Role of Ethnicity in Sri Lankan Politics

RAW.Ranasinghe
The Head, Department of Political Science,
University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

Abstract

The study attempts to discuss the role of ethnicity and its socio-economic and political implications with the Sri Lankan society. As it is the major purpose of the paper, it does not pay much attention to examine the conceptual base of ethnicity except to examine the role of ethnicity in Sri Lankan politics in pre and post independent Sri Lanka. Objectively the more emphasis is given to discuss the causes and consequences of the conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils with a historical overview of the conflict. At the initial stage, the conflict did not take the form of conflict based on ethnicity but was a war organized by Sinhalese against the South Indian Dravidian invaders. At the second stage in which South Indian Tamil invaders established their colonies in Northern territories, the conflict occurred as the form of the strengthening the central authority over the peripheral disobedient rulers. Yet during the colonial rule especially under the British Empire, the role of ethnicity shifted from its previous form of the conflict between the central authority and the territorial autonomy to acquire more opportunities in colonial politics and administration under the banners of ethno-cultural identities. The role of ethnicity during the post independent Sri Lanka moved towards the conflict between the unitary(ism) and separatism which made a severe damage to the development and progress of the country in human and physical perspectives. Still the ethnicity plays a prominent role in socio-economic and political spheres of the Sri Lankan society.

Key Words: Ethnicity, Ethnic Group, Ethnic Conflict, Sinhalese and Tamils.

1. Introduction

"Ethnicity" denotes to feeling of affiliation among a group of people on racial, linguistic, cultural, religious and regional bases and more explanations are needed to define what is ethnicity. In recent writings (Gunawardana, 1995, 2), the term "ethnic" has been used as a substitute for "racial" group. Yet the term "ethnos" goes far back to the period of Aristotle and it was used to denote to number of people living as a group with common characteristics." In the contemporary world everybody is assumed to have an "ethnic identity" inherited by their anthropological history. When members of a group of humans share and maintain certain beliefs, values, habits, customs and norms, generation after generation, it forms a specific social group which could be called an ethno-cultural group. Thus the human society could be divided into groups based on specific identities such as Language, Religion, Caste, Race, and Tribes. These social diversities may lead to a state of conflict amongst groups due to their stereotype behavior, of which repercussions might be disastrous to coexistence of human groups. This is mainly due to the "over determination"[1] of ethnic groups. As Gunasinghe (1987, vi) analyses

---

[1] Over determination refers to a structure of dominance over the contradictions of particular formation at a particular point of time.(See Charles Abeysekara and Newton Gunasinghe on Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka Social Science Association Colombo, 1987

"the impact of ethnic "over determination" has regrouped and re-divided the society in a novel manner cutting through familiar political camps and distinction."

Sri Lanka as a small tropical island has accommodated three main ethnic groups of which major ethnic group is Sinhalese which shares more or less 73.9% of the total population of the country and almost all of them are Buddhists. The North Indian 'Aryan' origin Sinhalese civilized the country around 500 B.C, several centuries before the Tamil immigration took place. Tamils including both Sri Lankan Tamils & migrated Indian Tamils who are mainly Hindus share 18.2% and Muslims 7.1% while Burgher, Malays and Veddhas (aborigines) sharing the rest 0.8% of the total (Central Bank of Sri Lanka 2009). (see table 1.1)

Table No- I.1   **Population of Sri Lanka by ethnicity, 1921-2001 (percentages)**

Ethnic Group	1921	1931	1946	1953	1963	1971	1981	2001	2008
Sinhalese	67.0	65.3	69.4	59.3	71.0	72.0	74.0	74.5	73.9
Sri Lankan Tamil	11.5	11.2	11.0	10.9	11.0	11.2	12.7	11.9	12.7
Indian Tamil	13.4	15.4	11.7	12.0	10.6	9.3	5.5	4.6	5.5
Sri Lankan Moor	6.3	5.6	5.1	6.3	6.5	6.7	7.0	8.3	7.1
Others	1.8	2.5	1.6	1.4	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100.

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

Note: Estimate population. Census was not completed in the Northern and Eastern Provinces except or Ampara District.

Table 1.2 Cultural Composition of Sri Lanka

Religion	%
Buddhist	69.3
Hindus	15.4
Roman Catholic	7.6
Islam	7.6
Others	0.1
Total	100.00

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Vol. xxxii June 2009

Warnapala (1993,p.3) says that "the Sinhalese people who claim an Aryan descent, constitute the dominant majority in terms of Language Religion and Culture which from time immemorial has had an impact on the political, social and economic life of the country is the dominant culture." Yet, examining the concepts of Aryan and Dravidian ethnicity constructed in historical records such as Mahawamsa and Choolawamsa on anthropological as well as archeological evidences, some scholars like Tennakoon (1987,p.1) attempt to analyze the history of Sri Lanka as a story constituted on mythical assumptions.

Muslim community made up of Arab settlers who established settlements in the island in the seventh century is scattered all over the country with several important clusters in the eastern province and in certain districts of

the Western part of the island. The Sri Lankan Muslim population ethnically is comprised of three main categories:Ceylon Moors, Malays and Indian Moors and almost all of them are Tamil speaking. This affinity of language between Muslim and Tamils has taken as an advantage by Tamil politicians to emphasize on their ethno-cultural demands. In sectorial wise Muslims in Sri Lanka can be divided into two categories. The major categories are the followers of the Prophet Mohamed, i.e. Sunni Sect and the Zia Sect dissent from the Prophet Mohamed's Sect. Sunnis make up more than 98 percent of the Muslim population, with the Zia accounting for the rest. The Moors, make up more than 95 per cent of the Muslim population (Amerdeen 2006,p.23).

The burghers of Ceylon are the descendants of the European officials who worked in the island for the Dutch East India Company. As Warnapala (1993,p.4) mentions that Burghers could influence to the politics and administration during the colonial rule due to their educational fitness. Yet this position was declined due to the introduction of universal franchise and the abolition of communal representation in the legislative council. Warnapala (1993) wrote "The ethnic rivalry has now acquired a new and vitally important dimension in the crisis of the state and Sri Lanka in this context is an important and relevant example." Ethnicity in the contemporary world as Cohen (1974) views is essentially a political Phenomenon'. Struggle for political power within a multi-ethnic or multicultural society may lead to ethnic hostilities among groups. Inter-ethnic hostilities as analyzed by Samarasinghe (1985, p.3) can be based on three fundamental sources which are *interpersonal, Institutional and structural* sources*.* He explains that "Intolerance over personal grudges of one community with the other causes of ethnic hostility as to be seen amongst Black and White in the US society. The second source of ethnic conflict, according to Samarasinghe is institutional in which one ethnic group is excluded relatively from the socio-economic and political institutions, it may cause ethnic hostility. For instance, the accusation of exclusion of Tamils from the equal rights in politics and administration in Sri Lanka could be analyzed as the institutional source of ethnic hostility.' The structural source of ethnic hostility according to Samarasinghe is represented by social and economic inequalities with an ethnic bias. Exclusion causes unequal income distribution and poverty. This main assumption would help us to examine the role of ethnicity in the context of Sri Lanka.

2. Definition to Ethnicity

The term 'ethnicity' is used by the modern sociologists and political scientists in identification of the social groups with specific attributes that differ from the other social groups in the society. Ethnicity describes a collective identity and is based on the assumption that a collectivity has its roots in common ancestry, heritage, religion, culture, nationality, language and a territory (ESDS 2012, p.6). According to the western scholars the ethnic identity may be reflected through specific symbolic elements of social groups. These elements are particular kin structures, diet, religious beliefs, rituals, language, dress, economic activities or political affiliations of the groups. Typically the ethnicity would include different practices in a number of these areas. As Nash (1987, 6) explained "ethnicity can be characterized as the manifestation of ethnic consciousness for status and recognition as a social entity." In the words of Nash, the building blocks of ethnicity are Language, a shared history, religion and nationality'' (Phadnes, Urmila). According to Brass (Brass 1991, p.18) ethnic group can be defined in terms of three major ways such as objective attributes, subjective feelings and behavior. The objective definition assumes that though there is no specific attribute it is invariably associated with all ethnic categories and there must be some distinguishing cultural feature that clearly separates one group of people from the other. The subjective definition attempts to find how the group came to subjective consciousness or feeling at first. The behavioral definition what and which is mostly related to the objective definition which views that there is a specific pattern of behavior of one group that differs from the other group.

However Brass also has accepted that any of these definitions is a sense of identity which consists of subjective symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people of any aspect of culture in order to differentiate themselves from other groups (Brass p.19). It is clear that the term ethnic group is generally understood in anthropological literature to designate a population which is largely biologically perpetuating, shares fundamental cultural values realized in overt unity in cultural forms, makes up a field of communication and interaction, and has a membership which identities have been identified by others as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order (Barth, Fredrik, 1982,pp.10-11).

According to Horowitz (1985), ethnicity is an umbrella concept that "easily embraces groups differentiated by color, language, and religion; it covers 'tribes,' 'races,' 'nationalities,' and castes" (Horowtitz 1985, p.53). According to the definition made by Bulmer (1996) 'An ethnic group is a collectivity within a larger population having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared past, and a cultural focus upon one or more symbolic elements which define the group's identity, such as kinship, religion, language, shared territory, nationality or physical appearance. Thus members of an ethnic group are conscious of belonging to an ethnic group' (cited in ESDS 2012, p.6-7). Kofi Hadjor providing a definition for the term ethnicity mentioned that ethnicity is the form of consciousness based on promotion of ethnic identification. It is an exclusive consciousness which thrives on the elevation of ethnic differences. Ethnicity directly challenges to national consciousness and identity (Hadjor, Kofi Buenor 1987, p.145).

However the emphases of these definitions are "ethnicity"; it is an unavoidable cultural phenomenon that helps to diversify the human society rather than its unification. Thus the diverse and antagonistic role of the ethnic identity in the contemporary world has challenged the liberal notion of "Melting Pot Theory" and the Marxist theory of "Class Consciousness."

In the contemporary world everybody is assumed to have an ethnic identity. Therefore, ethnicity is often associated with a fixed ethnic identity. Human being at the elementary level of their collective life involved in a constant struggle against others for securing their hunting plots or territories within which they secured their ethnic hegemony. Thus the social groups in modern societies use the 'ethnicity' as an identity in demanding the socio-economic and political rights in order to strengthen their group status within the civil society. Except in a developed society where 'ethnicity' is latent, in every other context ethnicity plays a vital role in relation to politics; ethnic conflicts might erupt with unexpected massive damages. Then the questions which should be raised here are, what would be the solution for the ethnic rivalry in multi-cultural societies and how it would be a perfect remedy to the issue? The melting pot theory of liberalism has already proved its inapplicability while socialism has become an unsuccessful phenomenon in the context of multiethnic society. Even the solution of consociational democracy which is the most recent proposal for resolving the conflict of multiethnic society, has been rejected by critics like Paul Brass (1991) on some basic grounds.

3. Ethnicity in Sri Lanka- A Historical Overview

The antagonism between Sinhalese and Tamils can be traced back to the period of early 10th century circa, when Sri Lankan rulers faced periodical threats by the invasion of South Indian 'Chola Dynasty'. The ethnic conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils in the early History is represented through the series of ethno-religious wars. As a consequence of this conflict the northern part of the country was subjected to the rule of the south Indian rulers from time to time and consequently the internal power of Sinhalese became weaker. However these periodic invasions caused to move the Sinhalese Kingdom from the North-Central part to the south western and latter to

the 'Kandyan Kingdom' of the Central Hills, at where the last King of the Sinhalese dynasty was conquered by the British.

Ancient and medieval history of Sri Lanka has been mainly recorded in Mahawamsa and Chulawamsa which are the basic sources of the history of Sinhala Buddhist in particular and of the others in general. As Rohanadeera,(1984) explains Sinhala Buddhist identity was not a recent fabrication. "Anyone who reads Mahawamsa, Chulawamsa, the 34th chapter of Pujawaliya, Nikaya Sangrahaya, Saddharma Rathnakaraya, Parakumba Siritha or examines the inscription and Sannas[2] Records from the Anuradhapura period in 4th Century BC to the era of Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe in Kandyan Kingdom in 18th and 19th Century would be convinced that in Sri Lanka, Sinhalaness and Buddhism have maintained mutual rapport with each other throughout the long history of the country."

According to these records, migration of Sinhalese is thought to be commenced with the accidental sailing of Prince Vijaya and his notorious gang in a tidal wave to the Northwestern coast of the country. This Aryan prince and his colleagues used marriage diplomacy with Indian clans to make their permanent settlement with characteristics of Indo-Aryan civilization in the country. The Dravidian (Tamil) migration occurred several centuries after the Sinhalese. Yet as Gomas (1984) argued, "Tamils cannot be the original settlers of Lanka as their numbers have been always remained small." Yet some Tamil scholars like Satyendra (1985) believe that Sinhalese do not have pure origin of Aryans but a mixture of Aryans and Dravidians origins. Quoting Mahawansa, Satyendra explains that a few years after his arrival in Sri Lanka, Vijaya and his fellows married Tamils from the Pandyan Kingdoms in South India. However, this marriage diplomacy accelerated the flow of Tamil migration to the island in several waves. Making a counter argument to Satyendra, Gomas (1964) in his newspaper article explains that Dravidians are not migrants but invaders and "it would be more accurate to define the Dravidians of North (of Sri Lanka) as descendants of South Indian invaders who came to plunder weak Sinhalese kingdoms."

The South Indian invasions were so crucial for the peaceful existence of the Sinhalese in the medieval eras; the rulers of the country had to shift the kingdom from one place to the other for security and strategic purposes. Thus the seedling of antagonism within the ethnic groups could be accepted to be commenced with the Dravidian invasions and their destructions of irrigation system and demolition of cultural and sacred places on which Sinhalese Buddhist civilization had been based. Since the era of the King Duttagamini - the hero of Sinhalese Buddhists, who unified the island and restored the Sinhala -Buddhist culture, the successive rulers could maintain the territorial integrity until the subjugation of the Kandyan Kingdom by the British in 1815.

3.1 Role of Ethnicity in Politics and Administration in Colonial Ceylon

The colonialism that turned the page of modern era of the Sri Lankan history from the 16th century onward added a new dimension to the discussion of the role of ethnicity in politics and administration of the country. The Portuguese and the Dutch who were the early colonizers of Sri Lanka did not promote and utilize the ethnicity as a supportive factor in administering the maritime territories, but exploited the sub-cultural groups (cast groups) in carrying out their trading and commercial activities. Sinhalese caste groups which had been

---

[2] Written documents authorizing the control of a geographical area or a sacred place or rendering a particular service to the state.

involved in specific production activities or services were incorporated by Portuguese in to their commercial and trading activities under specific departments which were known as "Baddas (Abeysinghe Tikiri, 1966, p.72). Cinnamon peeling industry, for instance, had been organized under a specific caste group called 'Mahabadde' while collectors of tusks or ivories were called 'Kuruwe Badde' (Abeysinghe).

The Dutch did not pay much attention to promote and incorporate the ethnicity or the caste in their administration but extended opportunity for the natives to emerge as groups of new servicemen and artisan classes. Yet the arrangements were made to incorporate the caste groups into their local administration while retaining the "key administrative positions" with the Dutch officials who transferred the responsibility of mobilizing the people in the villages to the graded native officialdom, whenever the Dutch desired to do so (Ranasinghe 2014). The British was the first and the most explicit colonial power that brought the ethnicity as a prominent factor in politics and administration in the colonial rule. They promoted the ethnic minorities against the majorities by extending more opportunities for minorities in politics and administrative spheres than that of majorities. Thus the colonial policy of "divide and rule" employed by the British in colonies like Ceylon (Sri Lanka), promoted the ethnic conflict as a long-lasting issue that thwarted the socio-economic and political progress of colonies even after their independence.

The revivalist movement that attempted to promote national consciousness against the western culture ended by the mid of the second decade of the 20th Century and it caused the emergence of ethno-cultural strife in the post revivalist Ceylon. The Sinhala Muslim Riots in 1915, for instance, befell not directly as the communal but was a case of cultural bias and intolerance of one group over the other's cultural identity that curved unpleasant experiences among groups. It was spared due to the attack made by Muslims on the Sinhalese Buddhist Cultural procession in front of a Mosque at Gampola.[3] The incident was utilized by the British to suppress Sinhalese leaders of the Revivalist Movement which could be treated as the real nationalist movement which converged all ethnic groups into a national objective. Thereafter, no such incidents took place during the colonial era except some isolated incidents that took place in the post independent Sri Lanka over the issue of power sharing between two major ethnic groups. .

3.2 Ethnic Grievances – Subjective Dimension

The environment for the rival politics between Sinhalese and Tamil leaders developed during the Donoughmore era. The ideological representation in the State politics during the Donoughmore era was merely based on the ethno-cultural identities, mainly due to the absence of competitive political party system. The ethno-cultural slogans were the determinant factors of the success of the elections. Free education through "Swabhasha' (native languages), land for the landless, employment for the vernacular educated were the attractive slogans often used by the politicians in the election campaigns. Though these slogans represented a common validity for all community, it was clear that the majority Sinhalese would obviously be gained much more than minorities due to their majority representation in the legislative council.

Tamils forwarded their grievances to the colonial secretary saying that they had lost their political power through the rule of majority of Sinhalese (due to the universal franchise, the administrative power gained by the executive committee system headed by Sinhalese), and the cultural powers through the 'Swabhasha' or indigenous language policy. The subjective feelings of Tamil ethnicity in the pre independence era were

---

[3] Gampola was a kingdom of Sinhalese in medieval times and presently it is a town 10 15 km away from the city of Kandy

represented in a dual character. First they used the ethnic identity to obtain the sympathy of colonial masters by whom the Tamil ethnicity was used as a counter force to face Sinhalese who challenged the British rule. Secondly they always used their subjective feelings in and out of the government to voice against the objectives of Sinhalese.

However, the recommendations made by the Donoughmore Constitution were condemned by the Tamil political leaders stating that it heralded "the death to the minorities." Yet, the commissioners defining the communal representation as the "cancer in the body politics," (Donoughmore Report) favored the Universal Franchise. After the formation of Sinhalese dominant Board of Ministers in 1936, as Tamil leaders pointed out, the ratio of representation between the two communities, which was 1 Tamil to 2 Sinhalese prior to the Donoughmore, had now become 1 Tamil to 5 Sinhalese in the legislative Council. Based on this argument, Tamil leaders demanded 50:50 rights to avoid the danger of concentration of power within one community (Report of the Commission on Constitutional Reform (Soulbury Report)). Soulbury commissioners did not agree with the 50:50 demands as it was irrational and biased compared with the size of Tamil population and the number of their representatives in the parliament. Yet arrangements were made to extend the opportunities for minorities through the creation of multi-member constituencies, the second chamber-the Senate House and six appointments to the Parliament. However, these arrangements were impractical due to the over representation of Sinhalese (Ibid).

In 1944 a Commission headed by Lord Soulbury was appointed to consider a draft constitution for Sri Lanka with the objective of granting independence. The impending arrival of the Soulbury Commission on the island intensified communal rivalries and the consolidation of ethnic identities (Asoka Bandara 2009,p.37). Based on the Commission's recommendations, the constitution for independent Sri Lanka was drafted by Sir Ivor Jennings – a British Fabian Scholar, giving the shape of the Westminster model that was the classical model of the era. The entire provision of the constitution was made to protect the rights of minorities. The Article 29 of the Soulbury Constitution was criticized by scholars as a major obstacle to the sovereignty of the people symbolized through the power of legislative council. According to the above Article the Parliament did not have power to make and enact the legislations that might have direct or indirect violent effects on minority rights. In practice, Sinhalese realized the state of 'independence' they have received was not the one that they had really expected. There was no change to be seen in the socio economic and cultural spheres, even after several years since the independence. The ruling class was still the English speaking elite who valued the western culture while the economy was dependent on the hands of few national and international enterprises. English was the official language, and Christianity was the privileged religion. The people had never expected such a situation. They wanted to restore their own rule enriched by Sinhala-Buddhist culture instead of a western biased system. Due to the majoritarian composition of the government, the minorities could not enjoy the rights though they were included in the constitution.

3.3 Conversion of the Ethnic Demand from Equal Rights to Self-Governing

After the realization of impracticability of equal representation under the universal franchise, the Tamil leaders moved gradually from the demand for equal rights to autonomous region in northern territories where the majorities of Tamils were living. Following the recommendations made by the Chocks Commission in 1955 for the establishment of regional council as a solution for the political grievances of Tamils, Prime Minister Bandaranaike signed an Agreement with SJV Chelvanayakam- the leader of the TAK[4] (Federal party) in 1957

---

[4] Tamil Arashu Kachchei (Party for Tamil State)

and recommended to establish a Regional Council in northern region. Anyhow, with the unilateral withdrawal of the B-C Pact [5] by the Prime Minister Bandaranayake, Tamil leaders resisted by organizing a sathyagraha (non-violent) campaign at the Galle-face, Colombo. The situation led to a communal violence between Sinhalese and Tamil leaders in 1958.

It should be accepted that the ethno-minority politics in Sri Lanka cannot be discussed in isolation of Tamilnadu Politics. The relations between northern Sri Lankan Tamils and their homogeneous South Indians still exist and they are naturally blessed by the geographical situation of the two territories. "Tamilnado, as one of the largest states in the Indian Federal Government, which is populated by over 50 million of Tamil ethnic group, provides the moral and materialistic support for the separatist movement of their homogeneous Sri Lankan Tamils. Kailasapathy (1984, p.109) wrote that South India played a vital role in the development of their ethnic consciousness and separatist identity. This has become a crucial factor that should be taken seriously into account, in attending to any measurement of solution for the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka.

The other important aspect, to which we should pay our attention to explore the role of ethnicity in Sri Lankan politics, is the plantation economy and the South Indian laborers who were brought by the British planters to work in the plantation sector. After becoming an independent sovereign state, the country had to define its nation. The workers of Indian origin were not considered as the citizens of the country as they had not fulfilled the requirements to gain the citizenship of the country. They had a South Indian Dravidian mentality. Thus the citizenship of Indian immigrant workers was a controversial issue since the Donoughmore administration. The enactment of the citizenship Acts of 1948 and 1949 caused disfranchisement of Indian immigrant working force. Yet after the unionization under the Ceylon Workers Congress, the plantation workers made a gradual move from South Indian Dravidian consciousness to Ceylonized mentality extending their cooperation to the left movement. With the mass support of the plantation workers, the left movement could challenge the UNP at the general election to become the government of independent Sri Lanka in 1948. That was the immediate reason for bringing the Citizenship Acts of 1948 & 1949 to the parliament. Since then the citizenship issue of the plantation Tamils played a substantial role in the national as well as the international politics of Sri Lanka. The Indo-Sri Lanka relationship in 1960s and 70s was designed by the Indians who were concerned with the plantation workers.

As Warnapala, (1987, p.17) says "the Sri Lankan Tamils share the language and religion of the people of Tamilnadu." The geographical proximity together with ethno-cultural relationship between Tamilnadu and Jaffna peninsula has a great impact on deciding Tamil politics in Sri Lanka. For instance, "We Tamils" movement emerged in Tamilnadu in 1960s, promoted a conflict-ridden situation in Sri Lanka. With the encouragement of Tamilnadu politicians, Lankan Tamils too attempted to show their independence in an ethno based separatism, by launching a stamp of "Tamil Arasu Postal Service" in 1962. Retaliating to the Jaffna centered "We Tamil" consciousness Mr. R.G. Senanayake – pro Sinhalese politician too, organized "We Sinhalese" movement and measures were taken to brainwash Sinhalese pointing out that Sri Lanka is the one and only country for Sinhalese and if it is lost Sinhalese would have to jump into the sea. The coalition government of 1960 headed by Mrs. Bandaranaike took immediate military action to eliminate the separatist attempt by destroying stamps and taking the Tamil leaders into custody.

The system of District Political Authority (DPA) which was introduced in 1976 as a political solution for the demand of an autonomous region was also rejected by Tamil leaders as they had already insisted upon a separate

state. This determination of Tamil leaders was once again confirmed with the introduction of the Second Republic Constitution in 1978, under which the entire power of the state and the government was retained in the hand of an Executive President and hence the devolution of power had become a dream. It was explicit by the electoral behavior of the ruling party at the District Council Election for Jaffna held in 1981.

With the growing disappointment of majority Sinhalese with the system, one Western educated Anglican (Sir Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranayake) and also an outstanding political figure of the ruling party broke away from the government and formed a new party: Sri Lanka Freedom Party [SLFP] in 1951, giving new expectations to the discontented Sinhalese. The slogans of the new party were highly emotional and they stimulated the ethnic feelings of both groups. He proclaimed that he would restore Buddhism, the religion of the Sinhalese in the country and make Sinhalese official state language within 24 hours. The Sinhala Buddhists who had enormous aspirations of enjoying their cultural rights that were damaged under the colonialism, emotionally rallied around the new party and its 'charismatic' leadership. The new trend of mass waved towards the new party and its slogans of pro Sinhalese Buddhist national gave a greater excitement to the ethnic minorities and also to the United National Party (UNP) which was the ruling party at the time.

Both language and religion are motivating factors of ethnic cleavage. With the enactment of Sinhala Only Act in 1956, Tamil leaders began to question the socio-cultural equality and opposed the Language Policy of the MEP government led by Prime Minister Bandaranaike. The rationale behind the official Language policy was the necessity of an official language for Ceylon as a newly independent nation. However, the official language policy ignited the tension of ethnic conflict. The educated rural people who were attracted by the language policy rallied around Bandaranaike. It was so decisive to the political fate of the UNP which was known as an Umbrella Party; consequently the party sifted from its former policy of language equality to the "we too for Sinhala only policy" at its party conference held in 1954 at Kelaniya.[6] Eventually the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) led by Bandaranaike won the election in 1956, with a massive victory for the first time of the election history of the country. The emotional politics created a great fragmentation in the relationship between the two ethnic groups. The Tamils losing their confidence kept with both major parties of Sinhalese demanded more rights than representation. In the meantime the Federal party (PF-Elankai Tamil Arasu Katchi) led by Chelvanayam, pressurized the new government, demanding for a semi-automous federal with the status for Tamil as an administrative languages in Northern region. The Prime Minister Bandaranaike came to an Agreement with Tamil leaders in 1957 and forwarded the Bill for Cabinet approval. But eventually the resolution was sabotaged by the Sinhalese chauvinistic group, led by the opposition party (UNP). The Tamils lost their confidence with Sinhalese at the second time too, and demonstrated their objection by organizing a 'Sathyagrha' a nonviolence campaign in the high populated Tamil areas. This situation led to an ethnic riot between two groups causing physical damages in 1958, for the first time in the history after the Independence. However, the Prime Minister was assassinated by an unknown gunman in the following year after the communal riots and his widowed wife Mrs.Sirimavo Bandaranaike led the party until her daughter came to power as the president of Sri Lanka in 1994. It was clear that the ethnic identity during this period has played a dramatic role in relation to the expansion and protection of their boundaries of ethnic share of socio-economic power within the Sri Lankan society.

The ethnic rivalry in Sri Lanka, by1960s, was shaped by the two major reasons. At first the office of Mrs. Bandaranaike as the Prime Minister did not impress the Tamil leaders, as she was a pro-Buddhist,Kandyan Sinhalese, belonged to an Aristocratic family and also she was the leader of the Sinhalese chauvinistic party.

---

[6] Suburb city closer to Colombo.

Secondly the ethnic rejuvenation of Sri Lankan Tamils flourished through the influences of Tamil (Dravidian) chauvinism that was rising in Tamilnadu 'the land of the Tamils' (see Sri Lanka, ed.by ross Russell & Savada. 1990, p.75) during the 1960s. The latter is immensely important in the discussion of ethnicity of the country. The literature published in and meeting or conferences held in Tamilnado State during this period delineated that they were the 'Bhumiputra' (the people of origin or aborigines) in India and they have the coherent rights to enjoy the freedom and rights in a separate state in Indian soil and therefore 'Tamilnado should be separated' from the Central Government. The situation led to the emergence of an ethnic mass organization 'We Tamils' through which the separatist consciousness was trickled down to Tamil Ethno-nationalism in Sri Lanka. It was reflected by the Sri Lankan branch of 'We Tamils'; formed in northern part of the country in the same period. Some Sinhalese chauvinistic politicians attempted to form the counter organizations like 'We Sinhalese' as retaliation to We Tamil Movement. The Tamil leaders who were impressed by the Tamilnado politics attempted to symbolize their ethnic identity within a separate state issued a stamp of an independent postal service (Tamil Arasu Postal Service) in Jaffna peninsula. The Prime Minister Mrs. Bandaranayake responding to the growing tension of Tamil ethnicity in Northern Sri Lanka banned South Indian literature and all other connections of ethnic means, and ordered the government forces to maintain the law and order in northern Sri Lanka. It was the first incident that sought a solution by means of military for the Northern problem.

The Election with landslide victory of the United Front government[7] in 1970, was a turning point which brought the ethnic relations of the Sri Lanka into a critical forum. The new constitution introduced in 1972 was treated as an autochthony indigenous in character and was the one which totally divorced from the previous British made constitution which highlighted the minority rights and freedom against the majority and also subjected to be supervised by the British government. Yet the new constitution was a document which represented a long term aspiration of Sinhalese and was independent from external forces. People's sovereignty was symbolized by the Parliament (National Assembly) and the executive power was vested in the Cabinet. The Sinhala Buddhist identity was highlighted in its objective. . Shifting from the traditional economic policy to the inward looking policy through the measurement of import substitution and export promotion, the new government increased the government intervention in the economy. Thereby the government attempted to promote Sinhalese middle class who were less privileged by the previous economy and also to increase the employment opportunities in the public sector. 'Sinhala' became the official language while Tamil and English were considered as administrative languages. The intake to the Universities opened more opportunities for the rural Sinhalese who were also neglected by both colonial rule and West minister model of government.

The changing situation under the new constitution led the Tamil ethnicity towards objective and subjective dimension and they choose the way of separatism as an alternative solution for their ethnic reputation which they enjoyed in the colonial era and in the Westminster system. On the very day when the new Republic was officially declared, the Tamil leaders converging all Tamil parties into one ethno-political group created a new party as Tamil United Front (TUF) that was soon renamed as Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF); it made a social contract among themselves to stand for their ultimate goal of a separate Tamil state. This was the turning point of Sri Lankan ethnic conflict which shifted ethnic rivalry to the ethnic war.

3.6 Transition of Ethnic Conflict into Ethnic War

The failure of the United Front government due to internal and external crisis in the late half of 1970s was a blessing to the opposition party The United National Party (UNP). The UNP came to power with a giant victory

---

[7]It was an Alliance of SLFP and left parties

in the election held in 1977 and the first Republic constitution was replaced by the 'Gaullist model' constitution – the Second Republic Constitution through the provisions of which the entire power of the state was vested with the executive presidency. But the most significant feature of the new constitution was the restoration of rights of minorities including languages and employment opportunities that were suppressed by the previous system. Nevertheless the Tamil separatist movement led by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), popularly known as 'Tamil Tigers' launched an open battle against the government and claimed a separate state for Tamils. By the time they were well organized and formed a well-trained guerilla movement in Sri Lanka having advantages of training and base facilities in Tamilnadu and other parts of India (De Silva KMD 1995, p.119). They tested their Guerilla warfare and training capacity by a land mined killing of 13 Sinhalese soldiers in July 1983. This incident known as 'Black July' (Urmila Phadnis in Diamond Larry, et al 1989,p.168) resulted in evolving of tidal waves of communal riots which caused in internationalization of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Even though the July riots were organized by the government supported mobs, the Tamil militants declared an open war against the Sinhalese and the government simultaneously. They started to expand the boundaries of their proposed State by killing and chasing out the innocent Sinhalese and Muslim civilians from their hometowns while launching massive attacks to the government forces. This grave ethnic war was interpreted as a war between two fearful wild animals viz. Tigers against Lions. Tiger is the symbol of South Indian 'Cholas Empire' while the lion is the symbol of north Indian tribal group from whom the Sinhalese are believed descendants. Also the lion is the symbol of the national flag of Sri Lanka and the Tiger is the symbol of the utopian State of 'Tamil Eelam'.

Though the separatist militants were defeated by the government forces, the separatist ideology is still alive due to the patronage of some Western Regimes of which political leaders have to be dependent on the support of the Tamil diaspora. Ethnic crisis of Sri Lanka was internationalized with the Black July incidents which drew the sympathy of Western World for Tamil grievances. The assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in his election campaign in Tamilnadu received further recognition in the sphere of International politics. With the mediatory role of Mr. Eric Solheim, some countries (Norway, Japan, UK, France and Norway known as co-chairs) gathered to facilitate the Sri Lankan government to find a solution to this decade-lengthy crisis. Yet, apparently the behavior of co-chairs was biased towards the LTTE and thus the government accelerated the military operation against the LTTE and ended the armed hostility of the LTTE in 2009. The anti-western President Rajapakse disappointed the Western agents who have accelerated their involvement in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka through the international legal measures. The incident was given publicity by some International NGOs like Amnesty International, International Red Cross and various other movements that stand for Human Rights and democracy.

The Indian involvement in the ethnic conflict was based on the following two major reasons. The first was the political pressure of the State government of Tamilnadu to the Indian Central government. The Tamilnado government pressurized the Central Government of India in several occasions when the militants were in difficulty to face the government forces, to involve in the internal problems of Sri Lanka through a military means and to protect the rights of the Tamils. The Congress government was not in a position to just avoid the request of Tamilnado because Anna Dravida Munnetra Kalakam [ADMK], the ruling party of Tamilnado was one of the pillars of Congress Government. Second reason for Indian involvement in internal affairs of Sri Lanka was the pro-US foreign policy of Sri Lankan government which was adopted in 1980s. That obviously did not coincide with the aspiration of Indian hegemony in the South Asia and also in the region surrounded by the Indian Ocean. On this ground in 1987 the Indian government entered the Sri Lankan soil violating its territorial sovereignty and signed an Agreement with Sri Lankan government to find a solution for Tamil problems through a collaborative effort. The various resolutions made by Sri Lanka in collaboration with Indian Federal government were rejected by the Tamil Militants and they demanded their separate 'Eelam State'.

4. Conclusion

Societies, particularly in developing countries and generally in developed, are polarized in ethno-cultural identities. Intolerance and discriminatory and hostile attitudes among rival groups have become a common phenomenon. Even in the case of Sri Lanka, three main ethnic groups are often misled by their political leaders for their political survival. The Sinhalese- Tamil hostility which was designed by the conflict continued for several decades between the Tamil separatist militants (LTTE) and government forces was not a conflict where a race stood against another race. General mass in both communities did not want and do not want to attack each other. A clash between Muslims and a group of Buddhist monks was created due to mismanagement and mishandling of Ministerial powers of Muslim Ministers in the government and the Bhikku Organizations who opposed such behavior. Though the incidents linked with ethno-cultural factors are trivial, the possibility of snowballing is immense. The process of socialization of the future generation in Northern Sri Lanka is not democratic. Today, what the younger generation in Northern region is seeing in their surroundings? They can see soldiers holding destructive weapons, the war torn environment and ethnically biased politicians who drag the ordinary masses towards the ethno separatist end. The younger generation most of whom have dropped schooling and served the LTTE as child soldiers are less educated and hence facing the problem of unemployment. Yet the situation in southern Sri Lanka compared with that of northern is still seeking ways and means for building of an environment with peace and harmony in order to avoid all kinds of anti-democratic and anti-social elements.

References

- Abeysekera C and Gunasinghe N. 1987. *Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*. Social Scientist Associations. Colombo-Sri Lanka.
- Abeysinghe Tikiri, 1966. *Portuguese in Ceylon*, Lake House Investment Ltd. Sri Lanka.
- Ameerdeen.V. 2006. *Ethnic Politics of Muslims in Sri Lanka.* Centre for Minority Studies. Kandy-Sri Lanka.
- Barth. Fredrik, 1982. *Ethnic Group and Boundaries.* The Social Organization of Cultural Differences. Universitet sforlaget.
- Brass. Paul**.** 1991. *Ethnicity and Nationalism. Theory and Comparison*. Sage Publishers New Delhi/London.
- De Silva KMD. 1994. *Far East and Australia*. Europa publishers.
- Department of census & Statistics of Sri Lanka. 1994. *Statistical Year Book of   Sri Lanka – 1994.*
- Horowitz D. 1985. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: Univ. Calif. Press
- Kailasapathy, K. 1984. *Cultural and Linguistic Consciousness of Tamil Community.* in "Ethnicity & Social Change in Sri Lanka.
- Kenneth E Bauzan. 1992. *Development and Democratization in the Third World: Myth, Hopes and Realities.* Crane Russak Washington London.
- Larry Diamond Juanj Liz and Seymour.M.L. 1989. *Democracy in developing countries.* in Asia, Vol.3, Adamantine Press Ltd. London.
- Manning Nash. 1987. *Cauldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World.* University of Chicago Press.
- Phadnes, Urmila. 1979. *Ethnics and Nation Building in South Asia – A case study of Sri Lanka.* India Quarterly Vol. xxxv,   July-Sept 1979, No 3 P. 329

- Ranasinghe. RAW, 2014 *The local government in Ceylon A Historical Perspectives*. in International Journal of Science, Commerce & Humanities (IJSCH) Vol. 2, No. 5 UK.
- Russell Ross and Andrea Matles. 1989. *Sri Lanka*. Area Hand Book Series Federal Research Division Library. Sweden.
- Vamadevan.M. 1989. *Sri Lankan Repatriates in Tamil Nadu- Rehabilitation and Integration.* Zen Publishers. Madras.
- Warnapala Wiswa. 1987. *Welfare as politics in Sri Lanka*. McGill University.
- Hadjor, Kofi Buenor, On Transforming Africa (Discourse with African leaders)
- Africa world Press INC New Jersy / Third World Communication UK. 1987.