution, and various institutional mechanisms and their role in domestic conflicts. This chapter will also examine theoretical aspects of diaspora communities, their contradictory behaviour, and implications for ethnic conflict.

Moving on to the examination of Sri Lanka as a case study, Chapter I of Part II will discuss the key issues on which the conflict is based. Dividing the major issues underlying the conflict into those that are ideologically based and those which are materially based, it will attempt to provide an account on how those issues have
evolved during the course of the conflict. An ideological basis, in this schema, refers to the perceptual aspects of the identity of the both ethnic groups, which are changed and fortified by various factors over the time. The discussion of the material basis relates to the economic gains and incentives which have contributed to the cleavage between two communities. The Chapter II will be devoted to the political aspects of the island’s ethnic conflict. Examining the evolution of the political process of Sri Lanka from the colonial past to the present, it will attempt to identify the key strands underlying the ethnic conflict in the island. Placing a primary emphasis on the prevailing political order, the thesis will investigate the reasons why Sri Lankan democracy has not been able to avoid a polarisation of society along ethnic lines. This chapter will also discuss the existing controversies of the devolution debate in Sri Lankan politics. Chapter III will call attention of the controversial international dimensions of the Sri Lankan conflict. The continual obstacles to peace stemming from the inherent geo-political realities of the island will be investigated. The subsequent discussion will focus on the vital role that the diasporic community has played in hampering the possible establishment of peace. The final analysis will explore the evolution of domestic perceptions towards third party involvement, and the controversies of outside approaches to the island’s conflict. In the conclusion, the theoretical and empirical discussions in the thesis will be summed up and the main findings of work identified.
PART I – THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING ETHNIC CONFLICT

Introduction

It is no exaggeration to state that ethnic conflict has today become a universal phenomenon. There is no country that can boast of total immunity to this phenomenon. Not only countries with less developed economies, but also affluent Western democracies have been challenged with ethnic conflicts to various degrees. According to Ted Gurr’s detailed survey there are some 80 ethnic based conflicts around the world today, among these about 35 have grown into fully-fledged internal wars.50

However, the sudden eruption of dozens of ethnically based disputes causing massive destruction within the former socialist countries has given the impression that ethnic conflicts are purely a result of the socio-political transformations of the post-Cold War period. As some commentators posited, ‘the sudden explosion of ethnic conflicts around the globe following the end of the Cold War represents both a significant change in political relations and a mere artefact of the ways in which we construct our thinking on political behaviour’.51 Thus the widespread belief has been that ethnic conflicts have much to do with political developments of the post-Cold War era. Some believe that the massive eruption of ethnic conflict in the post-Cold War era is a result of the ‘removal of the authoritarian lid’, while the other view holds that an unprecedented upsurge of democracy has been the primary cause of the new wave of intra-state conflicts.52

However, it must be recognised that ethnic factors were a significant cause of intra-state turmoils even during Cold War period. One can reasonably argue that the basic impulse of German aggression leading to World War II had an ethno-nationalistic underpinning. The partition of India, causing massive human tragedy, was also driven by ethno-religious divisions. Many states in Asia and Africa experienced serious internal disputes, riots, often civil war, based on the racial, ethno-tribal differences during the Cold War period. Aside from those more specific examples, ethnic based disturbances disputes and clashes were commonplace even in states commonly regarded as being 'societies which had already resolved ethno-nationalist problems'.

Our case study - Sri Lanka, further suggests that ethnic conflict is not simply a post-Cold War phenomenon. The emergence of the ethnic dispute within the Sri Lankan society dates back to early 20th century. Ethnic riots causing significant human suffering were taking place at the very height of the Cold War period. Therefore it is fair to state that ethnic conflicts are not purely a post-Cold War phenomenon. It is the contemporary shift in attention, and an increased awareness of the subject, which gives rise to the impression that such internal conflicts have become a dominating element in the past decade. Despite domestic conflicts having been a significant component of international relations in the Cold War era, the ideological competition, which was the dominating element of that period, effectively averted the attention of the world community from intrastate conflicts.

Having said that it does not mean that the numerical increase and the qualitative changes of ethnic conflicts have not played a significant role in attracting the world's attention to this phenomenon today. Indeed the magnitude and scale of destruction associated with the new wave of intra-state conflicts has had a tremendous impact on the entire world community. However, it is a fact that if the obsession over the bipolar rivalry kept the world's attention away from intra-state conflicts, post-Cold War ethnic conflicts have filled the vacuum left by the demise of ideological competition.


53 Socialist states portrayed themselves as genuine multi-national states where the issue of nationalism had been already resolved. At the same time, the capitalist world presented itself in the similar manner as the rise of capitalism and globalisation gradually erase the parochial identities.

54 Chaim Kaufmann, 'Intervention in Ethnic and Ideological Civil Wars: why one can be done and other can’t', Security Studies, vol. 6, no. 1, Autumn 1996, pp. 62-63.
Indeed the socio-political developments in the post-Cold War era have managed to effect substantial changes in pre-existing intra-state conflicts too. During this discussion the various ways in which post-Cold War realities have undisputedly transformed the Sri Lankan conflict will be addressed. Not only it has grown in magnitude and the scale of destruction, but also in terms of approaches towards the peace seeking process, Sri Lankan ethnic conflict has been heavily transformed for the past decade or so.

Analysis of the causes of ethnic conflict is vital for an understanding of the nature of that utterly complicated phenomenon. No solution can be sought without understanding those subtle issues which not only initiate the conflicts but also serve as the force of their persistence. The following discussion will briefly turn an attention to the academic debate over the causes of ethnic conflict.
Causes of Ethnic Conflicts

If one can argue that ethnic conflicts are derived from economic backwardness, then examples such as Canada, or Great Britain may serve as a strong counter-argument. Affluent economies cannot always prevent ethnic separatism. The controversial, even enigmatic nature of the dispute has generated complex debates on the subject, often leading to extreme views. One extreme might argue that ethnic conflict is an unavoidable fact of life due to a biological underpinning, while the other may posit that ethnic conflict is merely a result of the actions of ambitious politicians. The following discussion will examine those diverse views, in order to shed light on the generation of ethnic conflicts and also to consider the ways in which certain societies have managed to avoid the emergence of their more destructive forms.

One suggestion fundamental to some analysts, is that the natural differences of ethnic groups are central to ethnic conflicts. Beverly Crawford claims that,

‘cultural differences, such as language, religion, cultural traditions and ethnicity automatically lead to conflict because they assume that culturally different groups are by nature exclusionary and are dominant by parochial values that outweigh universalistic norms.’

According to this view, it is simply the explosive energy inherent in ethnic differences which brings groups into conflicts. Further affirming this opinion, Michael Brown suggests that the existence of ethnically distinct groups in close proximity may produce a situation of competitive interaction which sharpens ethnic solidarity and group consciousness. According to this perception the plural society, which has become the norm of the contemporary socio-political terrain today, contains that primary prerequisite for ethnically based strife. This argument can be supported by

presenting numerous conflicts across the world where different ethnic groups have engaged in devastating wars in order to achieve their goals based on the parochial elements.

According to this argument any heterogeneous society is prone to suffer from ethnic conflicts. Again, it is true that across an array of politically and economically diverse states, ethnicity presents formidable challenges to the world political system today. However, there is a clear-cut difference in the intensity of those conflicts and the nature of their emergence in various states. While some countries are heavily affected by ethnic conflicts, others seem to have had significant success in avoiding destructive forms emerging. At the basic level one can observe that the economically stable Western democracies are coping with the challenges stemming from the ethnic factors more successfully than underdeveloped Third World nations. In other words developing countries are more vulnerable to ethnic conflicts than developed countries.

This primary feature counter-poses the statement that the mere existence of culturally diverse groups triggers ethnic conflicts. There is no doubt that Third World states are comprised of a far more complicated and complex ethno-demographic fabric than the developed world. The religious, linguistic and cultural mosaic of the Third World is, in that sense, more multiplicitous than that of more modernised Western societies. For example, India’s 900 million population is comprised of over 25 different ethnic groups and over 100 linguistic groups divided by deep cast and tribal cleavages. Each African country contains vast numbers of ethnic, tribal and communal collectivities creating an African continent which is extremely complex and diverse. Uganda, for example, has 16 major ethnic groups, and Tanzania has nearly 140 ethnically different groups with distinct languages and cultures. From that point of view, the potential for Third World states to generate ethnic clashes is far greater than that of Western democracies.

Nevertheless, some analysts believe that in order for ethnic factors to become a powerful force in generating conflict there must be some other significant elements.\footnote{Extensive studies are being carried out by Russian and Western academics on the post Soviet development in this area, See for example, C. J. Walker, Armenia – The Struggle of a Nation, London, Routledge, 1991; also R.J. Kaiser, The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and USSR, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1994; B. Pugachev, Ethnokonflikt i Russkii Faktor. Rossia: Problemi} One of those important elements is security. According to this assertion if one ethnically different group becomes ‘insecure’ in relation to another, this may lead to...
an ethnic conflict. Barry Posen’s theory of a security dilemma in respect to ethnic conflict is based on this assumption. In his view the state, as the dominant agency, has a responsibility to provide ‘security’ for all culturally diverse groups within the society. In cases where the state is not capable of protecting one group from being affected by another, that group tends to ‘provide its own defence’, which leads to a clash between the two groups.

‘What one does to enhance one’s own security causes reactions that, in the end, can make one less secure. Cooperation among states to mute these competitions can be difficult because someone else’s “cheating” may leave one in a militarily weakened position.’

A similar kind of explanation of the causes of ethnic conflicts can be seen in David Lake and Donald Rothchild’s ‘rational explanation’. They suggest that the basis of ethnic conflict lies in collective fear. When a group becomes apprehensive about their security and safety, they intuitively take a defensive position to protect themselves. In the atmosphere of a weak state, where the group is unable to seek protection from the state authorities, aggravating differences may trigger violence, inviting groups into open confrontation.

A similar stance is held by Kathleelen Newland, who posits ‘social uncertainty’ and the ‘fear of future’ as a cause in ethnic conflicts. Undoubtedly this uncertainty may arise from ideological as well as material bases. For example, a group may fear gradual assimilation by a larger group resulting in the loss of language, religion and culture. That fear may provoke it to take precautions which may create a cleavage between groups. Indeed, this could well be the case with the Canadian Quebec ethnic group which has taken a explicit stance to protect the language and cultural traits of French speaking Canadians. At the same time a fear for physical survival may be generated. Domination by larger groups may instigate fear in the minority groups of


being absorbed. Minorities resistance to majority domination may gradually develop into overt confrontations. Often historical memories may serve as stimulating factors in this situation. If a group has an historical experience of being invaded, subjugated or persecuted by another group, it is more likely for that group to take precautions to protect themselves which may grow into a larger ethnic conflict.

Developing their theories of ethnic conflicts, some analysts have attempted to incorporate already existing social theories. For example Ted Gurr explains ethnic conflict from the standpoint of the theory of relative deprivation, and a theory of frustration-aggression could be appropriately used to explain the situation related to this point.\(^{62}\) In his view, systematic exercise of the discriminatory actions and the legitimation of relegation and exclusion of a group leads to discontent and frustration which provide the foundation for ethnic conflict.\(^{63}\) Thus the deprivation of cultural rights and privileges inevitably causes dissent and discontent which often erupts as ethnic conflicts. The actions of the state, often in the face of a majority group pursuing forcible assimilation, which result in the deprivation of linguistic and religious rights, cause deep scars in the psyche of ethnic minorities and generate energy for a violent conflict.\(^{64}\) It is not difficult to find examples of conflicts which can be assumed to be the result of such actions. Almost all minority uprisings in today's world bear witness to the contention that longstanding state suppression has been a primary cause of their struggles. It is a widespread belief that the decades long suppression of religion, neglect of culture and continuous policies of assimilation are the most compulsive causes of the outbreak of inter-ethnic conflict in many former Soviet Union republics.\(^{65}\)

Considering the conflict from a different, material angle, Jack Snyder points to the weakening of the state as a breeding ground for ethnic conflicts. He suggests that the increasing degradation of the economic potential of a state and an inability to provide material security for the people (groups and individuals) can lead to ethnic

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mobilisation.66 From this point of view economically strong states are more likely to avoid ethnic group dissension, and demands for separation than weak states. This argument is often illustrated with reference to the nature and character of ethnic group behaviour in Western countries. It is argued that the drastic deterioration of the economies of the socialist states has served as an additional factor in ethnic separation.67 In the consideration of the link between economic potential and ethnic conflict, one can not ignore the Third World, which has become a fertile ground for such conflicts. Being the world’s poorest nations, Third World countries are plagued by various socio-economic ills that undoubtedly provide the battlegrounds over which competition between various ethnic groups for limited resources takes place. Therefore, in that sense, the presumption of resource competition is properly applicable in the case of the Third World.

So far, the many different causes of ethnic conflict have been discussed. Although the very existence of different ethnic groups does not always produce conflicts, under certain circumstances those divisions may serve as a strong force to mobilise the groups and trigger devastating strife. Thus, the primary explanation for the varying character and intensity of the conflicts in different societies is the manner in which those variables work. As a result one society can be highly vulnerable to ethnic factors, whereas another society is capable of managing that explosive element in order to avoid serious consequences.

The exploration of causes of ethnic conflicts cannot avoid the issue of colonial relations. Undoubtedly, the colonial legacy with its profound implications for colonised societies has been a strong factor in present day ethnic conflicts.68 It has been contended that colonial rule upset social equilibrium and consequently created new hostilities while it deepened prior enmities.69 One of the most important aspects of the colonial legacy, with regard to ethnic conflicts, is linked to the politico-administrative system introduced by colonial rulers. In many cases these arrangements forced diverse ethnic groups to adopt new socio-economic relations

67 Jack Snyder, ibid., p. 83.
which directly contravened the traditional ones. With reference to the Third World, Jasske Peter posits that

‘ethnic struggles were often submerged within nationalist movements during the colonial period, and independence has often been accompanied by a resurgence of ethnic identity; ethnic conflict also interacts with factional, class, and regional cleavages’. 70

In particular, it was the introduction of the Western political system, putting an end to traditional administrative systems, that brought about new challenges for countries in the post independent era. As one analyst described it, the fall of the colonial system after the World War II herded those less institutionalised and less “Europeanised” (in terms of political culture) states into a new socio-political system where inevitable crisis awaited. 71 The introduction of Western parliamentary democracy and the fundamental principle of according power to the majority undermined the multi-dimensional heterogeneity of many indigenous societies. The eventual result of colonisation’s imposition of this universalist principle, as the legitimate basis for political power, has been a politicisation of ethnicity.

Furthermore, colonial rule, which implanted new administrative structures in the Third World, consciously or unconsciously gave a new significance to territoriality in those countries. The arbitrariness of colonial map-making which was an artefact of administrative convenience (if not the principle of divide and rule) pre-empted significant territorial disputes in the post-colonial era. 72

According to some academics the behaviour of ethnic groups is largely dependent on how the state functions. 73 The adherents to this position assert that the nature of the established political structure and the capability of the leadership are immensely important in managing ethnic factors in state affairs. Constitutional safeguards protecting minority rights and the functioning of the liberal democratic political

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71 D. Carment and Patric James, op. cit., p. 98.
structure have been identified as the primary requirement for avoiding ethnic conflicts. Therefore a number of academics have emphasised the significance of political leaders, especially the role of political elites as principle agents in ethnic conflict. In their view it is the political elite’s employment of highly sensitive ethnocultural affinities in their political agendas which leads to clashes between groups. Realising the enigmatic force contained in ethnicity political elites manipulate ethnic issues in order to further their own agenda. Issues such as cultural deprivation, economic discrimination and political mis-representation of ethnic groups are vehicles for group mobilisation. In this way elites often generate deep cleavages within those societies. Therefore it is fair to state that the politicisation of one ethnic group, resulting from an elite seeking to reap political benefit, often provokes a counter reaction which lays the foundation for serious ethno-nationalist conflict.

Expanding the notion of political authorities and elites as a source of ethnic conflict, Fearson has pointed out that a lack of commitment to minority groups, on the part of authorities, has the potential to trigger ethnic conflicts. In his opinion, broken promises and a sense of betrayal by the state may often evoke deep frustration in minority groups. A consistent refusal by state authorities to fulfil the demands of minority groups may lead the latter to turn to more radical methods in achieving their goals which may end up in devastating civil wars.

As Gurr has pointed out, ethnicity itself is not a source of conflict. Nevertheless it has a tremendous potential to mobilise people along those extremely intimate affiliations which may lead to deep cleavages. The specific catalyst for ethnic

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conflicts can vary from place to place and situation to situation depending upon how those variables are functioning.

**Ethnic Conflicts and Violence**

An obvious factor contributing to the overwhelming attention to ethnic conflicts in the post-Cold War era has been the numerical increase as well as the intensity of such conflicts. The majority of wars in today’s world are fought in the name of ethnicity. Unprecedented brutality is the main character associated with those ethno-nationalist struggles where killing, rape, kidnapping and other atrocities are justified in the name of freedom for the ethnic group. This character of ethnic conflicts has prompted some analysts to conclude that unlike ideological conflicts ethnic conflicts are generally hard to mitigate and negotiate.82 Analysing contemporary ethno-nationalist conflicts Stephen Ryan has attempted to outline some of the dynamics attached to the phenomenon. He suggests that the very nature of ethnic conflict generates a propensity for a cycle of violence.83 Unlike ideological conflicts, ethno-nationalist confrontations always highlight the natural divisions of the groups, such as language, religion, culture and so on. Therefore as conflict deepens the most reliable boundary between people becomes ethnic identity.84 This heightened awareness of ethnic identity distances the groups physically and psychologically, deepening the gap between them. As John Chipman noted, in this situation each and every member of the conflicting groups becomes labelled as combatant of the ethnic struggle in the eyes of the opponent.85 Therefore, ethnic conflicts radically transform the inter-

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84 Indeed the intermarriage is one way which often blurs the rigid ethnic cleavages. However, the clear tendency of the intermarriage in the conditions of high ethnic tension is its drastic decline. For example, in the height of the interethnic tension in Northern Ireland in 1960s and 1970s, the percentage of intermarriage was only 3-4. Similar trend of decline of the mix-marriage can be seen in the societies such as Yugoslavia, where intermarriages were fairly common event. See John H. Whyte, ‘How is the Boundary Maintained between the Two Communities in Northern Ireland?’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, April 1986, pp. 219-233; Ruza Petrovic, ‘The Ethnic Identity of Parents and Children’, *Yugoslavia Survey*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1991, pp. 63-76.

personal relations in the multi-cultural societies, generating greater and greater intolerance between ethnic groups. This exaggerated enmity often paves the path to the dehumanisation of each other, resulting in extreme brutalities and violence. The violence is justified for the sake of a ‘common good’, but the understanding of a commonality is confined to the ethnic group.\textsuperscript{86}

Militancy has become a widespread phenomenon in ethnically based conflicts. It entails a wide range of group actions undertaken with violent and coercive strategies to inflict physical and psychological damage to the opponents. In most cases militancy is a label attached to dissenting groups fighting a state. Fighting for the freedom of their ethnic group militants trigger violence and destruction in order to weaken the counter group or to force concessions. Nevertheless, it is not only dissenting groups who employ violence. Often in the case of ethnic conflicts state authorities also employ, or encourage, violence to eliminate or weaken their opponents. Recent events in East Timor saw the Indonesian army’s involvement in militant activities against not only Fretalin guerrillas, but also against Timorese civilians, in order to crush the independence movement.

As previously contended, it is a heightened sense of ethno-centrism which drives the ethnic combatants to inflict violence. In that sense, in a situation of ethnic conflict vengeance and hatred become the ideology of the freedom struggle. Historical memories and past injustices are often invoked in order to justify actions.\textsuperscript{87} The longer the conflict drags on, the bigger the reservoir of hatred to fuel the cycle of violence.

The most prominent feature of today’s ethnic conflict - terrorism - is ‘designed to instil fear and alter a political situation’.\textsuperscript{88} Indeed in the pursuit of political goals, terrorism has always been one of the most popular forms of violence. Walter Laqueur eloquently adumbrated the diversity of motivations and political ends to which terrorism has been put.

‘terrorism has been waged by national and religious groups, by the left and by the right, by nationalists as well as internationalist movements......Terror has


been directed against autocratic regimes as well as democracies; sometimes there has been an obvious link with social dislocation and economic crisis, at other times there has been no such connection. Movements of national liberation and social revolution (or reaction) have turned to terrorism after political actions have failed. But elsewhere, and at other times, terrorism has not been the consequence of political failure, but has been chosen by militant groups even before other options were tried.89

Thus the primary objective of an employment of terrorism by dissenting groups is one way of weakening or intimidating the oppressor in order to force them to make concessions. Continuous terrorist acts often disrupt law and order in civil society. As Michael Stohl pointed out, the ‘emotional reaction’ of society to the threat of terrorist acts is the primary aim of those who employ terrorism in their political pursuit.90 In addition to instilling fear, spontaneous terrorist attacks always become a serious threat to economic activities. The destruction of government, public and private properties, hijacking, hostage taking, and the explosion of bombs in public places, invariably incurs massive economic costs for the state. Continuous terrorist attacks also scare off international investment and damage tourism, with significant negative implications for the economy. Terrorist groups intentionally damage the image of the state in the international arena in order to weaken its economic potential. The IRA’s continuous terrorist attacks which have caused serious economic damage, as well as civil unrest, were primarily aimed at bringing down the authorities, in order to win concessions.

Another important objective of ethnic groups’ commission of terrorist activities is that of publicising their plight and the cause to which they have dedicated themselves. In fact ethno-nationalist groups have come to understand that terrorism is the most powerful means to convey their message to the international community. Terrorist activities are swiftly picked up and reported by the international media. Among the many ethnic conflicts, those which have become associated with terrorism have gained much attention from the international community. Widespread militant activities and violence carried out by groups such as Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), Hizbollah, Hamaz, LTTE, Fetalin, ETA, IRA, Kashmir Rebels and Kurdish militants,

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have become known to every ordinary person in the world due to the so-called ‘CNN’ factor. In this sense terrorism has been a very effective means of alerting the international community’s attention to many ethnic conflicts.

As to the effectiveness of terrorism as a means of conveying a message to the outside world, it must be said that recent developments would indicate that terrorism is becoming less successful in this respect. It is true that during the high tide of democratisation following the collapse of the socialist bloc, the international community was strongly sensitive to events associated with violence and human rights abuses. During that early period, the international community was more sympathetic to the plights and demands of the dissent groups regardless of whether they employed violence as a counter action. In the eyes of the international community those actions were merely reactions to an undemocratic and authoritarian regime. The international community often put pressure on the state authorities to moderate their regimes and accommodate the human rights demands of minorities within their constituencies. The overall acceptance of the break up of the socialist states can be a seen as a case in point. The various dissident activities that emerged within the Soviet Union in the late 1980s were tolerated and their manifestation treated as the justifiable reaction of oppressed minorities. Although this discussion will consider the international reaction to Tamil dissension in detail at a later stage, it is worth noting that in the late 1980s and early 1990s the emphasis was on anti-Tamil violence, although Tamil militancy was already fully active.

The point here is that the success of terrorism as a means of conveying a message to the outside world and thereby attracting the sympathy and support of the international community has been drastically declining for the past decade. The rapid growth of terrorism crossing state borders has already become a significant threat to the international community. This very factor has become the primary reason for a change in the international community’s attitude towards violence and terrorism, regardless of the cause for which it is employed. The United Nations Convention on Terrorism of 1997 explicitly stipulates this, stating ‘the unequivocal condemnation by the international community of all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable wherever and by whomever committed which, inter alia, threaten the

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91 During protests against the Soviet regime in Georgia, Baltic Republics, and some other republics, the sympathy and support of the international community fell on the groups who manifested their dissension.
territorial integrity and security of states. Criminal acts intended to or calculated to create a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature.  

Terrorism no longer has state borders. Terrorist groups operate in the same way as the state system functions. With closely linked international networks, terrorist entities have engaged in almost every affair in the international system today. In terms of economic strength they are comparable to multi-national companies. The economic, technological, and ideological cooperation of terrorist groups has made them highly intractable and unconquerable. Thus the realisation of this rising threat of terrorism, especially that of international terrorism, has been the primary incitement for the world community to engage in this arena.

Many individual states have taken a hard line position on terrorism, totally withholding any sympathy or support for any group engaged in terrorist activities. This strong rejection of terrorism has emerged, on one hand, as a result of the grave threat it poses to the world system. On the other hand, an adherence to terrorist methods, by some groups, regardless of the state’s attempts at reconciliation through democratic concessions, has also compelled the international community to condemn dissident actions. In cases such as Chechnya, Ache, or even Kosovo, state authorities have been prepared to make significant structural changes in the governance to accommodate the demands of the minority groups. Despite such extensive devolutionary proposals, many ethno-militant groups have adhered to their extremist ideology of ethnic separation. In pursuit of this goal, most of these groups have employed terrorism as a principal device. This tendency of separatist groups to decline democratic options and persist in a program of violence and brutality has resulted in the international community’s disillusionment with many minority struggles.

Violence and terrorism have become endemic to some groups in pursuit of ethno-nationalist goals. Often separatist groups breach generous and promising peace initiatives in order to return to a violent path. In many cases they disregard the strong

condemnations, rejections and even requests of the state and international community to halt the violence and to take a democratic path to problem solving. It is surprising that in certain cases some groups have persisted in violent means, even when it is apparent that militant actions are highly unlikely to secure their goals. Therefore the following section will attempt to explore some of the variables which keep militant groups adhering to violent programs.

**Ethnic Secessionism and Militancy**

As has been previously contended, violence is used by the ethno-secessionists primarily to weaken the oppressor with the aim of forcing concessions. However, the question addressed here is one of why some ethno-separatists continue to adhere to a violent path, even when it is unlikely to produce a positive outcome. In other words, we are attempting to understand why some groups continue with terrorism and violence amid ample evidence that the most reliable way to achieve their goal (that of alleviating the suffering of the particular ethnic group) may be democratic political dialogue.

Some analysts believe that one of the most important factors in resorting to violent methods in order to achieve political goals is the character of the leadership. According to this view, the psychological make up, identity, character and personal up-bringing of the leader may heavily reflect on the manner in which that movement behaves. If the leadership has a strong adherence to violent methods, then the movement may continue to pursue violence even if it is highly irrational and unreasonable. It must be mentioned that in most cases such leaderships are established amid a violent environment. Such leaders have often experienced brutality themselves or witnessed the brutalisation by the oppressor or close relatives. A personal burning hatred underlies the justification of any violent action in the name of the common goal. On the other hand, the inherent nature of ethnic conflicts produces many similar experiences among followers, who will similarly embrace violence in order to satisfy their own desire for revenge. Therefore in an environment where one ethnic group has

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suffered bitterly at the hands of an oppressive ethnic group an ideology of hatred can arise as a powerful force mobilising a group dedicated to the movement.\textsuperscript{94}

In addition to that, the leadership of such movements often becomes highly authoritarian. No dissent is tolerated within the movement, and the opinion of the supreme leader becomes the sole guidance for achieving the common goal.\textsuperscript{95} Under these circumstances a militant ruler often imposes rigid discipline and law in order to dominate the whole movement.\textsuperscript{96} Such a leadership does not tolerate a majority opinion. On the contrary, it often creates a mechanism within which each and every section of the movement comes under his/her immediate control, allowing him/her to eliminate any dissent. Thus even if individual militants hold a different opinion on violent methods, it is highly unlikely they will be able to put forward an alternative.

Replenishment of the cadres of militant groups can be voluntary if the militant group has free access to, and wider support from, the community.\textsuperscript{97}

Another aspect to leadership in such movements is the ability to instil a doctrinaire of violence justified in the common cause. A pre-eminent feature of present day ethno-terrorist groups-irrationality is a clear result of such indoctrination. This aspect extends from committing atrocities and killing the counter-ethnic group to self-sacrifice.\textsuperscript{98} Any action committed for the sake of the common goal is regarded as a sacred duty. Accordingly, violence is not seen as an evil but as honour. Therefore, many militant groups use the ideal of martyrdom as a powerful force to sustain their violent activities. Any member who wilfully sacrifices his/her life for the common good becomes an icon, or martyr, in the society. Often various ceremonies are held to commemorate slain militants, which further affirms the ideology of martyrdom attracting more members to the ranks of the movement. Pictures of martyrs are displayed in public places. They are declared national heroes. In some cases, names of martyrs are used for particular military operations or platoons, as in conventional

armies. In this manner, contemporary ethno-separatist militants have created an ideology of violence which has been the most powerful factor in these movements.99

Another rationale for the adherence to violence by ethno-nationalist groups could stem from their uncertain position in peace. Even if the most reasonable solution to the conflict is through democratic dialogue, but the movement’s future (especially the future of the leaders) is uncertain, the movement may continue to pursue its traditional path. Undoubtedly, those groups engaged in ethno-separatist struggles commit vicious atrocities during various stages of their battle. Often violence is committed not only on the oppressor group, but also on moderate thinkers of the same ethnic groups who are treated as traitors to the common struggle. Thus, over the years those ethno-nationalist groups create a large number of enemies. It is fair to say that in the contemporary world most such groups have committed atrocities beyond the boundaries of their own states, also creating enemies in the international arena. The killing of various foreign political leaders and moderate thinkers generates wide resentment from groups outside the country. In addition, an engagement in varieties of illegal activities with other international terrorist groups means that ethno-nationalist leaders often become ‘internationally wanted’ people. In such situations, an acceptance of peace would be suicidal for those separatist activists who become committed to violence as a means of survival.

Lastly, it is apparent that the ability of militants to pursue their violent path is another factor which keeps them adhering to militancy. Most rebel groups, as has been pointed out, have an international support network that provides arms, ammunition, and funds to help them to sustain continuing insurgency. Accordingly, it is important to note the role of a widespread diasporic group which has become a considerable factor in helping to wage wars in their homelands. Funds raised overseas and continuously pumped into separatist movements provide much needed financial support to sustain militancy. As a result of this, many insurgent groups have turned into powerful war machines. As recent events prove, in the majority of cases insurgents have been able to offer a strong resistance to conventional armies.100 In fact, many ethno-nationalist groups today wage semi-conventional or conventional

warfare, unlike in the past when resistance was mainly confined to guerrilla wars. Through the exchange of expertise and technology with outside networks, and the receipt of continuous material support from diasporas, ethno-nationalist groups have today become powerful organisations which can carry out military campaigns. This is a formidable factor preventing them from taking the democratic path.

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CHAPTER II

DEMOCRACY, LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND ETHNIC CONFLICT

Introduction

The collapse of communism was widely regarded as the triumph of liberal democracy. In the view of some commentators, the downfall of communism was ‘the watershed in the new world history’ marking an unprecedented rise of democracy.102 Francis Fukuyama signalled the beginning of the era of democracy as follows:

‘What we are witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War ... but the end of history as such: that is, the endpoint of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government’103

Similarly, Samuel Huntington stated that ‘the transition of some thirty countries from non-democratic to democratic political systems’ was a victory of the concept of democracy.104 However it did not take very long for the world to realise that the triumph of liberal democracy is not dependent upon the arithmetic rise of democratic states. Changes which took place in the international arena soon after the immediate post-Cold War period, placed a formidable question before the world as to whether the conventional criteria in measuring democratisation is still viable. Harsher critics of the contemporary liberal democratic system claimed that conventional democracies are ‘shams which disguise the existence of undemocratic social and political forms’.105 Such an ambivalent attitude towards the democratic states was evoked as a result of two major tendencies. On the one hand, the so called new democracies, which emerged as triumphant victories over the communist evil, soon began to fall into deep socio-political crises. On the other hand, questions arose about the

credibility of longstanding democracies that had been regarded as bastions of the liberal democratic ideal, resisting the communist evil during the Cold War.

This investigation is particularly concerned with the second category – the nature of liberal democracy in traditionally accepted democracies. The course of the following discussion will pose the question of whether the aggravation of ethnic conflict in the so-called traditional democratic states may be primarily a result of flaws in the liberal democratic establishment of those states, despite their appearance of being genuine democracies. At the same time the matter of whether this general acceptance of those states as democracies by the outside world has further reduced the potential for them to improve their state of democracy is considered. Having received a false message, those states may have continued to exist as quasi-democracies, propelling them into crisis at a deeper level. In order to undertake that inquiry, a discussion of several concepts related to the fundamentals of liberal democracy follows. Understandably, it is not the intention here to provide a comprehensive analysis of the theory of democracy but to shed some light on the most relevant aspects as they bear on our basic discussion – that of ethnic conflict and the liberal democratic political order.

**Conceptualising Democracy**

To begin our discussion, it is appropriate to look at the meaning of the term democracy, a term that is frequently used but often remains vague and confusing.\(^{106}\) This is precisely why some commentators call the term democracy 'an essentially contested concept'.\(^{107}\) Nevertheless, semantically, the term 'democracy' connotes 'the rule by the people'.\(^{108}\) Barry Holden posits that,

'democracy is a political system in which the whole people, positively or negatively, make and are entitled to make the basic determining decisions on important matters of public policy'.\(^{109}\)

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\(^{108}\) Democracy- word derived from Greek language in the context of its social changes, providing he connotation as demos, 'the people' and the kraterin, 'to rule'.

According to such a definition, the democratic polity is a society where people's will prevails as the dominant element in decision making and governance. In its contemporary connotation democracy is a socio-political environment which provides broad freedom for the people, their opinions and political organisations, and operates for the sake of the common good. The other essential ingredients of democracy are the parliamentary system, which provides an opportunity for the people to elect a government in accordance with their will, and a constitution which establishes solid legislative powers and an independent judiciary which is free from interference from the other sectors of the polity. Therefore, unlike dictatorships, where the head of the polity is one person or the military, democracy allows 'people' to make decisions about their own society for their own good. Furthermore, this right to make decisions is always enshrined in the constitution.

The next significant component of democracy is the government through which the 'people's will' can be accomplished. Thus, the primary function of the state is to fulfil the desires and the expectations of the people who empower and authorise it. In that sense, the state is a secondary institution and is entirely dependent on the 'people'. Before the discussion is turned to relations between the state and the people, it is vital to pay some attention to the concept of 'people', which will lead to an examination of 'group' without which the discussion would be incomplete.

Who are the People?

A broad definition of 'the people' is those who live within a state, or a country. Therefore in the context of contemporary political environment, the people are those who live in internationally recognised sovereign states. From that point of view one can understand that the population of a sovereign state has the right to make decisions about their own government. Therefore, in essence, each and every member of the society is eligible to make decisions for the common good.

However, the most crucial problem of a decision making process by individuals for the common good is associated with achieving consensus, because although the 'people' in an abstract sense are homogenous, in reality society is very heterogeneous.

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First of all, the ‘wills’ and ‘wishes’ of individuals are diverse due to various individual psychological characteristics. At the same time people have attachments, links and relations to various groups which may be defined by class, religious, cultural or ethnic lines. Therefore, while all these characteristics make a profound impact on their own ‘will’ and ‘wish’, they also have major implications for the decision making process which serves the common good. As a result, it often becomes extremely difficult to gain a consensus of the masses with regard to ‘common good’. The key point forwarded in Anglo-American democratic theory is that it is not really possible to equate the ‘will of the people’ with the will of every individual. This implies that there can be, and often is, a clash between the ‘will of people’ and the wishes and wills of individuals in society.112 Barry Holden further explains,

'It follows that the 'will of the people' cannot, except in the unlikely case of unanimous agreement, comprehend the will of very individual. Therefore an action regarded as implementing the people's will must conflict with wills, and thereby threaten the freedom of some individuals.'113

What is of crucial importance for our discussion is this disparity of expectations in a diverse plural society with regard to various groups. As has been discussed, individuals have links and affiliations with various groups which also impact upon their will. In essence, ethnicity is one of the most influential affiliations of individuals and has a defining role in their decision making. In other words, ethnic group attachments often impact on the individuals in a way that segregates society along ethnic lines and creates separate groups within that abstract 'peoplehood'. Therefore in general contemporary plural societies are entities divided along religious, linguistic and cultural lines. In addition to individual ‘will’ and ‘wish’, these ethnic group affinities often play a significant role in the decision making process for the common good. In fact ethnic affinities may override the individual ‘will’, which further contradicts the expectations of the ‘people’ and the ‘groups’. Therefore in our view it is vital to investigate the reasons these ethnic attachments are so important. The

following brief discussion will consider various academic debates on ethnicity and its role in defining group mobilisation, which is one of the main strands of our discourse.

**Ethnic Identity and Group Mobilisation**

Despite the vast amount of literature available on the subject of ethnicity, it is widely accepted that the term ethnicity is something ‘difficult to define with precision’. However, the understanding of ethnicity as concept is essential to an understanding of ethnically based conflicts. Obviously the term ethnicity implies some membership of a group or a collectivity. At the same time term ethnicity specifies certain characteristics of the group which unifies the members of that group. In the first place ethnicity is a symbolic emblem, which is comprised of certain characteristics unifying a group of people and distinguishing them from others. Therefore ethnicity is basically a symbol of group identity. As is the case with wide range of other symbolic emblems of groups - such as class, sex, profession, age and so on - ethnicity fulfils the requirement of providing a distinct identity through which a group stands out from other similar ones.

In general, the most commonly emphasised features of ethnic identity are: language, religion, cultural artefacts, customs, traditions, food and dress. These may be regarded as the objective features in ethnic group mobilisation. According to George De Vos, an ethnic group is made up of people who hold in common a set of traits based on ‘religious beliefs and language, a sense of historical continuity, and common ancestry or place of origin’. The existence of a psychological attachment towards the objective traits, which adds an emotive underpinning to the group mobilisation process, is quite essential in the opinion of many analysts. The collective consciousness - without which an ethnic identity can not persist - that cements a psychological attachment to the group, may stem from a variety of other sources. The stronger the group consciousness, the

more rigid and stable the ethnic identity. A systematic degrading of the group consciousness may, in turn, cause the weakening and sometimes disappearance of an ethnic identity. Indeed, this is one of the major reasons why ethnic group leaders attempt to sustain, often even coercively intensify, the collective consciousness by manipulating a variety of elements of ethnic identity in the situation of ethnic conflicts. An awareness of ethnic identity, or collective consciousness, serves to maintain the cleavage between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Therefore ethnic consciousness has been treated as the most important factor in ethnic identity formation and persistence and serves as the mobilising force in inter group competition.

The definition of ethnic groups given by Anthony Smith in his recent study listed six fundamental essentials in the formation of ethnic identity. As he suggested the primary requirement of an ethnic group establishment as a distinct group, is the name. The name permits an identification as group members as well as by outsiders. The second requirement is a myth of common ancestry. In order to be identified as a distinct group, members of the ethnic group must believe in a common ancestry, regardless of whether it is real or imaginary. Thirdly, they should possess historical memories about their past. These may exist as historical writings or have been passed down to the present generation through an oral tradition. Those historical memories may emphasise the glorious achievements of ancestors. Historical memories often place an emphasis on past injustices, atrocities and hostilities spanning centuries. This consolidates the collective consciousness and the distinctiveness of one ethnic group in relation to others. The next essential feature of an ethnic group is the shared culture. Culture includes language, religion, traditions, customs, dress, food, values, dances, music and other elements attached to the social life of the group. These explicit features often serve as cementing components of ethnic groups and group consciousness. In his list of essential elements, Anthony Smith also includes common territory. The territory of an ethnic group is often perceived to be an inseparable part of all above mentioned components. Ancestral history, language, tradition, religion and even rituals, always have intrinsic links with the territory. Many ethnic group claims are staked on rights to an ancestral homeland.

for which they have fought and sacrificed their lives. Geographical territory is the physical basis for group enjoyment of the so-called 'psychological satisfaction of being an ethnic group'. Regardless of whether a whole ethnic group, or a part of it, may live outside the homeland, the attachment to the homeland motivates an ethnic group's assertion of claims to it, claims which strengthen the collective consciousness. In both cases territory serves as an important factor in the affirmation of group identity. Because of this factor, a sense of ethnic identity is often more intense in diaspora groups than in home-based ethnic groups. Finally, Anthony Smith suggests that a sense of solidarity must exist among the members of the group in order to sustain a collective which has crystallised around ethnic affinities. Solidarity may arise out of a sense of collective effort focused on the same goals, which will not only benefit the group but also the future generations of the group.

One of the most fundamental aspects of ethnicity is its inherent power of group mobilisation. Some view this ability of ethnicity for group cohesion as fixed and unavoidable. One of the leading proponents of primordialism, Edward Shils contends that,

'as one thought about the strength and tension in family attachments, it became apparent that its attachment was not only to the other family member merely as a person, but as a possessor of certain especially significant relational qualities which could only be described as primordial. The attachment to another member of one's kinship group is not just a function of interaction ... it is because a certain ineffable significance is attributed to the tie of blood'.

Van den Burghe, a vocal primordialist, based his thesis on biological evolutionary theory. He summarised his paradigm as follows:

121 Similar notion has been expressed by other analysts. See for example, Milton J. Esman, Ethnic Politics, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 6.
my basic argument is quite simple: ethnic and racial sentiments are an extension of kinship sentiments. Ethnocentrism and racism are these extended forms of nepotism - the propensity to favour kin over non-kin. There exists a general behavioural predisposition, in our species as in many others, to react favourably toward other organisms to the extent that these organisms are biologically related to the actor. The closer the relationship is, the stronger the preferential behaviour.\(^1\)

In opposition to this notion is the view that ethnicity is a manoeuvrable substance which is mainly utilised for political means.\(^2\) This implies that ethnic identity is a social construct and therefore a transformation of social forces inevitably leads to changes in the ethnic identity. Max Weber contended that the components attached to ethnic identity, such as historical and ancestral past, are 'fictitious'.\(^3\) The so-called instrumentalists suggest that those properties one receives from the birth, such as language, religion and cultural traditions, are negotiable and often replaceable. Some admit that 'ethnicity is a matter of degree'. The components of ethnic identity have a variable degree of intensity, coming into being at various times, under various circumstances. Therefore ethnic identity as a political force is widely manipulated by political parties and leaders who carefully select the most applicable components, according to the time and the need.\(^4\) Ann Swidler's metaphor of cultural symbols as a 'tool kit' invokes a useful illustration of the character of ethnic identity. She describes the way in which components, such as language, religion, traditional symbols, stories, rituals, are used to construct the appropriate features of ethnic identity.\(^5\) Taking a similar stance, Urmila Phadnis posits that at any given time a particular cultural marker may gain pre-eminence in the assertion of ethnic identity, with the other cultural criteria operating either in a subordinate or muted form.\(^6\) Joane Nagel elaborates as follows:


'If informal ethnic meanings and transactions can shape the everyday experiences of minority groups, formal ethnic labels and policies are even more powerful forces of identity and social experience. Official ethnic categories and meanings are generally political. As the state becomes the dominant institution in society, political policies regulating ethnicity increasingly shape ethnic boundaries and influence patterns of ethnic identification'.

Indeed the manoeuvrability of the ethnic identity has been widely explained in the context of competition for resources. According to the advocates of that view, in the context of resource competition ethnic identity emerges as one of the most powerful forces in group mobilisation. Therefore, under such conditions, individuals may choose ethnic identity as the most reliable and convenient allegiance. Robert Masao Jiobu emphasises the process of identity formation as a result of resource competition. He states that scarce economic resources often provide a powerful motivating force in society to construct interest groups along ethnic lines. As he noted,

'the greater the competition, the more likely ethnicity will become its focal point. When resources and rewards are scarce and competition high, the social meaning of ethnic tags will rapidly crystallise, forming hard boundaries. In this sense, competition leads to ethnicity'.

Thus according to the instrumentalist approach ethnicity has little independent impetus without political manoeuvring. Ethnic identity is not a force unless it is used and reinforced for political motives. Only when ethnic identity is politicised, mobilised and led by an ethnic elite does it become a powerful force.

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131 See Nagel Joane, 'Resource Competition Theories', American Behavioural Scientist, vol.38, no.3 January 1995, pp. 442-458. As this position argues, the 'competition can be seen as a driving force underlying patterns of ethnic identification, ethnic group formation, ethnic conflict and antagonism, and ethnic movements'.
Nevertheless, in our view, both of these approaches make a valuable contribution to the explanation of ethnic group mobilisation and persistence. They are both extreme versions of the theory of group genesis and persistence. Certainly, people in society differentiate themselves according to their cultural and historical, as well as their traditional traits. An intrinsic attachment to those elements can be justified by the fact that they find themselves comfortable within those groups. There should be no argument that those traits must be considered to be legitimate elements through which groups define themselves as different from others. The individual’s freedom to sustain their culture and traditions is a tenet of human rights. That everyone is allowed to observe their religion and practice their language is a part of universal human rights. Relegation and subjugation of those elements naturally instigates protest and contravenes democratic principles. Thus, in the rejection of ethnic identity as an irrelevant element the instrumental approach is inadequate. On the other hand, an overemphasis on the biological origin of ethnic identity, as a non-negotiable component, has its own drawbacks. Societies are naturally comprised of different groups. There is practically no society in the contemporary world in which the entire population is made up of a single ethnic group. The primordial approach may be seen to sanction group clashes as being inevitable. Furthermore, there is ample evidence of a variety of ethnic groups living harmoniously within one state, while still exercising and enjoying their own cultural and traditional ethnic attributes.

**Controversies of Democracy and Liberal Democracy**

In its purist sense, democracy is the will of majority. Therefore, in a democratic society the needs and desires of the majority must always prevail. The generally accepted mechanisms of democracy such as universal franchise, parliamentary elections, and constitutional law, are designed to establish and consolidate that fundamental principle. However, in reality the basic contradictions attached to this method of establishing popular rule often generate deep distortions in democracy. Firstly, it is the ‘majority will’ which is taken as the defining factor of common good. According to that rule, whatever the numerical majority decides becomes that which everyone must accept, regardless of how unacceptable that decision may be for the minority. That basic principle of democracy has a tremendous potential for generating dissent and contempt within numerically smaller sectors of the society. Furthermore,
in some cases, majority rule may be defined by an extremely small margin. For example, if slightly over 50% of the population is on the side of certain demands, regardless of an almost similar portion opposing those demands, the majority will prevail. In that case the majority represents only half of the society, leaving the desires and demands of nearly a similar number of people unrepresented.

As far as ethno-national representation is concerned, this controversial principle of democracy often undermines its own credibility. In the ethnically heterogeneous societies 'majority will' may well represent a single ethnic group, if that group has a numerical domination. Although this precedence is strictly in accordance with democratic principles, in reality this situation creates a society where the majority ethnic group dominates and controls the whole society, simply because they are the biggest sector in the population. In this scenario, the demands and desires of ethnic minorities have no representation within the governance. When ethno-nationalist interests seep into the political arena, politicians tend to utilise those highly sensitive sentiments in the competition for power. In this context, various competing political parties may emerge within the majority ethnic community, adding tension to the ethno-political competition. The tendency of those parties to present themselves as genuine servants of the majority ethnic community, outbidding political opponents, promising various concessions, interpreting and reinterpreting histories, often marginalises and antagonises ethnic minorities. Another specific outcome of this process is the sharpening of ethno-nationalist sentiments within minorities groups, paving the way for competition between the majority and minorities, not on purely political grounds, but on an ethno-political basis.134

The most paradoxical aspect of the whole process is that it contains all the necessary ingredients required to justify itself as democratic. Political competition involves various parties and the governance would be established by free and fair elections.135 However the final outcome is often not an establishment of a pure democracy, but an ethnic democracy - as some analysts categorise those societies - where 'majority will' prevails along the ethnic lines.136 In such societies where the

winner takes all, the winner is defined as the dominating ethnic group. When political competition is confined to ethno-politics, the concept of 'the common good' tends to take a distorted form, limiting socio-economic entitlements to the ethnic majority, often at the expense of ethnic minorities. By the same token, it is important to recognise that this quasi-democratic multi-party competition within ethnic democracies often becomes a significant barrier to the revival of democracy. Even if such a government attempts to make substantial concessions to ethnic minorities - such as upgrading language or religious status, regional autonomy, devolution of power and so on - an opposition party may use the issue of ethnicity to bring down the reforms for the sake of power. In this situation the bipartisan political system, which is an acceptable democratic form, may stand as a crucial obstacle to resolving ethnic conflict.

Thus the paradox of democracy is that democracy must contain a parliament, multi-party competition, free and fair elections, universal franchise and so on, but the presence of these elements does not necessarily guarantee freedom and justice for every individual and group within a plural society. At the same time, the absence of freedom and justice for every one is not a justifiable criteria for defining a society as undemocratic.

The contradictory nature of democracy has prompted some analysts to make a distinction between democracy and liberal democracy. In his insightful analysis, Fareed Zakaria attempted to distinguish between liberal democracy and democracy by saying that,

‘liberal democracy [is] a political system marked not only by free and fair elections, but also by the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion, and property’. 137

According to this assertion, in addition to the elementary features of democracy a society must have a constitutional liberal state structure to avoid the shortcomings of democracy. This new argument introduces another element to our discussion, as it suggests that a state can only provide justice and freedom to all people by establishing a liberal democratic structure. The discussion that follows will attend to certain

137 Fareed Zakaria, op. cit., p. 22.
aspects of liberal democracy in order to reveal some of the contradictions attached to it.

As the semantics suggest, liberal democracy is a combination of two central concepts rolled into one principle: liberal and democratic. The formulation of liberal democracy appears to be an attempt to mitigate the contradictions inherent in the ideals of democracy. The two distinct concepts of liberalism, which connotes individual freedom, and democracy, which indicates the will of people, are combined in an attempted compromise as the basis of a socio-political structure, in order that people may co-operate and coexist with each other. Barry Holden points out that 'liberal democracy is best understood as referring to democracies of a limited kind'.

Indeed liberal democracy as a social construct has been subject to severe criticism. As one analyst suggests 'the conjunction of 'liberal democracy' is paradoxical, because the relationship between liberalism and democracy has been a deeply ambiguous one'.

However, those who believe that the flaws of a purist democracy contain the potential to oppress certain categories of individual and group rights suggest that the only way to neutralise the overarching power of the majority (or the state) is to institutionalise individual rights in a constitutional manner.

'Liberals, from this classic viewpoint, are those who think it desirable that the power and authority of the government should be limited, typically by subjecting the government to regulation by such devices as a written constitution and/or a bill of rights. Viewed in this way, a liberal democrat is therefore one who holds democracy to be the best form of government but believes that even a democratic government should be limited.'

In this sense 'liberal democracy is a political system in which the people make the basic political decisions, but in which there are limitations on what decisions they can make.'

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138 Barry Holden, op. cit., p.16.
140 Barry Holden, op. cit., p.16.
141 Ibid, p. 17.
Emanating from the theories of individual rights, liberal democratic theory maintains that individuals have basic rights or entitlements, as can be evidenced in the work of political thinkers such as John Lock (1632-1704). According to the natural law point of view on rights, a human being must be treated as an equal with others.\textsuperscript{142} John Rawls presents a similar position defending individual liberty based on a theory of justice.\textsuperscript{143} In this sense the foundation of liberal democracy is that no one receives privileged or discriminatory treatment from the state or the government. Neither cultural nor social differences must affect the treatment of individuals or groups within the sphere of governance.\textsuperscript{144} The relevance of this to our main thesis is that within liberal democracy, regardless of ethnic, cultural and historic differences, all people and groups are equal in society. As Green points out, ‘political equality is the real spirit of democracy’.\textsuperscript{145} However, the main tenet of the liberal democracy in regards to equality, is that all persons (groups, in our case) must be treated equally. But at the same time ‘their reasons for different treatment’ must also be considered.\textsuperscript{146} This is the most contradictory point in liberal democratic theory. While as an individual every one is equal and free, he/she is simultaneously responsible as a part of the whole society. Applying this formula to our main argument, ethnic groups as an intrinsic element of the society have equal rights to exist and exercise their rights. But at the same time, as a part of the whole society those groups have particular responsibilities towards others.

At this point it is relevant to look at the role of the state or the government in liberal democracy. In liberal democratic theory the government plays a twin role. Firstly, the government acts as an agent of the people (groups) through which they accomplish their decisions. At the same time it is the agent that prevents them from restricting the each other’s liberties. In this sense government plays an interventionist role. This contradiction stems from the fundamental clash between the principle of liberal democracy, which is the freedom of self-determination for the people, and the self-determination of the individual (or groups). A certain kind of hostility between these two concepts can be identified. While fundamentally government is a secondary institution, it still has powers to enhance, ensure and establish the rights and

entitlements of the individuals (or groups). Therefore while a libertarian notion proposes that individual rights must be protected from the government intervention, the counter argument holds that the state must have the authority to pro-actively intervene in protecting those rights.\(^\text{147}\) In this regard, liberal democratic governments have the authority to empower previously discriminated communities or groups on the basis of fundamental rights. Such action has been criticised as undemocratic. Holden points out that,

'a democratic government is more threatening, because it is more powerful than an autocratic government. An autocratic government has only its own power and does not also embody the power of the whole people'.\(^\text{148}\)

It may impose laws and regulations in order to protect certain sectors of the society. The institution of 'negative and positive liberty' may be interpreted in various ways by political leaders at various times. As means of remediying inequalities in the society, governments can take various actions, enhancing or limiting the freedoms and entitlements of various individuals and groups. Such action can endanger the foundations of liberal democracy.

In regard to economic freedoms and entitlements, tensions in this area can run quite high. Theoretically, every person (every group) in the society must have equal and free access to economic benefits. But at the same time economic inequalities may often hamper some individuals' and groups' access to entitled rights. In egalitarian terms, government intervention is the only remedy. However, the libertarian approach strongly contests any use of state intervention as a device with which to empower certain sectors of society justified in the name equalising disparities. As libertarians argue, such intervention contradicts the fundamental tenets of the concept of liberty and is an explicit breach of the freedom of the individual. In every case where this device has been applied, it has been met with stiff resistance and criticism from within society. An example of this can be seen in South Africa, where a new government has been instrumental in empowering the majority Black population, who had been deprived of basic socio-economic entitlements for decades. Similarly, the legislation


to entitle Malay people over the Chinese population in Malaysia has instigated criticism and tension within the society.

So, the basic concept of liberal democracy implies that people in a society are different in their ethnic, cultural and religious affiliations as well as in individual qualities. At the same time the concept suggests that they are equal in the face of the whole society, having equal rights and entitlements. The resolution of this dilemma invites third party intervention in the form of the state, paradoxically adding more contradictions to the problem. As has been pointed out, in a pure democracy the state is a subordinate organ in relation to the ‘people’. However, in an environment where differences between the ‘people’ create a clash of interests, the state has to play the role of a negotiator - a role which often can seem arbitrary, or can be used in an arbitrary manner.

Due to this contradictory nature of liberal democracy, states which are empowered by the ‘people’ to bring about freedom and justice often become a burden. Zakaria elaborates on this:

‘the tendency for a democratic government to believe it has absolute sovereignty (that is, power) can result in the centralisation of authority, often by extraconstitutional means and with grim results. Over the last decade, elected governments claiming to represent the people have steadily encroached on the powers and rights of other elements in society, a usurpation that is both horizontal (from other branches of the national government) and vertical (from regional and local authorities as well as private businesses and other non-governmental groups).’

An increasing centrality of state authority often results in the suppression of a society even to the point of breaching constitutional law or arbitrarily adding new laws to enhance state power. Massive human rights violations sometimes take place in the so called democracies under the guise of maintaining civil law and order, public good, or for the sake of economic progress. The process of consolidation of state power has been often justified by ethno-cultural diversity. However, the

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149 Fareed Zakaria, op. cit., p. 30.
150 The motivation of economic growth has limited many civil and group rights of people in South East Asian states like Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. See Fareed Zakaria, op. cit., p. 27.
unprecedented rise of ethno-national upheavals against the central authorities, reminiscent of the rise of liberation movements against colonial rulers or socialist autocratic regimes, is a tendency which has become clearly evident in the recent past. Such upheavals develop in states traditionally considered to be democracies, as well as in the newly democratizing former communist states. In both cases, despite apparently proceeding towards the ‘democratic world’, existing structural deficiencies in governance have evoked ethno-nationalist upheavals which tear the societies apart. In Zakaria’s explanation,

'in countries not grounded in constitutional liberalism, the rise of democracy often brings with it hyper-nationalism and war-mongering. When the political system is opened up, diverse groups with incompatible interests gain access to power and press their demands. Political and military leaders, who are often embattled remnants of the authoritarian order, realise that to succeed they must rally the masses behind a national cause.'

It is no secret that some seemingly democratic states have been long plagued by a multitude of ills, such as corruption, favouritism, dynastic power delivering, bribery, and the extortion of state resources. While maintaining a facade of democracy, this quasi-democratic status has provided fertile ground for massive crimes committed by the state as well as incubating similar organisations within the society. Thus while those states where hailed as protectors of democracy by the international community, hundreds of thousands of people were killed and jailed. Ironically, Western democracies often provided verbal, and at times logistical, support for the suppression of groups that emerged from within those societies in resistance to oppressive regimes. In this way, the obsession of the international community with quantitative numbers of democratic states, and not their genuine quality, has directly encouraged a decline in the standard of democracy across the world.

Thus, it is not the ‘minimalist definition and label’ of democracy which makes for genuine democracy, nor will the ‘selection of constitutional liberalism’, as the procedure for governance, generate a genuine democracy. Reiterating Zakaria’s definition, it is only the government’s ultimate ‘goal’ which provides the credibility

\[151\] Ibid., p. 38.
for it to proceed and succeed in establishing liberal democracy. Recognition of the diversity of the society and action in order to protect individual and group autonomy - these are the fundamental principles enshrined in liberal democracy which must be the inspirational goal of governance.

The following section of our discussion will examine how those fundamental principles of liberal democracy operate in the Third World. There are two major reasons for selecting the Third World. Firstly, the majority of Third World states were traditionally considered to be credible democracies - particularly in the Cold War environment when they stood for opposition to Communist authoritarian states. Secondly, the operation of liberal democracy as it bears on the case of Sri Lanka – which is a significant member of the Third World – will be considered.

**Liberal Democracies in the Third World**

The adoption of the Westminster parliamentary polity, inherited from the colonial rulers, is a primary feature of Third World states. In essence, many developing countries have a multi-party political system with universal franchise, a system that provides an opportunity for the constituency to elect their members of parliament by regular elections. According to conventional criteria, those Third World states possess the basic features of democracy. Nevertheless, as has been previously suggested, at a deeper level democracy is a relationship between people and the state. The degree of democracy is heavily dependent upon the position that those fundamental agencies occupy in the polity and the role they play within it. Ideally, the state should be secondary to the people who empower that government to fulfil their wishes. Despite this however, a domination of the state over its constituency can be observed in the majority of Third World polities. In other words, the most prominent feature of Third World democracies has been the consolidation and centralisation of power in the state and over the people. As Alavi pointed out, ‘the excessive enlargement of power, control and regulation’ has been the exclusively important feature in almost all the

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152 Ibid., p. 25.
153 The overall concept of Third World is fluid and inconsistent. In fact after the Cold War it has become even more ambiguous. However, the conventional idea is that it includes countries with underdeveloped economies in Asia, Africa and Latin America.
Third World states despite the fact that they have been elected by popular vote. In this regard, it can be seen that despite ostensibly being the agent of the masses, that is an agency which enact the will of the people. Thus central state control contravenes the primary principles of liberal democracy in these states. It is obvious that neither liberty nor democracy can be achieved in a system where domos has become secondary.

It is interesting to observe the way in which the contradictions of liberal democracy are played out in the context of Third World. As has been previously noted, the contradictory principles of liberal democracy have been selectively applied in order to neutralise the potential for clashes in plural societies. Therefore while the state is, in essence, a secondary agent, it still has responsibilities to limit the excessive liberties of certain individuals and groups, where they encroach upon the liberties of others. In the context of the Third World, in particular, where social and economic inequalities are widespread, it can be argued that state intervention is an unavoidable and essential mitigating and adjusting force. According to that argument, the limitation of freedoms and entitlements of certain individuals and groups by the state and for the ‘good’ of the majority, is justifiable. The tendency toward state domination in Third World democracies has become contradictory to purist Anglo-American liberal democratic ideal.

Gupta explains the process of state domination in the Third World as follows:

‘in an economically backward and socially unequal society, the state must play an interventionist role, especially in the economy, which gives rise to the phenomenon of ‘command politics’

He further elaborates by saying that ‘in a sense, the traditional liberal concept of the state as a third actor is replaced by the concept of state as a central actor in society. The paradoxical operation of democracy in the Third World often leads to the establishment of ‘democratic dictatorships’. In contrast to the authoritarian state’s sole power of the autocrat, ‘democratic dictatorships’ operate by popular will, often

156 Ibid., p. 160.
mandated by a majority vote. Thus, in terms of conventional political theory, they are considered to be legitimate governments. With regard to international relations in particular, those states are democracies as basic liberal democratic principles have been followed. Nevertheless, the general tendencies apparent in the functioning of Third World democracies provide ample evidence of governments acting contrary to those basic principles after they have assumed power by popular vote. Many developing democracies have made drastic changes in the constitutional procedures, electoral and parliamentary processes, judiciary systems, civil and human rights spheres - changes which indicate a distinct inclination towards non-democracy. There are many examples, but the following examples from the South Asian context should suffice to endorse this argument. The Indian government imposed a state of emergency and banned the opposition political parties in 1975-77. On a number of occasions, the Sri Lankan government changed the constitution, extended the term of parliament, and imposed various inhumane and anti-civil regulations. All this was done within the framework of fundamental tenets of a democratic government elected in accordance with the public will.157

While the control of a pure dictator has no time limit (unless a civil or military confrontation overthrows it), a democratic dictatorship is generally re-elected in accordance with the parliamentary term set out in the constitution. Despite this there is a general tendency towards the increasingly centralised authority of state power after each changing term.

The other aspect is the dominance of one or two political parties in the contest for popular vote. The clear dominance of the Congress Party in India, that party being the vanguard in independence and having a wide organisational base, is a classic example. A single or bi-party dominance is a feature of the majority of Third World states. Another striking feature of Third World democratic elections is the stiff competition between two dominant parties, often resulting in the victorious party establishing government on the basis of a tiny margin of votes. Thus, the majority will is represented by only a marginal vote. As a single majority constituency determines the outcome of elections, large parties with organised political structures gain more seats than their share of votes warrants. Therefore, it does not necessarily follow that these governments are genuine representatives of an overwhelming majority. This

situation undoubtedly leads to the so-called ‘tyranny of the majority’ which has been the principal evil of Third World governance.

When an elected government begins to increase its power over its constituency, resistance to the proposed reforms often emerges from the opposition. This is particularly related to ethno-cultural demands of the minorities. The opposition’s demands for concession are often called a ‘betrayal of the nation’, triggering a rigid nationalism within the majority group. On the other hand, a rising minority resistance always invites the central government to consolidate its authority, often alongside a massive growth of militarism and a restriction of civil liberties.\(^{158}\) The ‘goal’ of the state then becomes not the process of constitutional liberalism, but on the contrary its own survival. Such a goal is not conducive to the sustaining of democracy. Constitutional amendments, the restriction or banning of political parties, a limitation of the freedom of the media may also follow. These draconian acts to crush uprisings, riots and insurrections are the most pervasive means in pursuing this goal.\(^{159}\)

In this context it is pertinent to comment on the role of the elite. The elite is the vehicle of the people’s will in a liberal democratic system. However, due to the particular mechanisms of Third World democracy, elite participation in the political process often results purely in competition for the vote, a competition which often involves a mass of undemocratic elements. With main objective being the acquisition of power, elites in developing countries often resort to stirring up sensitive elements such as nationalism, religion or language, in order to win an election. Third World countries, where socio-economic divisions have been tightly linked to traditional (primordial) cleavages, are inherently vulnerable to those appeals - which political elites often utilise with enormous success. As Gupta said of the Indian situation,

> ‘All political parties in India have perfected the art of keeping alive the sectional interests of the minorities, backward classes, and the tribes in order to win their support during the elections.’\(^{160}\)


\(^{159}\) Gupta, op. cit., p. 162.

\(^{160}\) Gupta, ibid.
As a result, various states have identified themselves with the religion and language of a particular community - often with the majority community, the community which creates major contradiction in the democratic process. Thus, the acceptance of the majority will has created an impression of a homogeneity of societies which are far from homogeneous. In doing this, those states create a divisive environment, paving the way to further tension.

Finally, another significant element, bearing closely on the process of illiberal democracy in the Third World, might be called 'hegemonic fear'. A perceived or real threat to state security, emanating from regional members, may severely dampen the process of democracy in a state. Unlike Western democracies, Third World states have been surrounded by similar kinds of quasi-democratic states. Regional powers often attempt to impose pressure on weaker states, in order to contain them within the sphere of their influence. This factor inevitably leads those smaller governments to resort to excessive militarisation and discrimination of certain sectors of society, which in turn creates an atmosphere of hostility and cleavage. Another aspect of the same problem is the attitude of the international community towards those hegemonies. While hegemony cannot be liberal democracy in the purist sense, the international community's recognition of those states (as democratic) and the reliance upon the role they play in their regions, may severely dampen the democratic process.

Therefore one can argue that it is not the political structures of liberal democracy which have undermined the development or the social progress of the Third World, but the inability of the political leadership to sustain the spirit of liberal democratic ideals in practice. In other words, the application of liberal democratic ideals in the Third World has not been a substantial success and has caused many social ills. While maintaining token features of democratic structures, such as a constitution, universal franchise, regular elections and so on, countries of the Third World have not been able to consolidate the institutional structures and the spirit of liberal democracy. On the contrary, they have been mutating into variants of democracy, not much different from authoritarianism.

Furthermore, it is fair to say that it not the economic inadequacies that hamper the process or obstruct the sustaining liberal democracy in developing countries. Quite the contrary, the lack of democracy has been a major barrier to the Third World overcoming their economic problems. In 1990 a Conference for Africa, under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, adopted an 'African
Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation’ which forwarded a similar argument. That document stated that ‘the absence of democracy is the primary cause of the chronic crisis in Africa’.161 Similarly, in April 1990 the World Bank President signalled to ‘better governance as the primary requirement for economic recovery in Africa’.162

Robert Dahl makes a valuable observation about democracy when he writes that ‘there is no democracy in its perfect form in the world’.163 In reference to that statement, it is time to review and reassess the weight and the quality of Third World democracies. When the massive distortions and deviations of those states conventionally regarded as democracies are profiled they seem highly undemocratic. A world expecting to promote progress in material and humanist terms, must make an accurate assessment of those illiberal democracies which have turned into vast arenas of violence and injustice. Thus it is argued here, that a false legitimisation of Third World illiberal democracies (as democratic) is currently at the heart of the problem, internally and internationally.

The final section of this discussion is related to a conceptual analysis of the devolution of power. Devolution can be identified as one of the most prominent components of liberal democracy. In the context of widespread ethnic conflicts, the value of devolution has increased immensely. Regional autonomies and the empowerment of local bodies at various levels have proven that those measures can effectively deliver justice and empower dissenting groups, releasing tension and creating an environment conducive to social harmony. Nevertheless this device has not always been successful. Thus a consideration of certain critical aspects of devolution which have a direct bearing on the case study will follow.

Devolution and Ethnic Conflict - Magic Formula?

In order to understand the nature and function of devolution, it is appropriate to begin the discussion with some definitional analysis of the term. In the existing literature on the subject there is no unanimity in the definition of devolution. As John Osmond claimed:

162 Ibid.
'the politics of devolution are to a larger extent obscured, some would say deliberately obscured, by the language that has been devised to embrace the question.'

The generally accepted meaning of the word 'devolution' is, as some commentators suggested, an empowerment of the people in the locality by employing various strategies. However, in a broader sense devolution encompasses the reviewing and restructuring of the existing patterns of political authority and relations between the centre and local ethnic communities, in order to reduce or end the disparities in political, economic and cultural arenas. Thus the main objective of devolution anticipates a refining of the relations between the centre and local community. This has profound implications for the argument offered in this chapter, that devolution is a vital element in establishing liberal democracy.

Enoch Powell's analysis of the subject makes an interesting contribution to the debate. He admits that:

'devolution is not the same as the transfer of power; it is the opposite; power devolved is power retained, and that retention is the very reason which makes devolution acceptable and possible.'

According to this argument, the devolution of power from the centre to the periphery means a distribution of power from where it has accumulated. In that sense devolution takes a kind of an authoritarian form. A distribution of power to where it is entitled must be the way community empowerment takes place. Thus, in order for diverse societies to be democratic and just, local communities, particularly ethno-

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166 A blueprint for civic peace in multiethnic states by power sharing or consociational democracy is proposed by Arend Lijphart which suggests that if ethnic conflict is a result of the exclusive politics of the ruling powers, the way to limit the differences can be through employing inclusive politics. See for a detailed analysis Arend Lijphart, 'Consociational Democracy', *World Politics*, vol. 21, no. 2 January 1969.
territorial units, must be entitled to control their own resources and run their own affairs.

In this sense, devolution bears heavily indeed on the liberal democratic ideal. The fundamental principle of liberal democracy envisages that each and every individual and community have the right to exercise fundamental freedoms and must be treated as equals. The practice of a devolution of power to ethno-territorial units may provide a greater degree of freedom and flexibility for those communities to make decisions in order to achieve their aspirations and goals. In his insightful work on the devolution of power, Jonathan Lemco attempted to list the conditions under which devolution may become imperative as a means of diffusing differences between the centre and the locality.

1. The desire of a local community for political independence
2. The presence of territorial or spatial divisions of power
3. The desire of a group for economic independence
4. Heightened differences in the ethnic, religious or linguistic outlook of a local group
4. The influence of the history, myth or beliefs attached to the territoriality
5. The character of political leadership
6. The existence of older models of federal union
7. Pragmatism, the need for administrative efficiency
8. The influence of role models which have successfully applied devolution.\textsuperscript{168}

Looking at this list, the significance of ethnicity to the subject of devolution becomes apparent. It has been pointed out that ethnicity is one of the major group categories within the wider society and is often the rallying force behind claims made by particular elements in communities. Linguistic and religious differences, longstanding historical and even mythical attachments to the territory, and economic and resource related aspects of ethno-territorial communities may be the bases of certain demands for greater freedom. In fact, these demands may often take intensified forms when those communities feel that centralised control has been the main obstacle for the achievement of their desired goals. The theory of neo-internal colonialism posits that

the centralised control may trigger regional and ethno-territorial dissent.\textsuperscript{169} Cultural discrimination, particularly in relation to language, religion and traditional values, economic deprivation, and resource exploitation, may create tension between the centre and the periphery. This was the case in Ethiopia where the Amhara group, which dominated political power, exerted Amhara culture as the basis of the formation of the Ethiopian state.\textsuperscript{170} In the context of the Arab domination of the state in Sudan, deep religious and linguistic differences between Arab and African ethnic groups became entrenched in a decade long war.\textsuperscript{171} Therefore, it is contended that devolution should be considered to be a device with which to adjust and reshape such distortions in order to achieve consensus within diverse societies.

The debate over devolution often hinges on the antagonism between two central concepts in contemporary political terminology. Those conflicting principles are: the concept of the unitary state and that of a traditional homeland. In accordance with the international law, the contemporary state is sovereign and has the power to control and define territorial units. Thus, a fundamental element involved in this sovereignty is that of territorial integrity, which implies the inviolability of its territorial unity both from within and from the outside. However contemporary plural societies, which are ethno-nationally diverse, often encounter ethno-territorial disputes to varying degrees. The bases of such disputes are related to ethnicity and territory and are often associated with the concept of a traditional homeland. This clash of concepts fuels all the ongoing intrastate conflicts, of which Kashmir, Chechnya, and the recent war in Kosovo are but a few examples.\textsuperscript{172} While the debate over the authenticity of ownership of the land is central to both the unitary and the homeland concept, many believe that contemporary ethnic disputes are mainly due to the incompatibility of those concepts with the liberal democratic principle of the political system. Although the unitary concept has often been associated with democracy, in reality due to the fact of over-centralisation unitariness has been the major obstacle to democratic principles. Often, the interventionist role of the central state mechanism has caused a marginalisation of ethno-territorial communities, damaged the ethno-cultural traits


\textsuperscript{171} T. Gurr, \textit{Ethnic Conflict in World Politics}, Boulder, Westview, 1994, p. 25

and dampened the socio-economic life of those groups. The inevitable result has been the deep discontent of ethno-national communities, which in turn arise as a counter force confronting the state. The rejection of Parnell’s Irish Home Rulers in the 1880s laid the basis for the disintegration of the Union in 1921. Indeed, the further exacerbation of ethnic conflict in Northern Ireland was intrinsically linked to the adherence of the British rule to the principle of unitary government over its ethnically diverse regions. As one analyst asserted, the fundamental cause for the possible break up of the United Kingdom would not be the Labour Parties intention to devolve power but, rather, the Conservatives attitude towards rigid centralism. Many ethnic conflicts in the Third World today can also be considered to be the result of the failure of governments to offer a timely response to continued demands, by ethno-territorial authorities, for empowerment.

Devolution - Alternative to Unitary State

Indeed the degree of devolution can vary from place to place in accordance with the intensity of the demands and the politico-historical background attached to each particular case. As some commentators suggest, the impetus for administrative reforms is not merely a result of ethnic upheavals.

‘The assertion that there is a link between a particular form of government and social or economic development was replaced by the more technical, apolitical proposition that the important variable was ‘governance’, interpreted as the processes by which economic and social matters are managed, and the capacity of institutions to manage them fairly, rationally and predictably.’

Among the many contemporary variants of devolution of power federalism has become one of significant importance. The strongest imperative of the federal system

174 Ibid.
is the creation of a political entity in which the centre and the localities share power to an extent which is conducive to political and socio-economic progress in the state. Thus it is no surprise that federalism is often considered to be a philosophy of 'diversity in unity'. However, federalism emerges from a pluralist approach which recognises diversity as an integral part of human society. Therefore, the need for the accommodation of that diversity is accepted as a fundamental right. The classical pluralist theory of J.S. Mill asserts that the presence of strong local institutions enhances the political process of pluralist democracy. As one of the most prominent scholars of the subject, Daniel Elazar, claimed, federation is

'a polity compounded of strong constituent entities and a strong general government, each possessing powers delegated to it by the people and empowered to deal directly with the citizenry in the exercise of those powers.'

Furthermore, the basic definition of federalism according to K.C.Wheare's groundbreaking work 'Federal Government' of 1946 states that

'federalism is the method of dividing powers so that the general and regional governments are each, within a sphere, co-ordinated and independent'.

Thus federalism presupposes a sharing of power by both the centre and local authorities, in order to deal with various issues pertained to them. Therefore, depending upon the differing character and degree of the powers allocated to the governing bodies the degree of the devolution may vary.

However, the most prominent element of federalism is the degree of independence that each segment of the government enjoys. At the same time, despite their freedom and independence, all segments of the federalist government are inter-dependent. In

practice, it is the balance of these two major features, namely the notion of independence and of inter-dependence, which determines the effectiveness of the system. The balance between the freedom and responsibilities of central and local governments depends upon the degree of centralisation and de-centralisation. There are various mechanisms for this process. Among these mechanisms, legal instruments such as the reform of constitutional relationships, legislative executive powers and legal powers, administrative structures, and finally, financial and economic structures, are considered to be integral elements. Jonathan Lemco asserts that

'federal nation-states can concentrate power and authority in large central governments while diffusing the exercise of powers so as to give most, if not all, segments of society a constitutionally guaranteed share in the governing process'

As long as federalism is intimately linked with the notion of territoriality it provides a 'constitutionalised legal contract' for the territorial segments of the state to administrate and manage certain freedoms and responsibilities. In doing so, it inevitably generates an environment where the domination of majority rule, or more precisely, centralised rule is unworkable.

Thus the key phrase for federalism, and the devolution of power as a whole, is 'freedom and responsibility' which is the fundamental principle of liberal democracy. While people are free to exercise their rights in liberal democracies, they also have responsibilities to the common good. Bringing this formula to a consideration of devolution, it can be seen that devolution must involve the perfect marriage of these two aspects, in order to genuinely participate in the democratic spirit of power sharing.

In the case of ethno-territorial federalism, this is a mechanism through which ethnically distinct regions may be empowered with more political and economic

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183 Ibid., p. 3.
rights in administration and decision making. At the same time, federalism provides an opportunity to ensure the protection of specific ethno-cultural elements, which may have been endangered by a centralised state system. The federal system allows for more flexibility in respect to the practice of language or religious rights within regions, facilitating the protection and preservation of traditional and cultural elements or values. Re-examining the issues which cause tension in inter-ethnic relations the federal system provides the space in which to devise innovative forms to diffuse and often settle ethnic conflicts. The recent example of Scottish and Welsh devolution, with an indigenous parliament established by referendum, illustrates the modifying potential of regional power sharing structures in regard to ethno-national demands. Similarly, the Spanish Constitution provided steadily increasing power to regional authorities addressing the demands of ethnic groups. Furthermore, the Canadian example vividly demonstrates the varying nature of devolution. The demands of Quebec nationalism have been responded to by constitutional power sharing to an extent which allows it to have overseas trade and consulate offices of its own. Thus it can be said that there is no exact formula for the devolution process. It all depends upon the specific situation and conditions of ethnic conflict. However, it appears to be the case that the longer the grievances persist, the stronger the demands will be, and the satisfaction of those demands will require a more extensive degree of power sharing.

There is no uniform consensus on how much power must be conferred to each administrative body. It is generally argued that the degree of power delivered can be varied depending upon the circumstances. While the state tends to retain more power, the natural tendency of local government is to extend its own claims for power. Genuine federalism is a balance of such bargaining, arriving at a solid consensus. However, it is worth noting that some commentators believe that benefits from the power sharing gamble must always accrue to central government. Jonathan Lemco is categorical about this, stating that

‘it appears that all successful federations have retained a strong central government influence while retaining weaker levels of constituent autonomy. For most successful federations, leaders of constituent units have been
convinced that their best interests will be served if they give up some independence for the sake of the federation as a whole' \(^\text{186}\).

Nevertheless it must be added that the success of the federal solution to long-standing ethno-territorial disputes is not solely dependent upon the proportion of powers and duties. Those aspects will be covered in later discussion.

A bold alternative to majoritarian democracy proposed by Arend Lijphart is widely known as consociationalism. The main tenet of consociationalism conceives of power sharing assured by mutual accommodation and compromise between divided groups. \(^\text{187}\) The perceived framework is formulated in such a way that while power is constituted by a grand coalition of all segments of an ethnically divided society minority rights are protected through mutual veto. Thus the suggested scheme prevents a political domination by the ethnic majority. Providing the opportunity for all the ethnic groups in a society to share political power, the scheme of consociationalism allows every segment of the society to take part in the political decision making process. Retention of the authority to make decisions over issues critical for a particular ethnic group through devolution prevents a majority domination which could create a cleavage between minorities and majority.

The prototype of the concept of consociationalism is associated with the power sharing mechanism operative in Switzerland. A system of cantons, underpinned by linguistic and religious affiliation, has been conceptualised in such a way that each ethnically differing group within the federal system has the overwhelming authority to make decisions over critical issues pertaining to their community. At the same time, a conglomerate of regional powers in the central government with equal rights has effectively managed to establish a sense of unity and equality. \(^\text{188}\) In addition, in New Zealand the process of affirmation of Maori rights by various legal regulations - such as the Maori Land Act and the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal - can also be considered to be a good example of consociational policy. \(^\text{189}\) Thus the inclusion of diversity is at the heart of the concept of consociationalism. Aimed at avoiding ethno-

\(^{186}\) Janathan Lemco, op. cit., p. 16.


centrism, this principle enhances a spirit of the recognition of differences and the ability for those differences to act equally in the political atmosphere.

Constraints to Devolution

However, fulfilling the promise of devolution as an alternative to more centralised government is not always an easy task. Northern Ireland’s conflict between Catholics and Protestants would serve as a classic case in point. Disagreements have consistently hampered devolutionary proposals. However, the crux of the argument posed during this discussion is that the concept of devolution presupposes the creation of ‘dual loyalty’ within the state. While devolution promotes ethno-regional affiliations, economic and political powers for the local communities, the other objective of decentralisation is to forge a strong loyalty towards the central state government. It is fair to say that many Western democracies have, undoubtedly, been able to achieve this goal to a certain degree. Examples such as Switzerland and USA confirm this. However, it has been evident that the accomplishment of this goal has been far from trouble free in the developing world.

According to Ronald Watts the success of a devolution of power depends upon a range of factors. Analysing the optimal conditions for the devolution process, Watts presents a list of variables such as:

‘the size, number, and internal homogeneity of the provincial units, the distribution of legislative and executive responsibilities and financial resources, the machinery of inter-governmental consultation and co-operation, the way regional groups are represented in the institutions of the central government and the flexibility of the political institutions in adapting to changing needs’\(^{190}\)

These are the essential elements on which success depends. Furthermore, Stewart points out that uncertainty or ambiguity about the respective roles of the actors

involved in devolution bargaining, poor communication and organisational mismatch may often become serious hurdles for the process of devolution.\(^{191}\)

It must be noted that in the situation of ethnic conflicts there may be particular impediments to the success of the project of devolution. Heightened ethno-nationalist divisions often diminish the significance of power sharing. In the first place, the spirit of devolution is about compromise and consensus. When groups are fighting on the basis of ethno-nationalist aspirations these ideas become extraneous. Thus, it is always difficult to convince ethno-nationalist movements to give up extremist demands and to discuss pragmatic and workable power sharing arrangements.

On the other hand, it may be the state which is unwilling to compromise and relinquish the ideal of a unitary state. Again this could be due to the political leaders’ affiliation with a strong ethno-nationalist ideology, or a simply the manipulation of nationalism to please their political constituency. As has been previously mentioned, it is often the case that partisan politics in the developing world entice political leaders to utilise social cleavages in the interests of their immediate agendas. Furthermore, elements alien to liberal democracy, such as authoritarianism, limit the spirit of and opportunity for devolution. In other instances, even though the central government and ruling authorities may be open to power sharing as a solution, and the dissenting ethnic group is also amenable, the government is not always able to implement the scheme. This may be the case if opposition political parties block moves to devolution. In plural societies opposition parties often take a stand against power-sharing projects for political expediency, utilising the issue as a platform from which to contest elections. Particularly in the circumstances of heightened ethnic tensions, devolution can easily be portrayed as a betrayal of the nation, or as a giving up of part of the state to some opposing ethnic group. Nationalists often consider devolution to be the first step toward separation. Thus under these circumstances elements of parliamentary democracy, such as electoral competition, become constraints upon the decentralisation of power. For the sake of political survival, governments may retreat from, or repeal, devolutionary propositions. Thus, the more the polity is fragmented, the weaker the chance of achieving consensus within the democratic framework. Undoubtedly, this can be a serious obstacle to political settlement through a scheme of

devolution. In addition, it must be mentioned that nationalist pressure groups, ethnic elites as well as ethnic diaspora can become strong impediments to devolutionary projects in the context of high-tension ethnic conflicts.

Apart from those extreme instances, there are various situations which impede the devolution of power. The dialogue between the parties involved in devolutionary proposals often stalls over which specific issues are to be devolved or retained. While governments tend to readily devolve cultural and social elements to ethno-territorial units, powers over land, defence, police, foreign affairs, investments are more strongly disputed and controversial. A project of devolution may easily get bogged down in any of these issues, unless the parties are capable of flexibility and compromise. The recurrent break down of the peace process between Israel and Palestine over critical issues such as land, capital, and political prisoners, offers a good example. Again, the precarious nature of the Good Friday Agreement, which envisaged a political settlement to the protracted conflict in Northern Ireland, is hampered and continuously upset by various parties and factions of both the Ulster Unionists and the IRA.

Devolution is heavily constrained in ethnically mixed or territorially incongruent territorial units. If the ethnic group is widely dispersed or population pockets are scattered across a state, the formulation of schemes capable of satisfying all parties becomes extremely difficult.

Ultimately, the standard of economic development and the political culture of a state are significant factors in the implementation of devolution. The higher the standard of political culture, the greater the possibility for successful implementation of decentralising reforms. A strong attachment to pluralist and multi-cultural political traditions as a fundamental principle of liberal democracy reliably facilitates the delivery of control and the restructuring of state authority. On the other hand, economically weak and unstable states have less potential to successfully implement a devolution of power.

However, the most important element in this process is the genuine will and commitment of the political leadership. As the agent of the people and the promoter of the democratic values, the state bears the greatest responsibility for creating an environment of compromise and consensus. The political leadership must champion those values.
Finally, it must be said that devolution is not a panacea, and it is erroneous to regard devolution as the only solution to ethnic conflict. As the origin of ethnic conflict is complex, the solutions may also be multiple and complicated. Along with power sharing, economic prosperity, the alleviation of poverty, and the elimination of unemployment and social exclusion should go hand in hand to affirm not only the separate ethnic groups, but also the society as a whole. Only that two way process can eventually lead to eventual social harmony.

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CHAPTER III

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF ETHNIC CONFLICTS

Introduction

Increasing globalisation has been further intensified by the post-Cold War political changes. Apart from the extended economic, social and cultural activities, the post-Cold War era has witnessed a steady increase in political interaction between states, regions and the world at large. However, the most important aspect of state/international community relations associated with post-Cold War developments is related to intervention. Undoubtedly, there has been a steady rise of outside intervention in internal affairs currently giving rise to a range of controversies. If the involvement of outside actors in internal affairs during the Cold War era was strictly defined by ideological parameters, post-Cold War developments bear witness to the emergence of new factors determining this domain. One such factor in the new era is a humanitarian compulsion, which has revolutionised a whole array of outside intervention in internal affairs. In its relatively short history, the post-Cold War period has demonstrated that the world is no longer prepared to be confined to conventional international regulations as far as human rights are concerned. The actions of the international community with regard to internal conflicts in the Balkans and East Timor provide vivid evidence that human rights issues can compel the outside world to intervene in so-called domestic conflicts, even in arbitrary forms.

The tendency is certainly consonant with the promotion of liberal democracy as a mode of conflict resolution, suggested in this thesis. It has become clear that world peace and harmony are impossible without concerted action by the wider international community. Thus swift and correct action and reaction by the international community to internal conflicts is essential to sustain the quality of democracy. In this

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sense the international community’s role in monitoring and scrutinising state democracy has taken new shapes and forms in the post-Cold War era.

Nevertheless, these new developments are not without contradictions. With the increasing role of the international community in intrastate conflicts in recent years, there has been an unparalleled increase in controversies attached to those developments. Thus, an analysis of some of the controversies associated with an international perspective on intrastate ethnic conflicts becomes pertinent here. As it has been pointed out, a specific feature of recent developments has been the increase in outside intervention in internal affairs, and the primary motivation has been humanitarian. Nevertheless, an overt disparity in international involvement in internal conflicts is apparent. This disparity evokes the question of whether the international community is biased in the selection of conflicts that are acted upon. While some parts of the world have clearly benefited from the newly emerging humanitarian intervention, other parts of the world remain as isolated as they were in the Cold War era. This disparity evokes the contention that the compelling factor for international involvement in intrastate conflicts might not be humanitarian, but geo-political. The following analysis of the primary modes of outside intervention investigates the defining forces of such involvement in order to shed light on those controversial issues.

The discussion will attend to theoretical aspects of the involvement of outside actors in intrastate conflicts, particularly in regard to ethno-secessionist disputes. While the ways and means by which outside actors become involved in domestic

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conflicts are various, their motivations in such actions are also manifold. This analysis will attempt to examine a wide range of consequences of outside involvement, which largely shape the intensity and character - and often determines the destiny - of such conflicts. The wide range of actions towards intrastate ethno-secessionist conflicts, taken by outside actors, falls into four main groups: encouragement, suppression, reconciliation and non-intervention. An outside party, or parties, may react to domestic conflicts in the above mentioned ways, incorporating a range of devices to achieve numerous motives and objectives. Obviously the reaction may, actively or passively, be focused on one or another party involved in the conflict. The primary objective of the outside actor determines the level of support for, or suppression of, any particular party involved. Since geo-political factors are one of the fundamental drivers of all modes of outside interventions, those factors will be concomitantly examined throughout the analysis. The other aspect of international community that will be analysed is the diasporic community and its important and equally controversial role in the context of intrastate conflicts.

**Outside Intervention and Encouragement of Ethno-Secessionism**

Outside parties may involve themselves in a domestic ethnic dispute by encouraging one or another party to achieve their goals. Sympathy towards a minority struggle may spur actions in support of secessionist movements, while in other cases, outside actors choose to support the central government's attempts to quell a secessionist movement posing a threat to the state. The sympathy and support for any particular party is dependent upon the specific factors motivating outside actors to become involved in the dispute. Those motivating factors can be divided into two main categories, humanitarian and instrumental. In some cases, outsiders may become involved in a conflict due to humanitarian concerns, whereas in other cases the compelling reason for such action is instrumental. Both humanitarian and instrumental motives, in combination, may also move an outside party to intervene in a conflict.

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Outside encouragement of secessionist groups may arise as a response to humanitarian concerns. A central government’s commission of widespread human rights abuses against a minority group may capture the sympathy of outside parties. Moreover, if the suppression of, and discrimination against, the minority group has been long standing, severe and overt, a third party may provide support to the victimised party for humanitarian reasons. Post-Cold War developments, in particular, provide evidence that human rights have become a highly justifiable reason for outside intervention. The continuous ill-treatment of minorities in undemocratic states often provides moral and legal justification for outside intervention which is aimed at relieving the suffering of the suppressed. Thus, it must be recognised that, at any given time, the international milieu is an important factor in outside actors engagement in domestic conflict. In instances where the character of internal and external politics and the quality of democracy tarnish the reputation of a state, an outside party/parties may become involved in the conflict sympathising with the victimised group.

Outside support may also be attracted depending upon correspondent ethno-national relations across state borders. If the ethnic group under duress has kin in another state, particularly in a neighbouring state, sympathy and support for the combating group from that state is more likely. In such cases the impetus behind that outside support for the secessionist movement is ethnic affinity. The suffering of a co-ethnic group does not permit indifference, and ethnic brethren often become ardent advocates and supporters of a secessionist struggle.

The analysis of instrumental motivation for outside intervention must include geopolitical factors as they play a defining role in third party’s decisions to intervene. The geo-political environment is an expression of the location of the conflict in relation to other states and regions, the size of the country, the availability or absence of resources, the presence or absence of powerful regional organisations, the nature of the political system within the country as well as in the greater region and so on. Thus, the calculation of self-interests - circumscribed by those geo-political realities -


often plays a decisive role in third parties’ support for, or containment of, ethno-nationalist struggles.²⁰³ As Stephen Ryan pointed out, the manifold interests may include both domestic and international political considerations, short and long term economic gains, both internal and external security, and short or long term military advantages.²⁰⁴ If after a cost-benefit analysis of above mentioned elements, an outside state deems it beneficial to involve itself it will support a secessionist movement. The impact of any given domestic conflict on the outside world is largely dependent upon its geographical location. States in closer proximity are more likely to get involved in such conflicts than distant states. The presence of kin ethnic states may also make a tremendous difference to the geo-political environment, adding an emotional element to instrumental motivations. An exodus of refugees, emerging security threats and strategic concerns may lead those kin states to act in support of the secessionist movement. Depending upon the strength of the kin ethnic group as a political constituency, a particular state may make policy decisions which directly reflect on neighbouring ethnic conflict. If the co-ethnic group in the kin state holds a significant balance of power in central government, the likelihood of support for the struggle of an ethnic minority in a neighbouring state is larger. Geographical proximity provides more favourable conditions for a kin state to support separatist groups by sheltering, training and supplying arms.²⁰⁵

A variety of economic and political interests may also serve as instrumental motivations for outside actors to encourage secessionist parties. If an outside state finds that secessionist victory, or the prolonging of battle, will be economically, politically or strategically advantageous, that may provide a motive for supporting the dissident group. As Gurr and Harff have pointed out, states with more economic resources are more likely to be exposed to external intervention in their internal conflicts than relatively poor states.²⁰⁶ Rivalry between states and antipathies between leaders at a personal level may also serve as catalysts for the backing of ethno-secessionist movements. Pressure from within the domestic constituency is another significant factor encouraging third parties to support secessionist movements. Again this factor has a particular relevance to those outside actors accommodating a sizeable

²⁰³ Stephen Ryan, Ethnic Conflict and International Relations, op. cit., p. XVI.
²⁰⁴ Stephen Ryan, ibid.
²⁰⁵ Abeysinghe M. Navaratna-Bandara, Dartmouth, 1995, op. cit., p. 15
ethnic group that have kinship affinities to the struggling group. The more the state is dependent upon that political constituency, the greater the pressure it receives to intervene in the conflict. Thus, a government’s fear of losing power, or jeopardising its political future may compel a state to intervene in such conflicts.

The methods, by which outside actors may encourage secessionism, include politico-diplomatic support as well as direct and indirect material assistance. An outside state may use international media to expose brutal atrocities and continuous state suppression, generating significant sympathy for minority struggles. Similarly, in the diplomatic arena, an outside state may justify the struggle of an ethnic group against an autocratic state, significantly enhancing the strength of that group. Providing sanctuary for rebels and fortifying military capabilities by offering military training, arms, ammunitions and financial support are obviously important elements of separatist struggle.

The direct consequence of intervention by outside parties in support of secessionist groups is the enhancement of that group’s capabilities. On receipt of essential material contributions to a military campaign, ethno-secessionist groups may become strong enough to effectively resist the state and often become a powerful counter force. Furthermore, sympathetic outside states often become the stage from which secessionists may present their grievances to the wider world. With state and non-state support, ethno-nationalist publicity further tarnishes the reputation of the repressive state and bolsters the perception that their struggle is legitimate.

**Outside Intervention and Suppression of Ethno-Secessionism**

The suppression, or discouragement of secessionist movements is another mode of external intervention in domestic ethnic conflict. This discussion will now discuss the ways in which outside actor’s support for the central state is integral to this objective. An individual state, a group of states or the international community as a whole may intervene in a domestic ethno-nationalist conflict, suppressing a secessionist group by a variety of means in order to achieve their manifold objectives.\(^{207}\)

As with encouragement, suppression of secessionist movements by outside actors may be driven by humanitarian as well as instrumental motives. If the outside actor,

or actors, are convinced that the principle source of human suffering attached to the conflict stems from secessionist activities, then those actors may consider suppressing the group in order to stop the carnage. Widespread violence and excessive human rights abuses by the ethno-nationalist groups often provides a compelling reason for a third party to take up such a position. Furthermore, if outside actors become convinced that the principle constraint to an amelioration of the conflict is the radical stance of the ethno-nationalist groups, that consideration may also serve as a reason for suppression of those groups.

On the other hand, if a state has been pro-actively engaged in a peace process, which is continuously disrupted by the extreme stance of ethnic militants, outside parties may act in order to weaken and suppress the militant group. In fact even when the state has been the primary cause of the conflict and has demonstrated serious reluctance to offer concessions in the past, any noticeable change of that state’s stance may elicit sympathy towards it. Due to the fact that international community has an intrinsic bias towards the conventional state system, the chances of a complete separation, for the benefit of secessionists, are minimal. The conscious effort on behalf of a state to accommodate minority demands through extensive devolution often becomes a powerful inducement for the international community to alter its position on secessionist movements. Thus the flexibility of a state and its willingness to democratisation the existing political structures encourage outside actors to put pressure on militant ethnic groups to accept the political settlements proposed by the government.

Nevertheless, the more specific motivations for outside actors to intervene in domestic conflicts and discourage or suppress secessionist groups, and to support state actors, are associated with pragmatic or instrumental factors. Actions from the international community in such conflicts are often driven by self-interest. As previously discussed, geopolitics is the defining factor in these instrumental motivations. Depending on the geo-political location, a country plagued with conflict may have a different significance for various external actors, and their responses may differ hugely. The heavy involvement of Western states in domestic

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conflicts in their own regions, as opposed to conflicts in distant and peripheral regions, is often explained as simply the result of geopolitics. In that sense, ethno-secessionist movements, being one of the most pervasive destabilising factors of modern times, often induce outside parties to intervene to prevent, contain or resolve them. Those outsiders may choose to support the government and suppress the secessionists for understandable security and strategic reasons.

Apart from the more overt implications of ethnic conflict for neighbouring states, such as refugee flows and socio-economic destabilisation, these conflicts often invoke the fear of separatism and militancy spreading within their own borders. In such situations, neighbouring states fear an infiltration by militants and a spread of separatist ideologies which may trigger similar challenges in their own states. States with a fragile ethno-communal unity are particularly vulnerable to such situations. Furthermore the overlapping of ethnic links across state borders often compels governments to become extra cautious and may lead them to support the neighbouring government against the confrontational group. Often states do not welcome the emergence of a new state in close proximity because of future strategic uncertainty. Therefore, states often tend to support governments as opposed to separatist groups. Due to this fact, states that were once sympathetic to a secessionist movement may radically change their stance on the ethno-nationalist group when an escalation of fighting increases the potential of separatism.

Humanitarian concerns may also become compelling instrumental reasons for outside actors to make drastic changes in their stance on ethnic separatists. Current developments associated with terrorism provide a case in point. The noticeable interest of the international community in ethnic conflicts, and their involvement in suppressing ethno-militarist groups, is not merely due to a humanitarian concern with the suffering attached to terrorism. On the contrary, this newly emerging interest is related to the serious security threat terrorism poses to the global community.²¹¹

Today ethno-nationalist struggles are no longer confined within their state borders. In fact terrorism, in its international form, has become the prime mode of exporting domestic conflicts to the global arena.²¹² While terrorism has long been used as a

²¹² 'International terrorism may refer broadly to any terrorist violence that has international repercussions, or to acts of violence which are outside the accepted norms of international diplomacy
device to achieve the goal of separatism by the secessionists, today that method has extended out into the wider world in order to magnify its effectiveness. Terrorism in both its internal and international forms has one prime aim - to mobilise all possible configurations in support of their struggle. As Walter Laqueur said, a terrorist for one is always a freedom fighter for another.²¹³

If terrorism, in general, is a means of weakening the enemy, international terrorism has more diverse objectives. There is no doubt that ethno-terrorists attacks on foreign soils target their political and militant rivals. By eliminating them they attempt to consolidate their position in the freedom fight. Ethno-secessionists often focus their attacks on foreign rivals who support the oppressive government and suppress their movement in various manners.²¹⁴

However the most common objective of international terrorism is one of publicity - the shocking events calling attention to the struggle. Jenkin provides this definition of terrorism:

"the threat of violence, individual acts of violence, or a campaign of violence designed primarily to instil fear- to terrrise- may be called terrorism. Terrorism is violence for effect: not only, and sometimes not at all, for the effect on the actual victims of the terrorists. In fact, the victim may be totally unrelated to the terrorist's cause. Terrorism is violence aimed at the people watching. Fear is the intended effect, not the by-product of terrorism."²¹⁵

Instilling fear internationally, terrorists hold that their acts are committed in the name of their prime goal: achieving a separate state or gaining concessions from an oppressive state. The intensification of terrorism in the world arena often puts pressure on a particular state. Terrorists believe that by exposing the nature of the state they may compel it to concede to their demands. At the same time, they may also believe that the continuous terror may encourage the world community to pressure the state into making concessions to the separatists. The series of terrorist activities

²¹³ Walter Laqueur, The Age of Terrorism, op. cit., p. 5.
carried out by the PLO in the 1970s, aimed at spreading the threat and forcing concessions from the confronting party. Indeed, terrorism attracts the world media and opens up a wide audience for separatist groups to present their grievances. As Walter Laqueur said in this regard, the ‘media are a terrorist’s best friend.’

Widespread terrorist activities attached to ethno-secessionist movements have become a common occurrence around the world today as ethno-terrorists export their dreadful activities in order to achieve the above-mentioned goals. Frequent mass killings by suicide bombing in public places, the assassination of political leaders, kidnapping, hijacking, hostage taking and many similar activities have been a compelling reason for the world community’s rising attention to this new phenomenon. The proliferation of the illicit arms trade, drug trafficking and human smuggling, which has today become an integral part of international terrorism, also needs mentioning. While those activities have escalated conflicts within the countries of their origin, they also pose a grave threat to the security of the global community. International ethno-terrorist groups have created a sophisticated network through which they generate finance, exchange intelligence and information, and provide military assistance to each other making those groups as strong as state members in the international system.

As it has been pointed out, the dramatic rise in the activities of international terrorist groups in recent years has compelled outside actors to take various measures to suppress ethno-separatist movements. Individual states, groups of states, regional organisations and international organisations currently show an unprecedented enthusiasm for combating terrorism. In this light it is important to take note of the UN Security Council’s adoption of a resolution on combating terrorism and the US government’s designation of some 30 groups as international terrorist groups. International conferences and symposiums dedicated to international terrorism are now commonplace too, illustrating the growing interest in, and concern over, the threat posed by this new phenomenon.

218 The resolution which unequivocally condemns all terrorist acts as ‘criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivation’ calls all countries to adopt and implement treaties against international terrorism. SL Net News Report, 19 October 1999.
219 It is important to note that the 14th Symposium on International Terrorism was held in September 1999 in Colombo, Sri Lanka where terrorism and international terrorism were related to the ongoing
There is no doubt that outside intervention in the suppression of ethnic separatism is a result of a rapidly changing world perception of international relations and the role of state and non-state actors. If a decade ago the world community enthusiastically welcomed the emergence of new states, today the general tendency is a noticeable reluctance to countenance the fragmentation of existing state systems. The world community is becoming more and more convinced that the promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights must not bring the world into a chaotic division of states. Instead, the new approach emerging within the international community holds that the empowerment of regional authorities and the accommodation of rights of minorities must be achieved through effective new political reforms within the state. Indeed, the direct effect of this new approach in world opinion has been to discourage secessionist movements and to support states embattled by such movements. This drastic change of world opinion has often resulted in states, previously sympathetic to secessionist groups, distancing themselves from those causes. Pragmatic calculations made by such states may reshape their stance on secessionist movements in order to prevent international isolation and resentment from the rest of the world. Therefore, if the world community overwhelmingly supports a state’s fight for survival against a separatist movement, even outside actors sympathetic to insurgents may change their attitude.

The ways and means by which outside actors intervene in order to suppress ethno-nationalist movements and support state authorities may include a direct condemnation of violence committed by militant groups, banning their activities in international arena, and urging them to accept political settlements suggested by the government. As a direct result of this, ethno-secessionist groups often loose their previous supporters and the provision of material assistance and moral support for their movements. The distancing of the previously sympathetic outside actors, without a doubt, weakens the strength of those groups. In addition, outside actors may become supportive of the incumbent government, reasserting the recognition of their sovereignty and territorial integrity, and providing economic aid and intelligence information to combat the separatists.

ethnic conflict. That three day symposium organised under the auspices of the International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol) was focused on the terrorist organisations, activities outside the states, financing and other related matters and attracted nearly 100 delegates from 34 countries, including US, Britain, France, Germany and China. SL Net News Report, 28 September 1999.
This pattern clearly disadvantages ethno-separatist groups. Cut off from previous support bases, militant groups must seek new sources to sustain their struggle. This factor has a direct effect on the durability and capability of an insurgent groups armed struggle. More importantly, the loss of politico-diplomatic support from the outside world weakens their mobility and ability to engage in international activities. A proscription by the outside world, as in the case of international terrorists, handicaps those groups who lose massive support from state agencies and are incapable of mobilising strong expatriate communities. A sole reliance on the support of similar clandestine groups becomes a serious problem for a separatist group’s military campaign against the state. Conversely, politico-diplomatic recognition and logistical support strongly boost the capabilities of the state to thwart the threat posed by ethno-national insurgencies. Often international acknowledgement of a states legitimacy as a sovereign entity encourages that state to expand a military campaign against separatists, intensifying the war and causing serious human suffering. Thus, with outside support the central state clamps down on any activities of the separatist group in foreign states, reducing their chances of secession.

Although as a whole the suppression of a separatist group by outside actors seems to result in the weakening of their activities, leading to a decline of the movement, it can be hypothesised that for certain reasons such a situation may also invigorate separatist activities. First of all, the sudden distancing and change of attitude of previously sympathetic parties may evoke staunch resentment and antagonism, resulting in retaliation and revenge as a part of the activities of the group. Violent and terrorist activities in that case may target not only the central state or the counter ethnic group, but also those outside states. On the other hand, due to proscription and condemnation by the outside world, solidarity between those banned groups often becomes stronger and leads to closer cooperation. Under these circumstances separatism and terrorism may become the binding ideology of those clandestine groups who attempt to achieve their goal with collective and cooperative efforts.220

Outside Intervention and Reconciliation

Another mode of intervention by outside actors in ethnic conflicts is intervention with the aim of reconciliation. A state or a non-state party may become involved in order to bring antagonistic groups together to establish peace. As with support and suppression, reconciliation may also be stimulated by both humanitarian and instrumental motive. If the third party perceives that the tremendous human suffering involved in prolonged conflict, particularly in the case of war, must be ended then humanitarian motivations may drive such a party to enter into the conflict. Thus the termination of humanitarian catastrophe and destruction is one principle motive of intervenors in such conflicts. The presence of kin ethnic groups may also invoke intervention in an outside conflict. In this case a kin state may become involved in order to bring antagonistic parties together in search of a peaceful solution, or to act as an arbitrator and the peacekeeping force. As a result of an overall rise in the awareness of human rights, particularly in the post-Cold War period, outside actors are reluctant to remain aloof in the face of massive humanitarian suffering caused by ethnic conflicts. In this context, it is more likely that an individual state or a global organisation would intervene in order to bring about peace. The failure of previous actors to settle a conflict also drives other actors to intervene in the peace process. If, during the Cold War, domestic conflicts were generally regarded as internal affairs, or at best treated as matters of regional powers, today there is sufficient evidence of a substantial change in this traditional pattern. Several protracted conflicts have attracted some unconventional participants in the capacity of peace-makers, which can be considered to be a development particular to the post-Cold War era. Indeed, this tendency is still in the early stages of maturation, and is far from comprehensive or all encompassing. Despite several exceptions, many serious conflicts still remain as isolated as they were in the Cold War period. Nevertheless, it is fair to claim that a post-Cold War resurgence of human rights has made a significant impact on attitudes towards domestic conflicts, and outside participation in the reconciliation process is making noticeable progress.

221 Stephen Ryan, Ethnic Conflict and International Relations, Dartmouth, 1995, p. 36.
On the other hand, intervention aimed reconciliation may be motivated by pragmatic intentions.\textsuperscript{222} In fact, most of those pragmatic intentions previously discussed in regard to encouragement and suppression are largely relevant to reconciliation as well. Generally, security threats attached to growing conflicts encourage outside parties to become involved in the capacity of peace-makers. The spill over effect and chain reaction of secessionism attracts neighbouring states to become instrumental in the capacity of peace-broker or peace-maker. Also ethnic kin states may attempt to operate as a conciliator in order to appease their own constituencies who cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of ethnic brethren.

As has been mentioned, reconciliation may involve outside actors in the capacity of negotiator or mediator to bring parties together in peaceful dialogue. In some cases, outside parties may decide on military intervention in order to separate hostile parties. Peacekeeping forces have become a prominent agency in contemporary domestic conflicts where internal wars create a serious threat to civil life and the establishment of lasting peace. In some cases a third party may have to consider military intervention in order to halt the fighting and gradually create a climate conducive to peace and normalcy.

There are a variety of consequences of third party intervention in reconciliation. These consequences vary according to the motivations and methods of intervention. The most obvious objective of such intervention is the establishment of peace. With the facilitation of third party, rival groups may reach some compromise minimising the hostilities. However, past evidence shows that a peace process with third party involvement is not always simple and trouble free. Cases such as Northern Ireland and Palestine bear witness to the that peace processes may be long and difficult. Also, third party involvement may further escalate the conflict and the process of reconciliation. The outcome of third party involvement in reconciliation may depend on the nature of the conflict, the character of the third party and its motivations, and the process of reconciliation itself.

The period of third party intervention may mark a characteristic stage of conflict. In long and drawn-out conflicts third party moderation is more likely to be attractive to both parties, as well as to the outside actor. Prolonged ethnic war exhausts combatants, both physically and morally. An escalating war budget, economic

devastation, continuous violence and the ongoing disruption to civil life often compel states to seek, or accept, third party involvement. For similar reasons, rebels may also accept third party intervention. From the third party’s perspective, it is the intensity of the conflict and the magnitude of destruction that often encourages involvement in the peace process.

The nature of the third party, involved in the reconciliation process, plays an important role in determining the outcome. The recognition of a third party’s role and its acceptability to both actors in the confrontation and to important outside parties, such as neighbouring states, its impartiality, and the program for reconciliation, among other factors, play a vital role in the success or failure of the peace process. The voluntary acceptance of the third party by the warring actors and the genuine intention to end the conflict is essential. If one or all parties consider that third party involvement is an imposition of any sort, the likelihood of the outside intervention bringing about a positive outcome becomes minimal. An acceptance by relevant other outside actors is equally important. The acknowledgement of the third party by neighbouring states, regional members and the wider global community is also vital to a successful outcome. If the intervention of a third party antagonises neighbouring or regional states, the process may be undermined. Hostile elements may use or manipulate the conflicting actors to undermine the role of third party, eventually bringing reconciliation process to a halt. Thus the wider the acceptance and recognition of the role of the third party, the greater the probability for the success of the peace process. By recognising the need for the assistance of that particular third party in establishing peace, the world community can pressure antagonistic parties to stick to the peace process. At the same time, the international community’s consensus on the role of third party provides an extra warrant for it to proceed with the peace process.

The third party must also be considered to be trustworthy by all participants. Its sole motivation must be that of peace. A third party with a hidden agenda may hinder the whole process of establishing peace. Thus, impartiality is fundamental to the role of third party conciliator. The acceptance of the third party by the combatants is also dependent on this factor. Any suspicion of bias seriously undermines the third party’s

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224 Bercovitch, ibid., p. 739.
function. Thus, kin states are seldom a suitable third party in peace negotiations. Furthermore, it is vital that the party, involved in the reconciliation process have a comprehensive knowledge of various dimensions of the conflict, its history, its character and possible future developments. The conciliator must know the strengths and weaknesses of all parties involved in the conflict in order to shape a peace strategy. The reputation of the third party in the international community, its status as a democracy, and its economic strength may also bear, directly or indirectly, on the peace process. Often the financial capability of the intervening party may enable it to entice the combatants with various rewards for concession and compromise. Usually a financially influential third party has more chances of succeeding in establishing peace than a financially weak party.

Third Party and Inaction or Non-intervention

It is not rare to observe foreign states pursing a policy of inaction or non-intervention in relation to domestic ethno-separatist conflict. Despite serious human suffering and negative implications for the regional and global community, some states continue to prefer a policy of inaction in regard to a given conflict. Undoubtedly the policy of non-intervention stems from particular motives and objectives of those states. Often, the inaction is primarily a result of the international normative regime. According to the accepted rules of international relations, the principle of state sovereignty and territorial integrity are fundamental element and runs counter to a policy of foreign intervention. Therefore a state may restrain from intervening in a domestic conflict, regardless how grave the human rights situation, concluding that the matter is purely internal to that particular country.

While geopolitics plays a significant role in pro-active intervention by a third party, it also plays a vital role in reactive intervention, or non-intervention. In other words, while certain states attract third party intervention in their internal conflicts as a result of their geo-political significance, other states may not due to the lack, or absence of it. Again, it is the geo-political factors, such as the strategic importance of the

geographic location, the size of the country, the economic importance of the state, the presence or absence of regional powers and organisations, and the quality of the political structures in the region, that will determine whether an outside actor will intervene in that particular conflict. If outside actors believe that the location of the conflict makes little or no impact on their security and politico-economic interests, it is unlikely that they will give priority to any involvement. These geo-political factors provide a credible explanation for the inconsistency of outside intervention into domestic conflicts in the recent past. The heavy involvement of Western democracies in conflicts in their own regions and the marginal attention paid to the conflicts in other parts of the world vividly illustrates this thesis. The non-intervention, or marginal intervention, of Western states in conflicts in Africa or Asia can only be explained in this manner. Thus, a conflict located in proximity to strategically important areas always attracts outsiders, wary of any destabilisation of their own security, to internal conflicts, whereas a peripheral location results in non-intervention. As a result of this, peripheral states with domestic conflicts are often marginalised or completely neglected. Similarly, in the absence of powerful regional organisations, domestic conflicts in locations surrounded by other states lacking in resources may not attract intervention.

No regional or world community can be possibly engaged, at the same time and in the same way, in all the serious ethnic conflicts that have emerged in recent years. Understandably, the international community must select and prioritise certain conflicts, treating others as secondary issues. Undoubtedly, this categorisation is often flawed. Priority will usually be given to those conflicts considered most relevant to the actors who become engaged. As a result, the world community appears to be biased in the eyes of those states whose internal conflict has been largely ignored by the international community. The mushrooming number of ethnic conflicts is a factor that has contributed to instances of international apathy or inaction over certain conflicts.226

The consequences of inaction and non-intervention almost always lead to the intensification of violence and a deepening of the crisis. Often neglect by third parties gives the central government a free rein to violate human rights. Similarly, non-intervention may encourage rebels to continue a violent campaign and further

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entrench the conflict. Non-intervention may also offer opportunities for separatists to carry out their activities in foreign territories. A further serious consequence of non-intervention by the international community, the developed Western democracies in particular, is that of peripheral states falling prey to regional hegemonies. With ambiguous intentions and, often, overlapping ethno-national relations, the involvement of those regional hegemonies further deepens the conflicts.

**New Tendencies and Controversies of Outside Intervention**

Outside intervention is controversial in its very nature. Regardless of who intervenes and the motivation behind intervention, there will never be a consensus on, or complete acceptance of, outside involvement in an intrastate conflict. However, recent developments in international relations provide ample evidence that outside intervention is becoming an integral part of contemporary world politics, despite the numerous ambiguities and controversies attached to it.\(^{227}\)

The most visible transformation of outside intervention in the post-Cold War era is that of the motives for outside involvement. It is widely believed that the new era has shone a new light on human rights. Even in the relatively brief post Cold War period, human rights have become a pre-eminent reason for outside intervention.\(^{228}\) Some theorists hold that the notion of humanitarian intervention has carved out a new set of principles for the whole array of third party intervention.\(^{229}\) According to this belief, the outside world gets involved in intrastate conflicts in order to alleviate human suffering and prevent human rights abuses. As opposed to vested interests prompting


\(^{229}\) It is argued that humanitarian intervention can be legitimised under the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide which places legal and moral responsibility on states to intervene when humanity is challenged by systematic killing and suppression. See Jane M. O. Sharp, ‘Appeasement, Intervention and Future of Europe’, in Lawrence Freedman (ed.), *Military Intervention in European Conflicts*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1994, pp. 36-41. With the outbreak of violence in East Timor, there were many commentators who under-rated state sovereignty versus human rights. For example, the Netherlands Foreign Minister Jozias Van Aartsen suggested that ‘today we regard it as a generally accepted rule of international law that no sovereign state has the right to terrorise its own citizens’. Quoted in *The New Zealand Herald*, 6 October 1999, p. 19.
the involvement of outside actors in conflicts outside their territories, it is a humanitarian concern which has become the inducement to action.\textsuperscript{230}

In the run up to the Kosovo intervention, X. Solana, the Secretary General of NATO, made the stunning declaration that 'there is little relevance of the state sovereignty as long as human rights are concerned'. This postulate essentially states that as long as human rights violations are concerned the world community will no longer comply with traditional conventions of international relations.\textsuperscript{231} NATO's action in Kosovo and the international community’s response to the conflict in East Timor, are the most explicit demonstrations of this new trend. In both cases, continuous human rights abuses seemingly compelled the outside world to an unprecedented response to domestic conflict.

Controversy over the NATO action in Kosovo was triggered by the arbitrary bombardment that was carried out without UN Security Council approval. From the perspective of outside intervention in the new era, the NATO action provided clear testimony that human rights concerns override the conventional tenets of the international normative regime. At the same time, however, that unprecedented action sparked serious alarm that such actions would bring the international system into utter chaos and disorder. Many member states openly stated that the NATO action marked the beginning of an era in which great powers may impose their rules on weaker states.\textsuperscript{232}

In their view, it was not the human rights issues that attracted the intervention of Western powers, but rather an intention to weaken undesirable states. Thus, they claim that human rights have been used as a pretext in order to exert control over those states and establish the role of a super-power.


\textsuperscript{232} States with internal insurgencies have been expressing grave concern about the growing tendency in outside intervention. At the 2000 UN General Assembly Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh said that 'the tendency increasingly weakens' the sovereignty of the states. Also some foreign ministers from the Arab world called the new tendency as 'a new form of colonialism'. The vehement position taken by states such as China and North Korea further insisted that human rights should not be a concern of outsiders. \textit{The New Zealand Herald}, 'Nations Split over Human Rights Abuse', 6 October 1999.
Proponents of this argument claim that the selectivity of outside intervention attests to the fact that human rights are merely a pretext for Western involvement. In other words the argument holds that the international community has a double standard when it comes to selecting which human rights abuses count, a position confirming that the motives for outside intervention are ambiguous. While after the Cold War the attention to the protection of human rights has been directed at states in Eastern Europe and the former socialist bloc, equally serious domestic conflicts in Asia, Africa and Latin America have been totally neglected. The representative of the Ghana based Centre for Conflict Resolution expressed his dismay at the ‘Hague Appeal for Peace’ by saying that ‘there are conflicts in Sierra Leone, Angola and many other African countries, but there seems to be no positive reaction from the international community to resolve them’. South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu expressed his disappointment at the selectiveness of the international community, adding that ‘one of the things to acknowledge is that the world is racist’. In the view of the contenders for outside intervention in the new era, the most pervasive and compelling reason for such actions has been geo-political interests, not human rights. The heavy engagement of Western states in conflicts in their own backyard and the clear neglect of similar conflicts in various other parts of the world has been offered as the proof of this claim. According to this argument, the issue of human rights has in the new era been used by members of the international community to achieve their geo-political ambitions.

There is a strong controversy attached to the issue of what constitutes legitimate intervention in any given conflict. There is no consensus as to which individual state, or group of states, should intervene in domestic conflicts. As discussed above, it is often the most directly affected state that becomes involved in order to secure its own interests. However, past experience shows that intervention by states with vested interests often deepens conflicts and creates further obstacles to resolution. Furthermore, the endorsement and acceptance of intervention by states with ambiguous geo-political interests has been one of direct causes of the prolongation of

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some conflicts. In the past, the international community’s lack of scrutiny of the motivations of intervening states has partly been a result of Cold War realities. The overriding concerns of bipolar competition often diminished the importance of domestic conflicts. At the same time, within the context of the Cold War, where communism was regarded as the worst evil, a democratic status qualified some states as legitimate actors in outside intervention. Nevertheless, the outcome of those interventions stands as evidence that the success or failure of outside intervention is heavily dependent upon the status of democracy of the intervening state. This status strongly determines the motivations behind such actions. Therefore, the international community’s approval and authorisation of a given party’s outside intervention comes into question. The regional bias of the great powers’ selection of conflicts, and the marginalisation of peripheral conflict as a matter for regional actors, remains a significant and controversial issue upon which the future of those protracted conflicts is strongly depends.

Apart from an imbalance in the presence of democracies which might promote stability and harmony in various parts of the world, the lack of credible and capable regional organisations must also be considered to be a serious obstacle to outside intervention in some conflicts. Yet again the Western world has been fortunate in this respect. Regional organisations, such as the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), (now Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)), have made a significant impact on the establishment of peace and security in Europe by actively engaging in various ethno-nationalist conflicts that erupted after the Cold War. Despite its controversial actions, NATO has also made a significant impact on regional security as a local organisation. However there is a serious disparity in the role of regional organisations in current international affairs. While the Western democratic regions have a plethora of necessary organisations that are sufficiently resourced and have sophisticated structures, the role of such organisations

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has been extremely limited in the Third World. The few existing organisations are severely limited and confined to traditional agendas (economic and socio-cultural issues) and no significant new organisations have emerged to address the challenges arising from ethno-nationalist conflicts, regional security, and strategic issues.239

While the lack of potentially interventionist actors is currently a problematic issue aggravating conflicts, the reluctance of the state to accept outside intervention is another controversial aspect. While Western democracies increasingly promote outside intervention, there is a noticeable reluctance stemming from the states where domestic conflicts are a critical issue. Many states have expressed their resentment at the post-Cold War pattern of intervention, and there is a clear rejection of what is perceived to be an American domination of the world. More importantly, with the open disregard for UN authority by NATO in the Kosovo action, UN credibility has also become debatable.240 In the eyes of weak states, the UN has no control over emerging Western domination of the global political system.241 As Western states have demonstrated a clear inclination to engage, on their own terms, in conflicts concerning themselves, the question remains, as to whether the UN has been relegated to the status of a second class global organisation. Weak states openly regard intervention by either organisation with suspicion. Will the future of those states be determined by the same regional hegemonies that have dominated in the past?

Moreover, the question of when an outside actor must get involved in a conflict still remains unanswered. Conventional wisdom in international relations suggests that the ripeness of the situation for intervention can be measured by the gravity of human rights violations, the state of exhaustion of the parties involved, and the state of consensus among them for such intervention.242 However, each of those parameters is itself disputable and may limit the inclination of a third party to intervene. On the

239 Organisations such as OAU, APEC, ASEAN are basically economic organisations. SAARC was founded in 1985 to 'promote regional cooperation in economy' among the seven member states—namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. See Mallick Ross, Development, Ethnicity and Human Rights in South Asia, New Delhi, Sage, 1995.

240 North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Nam Sun stated at the UN General Assembly that the adoption by UN of policies which encourage intervention make states weaker and vulnerable. The New Zealand Herald, 6 October 1999; Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, while criticising the UN for interference in island's conflict stated that the responsibilities of UN must confine to the 'mosquito and health care', leaving the rest to the internal political leaders. SL NET News Report, 15 October 1999.


242 Bercovitch, op. cit., p. 745.
other hand, there are many conflicts that have been going on for decades with enormous casualties and causing tremendous human suffering. The death toll incurred in some domestic conflicts has already reached hundreds of thousands, and these conflicts have not yet received a substantial response from the outside world. Despite decades of destruction, totally devastated economies and living standards, and seeming material and moral exhaustion, the parties involved in those conflicts remain embattled. Therefore, although the timing of outside action remains controversial, the question remains as to whether there is any limit to the amount of death and destruction beyond which outside parties will be moved to take practical action.

Furthermore, there is a significant degree of controversy attached to human rights themselves in relation to outside interventions. One can argue that there is no consensus on whose human rights outside intervention must protect. If the protection of Kosovars from a Yugoslav regime drove NATO into the Balkan saga, should outside actors prevent the persecution of Tamils from the Sinhala dominated army, or the Sinhalese from the LTTE atrocities? The criteria by which human rights are defined has been a controversial issue in ethnic conflicts, discouraging outside actors from intervening. In the same light, one can see that there are certain ambiguities in the definition of the status of democracy as it pertains to the actors, and this delays outside intervention. If separatist movements are considered to be freedom fighters, then outside interventions must focus on the protection and promotion of such groups from state repression. However, the aforementioned contradictions associated with international law often preclude such actions. On the other hand, when a separatist group insistently pursues separatism despite significant concessions offered by the government to meet their fundamental demands, should outside actors intervene to quell the secessionist movement and support the government? In that scenario, the state may become a victim of extreme ethno-nationalism. The manner in which the international community should act in response to a state which has conceded to a devolution of power, but is still engaged in a battle militant ethnic separatists, is controversial.

Other controversial issues in regard to the issue of outside intervention are associated with the methods of third party involvement. The varied nature, character and intensity of domestic conflicts require thorough consideration before any outside

party decides upon their involvement. While one conflict may require an outside actor as a negotiator or a mediator, another conflict might need military intervention in order to settle the conflict effectively. This complexity of deciding on the correct form of third party involvement is often accompanied by enormous pressure. There is no consensus among the international community as to who must decide upon the appropriate means of dealing with each conflict, and this often generates the hesitation of individual states to get involved. For example, the suppression and containment of ethno-terrorists may limit the activities of those terrorist organisations to a certain extent. But it has become apparent that the containment of an international terrorist organisation needs far more effective devices than ever. Thus the future of those remaining conflicts will largely be dependent on the flexibility and ability of the international community to handle those controversial issues and on the appropriateness of the forms of third party intervention.

Another significant factor complicating intrastate conflicts is the role of diasporic communities, and this has been largely overlooked in the past.

**Diaspora and Ethnic Conflict**

Diasporas have become an integral part of international relations and have a significant impact on regional and global affairs. Moreover, the implications of the activities of the diaspora are no longer confined to parent states and host nations. Diaspora activities are becoming multi-dimensional and multi-functional. If ethnic conflicts can be regarded, to certain extent, as a result of modernity, the very fact of modernity has complicated the phenomenon of diaspora and its significant impact on domestic conflicts.

Diasporas are, basically, communities living outside the territory of a certain state. Gabriel Sheffer suggests that,

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'modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin - their homelands.' 245

Therefore, if a collectivity of people belonging to a particular country or group resides outside its native or natural land and at the same time regards itself as a group with particular specificities binding them to each other and the homeland, they may be called a diaspora.

Although the traditional source of diaspora has been labour migration, the forcible expulsion of people has become a significant contributing factor of the expansion of diasporic communities in recent times. The origin of the Jewish diaspora was the eviction of the Jewish nation at the onset of the millennium. Similarly, the Armenian, Palestinian and other expatriate groups living outside their historical territory are the result of forceful expulsion. In recent years the world has witnessed the similar exodus of various ethnic groups fleeing from dictators and this has resulted in new diaspora communities and swollen existing ones. 246 The rise of ethno-national movements resulting in large numbers of asylum seekers and massive refugee flows can thus be identified as a significant factor in the expansion of diasporas. A systematic discrimination, suppression and deprivation of political rights has been the principal factor generating the large Kurdish diaspora in Europe and America, for example. 247

It is important to note that territory is one of the most important binding elements of ethnic diasporas. 248 Connor Walker elaborates this point:

'the ethnic homeland is far more than territory. As evidenced by the near universal use of such emotionally charged terms as motherland, fatherland, native land, ancestral land, land where my fathers died and, not least, the

246 1 million Kosovars and vast numbers of East Timorese, Bosnians, and Muslim Yugoslavs were sent across national borders. It is evident that even after the re-establishment of peace, the total return of refugees can not be expected.
248 Homeland concept is widely attached today to ethnic conflicts. An ethnic group fighting for their natural right to be the owners of their historical land is the motive of many conflicts.
homeland, the territory so identified becomes imbued with an emotional, almost reverential dimension.\textsuperscript{249}

Regardless of whether they have resettled voluntarily or whether their displacement was a result of forcible expulsion, the important feature of these communities is the nurturing of a strong attachment to their native homeland. Indeed, many members of a diaspora dream of returning to their native lands one day. This is more relevant to communities who have been displaced by threat. The war between Jewish and Arab Palestinians from 1922 to 1948 left around a million stateless Palestinians dispersed in neighbouring Arab states, such as Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. The ultimate desire of those ‘floating states’ is the return to their native land.\textsuperscript{250} In such cases lost territory is the dominant force binding together the ethnic group living outside the homeland. Even though in subsequent years the Palestinian diaspora steadily grew, the struggle for the Palestinian state remained central to their existence.

Both conventional Marxist and liberal democratic views have under-estimated the importance of diasporas, considering them doomed to disappear with the development of society. As it is cultural, religious, and lingual traditions which distinguish ethnic diasporas from the host society, it was argued that modern process of integration would reduce cultural, religious and other elements which distinguish ethnic diasporas from the host society. To some extent this argument is correct. However, the very threat of disappearance has prompted a greater consciousness within diaspora groups of traits which distinguish them from the host society. That awareness in itself tends to preserve and even invigorate those traits. Thus a major feature of ethnic diaspora groups is the awareness of and constant attempt to maintain and emphasise ethnic identity. In general, ethnic diasporas work hard to sustain their native languages, traditions, values, and craft. They establish ethnic organisations and religious institutions in order to continue their traditional practices. The Jewish diaspora is a classic example of an ethnic group maintaining its culture, tradition and even myths and beliefs regardless of the length of the time and the distance over which it may

\textsuperscript{249} Walker Connor, ‘The Impact of Homelands Upon Diasporas’, in Gabriel Sheffer (ed.), Modern Diasporas in International Politics, op. cit., p. 16.

have been dispersed and scattered. It is certainly not the only example. The experience of virtually every diaspora group around the world proves that the pre-eminent feature of their existence is a preservation of cultural heritage and the link with the historical homeland. Moreover, today in the era of the communication revolution an ethnic diaspora is more able than ever before to maintain extremely close contacts with parent states and homelands. It is now common for expatriate community members to visit homelands frequently. With the development of electronic communication, reading national newspapers and listening to the national radio has become absolutely easy.

Nevertheless, the main focus here is an examination of the role and significance of diasporas within the context of ethnic conflict. As has been previously mentioned, one of the major origins of diaspora is ethnic conflict. In so far as ethnic communities, forcibly or voluntarily displaced, have close attachments to the homeland, any socio-political movements occurring in the parent countries will be closely attended to by diasporas. Indeed in the context of ethnic conflicts the reactions and responses of the diasporas are direct and often predictable. Ethnic diasporas are highly vulnerable and sensitive to any developments taking place in the homeland, but particularly those involving ethnic conflicts.

First of all, ethnic conflict invigorates an affection for and attachment to the homeland and its kin group within the diaspora group. In peacetime a diaspora’s relation to the homeland is imbued with a romanticised affection for cultural artefacts and nostalgic memories. In periods of ethnic conflict atrocities committed against the kin group, the suffering of the co-ethnic members and a fear for relatives reinvigorates this connection. Guilt attached to being in a much safer situation may inspire the diaspora to act in ways to help their own ethnic community in the homeland.

In the context of ethnic conflict a direct appeal for involvement from the combatants may also be brought to bear on ethnic diaspora. Ethnic movements often establish organisations and offices overseas to recruit members and mobilise support for the movement in the homelands. These organisations have a variety of objectives and may become powerful political and military establishments. The Palestinian resistance movement that was first born in neighbouring Arab states in late 1950s rapidly

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251 See Daniel Elazar, 'The Jewish People as a classic Diaspora: A Political Analysis' in Gabiel Sheffer, (ed.), *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, op. cit., pp. 212-257.
mushroomed into various guerrilla groups and political organisations in the 1960s and 1970s.252

Analysing the role of diasporas in the international politics, Esman suggested that,

‘the continuing links between diasporas and homelands can be politicised and this is their major significance in the study of international relations. Diaspora solidarities can be mobilised and focused to influence political outcomes in the home-country, to provide economic, diplomatic and even military assistance to the home country or to seek protection and help from its government’253

It is clear that ethnic conflict provides an ideal environment for the mobilisation of diasporas. Therefore, the politicisation of ethnic diasporas is believed to be a major complicating factor in present day ethnic conflicts.254

Role of Ethnic Diasporas in Ethno-Secessionist Conflicts

Having close attachments to the homelands, diasporic communities can not remain aloof to events related to ethnic conflicts. They often consider it their responsibility to contribute to a struggle involving their kith and kin. This very fact serves to internationalise domestic conflicts, transporting them beyond the borders of that particular state.

Firstly, diaspora groups become a significant factor in publicising domestic ethnic conflicts on the world stage. By launching massive propaganda campaigns, ethnic diasporas attract world attention to previously little known conflicts. The national media of host states are used to attract the interest of journalists, academics and sometimes political leaders to the discriminations, atrocities and violence committed on ethnic kin in the homeland. In that manner, the diaspora has an important contemporary role in international relations, bringing the attention of the outside world to domestic conflicts and especially to resultant human suffering and human

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252 Fatah resistance group was established in 1959, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP), later united under PLO.
254 Ibid.
Despite the lack of political progress, the Tibetan diaspora has played a tremendously successful role in drawing the world’s attention to the plight of the mountain nation. The Tamil diasporas in the West were one of the principle factors in attracting sympathy and support to the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka from Western and North American states in the 1970 and 1980s. As a result of the pleas of the Tamil diaspora, many states in the West reviewed their immigration laws to accommodate rising tides of Tamil refugees. Raising the awareness of the international community has been one of the major objectives of ethnic diasporas in recent years. Through the professional and personal contacts of influential members, diasporas have been able to bring individual and organisational pressure to bear on parties opposing the interests of the diaspora in the parent states. A good example of this is the way that at the time of the Turkish invasion and partition of Cyprus, a Greek minority in the United States put pressure on US Congress and the Defence Department to place an embargo on military assistance to Turkey.

Diasporas may also raise material support for the ethnic cause in homeland conflicts. Indeed, in recent times this has indeed become one of the main sources of such support for actors in the homeland conflicts. In general, the diasporas have strong financial capabilities to contribute to ethnic causes, especially in respect to the Third World. Well-established professionals, academics, and business people from ethnic diasporas are the most favourable actors in this regard. As has been previously pointed out, in the case of ethnic conflicts one of the major thrusts of financial contribution may stem from a feeling of guilt. Apart from that, diasporas are able to lobby various individuals, business organisations, NGOs of the host nation, and sometimes state authorities, to provide material support for ethnic movements in the homeland. In addition to those means, diasporas may organise fund raising activities, charity shops, food festivals, and cultural shows to raise money. It is no secret that ethnic movements recruit members overseas to run various business activities, such as restaurants, spice shops, and many others to generate continuous funds for the organisations. The insightful research of Rohan Gunaratna on the Tamil Liberation fighters and the Tamil diaspora reveals that the diaspora’s finance generating activities are linked extensively to banking, shipping, and freight activities around the

There is also ample evidence of cases of 'forcible donations' collected from expatriate communities by diaspora organisations to the cause of homeland movements.\(^{257}\)

Obviously the money generated within diasporas is used for many activities, inside and outside the homeland, to promote the prime goal of the movements. However, in the context of ethnic war, money is largely used to procure weapons, ammunition and war technology. The training of cadres and intelligence gathering also requires a significant amount of finance. Diasporas are becoming trans-state agencies. They construct channels between the homeland and the outside world through which all legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, positive and negative activities are deployed in the service of the homeland struggles.

Finally, the implications of these developments in ethnic diasporas will be considered in the present day context. As diasporas can not be studied in isolation from all related segments of the international community, it is fair to state that the implication of the diaspora extends to all parts of the global setting.

Firstly, host states are one of the most precarious components in regard to intensive diaspora activities. As long as plural societies with democratic political systems allow all segments of the society to act freely, the opportunities for diasporas to use and often 'abuse' these freedoms are very high. Propaganda activities, fund raising and lobbying by individuals and organisations may be detrimental to a harmonious multi-ethnic environment in those societies. As a result of such activities, the host nation may suffer cleavages within its own society since various segments may have different views on the same issue. This situation may indeed create certain tensions within the host society. Intense pressure and lobbying may sometimes lead state authorities to adopt a position towards the parent states and the homelands of the diasporas, which may result in a serious diplomatic cleavage between the states. The reaction of the diaspora community to the New Zealand government's position on the NATO bombing campaign in Serbia and Kosovo is a recent case to consider. The acceptance and support of the NATO activities by the New Zealand government outraged the Serbian diaspora in New Zealand, who protested and publicly criticised


\(^{257}\) Terrorist groups often use blackmail and intimidation in collecting money from the diasporic communities. Interview with security analysts, Colombo, June 1999.
the government’s action.\textsuperscript{258} At the same time, a gradual rise in anti-Serbian feeling was perceptible in the New Zealand public, who openly criticised the Serbs for atrocities committed on the Kosovars. Indeed, such situations may become breeding grounds for anti-immigrant feelings, xenophobia and prejudices.\textsuperscript{259}

However, in relation to ethnic diasporas the most critical situation for the host nation may arise in a case where two or more conflicting ethnic diasporas are present in considerably large numbers. The combined action and reactions of two such ethnic groups to conflict in the parent state will often cause tension in the host society and lay the foundation for rifts in the host nation. At the same time, it would be difficult for the host government to take a position in the conflict since any given stance is likely to antagonise one or the other segment of the host society.\textsuperscript{260} Any reciprocal approach from the host government towards one party would have far reaching consequences, not only for one ethnic group but for the whole society. The handling of ethnic diasporas in the context of ethnic conflict has, therefore, increasingly become a significant issue for plural societies. Often host countries fall prey to ethnic diaspora demands, misdirecting their attitude to the conflict. Under the pressure of one or another expatriate group, a foreign state might wrongly assess the situation and further escalate the conflict. Therefore, the opinion of the diaspora being, in general, severely biased does not often provide a good basis for state decisions on foreign domestic conflict.

However, turning to more positive aspects, one can see the potential of ethnic diasporas to bring about constructive solutions to devastating conflicts. Exposure to democratic societies provides diasporas with a greater opportunity to learn how to tackle ethnic strife, following the examples and experiences of the host nations. In many cases ethnic diasporas are saturated with highly respected academics, business people and influential figures in various fields. It is important to recognise and emphasise the importance of those sources to a peace-making process. Diasporas based in neutral nations have the ideal opportunity to attract host nations to the role of a mediator, and such negotiations may bring a significant impetus to the whole peace-process. By acting as positive role models, diasporas can also send a strong message

\textsuperscript{258} Personal observations and communication with the Serbian community members.
\textsuperscript{259} Author’s observation.
\textsuperscript{260} Aspects related to this subject will be discussed further with regard to the Sri Lankan community in New Zealand.
home about the possibility of reconciliation and the restoration of peace and harmony. As we have seen, the complexity and magnitude of intrastate ethno-territorial conflicts are often determined by both internal and external factors. The peace-process, therefore, requires a careful consideration of all those factors in order to bring about a lasting solution.
PART II – SRI LANKA’S ETHNIC CRISIS

After British rule was established, identities continued to be constructed and reconstructed.... It was within this framework that the twentieth-century centralisation of state power and extension of the franchise led to the rise of ethnonationalism and the Sinhalese- Ceylon Tamil polarisation that now dominates Sri Lankan politics.²⁶¹

J.D. Rogers

CHAPTER I

KEY ISSUES OF THE SRI LANKAN ETHNIC CONFLICT

Introduction

Among the vast amount of literature on the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka, it is not hard to identify the fundamental elements which have been considered as the main issues contributing directly to the ethnic conflict. As one analyst concluded:

‘the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is the outcome of fundamental demographic, socio-cultural, religious, linguistic, economic and political issues that have foundations in the island’s history’.²⁶²

Referring to that list we can divide the core issues of the conflict into two major categories: the ideological foundation and the material foundation of the conflict. The ideological underpinning of the conflict encompasses ethnic identity, history, religion, tradition and language, whereas the material basis of the conflict includes elements of economic and political significance, such as education, employment, land tenure, demography, voting and citizenship rights, and so on. However in retrospect one can conclude that these issues have been transformed and are still transforming due to

numerous domestic as well as international socio-economic and political changes. Therefore, the issues related to the ethnic conflict in the island are in flux and the understanding of the nature of transformation of those issues is essential for appreciating the ongoing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. At the same time, the reassessment of those issues should shed a new light on understanding of the predicaments to a lasting solution to the conflict. This chapter will be dedicated to the investigation of fundamental issues of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and their shifts over the years due to various reasons.

Often, the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict is categorised either as a religious based or a language based conflict. Indeed as both religion and language are at the heart of the conflict this interpretation has a strong justification. In fact, the Sri Lankan conflict has been included as one of six studies – along with Ukraine and Sudan, of conflicts in which religious intolerance has been a significant, if not the major factor.263

This section will focus on the religious and linguistic elements of ethnic identity as a cause in the origin and development of the present conflict. The perspective of various schools of thought and scholars which have been divided on the point of to what extent the ethnic factor in the Sri Lankan conflict has played a role will be examined. Thus, the examination of the role of ethnic factors in the conflict will focus on the process of the formation of ethnic identity as an ideological basis which serves as the foundation for the group unity, legitimacy and cohesion dividing groups from each other.

Employing the socio-anthropological approach, some analysts attempt to explain that identity as a product of the historical process. As Kemper admits '(H)istories stand behind the authenticity of knowledge, relationship and practices. As a result, historical writing has always had genuine political importance.'264

According to this viewpoint, the cause of the present conflict in Sri Lanka lies in the historical base of formation of the identities of the two communities. Therefore, this approach suggests that the Sinhala as well as the Tamil identity, which have today become the major line of group division in the present conflict, are the basic

foundation for the conflict between these two groups. Both groups have their own history, which is aptly interpreted for the use of sharpening their identity. As one writer noted,

‘For Sinhala, history justifies their claim to impose their rule over the whole island of Lanka. For Tamils too history is used to justify demands, in the past for a degree of autonomy for Tamil-dominated areas, and today for total separation from the Sinhala-dominated parts of the country’. 265

According to the primordialist view, the Sinhala nationalism has basically been a result of the ancient marriage of the Sinhala nation and Buddhism which claims the due respect and the right in the present day context. Among the many advocates of this position is Bruce Kapferer, who in his analysis attempts to explain the ferocity of the ethnic conflict in post colonial Sri Lanka as a product of history, mythology and tradition passed over through generations. 266 According to this suggestion, the present ethnic crisis is not a surprising event of modernity but only a result of long-standing ethnic rivalry between the two groups. In the same light, Sinhala ethnic nationalism, according to some analysts, began with the historic rivalry symbolised in the Elara Dutugamunu confrontation. 267

However, the most eminent element in the identity analysis of the Sri Lankan context has been the religious and linguistic affiliation of both communities stemming from ancient times. 268 Therefore, the discussion will mainly attempt to assess the link

267 One of the most popular historical episodes is the Dutugamunu-Elara relationship. Dutugamunu, a Sinhala king who fought a bloody war against the Tamil king Elara for the preservation of the Sinhala nation and Buddhism, has been the most colourfully illustrated character in Mahavamsa. Thus the Dutugamuna-Elara relationship as well as the subsequent historical Tamil invasions on the island have been interpreted as the basis for the historical rivalry of the two groups. In fact the exploitation of Dutugamunu as a symbol of Sinhala-Buddhist heroism is effectively used in the current context to maintain the Sinhala/Buddhist nationalism by some activists and political leaders. Therefore, it has been taken for granted that the hostility between the two communities has long historical roots going back to the earliest period of the history on the island.
between these two elements in this context. One striking element in Sri Lankan society even today is the overwhelming influence of religion. Indeed this is more applicable to the Sinhala society with regard to Buddhism. Sri Lanka has been a major centre of Theravada Buddhism from the ancient times. In opposition to the Mahayana tradition of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, Theravada stands for a more conservative form of Buddha’s teaching.\textsuperscript{269} Theravada tradition emphasises the renunciation of desires and the achieving of Nirvana by following Buddha Dhamma (Buddha’s teaching). However, contemporary Theravada Buddhism practised in Sri Lanka has little similarity with these basic elements of Buddhism. Apart from few forest monks who live and practice in isolated areas, the majority of the Sri Lankan monks have direct contact with society. They are heavily involved in the social and communal life of Sri Lankan society where practically no event can take place without their blessing. Most importantly, the life of the Buddhist monks has a direct influence on social and state affairs. It is often cited that Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka have always been a great guide of the state.\textsuperscript{270}

**Roots of the Sinhala/Tamil identity in Sri Lanka**

In fact, the roots of the Sinhala-Buddhist identity on the island go back to the very beginning of the Sinhala race in Sri Lanka. Referring to the Mahavamsa records, some tend to see this espousal of Sinhala group identity with Buddhist religious identity in the early records.\textsuperscript{271} Mahavamsa indicates three visits of Buddha in his lifetime to the island affirming his personal attention to the land. According to the same chronicle, the arrival of Vijaya and the Buddha’s passing away coincides and Buddha himself requested the gods to protect the island as the future land of thriving Buddhism. Thus, this historical fusion of the Sinhala group identity and the Buddhist religious identity have been viewed by several analysts as the establishment of the concepts of ‘Sinhadipa’ and ‘Dhammadipa’ which is the basis of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. The Sinhala king became not only the defender of the island and the


\textsuperscript{270} Buddhist monks play a significant role in the social and political life of universities. This was especially apparent in the JVP uprising in 1971 where monks played a key role. Today Buddhist monks have entered conventional politics. One Buddhist monk won a seat at the last Southern Provincial Council election. ‘Baddegama and MP Monk’, *Lakhima*, 20 June 1999.

people, but one of his most important responsibilities was to protect and nurture Buddhism. Therefore the Buddhist clergy became the guide of the Sinhala kingdom. Without their blessing, ruling the country became virtually impossible. One commentator described this early link of nation and religion as follows: 'as far as Sri Lanka is concerned, being Buddhist is inseparable from being Sinhalese'.

However, it is important to note that according to many analysts the Sinhala Buddhist identity in the pre-colonial period was not a differentiated one. As a result, it did not cause a cleavage in society. It did not oppose religious or linguistic differences in opposition to other religions.

The growth of distinction began to rise with the colonial rule when opposing religious and linguistic differences emerged. Colonial settlements starting from 16th century brought various religious and linguistic elements to the country, under which Sinhala identity in the form of religion and language began to reform or invigorate. The introduction of Catholicism by the Portuguese and the various forms of Protestantism by Dutch and British have been taken as the catalyst for this process. It is worth noting again that the Tamils had been living in the island for centuries. At the same time invaders and mercenary missions had been there. On various occasions, Tamil soldiers were even recruited into the Sinhala army. As we already noted there were no ethnically based clashes in the pre-modern era. Obesekara further asserts:

'Up until the sixteenth century, being a Sinhalese implied being a Buddhist. After that time, with the advent of European powers, a split in the Sinhalese identity occurred as a result of Catholic and Protestant Sinhalese who were clearly not Buddhist. Sinhalese ceased to be an ethnic identity. Buddhism also lost its prominence as the national religion.'

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272 For a good account of the influence of the Buddhist clergy on the Sinhala rulers, see Shelton U. Kodikara, 'Communalism and Political Modernisation in Ceylon' Modern Ceylon Studies, 4/3, January 1970, pp. 94-114.
275 Obesekara, 1979, op. cit., p. 279.
276 Obesekara, ibid., p. 279.
Apart from causing economic, social and political dependence, colonialism destroyed the self-identity. This loss of self-identity provoked the Sinhalese to seek it back. The wide use of English and the rise of Christianity invigorated the self-consciousness of the Sinhalese and instigated a revival of identity based on religion. However the resurgence of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in this era is widely personified around Anagarika Dharmapala who is symbolised as the one who synthesised the Sinhala race, Sinhala language and Buddhism. He initiated the movement for the restoration of Buddhism and Sinhala culture, appealed to the Sinhala consciousness and the tradition of the Sinhala Buddhist identity. This movement indeed caused tremendous changes in the socio-economic and political spheres at that time. Undoubtedly the influence of the cultural revivalism spanned far beyond the colonial period. The main argument of the particular Buddhist revivalist movement was that Buddhism, which was the traditional guide of the Sinhala community, had been paid no attention to by colonial rulers. On top of that, Christianity which received unofficial state patronage had triggered resentment and discontent in Sinhala-Buddhist activists. Understandably in this quest of historical dignity of language and religion Buddhist monks played a tremendously important role. Outspoken religious debates such as Panaduara Wadaya were clear manifestations of the emerging role of Buddhist monks in the society.

Importantly, the Buddhist monk as a political potentiality was becoming a significant factor within the wider mass, and the subsequent social movements endorsed the role of Buddhist monks in the island’s politics as a vital element of reviving the traditional role in present context. Referring to the ancient traditional role of the monk, the clergy gave vocal expression to the Sinhala Buddhist identity which, as they argued, remained suppressed during the colonial period. The emergence of the Buddhist monk as the vocal champion of both religion and language during this period was partially due to such leading publications as the Revolt in the Temple (1953) and The Betrayal of Buddhism (1956). Both these publications represented major ideological guidelines for the emerging Buddhist revival and the

277 For a detailed discussion see M. Sangharakshita, Flame in Darkness: The life and sayings of Anagarika Dharmapala, Pune, 1980.
278 The real beginning of this process was the release of the Vidyalankara Declaration which gave historical reason for bikkhus (Buddhist monks) to take part in island’s politics and the right to take part in party politics, see Walpola Rahula, Bhikshuwakage Urumaya, (Heritage of a Monk), Colombo, 1946.
extensive role of Buddhist monks. What is also important is that both publications were shrewdly used to mobilise electoral support for the 1956 election by the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist politicians. As Robert Norton pointed out,

‘In Sri Lanka a creative volatility in the political uses of culture derived from pronounced dissonance in Sinhalese social and cultural experience in the colonial period. The colonial legacy was a profound rupture of meaning caused by the denigration of popular religion and language and the privileging of an Anglicised minority culturally and socially disconnected from the masses. These conditions provided space and energy for an aggressive reconstruction of identity in opposition to the Tamils, orchestrated by religious and political elites. The volatility has been a feature of intra-elite rivalry, the reconstruction of popular consciousness, and the violent acrimony of ethnic conflict’

Various other colonial policies also influenced the revival of ethnic identity. One classic example of this was the contradictory colonial policy towards ethnic groups demonstrated by the re-demarcation of provincial borders. A.J. Wilson pointed out the objective of the re-demarcation of provinces as follows:

‘The thinking behind this redrawing of boundaries of provinces was to reduce the isolation of the Kandyan Sinhalese hill-dwellers. Their separate existence presented an obstacle to the formation of a homogeneous nation and uniform system of administration, as the British envisaged. Britain was determined to rid of the Kandyan Sinhalese areas of influence of their native chiefs’.

Construction of new roads connecting hitherto isolated hill country and Jaffna with

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279 ‘Revolt of the Temple’ was written about the grievances of Buddhists and Buddhism and the damage caused by colonial rulers. ‘Betrayal of Buddhism’ was a result of the inquiry made by the committee appointed by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress to investigate the contemporary situation of Buddhism at the time of the Buddha Jayanthi (2000 years from the birth of Buddha) which coincided with the post independent Sinhala-Buddhist revival.


the rapidly transforming capital – Colombo, served as the meeting point for the different ethnic identities. The direct contacts opened by the development of roads with the northern peninsula and Kandy broke the centuries long isolation of those regions. As a result, there began an intensive Tamil immigration to Colombo. At the same time, colonial rule, emphasising the importance on Colombo and enhancing the capacity of centralised capital-Colombo, did not take sufficient measures to reinforce local administrations. This disparity in the spatial distribution of resources created a significant imbalance between the centre and periphery which came to be a tremendous problem in later years. Contacts between communities with intensified ethnic identities in an environment where resources for the fulfilment of their aspirations were limited inevitably triggered clashes. As the ethnic identity divisions were already deeply entrenched, the dividing line naturally fell along communal lines. A similar example is the bringing of Indian labourers to the traditional Kandyan hill country. Importation of Indian Tamils for plantation work was treated as a threat, and Tamil workers were regarded as intruders by the Kandyan Sinhalese because of the massive influx of Indian labour and the resultant radical transformation of the economic structures.282

There is a parallel argument that the revival of Tamil identity has the same kind of foundation. As was the case with Sinhala cultural revival, in reaction to the foreign cultural hegemony the Tamil identity, based on Hindu religion and Tamil language began to rise.283

However the major difference is that the Tamil cultural revival took place in South India, Tamil Nadu and was imported to the island. As it was the case with Sinhala, this led to political mobilisation in the Tamil community in South India which at later stage launched the separatist agenda in Indian politics.284 H.L. Seneviratne described the process:

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'The powerful and pervasive Dravida identity that emerged in South India could not but affect Sri Lanka, which has historically been part of what happened in India. This is more so when we consider two important facts: a) that the Tamils of the North of Sri Lanka the 'Jaffna' Tamils, have had close social and cultural ties with South India, and b) the proportion of the Jaffna Tamils in relation to the Sinhalese is similar to that of the South Indian Tamils to North Indians'.

In the post-independence period, the quest for Sinhala identity took a sharp twist which antagonised the Tamil identity. It became the ideology of Sinhala nationalism, which then focused not against colonialism but against a minority. In essence, the emergence of communal agenda in the political sphere is a renewal of the ethnic identity of the Sinhalese who had been deprived of it in the colonial era. While anti-colonial ethnic revival was based on linguistic and religious deprivation, in the 1950s Sinhala nationalism was based on the glorification of Sinhala culture and history. Affirmation of the Sinhala majority power inevitably effected the minority community. As James Turner Johnson pointed out:

'By contrast with the pre-colonial Sinhalese identity in which Buddhism was an undifferentiated element, the modern Buddhist revival, in both its nineteenth and twentieth-century forms, is ideological in nature, in the sense of being part of the integrated parcel of assertions, theories, and aims that constitute a specific political program.'

Obesekara further describes the consolidation of the Sinhala-Buddhist identity:

'The victory of Mr. Bandaranaike in 1956 was spearheaded by those who were directly or indirectly influenced by Dharmapala. Thus the post 1956 era saw the introduction of a new fundamentalist and militant Buddhism advocating the takeover of denominational schools to reduce the power of Christian missions; the compulsory teaching of (Buddhism) religion in schools; the

propagation of the intellectualist view of Buddhism as being not a religion but a philosophy consonant with the spirit of science and above all the use of Buddhism for political purposes. As a result, Buddhism had effectively become the political and civil religion of the state.\textsuperscript{287}

The rising tide of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism ever since was consolidated with political patronage and mass participation. The government became heavily involved in this process. In 1980s radical Sinhala chauvinist movements such as JVP and Janatha Sevaka Sangamaya (JSS) under hardcore Sinhala advocates such as Cyril Matthew led the process, as Obesekara explains, ‘from non violent methods to violent ones’ in order to achieve the goal of preserving the Sinhala Buddhist nation.\textsuperscript{288} Spencer correctly pointed out how this growth of cultural antagonism in the explosive combination of religion, language and history brought about the current crisis:

‘In the face of these Sinhala-Buddhist claims on the national past, alternative Tamil histories have been put together and propagated in the Tamil-speaking north and east of the island. Both ‘official history’ and ‘opposition history’ agree on the basic terms of argument: present conflict can only be explained by reference to the past.’\textsuperscript{289}

Buddhism is possibly regarded as one of the most humane religions in the world. The political use of religious elements in the case of Sri Lanka indicates how vicious it can be when ethno-nationalism seeps in to the political domain.\textsuperscript{290}

Therefore, many analysts believe that the extrapolation of historical past on the present should provide sufficient light on the present crisis in Sri Lanka. Sinhalese in the course of their attempt to justify their claim to the primacy, supremacy and dominance in the political life of the country have always rested their case on the historical past. In fact, this attempt has been viewed by some analysts as Sinhalese

\textsuperscript{288} Ibid., p. 157.
The deep impact of the historical myth on ethnic identity can be seen in legends related to it. According this argument the majority Sinhalese community asserts their rightful ownership and domination on the island due the primacy of their settlements referring to the historical chronicles such as Mahavamsa. It is their position that the Sinhala nationalist ideology has been inspired by the Sinhala Buddhist ancient writings.

Although this revivalist movement initially began against colonial domination, as the process developed it gradually assumed an anti communal outlook. A good example supporting this argument was the outbreak of anti-Muslim agitation which resulted in bloody riots between Sinhala and Muslim communities in the island in 1915.

Gradually intensifying communal identity, as a series of intentional and unintentional policies of colonial rule, antagonised the two major ethnic groups on the island. Describing the process of ethnic identity formation and invigoration in Sri Lanka, Nissan aptly expressed it as follows: ‘what began as a series of claims by both Tamils and Sinhala against the British was transformed into claims directed against each other.’

While Sinhala identity began to encroach into the political arena as the dominant force, Tamil politicians took the steps to foster Tamil nationalism which some call defensive nationalism. The divide of political force in the island became permanently communal. Fragile unity of cross-communal political elitism became invalid as the elites from both communities realised the driving force of the island’s political power lay in the communal divide. Ever since the major political demands of the parties have become integrated with ethno-political demands.

292 Mahavamsa, an ancient chronicle complied by a Buddhist monks in 4-6 c A.D. depicts the ancient history of the island. For details, see W. Geiger, trans., The Mahavamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon, London, Oxford University Press, 1912.
294 Tambiah, op. cit., p. 138.
295 Nissan, op.cit., p. 34.
As a result, the political atmosphere became far from ideal for the pluralistic political developments. The post-independent state system in Sri Lanka increasingly took a Sinhala dominated character despite its multi-party features. This character indeed evoked fear in the minorities. However the fear of assimilation or domination of the Tamil population by the Sinhalese to some analysts was ‘clearly exaggerated.’ In analysing linguistic nationalism and its part in the conflict, K. M. de Silva stated that linguistic nationalism was wilfully employed ‘by some Tamil politicians who wanted an easy road to political success’\(^\text{298}\)

Thus language and religion as important elements of identity became permanent components of the political process in the country. The deteriorating ethnic relations gave the island the reputation of being a ‘divided island’.\(^\text{299}\) The Tamils increasingly began to seek their historical shared identity in the land. While identities became increasingly entrenched, relations drastically deteriorated. Ethnic violence became a constant and regular feature in the island’s politics. Pressure groups from both communities began to benefit from the situation. The inability of the political elite to find a lasting solution aggravated the situation. Increasing political violence, which began to take the pattern of consistent waves, widened the gap between two communities. Hostilities became permanent and were cemented by historical, cultural and socio-economic foundations. Both communities began to unearth historical evidence to confirm the differences of the two groups. That was how the convenient political identity led to the demonising of the two groups in society along ethnic lines. Importantly, the entrenchment of Sinhala-Buddhist identity was taken for granted by the political leadership in the later years and it made little effort to defuse the tension. On the contrary, in order to satisfy certain interest groups, which were crucial in the electoral campaign, the majority leadership continuously put emphasis on the preservation of traditional Sinhala-Buddhist identity, widening the gap between two communities even more.

Indeed ethno-cultural identity still plays an important role in the island’s political developments. From the Sinhala side, pressure groups continue to ignite and sustain the identity issue as one of the major devices in the political agitation. Sinhala nationalist forces have direct links with all political parties in the island. These links


are particularly strong with the main Sinhala political parties, namely the governing Peoples Alliance (PA) which includes Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and major left parties and the principle opposition United National Party - (UNP). All are directly or indirectly backed by the formidable Sinhala nationalist organisations. The strong Sinhala Arakshaka Sanvidhanaya (Sinhala Defence League) maintains a close link with the UNP. Although Hela Urumaya (Sinhaala Heritage), another principle Sinhala nationalist organisation, is not openly connected to the SLFP, it is widely believed that it maintains close relations with the SLFP and the governing party.

Sinhala organisations, such as the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, Jathika Chintanaya, Maha Sammata Bhumi Putra Party, with their significant membership, are also effectively mobilising the Sinhala opinion in the island. They have proven to be tremendously capable of stirring mass opinion at the time of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord and the deployment of Indian Peacekeeping forces in the island. The current attention of Sinhala nationalist movements is primarily concentrated on the on-going devolution debate. The devolution proposal presented by the governing PA has triggered a stiff resistance from Sinhala and Buddhist radicals. According to them, the devolution of power to the minority Tamils in the north and east of the island is tantamount to the division of the country which will threaten the language, culture and finally the very existence of the Sinhala nation in the island. The Sinhala Commission, an umbrella organisation of a number of Sinhala-Buddhist organisations, condemned the devolution package which indeed influenced the reaction of the opposition party. The stagnation of the package today has much to do with the rigid resistance of the Sinhala extremist organisations.

Recently the Sri Lankan President came under severe criticism by the Tamils for her nationalist remarks on the historical authenticity of the Sinhala people. When analysing recent devolution speeches of President of Sri Lanka Chandrika Kumaratunga, Zompetti states that ‘Kumaratunga not only identifies with the Sinhala vis-a-vis the Tamils, but she also blames the totality of Sri Lanka’s problems and history on the ethnic other-the Tamils’.

300 Interviews with members of Sinhala groups in Colombo during field trips in December 1997 and June 1999.
301 Chapter III will discuss in depth the devolution package.
Political Representation

Despite the fact that the British formulated an administrative apparatus encompassing both the Sinhalese and Tamil communities, the power struggle and rivalry between these two groups began almost at the very onset of this process. In fact the confrontational tendencies of this communally based elite rivalry subsequently spread through all strata(s) of society. The English educated professionals and representatives of commercial spheres were the successors to the power of British rule. They received an English education and belonged to the newly converted Christians. Many of them were democrats, even socialists in their ideological outlook inspired by western education. However, as it was to turn out, in reality that they had to face massive local nationalist movements without whose support they could not realise their ambitions.

The political institution of British rule, mainly confined to the Legislative Council set up in 1831, was based on the communal principle in which representation of various groups was carried out by a governor. The British preferred communal representation seeing it as the most appropriate to offer sufficient representation to various communal groups in the island. In fact, under the communal representation principle Tamil elite groups received substantial representation in the legislative council. As a result of this process, local elite groups from both major ethnic communities were able to create at least a semblance of unity and amicability which was reflected in the foundation of the Ceylon National Congress (CNC), similar to the Indian National Congress, in 1919 when racial differences were of little importance. In fact, the major objective of the CNC was to win greater powers for local representatives and to achieve the ultimate goal of independence from colonial rule.

However, it is important to investigate the initial impulse of the colonial rule to promote communal representation on the island. According to the Donoughmore Commission, the principle of communal representation gives ‘a fair representation to

303 This new layer of the society was effectively comprised of Sinhalese and Tamils. The education, religion and values they absorbed tentatively neutralised their ethnic identity. For example political leaders from both communal groups such as Bandaranaike and Chelvanayakam were highly westernised Christians.

304 It is important to note that unlike the Indian National Congress the CNC was a purely elite organisation and had little mass involvement.
different elements of the population, with a view to assisting the development of democratic institutions.\textsuperscript{305} Although the British imposed communal representation within the Legislative Council was a satisfactory option initially, as the process of Constitutional reforms advanced the very issue of representation began to emerge as an issue of contention. Population imbalance in the sizes of communities provided a basis for the local elite to comprehend the advantages and disadvantages looming on the horizon. Having realised the advantage of being the majority, the Sinhala political elite began to demand the allocation of more seats for themselves in the Legislative Council. When the debate over the expansion of powers for the local elites intensified, the British government was compelled to find appropriate steps to meet the demands of the elites of both communities who were obsessed with the issue of political representation. The British devised other means to address the issue. Constitutional reform was introduced in 1923 in response to the agitation of the Ceylon National Congress (CNC), which sought provisions to enlarge the number of unofficial members nominated on the territorial basis. Indeed the introduction of the territorial representation sent an alarming signal to the Tamil elite. The Tamil leadership under Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam spearheaded the campaign to oppose territorial representation on the grounds that Tamils were in disadvantageous position. On this issue, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam left the CNC to form a sectarian political organisation 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 related to representation.\textsuperscript{306} Tamil leadership was fearful of the forthcoming self-government of the island. It maintained that self-government would be tantamount to replacing the British leadership with a Sinhalese leadership who represented the majority on the independent island. Thereafter, Tamil leadership began its overt manifestation for fair political representation, being a minority in a multi-ethnic setting.

The Donoughmore Constitution (1931-1946) which brought vital reforms in the political sphere of the island towards self-rule had several important elements which undoubtedly affected the ethnic relations of the country. Among them the abolition of communal representation and the introduction of universal adult suffrage can be seen

as important elements which contradicted the interests of ethnic groups in their quest for political representation. In recommending the total abolition of communal representation, Donoughmore Commissioner stated that,

'we have come unhesitatingly to the conclusion that communal representation is, as it were, a canker in the body politic, eating deeper and deeper into the vital energies of the people, breeding self-interest, suspicion and animosity, poisoning the new growth of political consciousness, and effectively preventing the development of a national or corporate spirit'\textsuperscript{307}

The British believed that communal representation is destructive and detrimental to communal harmony and for further national integration.

If one considers that the process of democratisation may serve as a cause of ethnic conflict, the best example would be the developments in the political arena which took place in pre-independent Ceylon. The introduction of the universal franchise as one of the most fundamental democratic principles paradoxically served as the primary cause of the gulf between the two ethnic groups on the island. Therefore, it is relevant for us to dwell briefly on the significant elements brought about by the universal franchise to the island's political landscape and the ethnic conflict in particular. In a country where two thirds of the population were Sinhalese, universal franchise and the system of single member constituency proved to be the major device for the bestowing of political authority to the majority community. At the same time, in a country with a multi-ethnic setting the same principle served as the device which led the minority to a substantially weaker position. Having realised the implications of universal franchise, Sri Lankan Tamil elites continued to demand from the British rule an adequate Constitutional guarantee to ensure the security of minority rights on the island. Professor Manogaran expressed the feeling that concerned the Tamils at that juncture.

'Tamil political leaders realised, for the first time since 1833, that they represented a minority community and that they should demand adequate

constitutional safeguard from the colonial rulers to defend Tamil rights in the face of the rising tide of Sinhala nationalism.\textsuperscript{308}

However, the Donoughmore commission did nothing to change the situation.

Another interesting implication of these events had a direct effect on the political representation and destiny of one important segment of the island. This was the Indian Tamil community on the island who by that time outnumbered even the Sri Lankan Tamils. Obviously the introduction of the universal franchise politically empowered the hitherto neglected plantation Indian Tamils. Enfranchisement of the Indian Tamil population understandably evoked apprehensions in the Sinhalese political leadership. The clear result was the scrapping of the voting and citizenship rights of Indian Tamils by the Sinhala dominated newly independent Sri Lankan government which effectively amputated the political representation of the island’s significant minority communities.\textsuperscript{309} Indeed the very issue of political representation of fellow Tamils became an important element of the Sri Lankan Tamil struggle after 1949. Needless to say, universal franchise empowered the rural communities and increasingly diminished the political authority of the urban English educated elite. However, the inclusion of the rural mass into the main stream political process paved the way for the manoeuvring of communal politics by the elite. Symbolic empowerment of the mass provided wide opportunities for the educated elite to play round with mass politics. Since the major device of mass mobilization lay along the communal division, it inevitably brought the ethnic groups to deeper cleavage.\textsuperscript{310}

After the implementation of the Donoughmore reforms, the majority Sinhalese community amounting to more than two thirds of the population occupied its ‘due share’ in the Legislative Council. In 1931 the Sinhalese secured 38 seats out of 50 elected seats in the legislature. The ratio of representation which was 1:2 until 1931 became 1 Tamil to 5 Sinhala members in the Legislative Council. The resentment of the Tamil leaders was such that they boycotted the 1931 elections. The result of this was the formation of the Sinhala dominated Board of Ministers which came to be


\textsuperscript{309} Before the enactment of the 1948 and 1949 citizenship and voting rights legislations, Indian Tamils had 7 members in parliament which after the enactment reduced to zero.

known as Pan Sinhalese Ministry. All these developments inevitably exacerbated the hostility among Tamil leaders who began to form political organisations of ethnic orientation. Accordingly political organisations from the Sinhalese side emerged. Consequently, the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) was formed by the Tamil leadership whereas the Sinhalais gathered around the Sinhala Mahajana Sabha and later Sinhala Maha Sabha. These organisations become important vehicles of ethnic based political competition, leading to a cleavage in the wider society. In the subsequent post-independent years these organisations become the most powerful driving forces of ethnic based political process on the island.

Undoubtedly, the Tamil elite began to realise that the reforms taking place in the political arena as a part of the preparation towards self rule would leave less and less space for the Tamil constituency. The Tamils complained that the British government acted with a biased attitude towards the Sinhala community. Furthermore, the Tamils accused the Sinhalese of a secret deal with the British colonial rulers to enhance their control in the parliament. The Soulbury Commission which had been appointed to implement further reforms towards the self-rule on the island was supposed to consider various proposals from the ethnic communities dealing mainly with representation in the parliament. Most important was the proposal put forward by G.G. Ponnambalam, leader of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), suggesting a balanced representation which came to be known as the ‘scheme of fifty-fifty’. The scheme suggested equal representation of all minority communities with the majority Sinhalese. It proposed preserving 50% of the seats for minority representation in the future parliament. Indeed this proposal produced a stiff resistance from the Sinhala polity giving more determination to the attempts to empower the Sinhala-Buddhist polity. Without much hesitation, the colonial government also rejected the proposal and established a single vote parliamentary system adopting territorial representation in place of communal.

312 They complained that the Tamils were discriminated in administrative appointments. British passage of special legislations to safeguard the Buddhist religion and religious sites such as Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance of 1931 and the Anuradhapura Preservation Ordinance of 1942 were pointed out as favouring the Sinhalese and Buddhists. See Soulbury Report, Colombo, Government Printer, 1946, pp.41-42.
However, it is noteworthy that having realised the gravity of the issue the Soulbury Commission recommended special steps to be taken to secure minority representation in the country. Specific measures proposed by the commission included the creation of multi-member constituencies for Tamil areas, which 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 provinces, which should have given a constitutional safeguard to the Tamils. Elaborating on further developments of the representation, it is appropriate to note briefly how these special provisions of safeguarding minority rights evolved in post-independent Sri Lanka. When enacting the Republican Constitution in 1972, the SLFP led United Front (UF) government under Sirimavo Bandaranaike removed section 29, which ensured the rights of the minorities in the country, saying it was ambiguous and inappropriate. The Tamil community treated this as a total neglect of their rights and a relegation of their status in the country. Although the Constitution of 1978 brought dramatic changes into the island’s legal and constitutional structure, the abolishment of section 29 has never been reversed. However, the subsequent introduction of proportional representation in electoral politics provided a certain degree of restoration in this respect.

The whole process of constitutional evolution was closely related to the establishment of a structure of political representation on the island. In retrospect one can also see the paradoxical developments which emphasise the struggle of a state to balance between the process of constitutional democracy and ethnic state-building. The most important element in this regard has been the perpetuation of the competition between the two Sinhalese political parties in the electoral power struggle. Relying on the majority Sinhalese votes, the two major parties, namely SLFP and UNP, masterly employed the communal elements to achieve their political goals. This tendency antagonised the minority Tamil leadership, gradually paving the path towards a spiralling growth of ethno-nationalism in both communities. A clear result of this process was the drastic erosion of possibilities for creating an all-encompassing national identity.

315 Soulbury Constitution, Section 29(2) and (3).
317 UNP and SLFP became permanent rivals in the political arena since early 1950s.
Language and the Ethnic Conflict

Undoubtedly, language has been one of the most ‘pivotal issues’ in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. As one specialist stated, ‘post independence Sri Lanka provides a classic example of the destabilising effects of conflicting linguistic nationalisms, that is to say nationalisms based on language, on a multi-lingual society.’ However, language has carried not only an emotional value in the ethnic dispute. Language has also been a source of economic contest over which two ethnic groups have had stiff clashes. First of all, the value of language for Sinhalese as a cultural artefact has been doubled due to the fact that they see themselves as a minority among the massive Tamil speaking population in South India. This very reason is widely used by Sinhala nationalists to validate their struggle for the preservation of their language and nation. It is often stated by extreme Sinhalese nationalists that the Sinhalese language, unlike Tamil, is spoken only on the island by some 15 million people and it is one of the endangered languages in the modern world. However, as was mentioned earlier, the importance of the language issue in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has not only had a symbolic connotation. It must be examined in the context of resource competition that dwells particularly in the areas of education and employment in the post-colonial period.

Despite the colonial emphasis on English as the administrative language, the numerical disparity between the vernacular speakers and the English educated locals was significant. By the time of the independence, the English educated local elite groups made up only 7% of the total population of the island. However, English, being the administrative language, became one of the most important assets for socioeconomic gains. Furthermore, the imbalance in the English educated population was vividly demonstrated across its ethnic make-up. In other words, the English educated proportion within the Sinhala majority population was considerably less than in its counterpart Tamil group. It is widely believed that the early establishment of

320 According to some, Sinhala is among the few languages which are in the process of extinction. Interviews with the members of the Sinhala organisations, Colombo, December 1997.
322 Some suggest that the major reason for the high percentage of Tamil population in English educated population had been due to the fact that the British trusted and had a positive attitude towards Tamils as loyal and industrious workers. Interviews in Colombo, November 1997.
English schools in the north by the missionary workers, particularly by American missionaries, contributed significantly to this disproportionate nature in English education. Due to this fact, the Ceylon Tamils had a significantly high number of English speakers who were conveniently employed by the British in the public administration of the island at the time of colonial rule. In fact, this disparity could be seen clearly even after the colonials left the island.

It is also important to remember another parallel development which increasingly intensified the relevance of language in ethnic relations. This is the further democratisation of the political structure on the island and the related reforms such as the introduction of universal franchise in 1931. In fact, the resentment against the English language was not only a result of the ideological attachment to it. It is said, that the local rural population had been encountering constant difficulties with the British administrative apparatus which was conducted totally in English. Therefore strong tendencies were emerging against the coloniser's language with emphasis on empowering the vernaculars. Those demands quickly turned into political claims. The first stirring in the direction of replacing English for Sinhala and Tamil as the languages of government surfaced in 1944. Marxist parties launched a strong campaign for both vernacular languages to be enforced as state languages. Western educated young local socialists inspired by the ideology of social justice regarded the enforcement of English as an imperial method of subjugation of the local mass. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, a virulent advocate of Sinhala language, initially began his movement with language issue by saying,

'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.'

Contrary to this vague and rather weak appeal, Bandaranaike carried out a mammoth campaign of ‘Sinhala only’ in the 1950s towards his election victory in

324 Hansard (State Council) 1936 v.1 col. 881, 3 July 1936.
325 Hansard (State Council) v. 1, 1944, col. 817.
1956. The issue of parity between Sinhala and Tamil provoked a rigid dissent among Sinhala Buddhist agitators in 1950. As Wriggings reflected, the ‘language issue had become an ideal instrument for enlisting the support of this important strata in the countryside’.326 This cultural renaissance and political mass mobilisation ended with the enactment of the ‘Sinhala Only’ in 1956.327

Following the enactment of the ‘Sinhala Only Act’, the Federal Party (FP) put forward demands for parity of languages considering the act as a discriminatory policy towards the Tamil minority in the island. This provided a legal ground for Tamil political parties who brought their grievances into the political arena. Pressure mounted in the Tamil community as they regarded that the ‘Sinhala only’ bill relegated the Tamils to a second class status in their own land. As a direct consequence of the language issue, the FP declared the objective of establishing ‘a Tamil linguistic state within a federal union of Ceylon’ to preserve Tamil cultural identity.328 The failure to give equal status to the Tamil language was a fundamental cause for the beginning of the confrontation because the language legislation of 1956 brought into political focus the concept of a bilingual nation and opened the way for separatist views.

In fact, the language based nationalist movement could be considered as the first manifestation of ethnic antagonism in the present day conflict on the island, which paved the path towards drastic growth of interactive ethno-nationalism. The consequent concessions made a rising tide of Sinhala nationalism. Although the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958 was passed to allay the fears of the Tamil community, under the virulent protest of Sinhala political and non-political groups the Act was abrogated resulting in series of violence and riots. This occurrence is to be seen repeatedly in the brief history of post-independent Sri Lanka, deepening the ethnic crisis and making it evermore difficult to find a solution. While the political leadership moved towards the redressing of historic grievances, government policies took an increasingly partial character. Thus, Tamil politicians began to perceive the government as being biased towards the majority and alienating the minority.

326 Wriggings, op. cit., p. 259.
327 Many moderate Tamil activists believe that the language issue was basically a symbolic means by which Sinhala political leaders used to attract easy votes from the Sinhala constituency. However, the damage it caused to the communal relations has been deep and long-lasting. The author became aware of this during his personal communication with moderate Tamil political and non-political activists, Colombo, November-December 1997.
328 Times of Ceylon, May-June, 25, 1956.
It is appropriate to examine the developments that occurred in relation to the language issue in the course of the evolution of the ethnic conflict. Although the Tamil language (special) Provision was drafted in 1958, under rigid nationalist pressure the Prime Minister was forced to abandon it. In fact, that suggested piece of legislation had meant to fortify the Tamil minority language and its usage on the island. The government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike rigidified the language campaign to the extent of ‘Sinhala only’. Radical measures were taken to bolster the Sinhala language and its utility in education and employment. It was only during the 1965-70 period again that moves towards compromise and concession took place as a method of reconciliation. Within the framework of the Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam pact, the Tamil language issue was raised again. The pact gave the Tamil language equal status with Sinhala and provided legitimate rights for its use in administration and jurisdiction within the Tamil areas of north and east. The tragic irony was that the pact had to be withdrawn by the Prime Minister because of Sinhala nationalist pressure. The next twist in relation to language occurred with the enactment of the new Republican Constitution in 1972 by the SLFP led United Front (UF) government. The new constitution expanded the status of the Sinhala language as the official language, while the Tamil language was declared as the language of legislation and courts. Commenting on the introduction of the new Constitution and its repercussions, prominent Sri Lankan historian K.M. de Silva stated,

‘The Constitution of 1972 unequivocally consolidated the ‘Sinhala Only’ policy of the 1950s and emphasised the essential subordinate role of Tamil language.’

Thus, despite the fact that the Tamil language was granted considerable recognition in the administration and jurisdiction by the new Constitution of 1972 the pre-eminence of the Sinhala language was effectively retained.

Reforms in the area of language were directly related to the rise of ethno-nationalism on the island and the subsequent violence. As a result of this, the majority Sinhala political leaders were compelled to seek solutions. However the main characteristics of the reforms were inconsistency and a lack of generosity. None of

329 K.M. de Silva, ‘Coming Full Circle’, op. cit., p. 36.
those reforms went far enough to satisfy the Tamil demands. Instead, the securing of the pre-eminent position for the Sinhala language caused further antagonism in the minority community.\textsuperscript{330} With rapidly deteriorating ethnic relations and increasing ethnic violence, the UNP government realised the looming threat. When enacting the 1978 Constitution, it declared both Sinhala and Tamil as official languages and recognised them as national languages.\textsuperscript{331} Furthermore, the English language was given the status of a link language, which can again be considered as a step to provide additional advantage to the Tamil speaking population. While Sinhala and Tamil were official languages throughout the country, Tamil was assigned the sole language in the northern and eastern provinces. By doing this, government gave assurance to the Tamil speaking population that they could use Tamil language in any part of the island.

Bilingualism (even trilingualism) has been effectively implemented in the island since the 1980s. Both the Sinhalese and Tamil languages, coupled with English, are widely used in education, media and communication. In 1989-90 under President R. Premadasa’s government the Official Languages Commission was established to implement and monitor the progress of the language policy.

In his epic analysis of the language issue in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, Professor K.M. de Silva described the long path that these two languages have taken to come a ‘full circle’ from ‘Sinhala only’ to equality and parity. In his view, the Tamil language has now been fully reinstated to its legitimate status.

‘Sri Lanka, by a curious irony, is the only sovereign state in which Tamil is recognised as an official language, apart, of course, from the unusual and somewhat unreal situation in Singapore where Tamil is recognised as one of four official languages, the other three being Mandarin Chinese, English and Malay. In reality Tamil has a distinctly subordinate position there to the others, and especially to Mandarin Chinese and English. A more appropriate comparison is with the language rights of the minorities in the cantons of Switzerland’.\textsuperscript{332}

\textsuperscript{332} K. M. de Silva, ‘Coming Full Circle’, op. cit., p. 39.
Furthermore, according to moderate Tamil opinion, the language issue has eased and it has lost its relevance in the conflict.\(^{333}\) However these reforms have made little impact on the attitudes of militant groups who are engaged in an insurrection against the state to achieve independence.

**Issue of Education**

The provocative issue of education has played an important role in post-independence politics with a massive upheaval of mass participation in the democratic political movement. The reforms proposed by the local political elite had to address long-standing grievances among which education had a significant place. As mentioned earlier, the colonial administration had neglected and ill-treated the vernacular education system on the island. As a result of that, local education, based on vernacular languages and traditional knowledge had little significance for finding employment during the colonial era. From that perspective, a noticeable cleavage on communal grounds was looming among the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils because the Tamil minority had been in a better position with regards to accessing the English education system. Early establishment of the missionary schools in the Tamil areas provided relatively more opportunities to the Tamils, which produced a significant gap between the two communities in colonial administrative positions.

Increasing involvement of the rural intelligentsia in mass politics brought about a demand for the conversion of education to the vernaculars and expansion of the hitherto elite university education to the rural masses. Following the indigenisation of society focused on Sinhalisation, education demanded radical reforms. A series of measures were taken to convert the education from the English dominated Western orientation towards vernacularisation.

However the most critical issue related to the ethnic tension and the deterioration of ethnic relations has been in university education. In fact university entrance has always been highly competitive in Sri Lanka due to a lack of facilities and resources. As a result of a centralised administration and centre-oriented development inherited from the colonial period, the residents of Colombo and a few other urban centres held

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\(^{333}\) Personal interviews with moderate Tamil political leaders, Colombo, December 1997.
a privileged position with regards to entrance to university as they had relatively better schools, teachers, and other basic educational facilities. At this juncture it is important to remember the British patronage towards Christian education created a historical legacy of neglect in traditional education and caused rigid resentment among the rural elite, especially in the context of cultural revival.\textsuperscript{334}

In fact, the contribution of the Buddhist clergy who had played a role of traditional educationalist in the past was also noteworthy. Statistics indicate that in reality the ratio of Tamil students entering universities, especially the lucrative faculties such as medicine and engineering, was disproportionate in comparison to other groups of the island’s population. These discrepancies were interpreted by the advocates of both ethnic groups from various perspectives.\textsuperscript{335} Some Sinhala nationalist groups argued that the majority Sinhala population had been deprived in education leading to destitution and high unemployment. However some experts, such as Tambiah, denied that there were realistic disproportions in this field. He stated that the ‘exaggerated concern of the Sinhalese about the Tamil over-representation was shrewdly manipulated by the politicians and propagandists for political ends’.\textsuperscript{336} However, the governments of the time maintained that the issue needed a prompt remedy. Thus, as a part of the policy of rectifying historical disparities in the socio-economic spheres, the government directly intervened in the issue implementing rather radical policies for the university admission in the period between 1970-77.

The government introduced a district quota system and a system of the standardisation in the early 1970s to eradicate the imbalance in university entrance, allocating more places to rural students. At the core of the decision was to rectify the historical neglect of Sinhala rural education. As a result of this measure, the number

\textsuperscript{334} The British sponsored Christian schools with government funds whereas the indigenous schools were run by the temples and Sinhala rural intelligentsia. According to C.R. de Silva, in 1899 out of 1263 government aided schools only 120 were Buddhist while 1082 were Christian. Of 2280 unaided schools, as many as 1516 were run by Buddhists. This demonstrates the role of the indigenous rural educator in the colonial period which inevitably emerged with the modern political upheaval. See for a detailed discussion C.R. de Silva, ‘The Impact of Nationalism on Education’ in M. Roberts, (ed.), \textit{Collective Identity}, Colombo, Marga, 1979, p. 476.

\textsuperscript{335} Sinhala Buddhist proponents viewed these disparities as deprivation of the legitimate rights of the true settlers of the island. In some cases Tamils were accused of being biased in the examinations and overmarking the Tamil students to increase the admission of Tamil students. On the other hand, Tamils believed that being hard working nation they deserved more than they received after the educational reforms. Interviews with Prof. George Cooray, Colombo University, Sri Lanka, December 1997.

of Sinhalese and Muslim students who entered into universities from remote and backward rural areas increased rapidly. But at the same time the number of universities remained unchanged and the situation directly affected the Tamil students from the north leading to a dramatic decline in their numbers.\(^{337}\)

There is a contention that the schemes such as standardisation and quota system did not harm the Tamil community but expanded the due share of the Sinhalese in education. The Sansoni Commission, convened to investigate the issue, indicated that even with the new system the Tamil community, received a fair share of university entrance according to population ratio.\(^{338}\) However the statistics indicate that the proportion of Tamil students entering 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 percent to 26.2 percent. The overall number of Tamil students in science faculties dropped from 35.5 in 1970 to 21 in 1973. At the same time, the number of Sinhala students for the same period rose from 75.5 percent in 1974 to over 80 percent in 1975.\(^{339}\) From a Sinhalese point of view, the educational reforms balanced out the admission to higher education in relation to the national population ratio to a reasonable extent, and did not affect adversely the island’s Tamil population. At the same time, the Tamils put emphasis on the loss of their traditional level of university education and argue that the education reforms were discriminatory.

Despite the debate over the effect of the state policy on education, the general view of the analysts is that the issue of university entrance caused tremendous harm to contemporary ethnic relations. In an exercise of quantitative calculation of the effect of the education reforms the arguments of both communities can be justified. But the trauma caused by the reforms is far-reaching. In fact, it is important to view the way that the government positioned the reforms. The timing and the method used to launch the reforms gave a strong impression of overt bias to the Sinhalese, which deepened the concerns of Tamil nationalists. In fact, the government’s way of handling the issue provided a rare opportunity for Tamil nationalists to use it in their political manifesto. They vigorously agitated against the measures as discriminating, provoking

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\(^{338}\) Sansoni Commission Report, 1979, Colombo.

resentment among the back-bone of the Tamil community— the Tamil youth and intelligentsia. The result was that the issue directly involved the Tamil youth in the conflict. As one commentator stated:

‘the question of university admission is clearly one which mobilised youth in Jaffna and prompted the Tamil United Front leadership to declare in favour of a separate state’. 340

As the ethnic conflict of the island took on a more ominous form, politicians realised the significance of the education issue. Successive governments attempted to take measures in relation to the issue of education as a principle element of the process of rapprochement. For example, in its electoral manifesto in 1977 the UNP pledged to abolish the discriminatory devises aimed at limiting Tamil access to higher education. But under the pressure from the majority who argued that the quota system and standardisation were methods of bolstering the disadvantaged rural communities the UNP government scraped the schemes. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that successive governments focused their attention on enhancing education nation-wide as a solution to this problem. The establishment of Jaffna University undoubtedly expanded the opportunities for Tamil students in higher education. At the same time, the promotion of five other affiliated universities to the status of full universities, eased tremendously the competition for higher education in the country as a whole and particularly in the rural communities. In addition, the establishment of a variety of technical institutions, such as open universities, as well as institutions affiliated to international universities, have been helpful in this regard. In fact, these changes have compelled some analysts to argue that education has become an almost irrelevant issue in the Sri Lankan conflict today. However, it is widely accepted that the political employment of the issue of education has been a grave blunder in generating and intensifying inter-ethnic tension in the island. 341

340 C.R. de Silva, ibid., p. 476.
341 I thank Professor George Cooray for valuable comments in this regard.
Employment Issues

Competition over scant material opportunities divides nations along parochial lines. The Sri Lankan case is no exception in this regard. As shown earlier, the increasing Sinhalisation of education in the 1960s expanded the opportunities for the Sinhala rural population in education. Despite those changes, English education on the island remained an elite privilege. Indeed, in the search for employment English education was still the most desired as government administration and business were operated in the colonial style. In the environment of stagnant economy, increasing numbers of Sinhala educated unemployed youth became deeply frustrated. At the same time, Tamil provinces, especially the northern town of Jaffna, with its long-standing established English education network, continued to provide a significant number of employees for the public as well as the private sector in the country. Apart from that, the dominating position of Tamil students in the fields of engineering and medicine was a visible feature of disproportional representation in employment along ethnic lines. A.J. Wilson described the occurrence as follows:

'new Sinhala literati and intelligentsia became discontented with the lower and middle level positions they obtained in the public and private sectors. The Tamils on the other hand had already obtained appointments in the public sector or as professional people'\(^342\)

Thus, due to those circumstances, the Tamil presence in employment, especially in the public sector, was proportionally higher in both colonial as well as post-colonial years as compared to that if the Sinhalese.

With a vigorous rise in agitation for rectifying the historical injustice in the society stemming from the 1960s, a disproportionate ethnic balance in the sphere of employment became a prime area of focus. Indeed the Sinhala nationalist leaders, and pressure groups such as Buddhist clergy, emphasised the issue as a grave injustice for the Sinhala community. Undoubtedly the politicians, realising the value of the issue, aptly exploited it for the advancement of their political goals. As a result of various measures that successive governments took in the 1960s, the Tamil presence in a

number of professions began to decline drastically. However, the SLFP led UF government (1970-77) was criticised for being rigid in implementing reforms in the field of employment to redress historical mistakes. Radical reforms resulted in a massive decline of Tamil representation within the higher administrative service. Similarly, the Tamil recruitment into general clerical services dropped considerably. The Committee for Rational Development report, prepared in 1983, stated that the tendency of declining Tamil representation in the public sector was significant. The same report noted that the Sinhalese with 74 percent of the population had 85 percent of the jobs in the public sector, 82 percent in the professional and technical services sectors. The number of Tamils (population ratio about 18 per cent including Indian Tamils) whose presence in the public sector was 30 per cent at the time of independence declined to 18 percent, and 13 percent in professional employment.

The results of reforms in the areas of resource competition in Sri Lanka are a good example of the gravity of straightforward pragmatism by the state in rectifying a social injustice at the cost of minorities. Despite the fact that reforms in the area of employment were pragmatically and logically legitimised, the methods used to rectify those disparities further exacerbated the island’s conflict.

**Territoriality in the Ethnic Conflict**

Another issue which created tremendous tension between the two ethnic groups leading to the present break down of inter-ethnic relations was the so called ‘colonisation’, or the state sponsored land resettlement program. In fact, the restoration of ancient irrigation systems and the resettlement of peasants in the north-central plain in the 1930s were envisioned as some of the pragmatic measures needed to face the socio-economic challenges of a self-governing island. Even in post-independence Sri Lanka, self-reliance and self-sufficient economy became the most attractive principles of government, encouraging the revival of northern territories.

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343 Among measures implemented were language tests for public servants similar to practices in Latvia and some other former Soviet states.


The resettlement of the population in the dry zone coincided with the concurrent reawakening of Sinhala nationalism which emphatically grasped the historical sense of past glory. The dry zone was associated with the glorious Sinhala-Buddhist civilisation, and the demise of that glorious civilisation is linked to the South Indian invasions. This historical underpinning provided an important dimension for the program of development in the north-central part of the island. It is believed that the government(s) aptly utilised this implicit connotation as a political motivation for obtaining the majority vote. Land resettlement was an integral part of the project. The government launched a series of resettlement projects selecting people from the over-crowded southern areas and the hill country of the island in order to establish new settlements in the northern territories. Ironically enough, the selected segments of population themselves bore an underwritten ambiguity to the resettlement program. In other words, the hill country Sinhalese peasants, who had been the guardian of the Sinhala-Buddhist culture, were the prime victims of the colonial economic policy which deprived them of their land under plantations. Thus granting them land in the north was seen as redressing historical injustices.

The new settlement program focused on the development of major river basins such as Gal Oya, Padaviya, and Kantale as well as the restoration of a number of tanks in the north-central plain. However, from the very beginning, the project sparked rigid resistance and criticism from the Tamil communities in the north as if the settlement program was an encroachment of Sinhala people into the Tamil Traditional Homelands (TTH). Therefore, the state promoted re-settlement program, from its very inception, came under attack from the Tamil political as well as academic membership. As one Tamil academic, and a strong advocate of the Tamil cause, A.J. Wilson, described, 'the colonisation schemes were deliberately interposed so as to break the geographical contiguity of the two Tamil provinces'.

The fears of Tamil population were based on the fact that the increasing Sinhala population could distort the original demographic picture in a region where the Tamil population was the majority. These apprehensions were reiterated in the political demands of the Tamil leadership from the onset of the confrontation between the two

groups. The opposition to Sinhala colonisation was enshrined in the heart of the Federal Party agenda when it was first launched in 1949. Although the Tamil political parties evolved, changed and fragmented with the passage of time, the issue of colonisation remained as one of the prime elements on their agendas. The Tamil United Front (1972) and the Tamil United Liberation Front (1974) presented the harms of colonisation as a principle issue of their demands. Even the Tamil militants, who took up arms against the Sinhala led government in creating a separate state, brought the issue of colonisation into the forefront of their armed struggle.

The Tamils argued that the changes in the demographic composition were a direct result of the settlement programs. They believed that the Sinhala dominated government wanted to dilute Tamil domination in the northern and eastern provinces in order to gain political control over the whole island. Analysing the demographic changes that occurred after the colonisation program, Robert Kearney stated that ‘the north and east, the areas of Traditional Tamil Homeland, have undergone major shifts in ethnic composition over recent decades’. His observations revealed that the Sri Lankan Tamils, once a majority in the Northern and Eastern provinces, had become minorities.

Furthermore, the development programmes such as the Mahaveli River diverting project, launched by the United Front government under Sirimavo Bandaranaike in mid 1970s, had a direct or indirect impact on the ethno-territorial make-up of the island, which exacerbated the tension between two communities. What is important to note is that the political leadership has often attempted to use ethno-nationalist sentiments in order to fortify their political agenda which gravely undermined the primary objectives of such projects. For example, many commentators believe that the accelerated Mahaveli program, implemented by the government of J. R. Jayawardane, contained a strong nationalist character.

There are some counter arguments pertaining to the colonisation issue too. First of all, while the Tamil political and academic circles argue that the colonisation led to a

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351 Personal interviews with the research officers of Agrarian Research and Training Institute, Colombo, Sri Lanka, June 1999.
rapid distortion of the demography of the region, there are several works which argue that the colonisation had no impact on the Tamil population patterns in the north and east of the island. Professor of geography Gerald Pieris (Peradeniya University), who examined the issue of Sinhala colonisation, points out that the government sponsored settlement programmes did not involve traditional Tamil areas. In his opinion, traditional Tamil settlements were confined to the coastal areas, whereas there have been extensive Sinhala settlements in the inland territories of the island with significant historical length. His principle argument is that the Sinhala settlements were there long before the colonisation process had begun. Moreover, he suggests that the schemes allocated lands in fair proportion to all three ethnic communities.353

**Indian Tamils and the Ethnic Conflict**

Although the Indian Tamil issue may not seem to be a direct component in the present conflict, this element must also examined in considerable detail due to its intrinsic relation to the ongoing conflict. The Indian Tamil population became one of the major issues of the Sinhala/Tamil conflict immediately after independence. The major involvement of the Indian Tamils in the present conflict can be outlined as follows. First of all, their voting rights had been included as one of the main issues in the Tamil struggle. Moreover, despite the fact that the Indian Tamil community has played near neutral role in the Sri Lankan Tamil separatist struggle, it has fallen pray to periodic racial attacks in the past three decades by Sinhala riots. Therefore, without examining the place and the role of the Indian Tamil community, it is not possible to have a clear and comprehensive picture of the present conflict.

First and foremost, it is vital to see the place of the Indian Tamil community in the Sri Lankan multi-ethnic setting. Although the Indian Tamil community has common linguistic and religious identity with the Sri Lankan Tamils, it is believed that the Indian Tamil population in the island represents a distinct ethnic group in Sri Lankan society. In historical perspective, Indian Tamils are regarded as comparatively recent migrants on the island. In terms of caste, culture, traditions as well as occupation and education, these two communities have significant differences. Those cultural, as well as historical differences, may have been the reasons for the lack of inter-relation

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between these two Tamil communities. The geography of the settlements has also served as an important factor in the seclusion of the Indian Tamil community. Being based in the hill country of the island, surrounded by Sinhalese population settlements, Indian Tamils have little communication with the indigenous Sri Lankan Tamil community.\(^{354}\)

The direct involvement of the Indian Tamil community in the island’s political life began immediately after independence. Residing in the Sinhala Buddhist stronghold of Kandyan hill country and numbering over half of the Tamil population of the island, Indian Tamils were a constant reminder of the colonial legacy and an increasing concern for the Sinhala political leaders. Indian Tamils became a political threat as the new constitution of 1931 granted them voting rights through universal franchise.

Immediately after independence the island’s government moved to disenfranchise the Indian Tamil workers. The very first pieces of legislation enacted after independence by D.S. Senanayake, first Sri Lankan Prime Minister, was the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948, and the Indian and Pakistani residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949 with the objective of scraping the voting rights and citizenship of the Indian Tamils. This move not only left the Indian Tamils stateless but it also created a tremendous distortion in the electoral pattern of the country. After the 1947 general elections, there were seven Indian members in a parliament of 101 members. After the enactment of the new citizenship and voting rights legislation, the number of Indian Tamil representatives in parliament was reduced to zero.

The political strategy of Sri Lankan Tamil leadership has always been to woo the Indian Tamils. Despite the differences in their origins and cultural roots, linguistic similarities have served as a strong basis for this. Indeed, the Indian Tamil issue has always been a vital element of the Sri Lankan Tamil movement. It must be noted that the issue of Indian Tamils was a substantial element for the split of the mainstream Tamil political movement in the late 1940s. The FP encouraged the resettlement of Indian Tamils in the north and the east within the framework of the state sponsored

\(^{354}\) The Indian Tamils comprised 12.6% of total population in 1946, 9.5% in 1971 and 5.6% in 1981. This decline in population is due to a series of repatriation programs. However, the Indian Tamils are mainly concentrated in the hill country plantation districts such as Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Kandy, Ratnapura. Apart from that, scattered Indian Tamil communities are located in tea and rubber plantation districts, such as Kautara, Kegalla, Galle, Matara, and Matale. Numerically small, but economically significant numbers, also live in major urban areas of the island where they possess significant trading and commercial enterprises.
land resettlement programmes. In fact, the Senanayake-Chelvanayakam pact of 1965 stipulated the preferential position of Indian Tamils in these projects. Realising the potential of the Indian Tamil community in the overall Tamil cause in the island, the FP painstakingly attempted to involve the Indian Tamil political and trade union leaders.

However the geographical isolation and the nature of the work they were engaged in caused the Indian Tamils to organise around their own trade union leaders rather than political parties. They had little interest in the main Tamil demands for autonomy or separatism in the north of the island. This may be due to the fact they lived in the midst of a massive Sinhala population. Apart from that, the Indian Tamil population had little in the way of good education, health, or housing facilities, which compelled them to focus on their immediate needs.355

As the ethnic conflict deepened, the importance of the Indian Tamil community for the common struggle increased for the Sri Lankan Tamil political leadership. In fact, throughout the 1960s and 1970s the Tamil Federal Party painstakingly strove to attract the Indian Tamil community to its political movement. However, it was only in 1974 that the Ceylon Workers Congress, (Indian Tamils trade Union) led by Thondaman, joined TUF (which later became the Tamil United Liberation Front-TULF). However, it is fair to say that the CWC was never really intended in the separatist idea, mainly due to its pragmatism. Understandably, in case of separatism the Indian Tamil population which is based amongst the majority Sinhala population would suffer immensely. The mass movement of Indian Tamils to the north will not be a pragmatic solution either because over half a million people of Indian population would not be able to find appropriate occupation in the north. Therefore, the political strategy of the Indian Tamil leadership has always been compromising and cooperative towards the major Sinhala parties in order to secure parliamentary representation. After the 1977 election the leader of the CWC, Thondaman, accepted a Ministerial position in the UNP government. In a similar way, the present government also helped the Indian Tamils to be represented in the current parliament.

Nevertheless, despite its political neutrality and noticeable political deprivation, the Indian Tamil community suffered during the waves of ethnic riots which erupted in the south of the country in 1977, 1981, and 1983. Those riots rendered heavy

355 I thank P.P. Manikam, at Social Scientists Association, Colombo for his insightful comments on the various related issues.
casualties to the Indian Tamil communities. Various human rights organisations revealed that large numbers were killed or wounded. In fact, the important question arising in this connection is if they were not party to separatism or terrorism, why have they been subjected to Sinhalese mob attacks? Furthermore, being one of the most underprivileged segments of the society, Indian Tamils are not engaged in resource competition with the majority Sinhalese. However, the consistent violence and disruption by the Sinhala majority can seriously antagonise the Indian Tamil community. The implications of such a development could be immeasurable. If terrorism and lawlessness were to emerge from the heart of the island, it would be ominous adding another serious dimension to the already complicated Sri Lankan problem.
'The most basic value relating to human dignity is the sanctity accorded to human life. Civil society has duty and moral responsibility to respond to a crisis involving collective violence, indiscriminate killings and disappearances. Our response to such situation will define ourselves as individuals.'  

Neelan Tiruchelvam

CHAPTER II

INTERNAL FACTORS CONSTRAINING PEACE

FLAWS OF DEMOCRACY AND THE ETHNIC CONFLICT

As was discussed in the conceptual discourse, a liberal democratic political structure is where every individual, as well as groups have equal rights in the eyes of the government. The state being the agency of the 'people' at large, acts to accomplish their wishes and wills. At the same time, diversity in society is counted as an important element. This chapter will focus on the process of state building in post-independence Sri Lanka with regard to this aspect. If the consolidation of state identity is in the heart of liberal democracy, has the Sri Lankan state identified that need in forging the overarching peoplehood? Has the Sri Lankan government acted in a way to achieve this goal?

In an examination of post independent political developments one can notice that the process of reconciliation by various acts, reforms and constitutional amendments also began with the first eruptions of ethnic conflict. By nature, the process of reconciliation has taken a process of devolution, recognising the differences and the empowerment of the localities in order to appease the disgruntled minority. However, the irony of the process has also been the seeming tendency for an ever-expanding devolution process to reconcile differences, which has not been able to contain the division. Instead, the gap between two communities has widened further. Demands for autonomy within the federal structure have grown into a complete separation claim. Another critical question that the chapter will address is why, despite conscious

attempts to reconcile the groups with a variety of devolution packages, peace has not been established.

The state being the vehicle of the wishes and wills of the people has a direct impact on the rights of individuals as well on various groups of the society. In particular, this thesis is relevant in relation to societies with a multi-ethnic nature, as the interests of different ethnic groups may often clash. Therefore, it is the state which adjusts these diverse aspirations by implementing various rules and laws including constitutional changes. As far as liberal democracy is concerned, the fundamental element in dealing with ethnic diversity must be impartiality and equality towards ethnic differences. The success of handling ethnic diversity in a liberal democracy is largely dependent upon this factor.

As far as the Sri Lankan state is concerned, it is evident that since independence there has been a steady erosion of ethnic impartiality of the government. Instead, Sri Lanka state has gradually become an ethnic state where the state has given preference to one ethnic group over the others. In this respect, although the Sri Lanka political structure has been functioning as a democracy with regular parliamentary elections and universal franchise, it has performed a steady ascendancy towards being an ethnic state.

Despite partial attempts and the desire of the political leadership to establish a democratic state, 'consociationalism in Sri Lanka had its snags and its roadblocks' from the very onset of the freedom.\(^\text{357}\) It seems that from the very onset of the independence, the Sri Lankan government has acted as if it is dealing with a homogenous society. It has not recognised the fundamental element of the multi-cultural setting of the state. The result of that has seen various acts and reforms, implemented in post-colonial Sri Lankan state, whereby the government has attempted to establish a homogeneous state.

\[^{357}\text{A.J. Wilson, 'Ethnic Strife in Sri Lanka', op. cit., p. 151.}\]
Sri Lankan Democracy and Post Independent State Building

At the time of Sri Lankan independence conditions seemed to be conducive for the establishment of a liberal democratic political system. One of those elements was the Anglicised political elite who admired, and who were prepared to accept Western parliamentary democracy as the basis of the newly independent state. Regardless of their desires to establish liberal democracy, there were significant features of the Sri Lankan political elite which undermined this process. The Anglicised Sri Lankan elite represented a considerably small portion of the population of the island. The Sri Lankan political elite was merely a product of the colonial administrative policy, confined to the wealthy urban indigenous aristocracy. Although most of them were inspired by the progressive, even socialist, ideologies after having studied at Western universities, their knowledge of the local population and problems it was encountering was minimal. Most members of the aristocracy were limited in their knowledge of indigenous languages, religions and cultural traits.\(^{358}\) Unfortunately for the country, this tradition was to take deep roots in the political landscape and has remained a feature of the island’s politics until today. It has been taken for granted that political leaders must emerge from those traditional aristocratic dynasties.

The result of this was the aloofness of the political leaders to situation on the ground. This gave an impression that the transfer of power to the local leaders was merely a continuation of colonial rule. As Nihal Perera stated:

\[\text{the principle objective of the Ceylonese elite was to replace the British, whether in regard to their positions or their spaces. Yet the construction of a nation state out of the post-colonial state was the responsibility of the particular state itself. This was carried out by the postcolonial state taking over the colonial administrative unit and implicit recruitment of national subjects to this pre-established structure, simultaneously attempting to transform this ensemble into a so-called nation, in the process expanding the extant Euro-American interstate political system. In this context, the most central}\]

characteristics of colonial Ceylon did not change much after the independence.\textsuperscript{359}

As a result, neither the political leadership, nor the popular mass has had a consolidating national consciousness which is a fundamental requirement for the nation-building process. In fact, in the view of some analysts, the peaceful transfer of political power to the local leaders from the colonial masters has also been a significant contributing factor to this.\textsuperscript{360} As Bruce Matthew states:

'unlike India, Ceylon had no struggle with the colonial power. More than anything, such struggle (or absence of it) determined the quality of nationalism, its depth and breath. In the case of Ceylon, this marked the beginning of a real failure in the development of ideology, because the evolving contradictions were not between 'nationalists' and 'colonialists', but among the national communities themselves.'

However at the time of the independence, Sri Lanka had a constitution which provided a fundamental framework for the future state building. Most importantly, the constitution assured the independence of the judiciary from political influence, and it safeguarded individual and group rights with specific laws. Although the constitution, inherited from the British rule, did not enumerate minority rights as a particular issue, there had been provisions which had a particular effect on those issues.\textsuperscript{361} With regard to fundamental rights, the constitution stipulated that parliament could not enact laws which made,

'persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions are not made liable, nor could parliament confer on persons of any community or religion, privileges or


\textsuperscript{361} The British constitutional framework which remained operative at the independence ensured minority safeguards. See Sir Ivor Jennings, The Constitution of Ceylon (3 rd edn, Bombay, 1953).
advantages which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religions.\textsuperscript{362}

This measure was to ensure the secularity of the state and protect the rights of the minorities against discrimination by the majority. Furthermore, the designers of the Sri Lankan constitution made sure that the parliamentary electoral system of the country would give substantial representation to minority communities.

However, despite those elements which provided hope for the development of a liberal democratic state, the post-independence nation building process in Sri Lanka has witnessed some contradictory deviation from this direction. Contrary to the expected developments towards liberal democracy, the Sri Lankan polity was swiftly dragged towards a majoritarian democracy. Quite in contrast to the liberal democratic ideology which enshrines the overarching citizenship and state nationalism based on citizenship, the Sri Lankan polity began to polarise along parochial lines, widening the cleavages between ethnic groups.

While the enactment of the universal franchise in 1931 as a fundamental element of democracy ensured the popular rights of the people, there have been grave concerns among the political elite over certain sections of society. This is directly applicable to the Indian Tamil population in the up-country who had been developing as a formidable political force under the Marxist parties at that time. At the time of the enactment of universal franchise, various Sinhalese leaders had pointed out their concerns in this regard. For example D.S. Senanayake directly opposed the inclusion of the Indian Tamils into the universal franchise pointing out that,

\textquote*{Sinhalese are an unfortunate community. Sinhalese have been misunderstood and even their generosity forgotten. I do not think there is any other community like Sinhalese who have consented to penalise themselves in order to give privileges to others. The Indians have a big community, we have only this small bit of land for ourselves. We want this country for ourselves.}\textsuperscript{363}
Francis Molamure, another advocate of this argument pointed out that 'my policy is to save Ceylon for Ceylonese'.\(^{364}\) Despite the constitutional safeguards assuring minority rights, immediately after independence Sri Lankan political leaders enacted legislation which effectively strangled the political life of the Indian Tamil population in the newly established state. The passage of the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949 making Indian Tamils stateless people, serve as examples of how Sri Lankan nation builders diverted the process from establishing liberal democracy.\(^{365}\) In enacting the Bill D.S. Senanayake said:

'It is a quite simple Bill, but a very important Bill. We are not prejudicing the interests of anyone. We are only trying to confer Ceylon citizenship on people in Ceylon who are not citizens of another country. It is necessary that we should have our own citizenship laws.'\(^{366}\)

In that manner the conceptualisation of citizenship by the new state-builders has been quite contrary to the true concept of citizenship in the liberal theory. Instead of including the various groups of society into the larger membership of the state, the Sri Lankan political elite, had begun the campaign of compartmentalisation of the society, from the very inception of the state building process. The Indian plantation Tamil community which has been a vital element not only in the economy, but also in the political life, was thus excluded from the political decision making process.

The motivation behind this act indicates another stark tendency of political life on the island which continues throughout the post colonial era. Indian plantation workers by the time of the independence were one of the numerically large minorities in the country. At the same time, under the Marxist parties they had organised trade union movements which had become a serious threat to the conservative political parties. Their allegiance with the Marxist parties, and massive strikes held by them in early 1940s, generated a significant support for them. As a result, Indian Tamil representation in the 1947 parliament increased to 8 seats, antagonising the interests of the conservative political leaders. Thus, the primary intention of the

\(^{364}\) Hansard, 15 November 1928, p. 44.


\(^{366}\) Hansard, 19 August 1948, p. 20.
disenfranchisement of the Indian Tamils was to enhance the political power of conservatives at the expense of the plantation Tamil population. Disenfranchisement of the nearly 1 million Indian plantation Tamils expanded the political base of the conservative parties. However, it also generated deep distortions in the electoral system of the island. The stripping of the voting rights by the Citizenship Act gave conservatives an opportunity to consolidate their political power in the up-country constituencies. Moreover, it must be mentioned that the conservatives, in order to justify their illiberal actions, resorted to a nationalist rhetoric, which stimulated parochial sentiments among the Sinhala majority. In their view, the exclusion of the Indian Tamil population from the political process was a need to repair the historical injustices towards the Sinhala population that had taken place in the up-country. The unfortunate tendency of the national leaders to whip up nationalist sentiments in order to reap political benefits became a consistent pattern throughout the post independent political history of the island.

Furthermore, the subtle element attached to the defining of national symbols in post-independent Sri Lanka should not be underestimated. There is no doubt that national symbols, such as the flag, emblem and national anthem, are of significant importance in the process of nation building. They symbolise the nation, its objectives and goals as an entity. Having become independent, Sri Lanka adopted a lion centred national flag with two yellow and green stripes of saffron. The ancient symbol of the lion holding a sword symbolises the glory of the Sinhala past. The stripes were added to identify the country’s Tamil and Muslim minorities. The impression that the Sri Lankan national flag gives is that of an explicit supremacy of the majority Sinhala community and that of a secondary notion towards the minorities. One commentator described the adverse effect of the ethnocentric connotation given by using the national symbols as follows:

‘the Sri Lankan national flag bears a sword-bearing lion, which is a replica of the one used by Kandy, the last Sinhalese kingdom to fall to British colonialists. Attempts after Independence to adopt a non-racial flag instead of the one with Sinhalese lion was rejected but with a minor compromise- two ribbons were added to denote the country’s Tamil and Muslim ethnicities. When Tamil nationalism reached warring proportions, it had an appropriate
counter symbol- the roaring tiger, which was used by the most martial Tamil dynasty in India, the Cholas.\textsuperscript{367}

Although one can ignore this as an insignificant element, a state committed to liberal democratic notions must avoid those contentious symbols which may evoke far-reaching consequences. Therefore, the national flag with two ribbons for the minorities may have been conceived by the Tamils as a conscious marginalisation of the minorities in the island. While equality is a fundamental element in liberal democracy, a state which is committed to those principles can not symbolise the supremacy of one section of the society. This inevitably instigates sectarianism within the society.

**Confrontational Politics and Ethnocisation of the State**

The two major tendencies, dominating the post independence Sri Lankan political system, have been the ever-ascending process of ethnocisation and the vicious cycle of bipartisan political confrontation by the major Sinhala parties. Both of these tendencies have been operating hand in hand, and there is a direct link between these processes. The following discussion focuses on the aspects related to these developments in order to elicit how these dominating features of the post-independent political process have affected the liberal democratic state establishment.

As already mentioned, the founding fathers of the Sri Lankan nation had little concern for creating an all-encompassing citizenship by including the diverse groups of the society into the political life of the country from the very outset. Measures taken by the first independent government point out that they had realised the crucial importance of the majority in electoral competition. An unfortunate reality has been that the will of the majority had been defined not as a secular political ideology, but as a numerical ethnic majority. Therefore, the emphasis on the nation fell not as a conglomerate of diverse groups and classes but as a numerical proportionality.

The formation of a new Sinhala party in the early 1950s undoubtedly added a new dimension to the confrontational politics in the island. Although the internal rivalries within UNP prompted the creation of SLFP as a splinter group, it is not difficult to

understand the most powerful motivation behind it. Solomon Bandaranaike, an Oxford educated, Colombo based aristocrat, who formed the SLFP had realised the enigmatic force of the Sinhala constituency in reaping political power. He had worked closely with the Sinhala community for quite some time when he formed and led the Sinhala Maha Sabha in the 1930s. As a Minister of Local Administration in the colonial government he had opportunities to realise the developing political momentum on the island which encouraged him to mobilise the Sinhala vote as a major weapon in the political struggle. A clear indication of this is the formula he employed in mobilising his political campaign towards the 1956 general election. He called upon the primary strata of Sinhala-Buddhist society, such as the Sangha, Weda, Guru, Govi, Kamkaru (Buddhist monks, traditional medical personals, rural teachers, farmers and labours), which encompassed the majority Sinhala community in the island.

Thus, the emergence of a second Sinhala political party, which sought its political support from the same community as the UNP, created tremendous tension between the two parties. While both were trying to please the Sinhala-Buddhist majority community, they had to outbid the opponents with stronger intensity. In that sense, it is fair to say that from the moment of the emergence of the SLFP, Sri Lankan politics entered a new era - an era of confrontational politics. Both the UNP and the SLFP relied on the vote of the majority Sinhala community, and thus began to compete with each other to outbid opponents and win over the Sinhala constituency. As A. J. Wilson described the process:

'political rivalries within the Sinhalese community led competing groups there to try to outbid each other to win electoral popularity at the expense of the principle outgroup - the Ceylon Tamils. As a result, populist politics gained ascendancy with the progressive mobilisation by political elites of the lower and disadvantaged strata in each ethnic group. Unstated forces, such as suppressed fears (of one group by the other) and ambitious dreams (of Sinhala majoritarianism), became explicitly articulated. Political discourse and debate descended from the legislature to the market place.'

This vigorous competition for the majority vote, confined by ethnic affinities, generated the ascending tendency of ethno-politics in the island which placed an ever-growing emphasis on the ethnic identity. The result of this process had a powerful impact on the ethnic identity of the minority communities, particularly among the Sri Lankan Tamil community.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that since the confrontational politics between two major Sinhalese parties began, both the UNP and SLFP have concentrated on the Sinhala Buddhist constituency. The promises they made were aimed at attracting the Sinhala-Buddhist majority. Both parties attempted to become more Sinhala and Buddhist than their opponent in order to impress their principle constituency and thereby win political power in parliament. The natural outcome of this obsession over the ethnic majority constituency was that the Sri Lankan political system began to take on the appearance of an ethnic state. Over-emphasis on the ethnic majority also effectively antagonised the minority communities, especially the largest and most politically organised Sri Lankan Tamil minority. Uncertainty and insecurity of the Sri Lankan Tamil minority was intensified by the ever-growing inter-party competition between the Sinhala groups which steadily implemented legislation and acts that had adverse effects on the Tamil community. As one commentator maintained, this process has been a fundamental cause of the present day political crisis in the island:

‘the objective of Sinhala nationalism since independence in 1948, and even before, was to recreate an ethnic state on the basis of an imagined state of ancient Sinhala Kingdoms. This effort marked the origins of the current ethnic conflict in the country. As a result, there had been a gradual but a clear alienation of minorities from the state system.’

However, it could be also argued that in conventional terms the post independence political process in Sri Lanka functioned according to the rules and terms of democracy. The multi party system established shortly after independence has continued to operate without great distortion until today. The impressive participation

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of the masses in the political process indicated that their choice of vote acted as the principle weapon to replace and elect governments.\textsuperscript{370} From the point of view of the political leadership, they were committed to parliamentary elections as the main arena of political competition. Relatively fair elections (at least until the 1970s) provided the impression that the Westminster parliamentary system had been established and was successfully functioning in the island state.

However, the analysis of Sri Lankan political developments in the post independent era provides evidence that beneath the seemingly democratic process there have been strong undercurrents which diverted the whole political process towards the opposite direction. Although the multi-party political system had taken root in the Sri Lankan political structure, domination of the bipartisan competition, which relied on the majority Sinhala population, strongly undermined the liberal democratic nature of the political contest between the major parties. If liberal democratic political competition must consolidate the pluralist character of society, diluting the parochial cleavages, as a result of the ethno-centric emphasis of the bipartisan politics in Sri Lanka, the process took a reverse direction. It became a fertile ground for the growth of ethnic affinities which fell into a vicious cycle of ascendancy. In contrast to the political competition between the Conservatives and Labour in the British politics or the Republicans and Democrats in the United States, where ideology of the political struggle lies in the secular affairs of the public, political competition between the UNP and SLFP in Sri Lanka turned into a struggle to win over the majority Sinhala vote, vitalising ethnic affinities.

Both major Sinhalese parties attempted to become the true servants of the majority, which they defined not by class interests but along linguistic and religious lines. Therefore, both the UNP and SLFP gave promises to create a society not for the whole population with diverse ethnic groups, but for the majority Sinhalese and Buddhists who were their targeted political constituency. This factor undermined the notion of a secular state in post-colonial Sri Lankan political developments. Since 1956 when the SLFP led government promised and enacted the Bill of ‘Sinhala Only,’ the tendency of Sinhalisation, as well as the establishment of a Buddhist state became a steady and consistent process. In the 1960s the Sri Lankan government continuously emphasised the need for an expansion of vernacular languages. Ironically, in contrast

to the initial emphasis on vernacularisation as opposed to the colonial language, the
Sri Lankan state implemented a process of expanding the use of the Sinhala language
which effectively cornered the minority Tamil language. The process of Sinhalisation
of the education system and public administration was carried out at the expense of
the minority Tamil interests. The explicit ethnicisation of polity by the Sri Lankan
government can be further seen in the 1970s when the Sinhala language was made the
national language and Buddhism was constitutionally affirmed as the state religion.
As the constitution of 1972 (Section 7) stated, the official language of Sri Lanka shall
be Sinhalese as provided by the official language Act of 1956. With regard to the
Tamil language it was stated that ‘the use of the Tamil Language should be in
accordance with the Tamil Language provision Act of 1958’, and that any regulations
under this Act ‘shall not in any manner be interpreted as being a provision of the
constitution.’\textsuperscript{371} Furthermore, the constitution emphasised that all laws shall be
enacted or made in Sinhala with a Tamil translation and the language of the courts
shall be Sinhala.\textsuperscript{372} Under Section 6 of the Sri Lankan Constitution of 1972, ‘the
Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it
shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all
religions the rights granted by Section (1)d’.

With these constitutionally endorsed laws, the Sri Lankan state gradually came to
appear as a Sinhala-Buddhist state, losing its secularity, which is a fundamental
element of liberal democracy. Even in the constitutional reforms of the 1978 the
clause on the ‘foremost status of Buddhism’ was not removed. On the contrary, the
Jayawardane government further established the Sinhala-Buddhist notion within the
governance. It was President Jayawardane who revived the tradition of beginning the
term of governance by delivering a speech from the sacred temple of Kandy, which
symbolised the inseparable attachment of the state to Buddhism. Furthermore, his
initiative to restore the ‘Wap Magul’ tradition remembering the kings involved in
Sinhala peasant ceremonies became a pattern for successive leaders of the country.
Moreover, at a later stage, President Premadasa established a separate ministry for
Buddha Sasana (not a ministry of Religious Affairs), which stressed the foremost
importance of the Buddhist religion in the Sri Lankan state.

\textsuperscript{371} The Constitution of Sri Lanka, 1972, Article 8.
\textsuperscript{372} Ibid, sections 9 and 11.
It is important to mention another negative tendency attached to this ethnocisation of the political process unleashed by the political forces in Sri Lanka from the 1970s onwards. While both competing parties exploited the nationalist sentiments of the Sinhala-Buddhist constituency in order to consolidate their political power, many extreme nationalist organisations mushroomed across the country. Often with the backing and support of the opposition political parties, those Sinhala-Buddhist organisations became rapidly politicised. They carried out massive campaigns of propaganda about the past injustice and immediate need for the restoration of Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony. They raised economic, religious and educational issues interpreting them as grievances confined to the Sinhala majority. Often headed by Buddhist monks, these organisations became an important vehicle of ethnocisation of the social forces. They called upon the Sinhala patriots to hold their hands together to save the endangered Sinhala nation and its historical heritage. One leaflet of those days pointed out:

‘it is evident that the archaeological ruins of the northern province which was a part of the Raja Rata in the days of Sinhala Kings and of eastern province which was the ancient state of Ruhuna, have been facing a threat of destruction for quite some time now. If we continue to permit this destruction to go on, shutting our eyes to it or engaged selfishly in our own personal affairs, we will be supporting this anti-Sinhala, anti-Buddhist campaigning which is wiping out all traces of Sinhala Buddhist culture from the area.’

Thus in this manner ethno-politics gradually seeped into the social environment and has become a powerful and consistent force in Sri Lankan politics. Moreover, the ethnocentrism adopted by the Sri Lankan governments materialised in various domains such as employment and education. The rectification of the historical unjust was realised effectively at the expense of the Tamil minority who had their socio-economic position in the society changed drastically. As Jayaraj described:

‘during the post-independence years, the empowered Sinhalese polity sought to remedy the situation by using its political clout. Tamils were rendered

officially illiterate by the adoption of Sinhala as the sole official language of administration through the ‘Sinhala Only’ Act of 1956. From the late 1950s through the mid 1970s, most trading and manufacturing establishments were nationalised and converted into semi-government institutions. The British system of recruitment through open, competitive examinations was scrapped in the 1960s and instead jobs were made available through political patronage. All these measures tended to reduce the dominance enjoyed by the Tamils in the employment and commerce. The anti-Tamil card had become a political ace.\(^\text{374}\)

While the laws related to language and religion directly discriminated against the minority communities of the island, the 1972 Constitution included a clause overtly demarcating the ‘peoples’ and ‘citizens’ of the country. This provision distinguishing peoples and citizens stated that all people were to be equal before law and that no person could be ‘deprived of life, liberty or security’\(^\text{375}\) but only citizens had the basic rights of freedom of thought, conscience, religion, speech, publication, movement, choice of residence, right to promote their own culture.\(^\text{376}\) This was a continuation of the attack on the Indian plantation Tamils. The provision was deliberately added to emphasise the relegated position of the Tamil plantation workers, further excluding them from the mainstream social processes of the country. Therefore, as A. J. Wilson pointed out, the 1970-77 United Front government ‘brought to a virtual halt the consociational tie’\(^\text{377}\).

Resultant opposition from the Tamil political leadership was unheeded by the government. On the contrary, the government implemented more radical legislation to centralise authority while emphasising the unity and territorial integrity of the state. One such example is the taking oaths from the parliamentarian to abide to the unity of the country by the Jayawardane administration. This move effectively excluded the Tamils from the legitimate politics driving them towards militancy.\(^\text{378}\)

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374 D. B. S. Jeyaraj, ‘Lions and Tigers’ *Himal*, vol. 12, no. 4, April 1999, p. 16.
375 The Constitution of Sri Lanka, 1972, Section 18 a and b.
376 Ibid Section 18 (1) c.
378 According to the Sixth Amendment the members of parliament were supposed to take oath to be loyal to the unitary state.
'Thus the ever-receding line of consociationalism, the main purpose of which, at its weakest, was to maintain a dialogue between the two disputants, came to a tragic end in the latter half of 1983 with the egregious blunder of the enactment of the Sixth Amendment to the 1978 constitution. The amendment compelled all members of parliament to swear loyalty to the unitary state of Sri Lanka. The TULF parliamentarians refused and vacated their seats.'

The gravity of the blunder has been commented on by another analyst:

"The picture of an exclusive Sinhalese state became categorically clear by 1983 when Tamil representatives were forced to leave the National Assembly, the main legislative body of the state. The indubitable dominance of the Sinhalese ethnicity in the state and the imposition of Sinhala Buddhist rights in detriment to the rights of the minorities were responsible for this development. This was similar to what occurred in some other Asian countries where the majority ethnicity took the complete state power into its own hands after the process of de-colonisation."

With the drastic marginalisation of the cultural traits of the minority, and material deprivation and discrimination, Tamil resistance escalated. Demands within the parliamentary democracy by Tamil politicians to gain and reaffirm their position in society became increasingly less viable. However, the steady growth of Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-politics resulting in minority resistance compelled the Sri Lankan government to consider the threat it might cause to governance. As a result, numerous schemes and proposals were put forward at various stages in the post independence period to defuse and contain the growing discontent among the minority Tamil population. However, it has been a consistent pattern of the Sri Lankan politics that the very nature of the bipartisan political structure has been the major constraint in realising those schemes and defusing tension.

Since 1957, there have been numerous peace initiatives proposed or enacted by both the UNP and SLFP led governments. Each time a government attempted to

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implement a solution that would address minority grievances, it was the opposition who confronted and blocked the movement obstructing the opportunities to remedy the damaged inter-ethnic relations and close the inter-ethnic political gap. Every concession to the minority has been branded as a betrayal of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation by the party in opposition who would use the opportunity to lure the Sinhala constituency and consolidate votes for the next election. On each occasion the opposition has employed Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist organisations as the most reliable vehicle to carry the attack on the ruling government. As a result, ruling governments often implemented effectively diluted versions of the schemes of reconciliation which inevitably failed to defuse the tension and establish lasting peace.

In order to understand the nature of confrontational politics operating in Sri Lanka, one can address the relevant events attached to one particular peace scheme, popularly known as the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957. First of all, it must be noted that the rationale of projects proposed by successive governments has not been prompted by a genuine understanding of the need to establish a liberal democratic state, but merely to remedy the growing threat stemming from the minority. Thus the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam proposal was also a mere result of the reaction by the Tamil minority to the ‘Sinhala Only’ approach of the government. The agitation by the Tamil political parties, as well as the non-violent Satyagraha movement organised by the Tamils in 1957, led Bandaranaike to contemplate a proposal which enshrined certain amendments to the ‘Sinhala Only’ language legislation. At the same time, it put forward the Regional Council Act which met the Tamil demand for a federal solution in the northern part of the country at that time. However, the opponents of the package perceived that the language concessions denigrated the Sinhala language on the island, and that political devolution was the basis for the creation of a Tamil state in the north. The UNP, in order to restore its shattered image after its devastating defeat in the 1956 election, used the occasion to mobilise both popular support and the support of the Sangha organisations (Buddhist Monks). The opposition UNP led by J. R. Jayawardane organised a ‘March to Kandy’ to make an appeal to the Temple of the Tooth to abrogate the proposal. Various meetings were held in order to echo the opposition to the package that the UNP called a clear betrayal of the Sinhala people by the government. In its view the enactment of the Pact, which was seen as

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381 J. R. Jayawardane’s speech reported in Daily News, 9 August 1957.
enhancing the use of Tamil language in the north and east would be detrimental to the Sinhala language on the island, and the establishment of a regional council would be the first step to the break up of the unified Sri Lanka. The result of the rigid opposition from the UNP was the abrogation of the Pact.

Similar agitations are apparent today with regard to the proposed devolution package by the ruling (PA) government. Forces opposed to decentralisation are emerging from the same sources as in 1957. The UNP, in whipping up Sinhala nationalist sentiments, stands as one of the major stumbling blocks to the passage of devolution. Various Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist groups are also vehemently in opposition. Perhaps the value of the devolution proposals made by the government to defuse the rising tension was appreciated by the opposition. But an acceptance of such proposals could be suicidal for its political survival in view of its dependence on nationalist vote. Over the years the factors obstructing the passage of the devolution proposal may have become stronger due to the ongoing warfare. It is believed that if the UNP accepted the current government’s proposal (which would end the ongoing war), the political strength of the PA and President Kumaratunga would be further consolidated leaving opposition’s political future uncertain. Thus the struggle for the political survival has been the major source of confrontation which has led the bipartisan system into a vicious circle.382

Between 1957 and the present, there have been several other peace initiatives put forward by both the UNP and SLFP. The tragic fate of all of them has been determined by the very nature of the quasi-democratic bipartisan politics in the country which has undermined the process of reconciliation. Paradoxically, both parties attempt to bring about peace by devolution when they are in the ruling position. Conversely, it would be that same ‘progressive party’, which attempted to give concessions to the minority when they were in power, who would block the schemes of reconciliation when in opposition.

382 This view was expressed by Professor George Cooray, Interview, December 1997.
Leftists and Liberal Democracy

The increasing role of the labour movement and Marxist parties in the first half of the twentieth century indicates that the left has been a strong and reliable guardian of liberal democratic principles in the Sri Lankan politics. They spearheaded the movement for universal franchise on the island. Unlike the conservative elite, they insisted on the need for the inclusion of the Indian Tamil minority into universal franchise. For example A. E. Goonasinghe, a prominent labour leader of the time, was vehemently critical of the demand of the conservatives to deny voting rights to the Indian Tamils. He said:

'a few plutocrats spoke of the Indians as a menace to Sinhala workmen. .... It was the same plutocrats who opposed the grant of universal suffrage. Having failed in their scheme, they now talk of depriving Indians in Ceylon of the rights to vote.'\(^{383}\)

A similar stance was taken by the parties on the left, courageously standing for the Indian Tamil rights. Their position was determined by class lines, not along the ethnic affinities. They regarded the Tamil plantation workers as an important and integral part of the Sri Lankan working class who must have equal rights with other sectors of society. As the LSSP member of State Council N. M. Perera stated, their struggle is the ‘fight against capitalist class whether they are Indians or Ceylonese’.\(^{384}\)

The left became particularly vocal about the Indian Tamil rights after their disenfranchisement by the UNP in 1948. They not only opposed the passage of the Bill, but also criticised it as anti-humane and reactionary in its very substance. Opposing the passage of the Bill, the LSSP member N. M. Perera stated:

'(I) thought that racism of this type ended with Houston Chamberlain and Adolph Hitler....I did not believe it possible that any person claiming to be a statesman would ask us to accede to a Bill of this nature. We cannot proceed

\(^{383}\) Ceylon Daily News, 10 September, 1928.
\(^{384}\) Hansard, 15 January 1937, p. 4150.
as if we are the God’s chosen race quite apart from rest of the world, that we alone have the right to be citizens of this country?"  

Similarly, the member of the Bolshevik Leninist party Colvin R. de Silva stated that ‘this Bill is another dig with a racial spade to make a future grave for universal adult franchise’. Their stance was defined on the grounds of class struggle against capitalists who were opposing the rights of the oppressed section of society. In this sense, the Marxist parties added to Sri Lankan politics a much needed liberal democratic meaning in the early period. They emphasised the need to forge overarching citizenship by including diverse groups into the political process. Colvin R. de Silva elaborated on that point in his statement as follows:

‘There is the cloven hoof of the class approach peeping from under the mantle of an impartial citizenship principle in defining the principle of citizenship. What this government has kept in the forefront of its mind is neither human justice nor social justice, but precisely restriction in the interests of a particular class.’

The Marxist approach towards the language dispute at the early stage was defined on the grounds of the liberal democratic principle. It urged the need for the expansion of vernacular languages as opposed to the colonial language. In this process as they pointed out that both Sinhalese as well as Tamil must be given equal status. In opposition to Bandaranaike’s campaign of ‘Sinhala Only’, the Leftists rejected it as undemocratic. LSSP member Leslie Gunawardane prophetically predicted the danger of the ‘Sinhala Only’ Bill as follows:

‘There is a grave danger...If these people feel that a grave and irreparable injustice is done to them, there is a possibility of their deciding even to break away from the rest of the country’.

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385 Hansard, 10 December 1948, p. 456.
386 Hansard, 19 August 1948, p. 221.
387 Hansard, 19 August 1948, p. 223.
388 Hansard, June 1956, p. 34.
However, towards the 1956 elections the Left realised that the adherence to their liberal democratic principles would leave them out of political power, as the momentum was gathering around the SLFP’s nationalist promises. The leftists abandoned their democratic stance and joined the SLFP, creating the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), which gave a massive victory to the Bandaranaike led government. With this development, the Sri Lankan politics lost the last guardian of liberal democracy. Since that time, the leftist parties have come together with the SLFP to form government on various occasions and have fully contributed to the two major tendencies analysed earlier: the process of ethnocisation and the political confrontation within parliamentary politics.

In abandoning their previous stance for the parity of both languages and endorsing the Bill of ‘Sinhala Only’, the LSSP member Philip Gunawardena spelled out triumphantly:

‘We are completing by this Bill an important phase in our national struggle. The restoration of the Sinhala language to the position it occupied before the occupation of the country by foreign powers marks an important stage in the history of the island’.389

Furthermore, the Leftists were in coalition with the SLFP when they vehemently opposed the 1968 Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact which was an another missed opportunity to implement a lasting solution to the increasingly widening ethnic divide. During its vicious campaign against the Pact, the LSSP’s political organ, Janadina newspaper, wrote,

‘Patriotic organisations are making rapid preparations to hold a series of meetings throughout the country to mobilise public protest against the Dudley-Chelva Pact which betrays the birthrights of Sinhalese’.390

Furthermore, the leftist parties were in coalition with the SLFP in forming the UF government in 1970 which did enormous damage to ethnic relations between the two

389 Hansard, 11 June 1956, p. 450.
groups. Most ironically, it was an ardent socialist and Marxist who designed the 1972 Republican Constitution which ascribed to the island the status of an ethnic state.\textsuperscript{391} The explicit rationale behind the actions of the Marxist parties in the post-independent era has been political survival and opportunism. Having realised the power of majoritarian politics, Sri Lankan Marxist parties not only transformed their classical means of struggle against the capitalists, from the armed revolution to parliamentary democracy, but also aptly utilised the same methods to survive political power struggles as the conventional political parties. They became as nationalist as both conservative political parties, contributing to the rising tide of ethnocisation across the country. As noted earlier, they also became party to the bipartisan political confrontation which halted many opportunities to find solutions to the ethnic conflict.

Thus the lack of commitment to liberal principles was not characteristic only of bourgeois parties which became the major political force in post-independent Sri Lanka. The abandonment of those principles for the sake of political power has been an obvious habit of the Marxist parties of the country too. Furthermore, it must be noted that due to tight political competition between the two major parties over Sinhalese votes, the significance of smaller parties became crucial in forming governments. The Marxists, having accepted parliamentary democracy as a vehicle of realisation of socialist ideals, keenly took the opportunity to reap the benefit. Therefore, it must be mentioned that with the renunciation of liberal democratic principles by the leftists, the state lost its last democratic force to resist those two negative tendencies, the ethnocisation and confrontational politics.

Regardless of the seemingly democratic multi-party political structure, due to fundamental structural deficiencies in the political system, Sri Lanka has not been able to develop into a mature liberal democratic society. The main structural problems are attached to the confrontational politics of the majority Sinhalese parties which has been a fertile ground for ethno-politics. The universal franchise attracting the mass into the political arena thus gave birth to a political struggle between the two major Sinhalese parties. The tragic fate of this battle has been the drastic marginalisation of the minority who has steadily radicalised its tactics in reaction to oppression and in order to reinstate its status in the society.

\textsuperscript{391} Colvin R. de Silva who was a founder member of the Bolshevik party was the architect of the 1972 Republican Constitution of Sri Lanka.