

CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to the Post-War Peace Building and Development in Sri Lanka

Upali Pannilage

Society is built on diverse social networks. This diversity lies in almost all aspect of social connections, such as race, ethnicity, religion, culture, customs, tradition, gender, political ideologies, professions etc. Social cohesion and social peace play a vital role in such a pluralistic society. Sri Lanka has been considered as a country with a multi-cultural society. Silva and Hettige (2010, p.2) write that “as a theory and practice, multiculturalism refers to a broad set of ideas, policies and principles favourable to the development and peaceful coexistence of a plurality of cultures. It seeks to promote tolerance, mutual respect and free flow of ideas across cultures in ways that enrich them all without necessarily undermining each other”. Classical definition of conflict is that “It is an intrinsic and inevitable aspect of social change. It is an expression of heterogeneity of interests, values, beliefs that arise as new formations generated by social change come up against inherited constraints. But the way we deal with conflict is a matter of habit and choice.”(Miall, Oliver, & Woodhouse, 1999).

Conflict touches everything in us, our feelings, our thoughts. Conflicts demand of us everything we have to offer. If not, our emotions will easily be expresses as violence, insulting the basic

needs of others, as verbal violence, physical violence, or both (Galtung, 2004, p. 4). Sri Lanka experienced over three decades of civil war with the military conflict ending in May 2009. The conflict killed tens of thousands of people and destroyed public and private property on a large scale. With the cessation of armed hostilities, the society has since entered in to a post-war situation where the need is to rebuild society, taking into account social, cultural and economic development aspects. While economic development through rehabilitation of infrastructure and livelihood bases is underway, the socio-cultural aspects of post-conflict rebuilding in Sri Lanka remain a challenge.

Historically, the principle ethnic conflict that emerged after the country's independence from British colonialism in 1948 revolves around the Tamil campaign for a separate homeland in the northern and eastern regions of the country. According to Chalk (2008) the Sinhalese are mostly concentrated in the southern, western and central parts of Sri Lanka and the Tamil population is located in the drier Northern and Eastern Province of Sri Lanka where they consist of two distinct groups: the Jaffna Tamils, who are mainly descendants of tribes that first arrived on the island over 1,500 years ago, and the Indian Tamils who are originated from the plantation workers brought to the island by the British tea planters during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Uyangoda (2005) stated that "cultural discrimination against minorities, like inequitable educational opportunities, legal and political constraints on the use and teaching of minority languages, and constraints on religious freedoms were some of sources of internal conflict in Sri Lanka".

The politicians were unsuccessful in addressing these issues and grievances, prompting some Tamil youths to take up arms in 1972 and demand for an independent Tamil state. Initially thirty-five militant groups were created. Among them five quickly achieved dominance. Of these five it was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that gradually emerged as the most powerful force. The group's main objective was the establishment of an independent Tamil state ('Eelam'), comprising of the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka.

In 1983, ethnic riots erupted leading to the deaths of hundreds of people especially in and around the capital Colombo. The latter was mob violence as a reaction to the ambush of a Sri Lankan Army patrol in Jaffna by the LTTE, which killed 13 army soldiers. Subsequently, during the three decades of unrest and civil conflict, there were cycles of conflict, demarcated by a short spell of ceasefires and the cessation of hostilities. The first phase of the Eelam war began in 1984 and ended in 1987 with the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord and the arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). The second phase of the Eelam war began at the height of the open war between the IPKF and the LTTE. The third phase of the Eelam war began after the collapse of direct peace talks with the LTTE in April 1995.

Failed peace talks and the collapse of the ceasefire agreement signed in 2002 saw the continuation of isolated battles, resulting in heavy casualties on both sides. The LTTE was eradicated from Eastern Province by August, 2007 (Mehta, 2010). Land operations commenced in the Northern Province in March 2007. On the 19th of May 2009 the Sri Lankan government forces claimed to have found the body of LTTE leader, militarily ending

the separatist war that had defined Sri Lanka's history for over three decades (Mehta, 2010).

The conflict resulted in the displacement of thousands of people from their homes, disrupted the potentially vibrant economy of Sri Lanka, severely undermined basic norms of human rights and chronically divided a society that initially seemed set to provide the model for Asian ethnic accommodation and development.

1.1 Post-conflict Sri Lanka

A post-conflict¹situation generally refers to a situation occurring after violent conflict has ended. It is a stage which constitutes economic improvement, and the reconstruction of infrastructure and broken relationships. It is also considered as one of the important stages during which peace building activities are carried out. However, the use of the term 'post- conflict' does not mean that all violent conflict has ended. Although conflict may have officially ceased, some level of violent conflict may still persist (Rausch, 2006).

In Sri Lanka, the transition from a conflict to post-conflict society has proved to be a long and complex process and in order to be successful it must be carried out with a clear political vision as to the direction of post-conflict Sri Lankan society. The Sri Lankan government has addressed the immediate issues and the related negative consequences after the dramatic military collapse of

¹ Although there are arguments on whether the Sri Lankan society is in post-conflict or post-war situation, the author has used these two terms to explain the situation after the end of military war between the LTTE and the forces of Sri Lankan government.

the LTTE. However, it is the manner in which the Government uses the political space created by the demise of the LTTE to initiate broader structural reforms to facilitate the transition from conflict to post-conflict society that makes the military defeat of the LTTE a real turning point in the post-war reconciliation, rehabilitation and rebuilding. This requires going beyond an approach to address the immediate priorities and engaging in a systematic and broader vision towards the Sri Lankan state and citizenry (Keerawella, 2013).

The major challenge for post-war Sri Lanka is to build peace and harmony in the society. Both the Government of Sri Lanka as well as non-government organizations (NGOs) have implemented several strategies and programmes to build peace in post-conflict Sri Lanka. The immediate issues in the post-war situation in Sri Lanka were accommodating and ensuring the welfare of nearly 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), undertaking the demining and the reconstruction of infrastructure and facilities, resettling of IDPs, and rehabilitating nearly 12,000 ex-LTTE cadres and their successful reintegrating into society. The long term issues were building trust among and between the community and establishing sustainable peace and harmony in the society.

Militarized governance even after the end of the war prevails in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of the country. In the post-conflict era there has been a blurring of civil–military roles, leading to the transformation of civil–military relations. While the military has been engaged in fixing roads and remodelling cities, they have also assumed a key role in making and implementing national policies in the areas including (but not limited to) education, foreign relations and development.

Thus, the time-honoured democratic practices associated with the civilian control of the military are no longer in operation.

The new government which came into power in 2015 has established the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) to lead, facilitate, support and coordinate matters related to national unity and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. The overall vision of the ONUR is a strong, stable, progressive, inclusive and peace-loving nation where all Sri Lankans co-exist in harmony and unity, while diversity and national identity is respected and celebrated with a guarantee of equal opportunity in economic, social, cultural and political spheres for every citizen. Particular programmes which have been implemented by ONUR and overlap with the papers in this publication include initiatives in arts and culture for awareness (working with visual and performance artists to implement programmes focused on national unity and reconciliation), psycho-social counseling support (facilitation of setting up a psycho social support task force to implement counseling services), resettlement of the displaced (return of lands, properties and resettlement of eligible families), and livelihood development (livelihood and economic opportunities projects with a special focus on female headed households and war widows). However, despite these efforts the grievances of the minorities still remain as there is no significant change in the devolution of administrative power or impact on the lives of affected people in terms of equal and fair consideration of their living.

1.2 Peace building

Peace studies facilitate the prevention of violence by promoting equality and equity. As explained by Galtung (2004, p.114) “peace is also prophylaxis. Peace enables us to face new conflicts peacefully. Peace makes people great because they are less victims of structural and cultural violence between genders, generations and races, between classes, states and nations, between regions and civilisations”. Galtung (1969) refers to two concepts on peace; positive peace and negative peace. Positive peace denotes the simultaneous presence of many desirable states of mind and society, such as harmony, justice and equity etc. Negative peace has historically denoted the absence of war and other forms of wide scale violent human conflict. Since the end of the war in 2009, Sri Lankan society is experiencing negative peace, a peace on the surface, with no bomb blasts, violence and any kinds of war.

A peace culture, and the force necessary to confront the dynamics and structures of violence and transform them towards peace, cannot be found in institutions and organisations coming from above or abroad. It can only be found in broad social involvement in building peace (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2002, p.76). The absence of a shared understanding among many different constituencies on reconciliation (the what, why and how) poses an equally formidable difficulty in advancing Sri Lanka’s post-war peace building project. The lack of clarity on the very idea of reconciliation has added to the intensely contentious nature of multiplicity of responses to what

reconciliation should entail in post-war Sri Lanka (Uyangoda, 2016, p.vii).

The purpose of post-conflict peace building is to prevent violent conflict from re-emerging and to rebuild the capabilities of a society to resolve conflict without fighting. Therefore, it requires political undertakings while comprising of activities which transcend the political domain, like development cooperation, humanitarian assistance, protection of human rights and institution building. Post-conflict peace building applies to situations where the worst has already happened, leaving behind trauma to heal, minefields to clear, former combatants to disarm and refugees to repatriate and reintegrate.

The armed conflict in Sri Lanka may have formally ended, but its root causes still remain in its society. While the Government and other actors in post-conflict peace building processes target initiatives such as infrastructure rebuilding on the ground, what the country needs to move forward is an approach to address the ground level societal issues and conflict instigating policies and systems (Pannilage, 2015). These include issues facing the most vulnerable in society such as women and war widows. Such peace building processes require the active involvement of role models and leaders in society. Equality in the distribution of natural and social resources, with a view to preserving resources and forming links between multi-ethnic groups for the sake of future generation should be part of the peace building process. Thus, peace building in Sri Lanka should go beyond addressing the obvious issues and be expanded to include the non-obvious issues. Post –war reconstruction may focus on social reconstruction in which social and emotional issues are addressed through culture and context sensitive approaches

rather than attempting social restoration based on idealistic common ideals (Herath, 2012). It should strive to establish a positive peace in the country and a cohesive society working to build a bright future for the country.

1.3 Construction of the publication

This book deals with peace and development in Sri Lanka in the post-war era. Although post-war reconciliation has been debated by many scholars from various angles based on both theoretical and practical explanations, this book concentrates on the aspects of peace and development from a broader perspective. Accordingly, the reconciliation process in the post-war period in the long term contributes to the sustainable peace and development of the society.

The publication comprises of 10 chapters, each dealing with its particular area concerning peace and development in a post-conflict context. The first three chapters deal with **perceptions and experiences of vulnerable groups in post conflict society**; women's roles and their perception of ethnic others, issues and challenges confronting war widows, and the rate of crime and involvement of army soldiers. The prospect of **peace and reconciliation** is then explored from the viewpoint of Buddhist monks while also exploring the concept of building peace and harmony through socio-economic infrastructure and traditional communal resources such as freshwater springs. The **disparities and conflict in resource distribution and use** is then explored further through two chapters highlighting the use of land near the Sinharaja Forest Reserve subsequent to the war and the

potential of entrepreneurial tourism to reduce structural violence.

This introductory chapter of the book aims to set the context for the studies and summarises the history of Sri Lanka's civil war and the current status of the peace building process in the country. It has also provided brief introductions to the each of the chapters of the publication.

The second chapter of the book contains on the 'Ethnic War and Women's Perceptions of Ethnic Others and Changing Roles of Women'. Based on a study conducted in an ethnically linked village in the district of Anuradhapura, Abeyrathne and Karunarathne argue that while the war presented opportunities for women to appear in the public sphere, it also resulted in the increase of their burden as they became the main breadwinner and caretaker of households in a changing context.

In the third chapter of the publication, Amarasinghe and Epa explain issues and challenges of war widows in the post-war Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. These authors conclude that women in war-affected areas encounter enormous social issues like gender discrimination, cultural discrimination, health, social isolation and other society related problems.

The fourth chapter deals with the lack of psycho-social awareness and services in the army in post-war scenario, and army involvement in crime with an added focus on gender representation. ManojJinadasa has concluded this chapter stating that Sri Lanka's Army personnel could be subject to the ill effects of the long war, as they were not provided with sufficient

practical knowledge on how to cope with post-conflict issues, which include possible impacts on mental health.

Hettiarachchi's study on the 'Role of Buddhist Monks in the Post-Conflict Reconciliation Process' has been presented in the fifth chapter of this publication. In this chapter, Hettiarachchi noted that traditional monastic education promoted negative perceptions of power sharing solutions to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka and worked as a hindrance in promoting peace and harmony. However, the discourse on shared history by Tamils and Sinhalese was a blessing in disguise for it can be used to support the ethnic reconciliation process.

In the sixth chapter of this book, Attanayake and Hariharathamotharan has emphasised need of 'Strengthening Democratic Governance for Peace and Harmony in Sri Lanka'. Based on a study conducted in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, the authors of this chapter highlight that the initiation of planned and organised peace at the grassroots level involves a range of preparations such as setting up objectives, developing a contextual peace in different layer content package, training peace workers and providing awareness within the different ethnic communities.

The seventh chapter of the book deals with people's perceptions regarding socio-economic infrastructure development in peace building. In this chapter, Sumanarathne and Ranawaka argue that despite sustained economic infrastructure development, the lack of social infrastructure development in war affected areas can adversely affect the peace building process of the country.

The eighth chapter discusses the 'Disparities in Utilisation of Natural Resources for the Development of Post War Society'. Here Karunaratne, Bandara, Hewage, Pushpananda, and Abeyratne, argue that after the war, water springs located in the areas which were affected by the conflict in Sri Lanka not only fulfil the water requirements of the surrounding communities but they also represent a means of building peaceful relationships between different communities using these resources.

Land use conflicts in the buffer zones of Sinharaja Forest Reserve in Sri Lanka in the post-war scenario are explored in the ninth chapter. Kumara, Senarath and Pitagampola have identified four types of land use conflicts. They are: (1) conflicts of ownership of private lands; (2) conflicts of ownership of state lands; (3) conflicts between human-made land uses, stream reservations and forest reserves; and (4) conflicts of wildlife intrusion into villages.

In the final chapter of this book Liyanage highlights the potential of entrepreneurial tourism to reduce structural violence. He states that the mass tourism sector is a dominant factor in economic development in Sri Lanka. However, the benefits of tourism rarely reach the underprivileged and marginalised poor, which comprise the bulk of the people in tourism destinations. Mass tourism also tries to overwhelm the small scale tourist operations, which generates much needed local and foreign exchange into the rural economy.

References

- Chalk. P. (2008). Tigers Abroad: How the LTTE Diaspora Supports the Conflict in Sri Lanka, In *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 9 (2) (2008).97-103.
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, Peace and Peace Research.*Journal of Peace Research*.6 (3).167-191
- Galtung, J. (2004). *Transcend and Transform: An Introduction to Conflict Work*, Pluto Press, London.
- Herath, D (2012). *Wounded Society: Social Wounds of the War and the Breakup of Community Social Structures in Northern Sri Lanka*.InHerath, D., Silva.K.T.(Eds) *Healing the Wounds: Rebuilding Sri Lanka after the War*.International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo.
- Jacobsen, K,F.B., Jacobsen, C.G. (2002) *Beyond Mediation: Towards More Holistic Approaches to Peace- building and Peace Actor Empowerment*. In Galtung. J. Jacobsen, C,J., and Jacobsen, K.F.B. (Eds.) *Searching for Peace: The Road to TRANSCEND*, Pluto Press, London.
- Keerawella, G. (2013). *Post-War Sri Lanka: Is Peace a Hostage of the Military Victory? Dilemmas of Reconciliation, Ethnic Cohesion and Peace-Building*, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo.
- Mehta , A. (2010). Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict: How Eelam Way IV was Won. *Manekshaw Paper*, No. 22 (2010), Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi.

- Miall, H., Oliver, R., Woodhouse, T. (1999). *Contemporary conflicts resolution: the prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts*. Polity Press, London.
- Pannilage, U. (2015). *The Post- conflict Rebuilding Process of Sri Lanka : A Content Analysis of Issues ,Challenges and Lessons Learnt*. In Subedi, H.R., Pannilage, U., Nepali., S.C.,(Eds) *Journal of Conflict, Peace and Development Studies*, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. 1(1) 11-28.
- Rausch, C. (Ed.) (2006). *Combating Serious Crimes in Post-conflict Societies*, A handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners, USA: United States of Peace.
- Silva, K.T., Hettige, S. (2010). Multiculturalism and Nationalism in a Globalising World: The Case of Sri Lanka. In Herath, D., Høglund, K., Schulz, M., Silva, K.T. (Eds.) *Post War Reconstruction in Sri Lanka: Prospects and Challenges*, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Kandy.
- Uyangoda, J. (2005). *Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace Building: An introduction to Theories and Practices*. Colombo: University of Colombo.
- Uyangoda, J. (2016). Post-war Reconciliation in Sri Lanka- The Complexities and Possibilities. In Pannilage, U. Fonseka, E.A. Disanayake, P.K.M (Eds.) *Abstracts of the International Conference on Peace, Reconciliation and Development Challenges*, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna.