

Sri Lanka : Identity Politics and Economic Deprivation



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Introduction

- ◎ Sri Lanka has been mired in ethnic conflict since the country, formerly known as Ceylon, became independent from British rule in 1948.
- ◎ Sri Lankan society is an ethno-religious mosaic and within the ethnic groups, there are clear religious distinctions as well . To a certain extent, ethnicity and religion also have a regional basis.

Religious Identity



- The politicization of ethnic difference has been a central theme in the conflicts of Sri Lanka.
- The conflict centers around years of pent-up frustrations between the two ethnic groups- the largely Buddhist, Sinhala speaking majority which composes around 75 percent of the population and the other group mostly Hindu, Tamil speaking minority; which makes around 17 percent of the population.

Identity Politics in Sri Lanka

- ◉ Each political party and each politician in Sri Lanka see politics through the eyes of their community.
- ◉ In Sri Lanka, politics have been identified with communal interest and not with national interest.
- ◉ Since Sri Lanka gained independence from British empire in 1948, Sri Lankan political leaders have been playing with communalism.
- ◉ Shrewd political leaders used language, ethnicity, regionalism and religion in politics.

- Sri Lanka has faced one of the most violent ethnic war under the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which was driven predominantly by Tamil resentment of their language and identity being suppressed by Sinhalese-dominated institutions.
- The war had led to the death of many innocent Sri Lankans and ended with decimation of the LTTE.

Sinhala and Tamil – Identity Politics

The Rise of LTTE



**Sri Lankan
Government**

VS



LTTE

- In 1956, Sinhala was declared the only official language.
- Then the Sinhalese dominated government whittled down one by one the very pillars of Tamil self-worth by beginning to hold Tamils back on university admissions and government jobs.
- Although many Tamils had successfully integrated into regions outside of their “homelands” in the north and east, government programs to settle Sinhalese into Tamil areas were also perceived by Tamils as a deliberate effort to weaken them.

- Tensions between an increasingly Sinhala-dominated state and the Sri Lankan Tamil political elites began to escalate through the 1970s.
- But it was the 1983 pogrom that consolidated a common Tamil sense of grievance and identity and fueled support for the secessionist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam(LTTE).
- LTTE called for armed struggle and creation of a homeland safe for Tamil people.
- Since then the conflict has spiraled, and the LTTE has begun an “ethnic cleansing” of the Jaffia peninsula.

Causes of Conflict in Sri Lanka



Citizenship Rights



"Sinhala Only" Policy



University Admission Criteria



Resettlement

“The Sinhala Only” Act

- The Sinhala Only Act privileged the country's majority Sinhalese population and their religion of Buddhism over the minority Hindu and Muslim Tamils.

Economic Deprivation : Challenges and Impacts

- ① The political and territorial identity of individuals or groups also influences their economic conditions.
- ① The civil war has claimed thousands of lives, in addition to causing damage to tremendous number of economic resources.
- ① Social and political institutions were not immune from the destruction, either.

- The events of 1983 were a watershed in the macro political economy of the Sri Lankan conflict.
- The economic consequences of the 1983 were quite devastating.
- Tourists and foreign investors were shaken by the incidents of riots.
- Sri Lankan tourist industry declined as a result of various attacks.
- Foreign Direct Investment(FDI) also slowed down considerably after 1983.

Funding Deficit

- Sri Lanka had chronic deficits in the government budget and the balance of payments(BOP) before the war escalated in the 1980s.
- The war expenditure imposed additional burdens on the nations' finance, at a time when the war itself impacted negatively on production, export earning, and economic growth that in turn reduced tax revenue.

Factors contributing to the prevailing poverty

- Inadequate economic growth
- Low economic benefit trickle down to the poor
- High state expenses on defense due to the prevailing secessionist conflict in the North
- Inefficient allocation of resources to the deprived populations and regions in the country
- Certain population groups are likely to experience poverty over many years(or all their lives). These include internally displaced persons from the conflict, disabled, elderly, street children, female headed households and youth.

- The poor are also prone to environmental problems such as rainfall, deforestation, and soil degradation, with a depressing effect on their productivity and home.
- The chronically poor experience financial stability associate with low wages, low skills, seasonality of employment, employment opportunities limited to hired labour, deterioration of real wages, high food expenditure ratio, high expenditure on alcohol, inadequate income support from state poverty alleviation programmes and low access to credit facilities.

Challenges Ahead

- Sri Lanka is well known for achieving high levels of human development at relatively low levels of GDP per capita.
- Successive governments have invested heavily in education, health and welfare programmes, and this has been associated with the country achieving high levels of life expectancy and literacy that are comparable to industrial countries.
- However, these human development achievements and high levels of public expenditure on social welfare, have not eradicated deprivation.
- Issue of Political influence on fiscal policy

- Sri Lankan government has scored a string of wins in its long-standing civil war with Tamil militants.
- But it faces the challenge of integrating its Tamil minority. A certain level of trust must be fostered between the various ethnic groups to occupy the land together in relative harmony.
- There is a continuing gap between the desired peace and possible peace.
- Sharp contestations about the path to peace and what “peace” should actually entail have, as witnessed during the 2002 peace process, decisively weakened the parties’ commitment to negotiated peace, and have thus brought the protagonists back to a full-fledged yet undeclared war.

Conclusion

- The conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE has lasted nearly three decades and is one of the longest-running civil wars in Asia.
- Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict is embedded in the vital question of state power.
- It is essential that the government moves to give "a fair deal to the Tamils and integrate them more effectively in the fabric of the nation."
- The government need to redirect its welfare policies and programmes to more adequately assist the deprived sections.

Thank You...!!!