

# **A Case Study on the Perceptions of Jaffna Tamils Regarding the Elongated Civil War**

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## **1. Introduction**

Sri Lanka faced thirty years elongated civil war which originated in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country. Jaffna Peninsula (which is considered as the heart of the Northern Province) was an area which directly faced the brutality of war that occurred between the Sri Lankan government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) terrorist group, and majority of civilians residing in this area had experiences of the war and became war victims for years. Terrorism refers to the use of violent acts to frighten people in an area as a way of trying to achieve a political goal (Jetter, 2016). According to the Ministry of Defence (1999), LTTE, commonly known as the Tamil Tigers, is a military organization that has been waging a violent secessionist campaign against the Sri Lankan government since 1970s, in order to create a separate Tamil state in the North and East of Sri Lanka. However, it is essential to find out people's attitudes regarding the war and their memories of war as well. Therefore, this research explores the war memories of Tamils in Jaffna. A family which belonged to a fishing community in Passaivur, Jaffna was selected as the case of this research and convenience sampling method was used to select the sample. The research problem is to find out how Tamils in Jaffna reflect their memories and how they comprehend experiences of war period. The major objective of this research is to explore the perceptions of war victims about the war. Enlightening people by using the findings of this research is also an objective of this research.

## **2. Literature Review**

Balasuriya (2009) defines terrorism as a technique for inducing fear by intimidation, and terrorist violence is neither spontaneous nor random, but carefully planned and executed. In May 2009, Sri Lanka defeated one of the most violent insurgencies and terrorist campaigns in the world. Maritime and aviation attacks supported by cyber exploitation gave rise to a thirty-year conflict in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan government's security apparatus-military forces, police and intelligence services- sacrificed an entire generation to defeat a formidable force (Gunaratne, 2016). According to Balasuriya (2009), the foremost root cause for the establishment of LTTE was the killing of Alfred Durraipappa, Mayor of Jaffna, outside a kovil, on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 1975,

and that lead to form a small commando unit of the Tamil New Tiger (TNT) under Prabhakaran's leadership. With considerable population, he established the LTTE in May 1976, and 10 days later, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) presented the Vaddukodai delegates' convention which passed a resolution demanding a free, sovereign, secular and socialist state of 'Tamil Eelam' based on the right of self-determination. Though there was no visible, direct linkage between the two historic incidents, the TULF and LTTE had a considerable relationship during the formative years. According to Shanmugathas (2016), it was wrong to label LTTE as a terrorist organization and, the civil war ended in a bloody manner with an estimated 40,000 civilians killed during the final stages of the war and egregious human rights violations were committed by both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government during the final stages.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This research was mainly based on a case study that was conducted with a family in Jaffna. The interviews were conducted during five days by staying with the family (from 04<sup>th</sup> April 2019 to 09<sup>th</sup> April 2019) while experiencing their rituals, food, culture and religious practices. This family belonged to a fishing community of the Jaffna peninsula, and they lived in a village of fishermen called Passaivur. This research fundamentally followed the qualitative approach and the convenience sampling method was used to select the family in order to conduct in-depth and semi-structured interviews with family members. Apart from this primary data collection methods, the secondary data was also used for this research.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

According to the collected data from the case study and other secondary data sources, the following factors were identified as the results of this study. Tamils in Jaffna had an ideology that the civilians were directly victimized by both parties who were involved in this war (LTTE and Sri Lankan government). However, they had another belief that the LTTE members were also their own people, even though they were considered as terrorists. This reflected the feeling of belongingness and attachment towards their ethnic group. In addition, Tamils in Jaffna perceived that LTTE represented and fought for the rights of Tamil civilians and they fought to eradicate the discrimination by the major ethnic group by claiming a separate state. They expressed their ideas regarding "Maha Viru Celebrations" (celebrating the people who died as suicide bombers during the war) in a rational point of view. At the same time, they refused the mass destruction of LTTE and the terrorism which prevailed around the country. In addition, they believed that the governance prevailed in Jaffna by LTTE functioned well and it led to occur at least amount of crimes in Jaffna

community. However, they also had a doubt whether the LTTE could establish a well-functioning state, even if they had won the war.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This research was conducted to explore how the Tamils reflected their memories of thirty years elongated war. According to the findings of this research, the following conclusions were identified. Tamils in Jaffna have an ideology that the LTTE fought for their own people to protect and secure their civil rights. The findings of this study suggest that they had to become victims of war because of the both parties which were involved in the war. In addition to that, they had doubts whether the LTTE government could fullfil the civilians' needs. Tamils perceive the Mahaviru Celebration as a rational commemoration. Finally, I suggest that this research can be used for further research regarding the field of peace and conflict resolution.

## **6. References**

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