

# The Implications of Development in the Story of Evolution of Violent Conflicts in Sri Lanka

A.M. Jazeel

## Abstract

In the annal of evolution of violence in Sri Lanka, the conflicts did not arise all of a sudden, but evolved gradually from long standing various sources of conflict and disagreements. Although the developmental issues are not only responsible for starting and sustaining the violent conflict, they still remain a significant factor in the history of various pogroms occurred in the country. The analysis of the genesis of Sri Lankan ethno political conflict reveals that the history of development in Sri Lanka also has its linkages to the dynamics of conflict and peace initiatives. The objective of this paper is to explore the ways in which development is implicated in the story of evolution of violent conflict in Sri Lanka. The first section outlines the implication of development in the evolution of conflict dynamics during the colonial period and the second section portrays the development and its linkages to the evolution and dynamics of conflict and peace process during post-independence, specially focusing on the emergence of conflicts in the periods of post 1977s, Post 1983s, 1990s, peace process and the post peace process. The final section concludes emphasizing the development is necessary, but not enough to sustain peace.

**Keyword:** Development; Evolution; Violent Conflicts.

## Introduction

In the story of evolution of violence in Sri Lanka, the conflicts did not arise all of a sudden, but developed (evolved) from long standing various sources of conflict. Although the development issues are not solely responsible for starting and sustaining the violent conflict, they still remain a significant factor in the history of various pogroms occurred in the country. The analysis of the genesis of Sri Lankan ethno political conflict reveals that the history of development in Sri Lanka also has its linkages to the dynamics of conflict and peace.

“The socio-economic issues relating to the ethnic conflict have produced sharply contrasting interpretations. Tamil minority claims the state development policies and projects carried out by

the successive governments in the past favoured Sinhala majority to the detriment of Tamil and Muslim minorities in the country in many ways who have been living in north east provinces traditionally and failed to solve the socio economic issues raised by the minorities in the backdrop of state development policies” (Gunatilleke, 2001:01), while the (Sinhala majority) government ideology on development is of the rapid expansion of national economy. However, the development, in general, involved the revival of the ancient glorious Sinhala Buddhist hydraulic society and implementing the various multiple purpose development projects with the expansion of colonization, power generation, and cultivation lands. The objective of this paper is to explore the ways in which development is implicated in the story of evolution of violent conflict in Sri Lanka.

The first section outlines the implication of development in the evolution of conflict dynamics during the colonial period and the second section portrays the development and its linkages to the evolution and dynamics of conflict and peace process during post independence, specially

---

**Author's Affiliation:** Senior Lecturer in English, Government Teachers' College, Addalaichenai, Sri Lanka.

**Reprint's Request:** A.M. Jazeel, Senior Lecturer in English, Government Teachers' College, Addalaichenai, Sri Lanka.  
E-mail: amjazeel@yahoo.com

focusing on the emergence of conflicts in the periods of post 1977s, Post 1983s, 1990s, peace process and the post peace process. The final section concludes emphasizing the development is necessary, but not enough to sustain peace.

#### *The Conflict and Development in the Colonial Period*

In the colonial period, there was no apparent violent conflict among the people of Sri Lanka. However, the development policies and the government settlement schemes adopted in this period planted the seeds to the enmity between the Tamil and Sinhalese which in turn led to the violent conflict in the post- independence period. For instance, the Tamil politicians had in the Soulbury Commission complained that in the “the allocation of for irrigation works had given the major share for restoration of large irrigation reservoir and had neglected the development and maintenance of village tanks in the North East” (*Ibid:05*). The contradictory position of these two communities had been made reference to in the report that “on the contrary, the Ceylon Tamil appear to have a disproportionate number of the posts in the public services. That they have won for themselves a much larger shares is a consequence of the higher standards of literacy and education which this community has so long enjoyed. It does appear that this is now being challenged by competition from the Sinhalese...” (*Ibid: 6*). These contradictions reflects that genesis of the ethnic conflict has bearing from the period of pre-independence.

#### *Conflict and Development in the Post Independence*

The era of post independence experienced several violent conflicts in the history of Sri Lanka, both in the south and north and east. The two insurrections of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in 1970s and 1989s, the protracted ethnic conflict between Government forces and Liberation of Tiger of Tamil Ealam (LTTE), the frequent inter clashes among the armed Tamil groups, and the fluctuating ethnic clashes and tensions between Tamil and Muslims in the eastern province are the major violent conflicts in Sri Lanka. In these major violence, development related issues are obviously implicated as one of the root causes for the evolution of these conflicts (Jazeel and Saravanakumar, 2016).

On the basis of the discriminations in the socio – economic development, JVP led its first insurrection against the state in 1970s claiming the “step motherly treatment” given to the rural South in the

development process (Jayadeva Uyangoda,2003: 56)

In the case of ethnic violence during the period, immediately after the independence and before 1977, the development policies and the projects adopted by the successive states affected the economic life of the Tamil and led to the escalation of ethnic violence in North Eastern Provinces. (Godfrey Gunetillaka 2001: 11). The Sinhala only official language policy and the standardization of university admission have severely affected the Tamils. These policies severely restricted or denied the entry of Tamil in to the public sector employments and university admissions. “In responding to this, thousands of Tamil students took to the street in protest against these policies” (Sajith de Mel: 2008: 12).

The government aided Sinhala colonization development projects carried out in Gal-oya, Pannala-oya, and Ampalam-oya in Ampara district, and Kanthalai, Allai, Muthalikkulam, Pathaviya (part) and Mahadiuluwewa schemes in Trincomalee district affected the Tamil and Muslims in the eastern province. These projects resulted in the sudden increase of Sinhala population and substantial alteration in the ethnic composition in the district. The Muslims and Tamil were denied their legitimate share of Developed State Land to the landless people in the Districts of Land alienation and the Sinhalese were, in turn, settled in those Developed State Land in the east brought from the South (Mohideen M.I. 2007). These issues of state planned Sinhala colonization projects “contributed to the growth of tension and hostilities among different communities resulting in ethnic violence. The victims of such violence have always been the Tamils and Muslims” (Mohideen M.I. 2007) and “these developments were perceived by the Tamil community and its youth in particular as ethnic discrimination in one of its worst forms” “denying equal opportunity in the sphere of employment, education, land alienation and economic life in general and starving Tamil area of large scale industries and development schemes” (Gunetillaka, 24).

#### *Conflict and Development in Post 1977s*

The policy of liberalization in the post 1977 period was, in fact, an immense economic boost to Sri Lanka. The government received greater flow of foreign aids for the national developments and allured foreign investments. These resulted in an unprecedented growth in economy after the liberalization in particular. The government

provided several social welfare programmes and initiated several accelerated multi-purpose development projects such as Mahaweli and Morawawe in this period taking in to national development.

However, “the impact of globalization and the introduction of liberalization and open economic policies had various negative effects on local economies and rural sectors”. (Markus Mayer et al 2003: 5) and “led to violent conflict of Tamil separate movement in the north and east youth unrest in the Sinhala south and jeopardized development achievement” (Markus Mayer et al 2003: 5-6). For instance, “Tamil farmers were hurt by price competition from liberalized imports in an area of few alternative economic opportunities, reinforcing the perception that the future of Jaffna was bleak” (Ronald J. Herring p.165)”. Similarly even rural Sinhalese in the south were affected due to “the unattended economic and social issues that obviously led to” violent uprisings by the youths of Marxist JVP in the south in 1989s. (Jayadeva Uyangoda, 2003: 55).

The state aided colonization under Mahaweli programme badly affected the minorities in east and fueled to the ethnic conflict. This project not only aggravated Sinhala ethnic ratio in the east province by new Sinhala settlements, but also symbolized the ethnic exclusion from aid benefit (Ronald J. Herring p.165) Ronald J. Herring argues about the colonization projects that:

The “accelerated colonization projects threatened to dilute or nullify decentralization as a solution to territorial autonomy demands of militant Tamil politics. Simultaneous deployment of ethnically charged symbols of the glories of ancient Buddhist Sinhalese civilization around foreign funded projects complemented demographic threats from colonization by Sinhalese settlers in areas considered Tamil territory.” (Ibid: 165).

#### *Conflict and Development in Post 1983s*

The ethnic conflict took a new turn in 1983. The economic targets of Tamil in Colombo were attacked by the Sinhala extremists. The LTTE started its the first Ealam war against the government. The government had reduced the annual budget for development and increased the defence expenditure instead. Several Foreign investment opportunities lost due to the escalation of violent conflict. For example, “Motorola and Harris Corporation had finalized their companies in the EPZ prior to the change in the political climate. Both withdrew their

plans away from Sri Lanka with the breaking of ethnic riots after 1983 “ (Island). However, the development works proceeded in the rest of the country except north and east provinces.

#### *Conflict and Development in 1990s*

“The first quarter of 1990 saw the cessation of hostilities between the state and LTTE. The direct impact of the same was felt by the economy which recorded a growth rate of 6.2% in 1990. This was short-lived with the starting of Elam war 11 in mid 1990” (Island). The donor aid development programmes were confined to the economic development of south and west neglecting the north and east. Only humanitarian aids were given to the victims of war in war torn north and east. It was criticized that the commitments of donor agencies for the initiatives of conflict resolution and peacebuilding were poor and the aid to the state assisted to wage war.

#### *Conflict, Development and Dynamics of Peace Process*

The peace process has failed to initiate development as an instrument to achieve peace. Although an “aid package of some four billion dollars pledged in Tokyo in 2003” on conditions, the trade off between the state and LTTE failed to get the dividend of peace process (Dr. Keethaponcalan S.I. 2006: 99). Both the state and LTTE had agreed to implement eleven projects including reconstruction of the Mullaitivu – Mankulum – Vellankulam main road, construction of ice plant in the eastern province, and building of psychiatric treatment centre for women with support of world bank, but the implementation of these projects did not materialize (Jazeel, 2009).

The State using the cessation of war, involved in the increasing economic through “Regaining Sri Lanka”

#### *Resumption of Conflict and Development in the Post Peace Process*

Now, both government and LTTE breaking the truce launched again war and withdrew the cease fire agreement. The defence expenditure increased and the prices of goods went higher unprecedentedly. Even in this dire situation, the government going ahead with development projects in the south, mainly widening connecting high ways to Hammanthotai, construction of Air port and Harbour in the south. But the deveiopment in the

east and north remains postponed and locked in the conflict.

### Conclusion

The development process in Sri Lanka has a strong relationship with the evolution of conflicts. Conflicts obstructed the developments in the country and at the same time, the development is one of the root causes of the conflicts. The peace process and the defeat of LTTE in the country lead to the development in the country.

### References

1. Bastian, S. *The Politics of Foreign Aid in Sri Lanka. Promoting Markets and Supporting Peace.* Colombo: International Centre for ethnic Studies. 2007.
2. Bush, K. *The limits and scope for the use of development assistance incentives and disincentives for influencing conflict situations. Case study: Sri Lanka.* Paris: OECD/DAC, Informal Task Force on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation. 1999.
3. Goodhand, J. *Aid, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka* London: The Conflict, Security and Development Group. 2001.
4. Goodhand, J & Klem, B with Fonseka, D, Keethaponkalan, P & Sardesai, S (2005) *Aid, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka, 2000–2005.* U.S.: Asia Foundation.
5. Herring, R.J. 'Making Ethnic Conflict: the Civil War in Sri Lanka', in Esman, Milton J. and Ronald J. Herring (eds.), *Carrots, Sticks and Ethnic Conflict: Rethinking Development Assistance.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. 2001.
6. Jazeel, A.M. "Impact of Conflicts on Educations in East" Unpublished PGDCRPP Thesis: Bradford University, Oluvil. 2009.
7. Varuni Ganepola and Prashan Thalayasingam. 'Poverty and conflict: A Review of Literature' Centre for poverty analysis. 2004.
8. Markus Mayer, Darini Rajasingham- Senanayake and Yuvi Thangarajah. 'Conflict, Development and Local Capacities in Sri Lanka' in Markus Mayer, Darini Rajasingham- Senanayake and Yuvi Thangarajah (eds.), *Building Local Capacities for Peace: Rethinking Conflict and Development in Sri Lanka.* New Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd. 2003.
9. Jazeel, A.M. and Saravanakumar, AR. *Role of ICT in Transforming Sri Lankan Higher Education,* International Journal of Advanced Research Trends in Engineering and Technology (IJARTET), Department of Computer and Engineering, Alagappa University, 2016; 3(Special Issue):20. (ISSN 2394-3777).
10. Jayadeva Uyangoda. 'Conflict, Development and Local Capacities in Sri Lanka' in Markus Mayer, Darini Rajasingham- Senanayake and Yuvi Thangarajah (eds.), *Building Local Capacities for Peace: Rethinking Conflict and Development in Sri Lanka.* New Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd. 2003.
11. Markus Mayer et al. 'Assessing Conflict Risks in Southern Sri Lanka', Colombo: German Development Cooperation GTZ- Sri Lanka. 2003.
12. Dhananjayan Srikandarajah. 'The Return of Peace in Sri Lanka: The Development Cart Before the Conflict Resolution Horse?'. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies. 2003.
13. Bernard Swan. 'Peace: Sri Lanka's Impossible Dream?', in Siri Gamege, Watson I.B. (eds.), *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka 'Fear of the East' or 'the Island of Tears'?* London: Sage Publication. 1999.
14. Godfrey Gunetilleka. 'A History of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Recollection, Reinterpretation, & Reconciliation - The Ethnic Dimensions of Socio - Economic Development' Colombo: Marga Institute. 2001.
15. Tony Addison and Mansoob Murshed. S. 'The Social Contract and Violent Conflict', in Helen Yanacopulos and Joseph Hanlon (eds.) *Civil War, Civil Peace.* United Kingdom: The Open University, 2006. p.137-160.
16. Jazeel, A.M. *The Impact of Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict on Education in the East,* Unpublished PGDCRPP Thesis, Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford: United Kindom. 2009.
17. Dr. Jayadeva Uyangoda. 'Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict: 'Root Causes''. 2006.
18. Dr.Keethaponcalan S.I. "Sri Lanka Peace Process, 2002-04: Another Opportunity Lost", Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies. 2006.