

# Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Seeking a Transformative Way Out<sup>1</sup>

Ashok K Behuria

## Abstract

*The long drawn out ethno-political conflict in Sri Lanka has been accepted as a serious challenge for scholars, activists, peace-makers and the expanding international community of professionals engaged in conflict-resolution/ management/ transformation. In view of the intractable nature of the conflict and its escalation potential, both the parties to the conflict have welcomed external mediation to seek a way out of the crisis. However, the divide between the two parties continue to widen further. Indeed, for the theorists of conflict resolution and peace-building, the Sri Lankan situation provides a laboratory where they can test their well-formulated theories as well as evolving hypotheses. Since the 1990s, a number of voluntary organisations, especially from the West, have sought to work with local community based organisations with the aim of creating the socio-political condition for making peace between the two ethnic groups - the Sinhalese and the Tamils - possible. They have succeeded in either creating or sustaining the conditions for the ongoing peace process. But a lot remains to be done especially in bringing about positive transformations in the existing structural paradigms engendering conflict in Sri Lanka. It is time now, therefore, for scholars and analysts to isolate the issues that contribute to the conflict, to dwell upon the socio-economic and political context that precipitates lasting ethno-political division and to seek a transformative way out of the crisis.*

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is one of the most widely researched conflicts of the world today. Most of analyses that seek to understand the root causes of the conflict are either based on interpretation of political events or study of personalities who guided political affairs of the country during and after the colonial period in Sri Lankan history.<sup>2</sup> Many of them are contaminated by communal, ideological or political empathies.<sup>3</sup> Some

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*Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Jan-Mar 2006

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of them are guided by standardised theoretical constructs which gear all their efforts towards a pre-conceived causal theory. A Marxist would emphasise on the imperialistic role of colonial masters and regional powers and then the class structure in Sri Lankan society<sup>4</sup>; a liberal humanist would denounce in no uncertain terms the role of Sinhala nationalism as well as the Tamil militancy and wish things were otherwise; the nationalists on both sides would always argue that “the other” community compelled their own to adopt an extremist posture and the most balanced of them would acknowledge the lapses of their own community but always refer to the they-not-we-started-the-fire argument. All these studies with their bewildering range of interpretations, in a way, signify the complexities of the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka.

There is a need, therefore, to analyse the conflict from a process-based perspective, to see if the conflict in Sri Lanka was inevitable and whether the communal antipathies ran as deep throughout history as they are made out to be today. Other issues that need to be discussed are: How did the ethnic identities emerge out of the colonial wilderness? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches that are being advanced to diagnose and remedy the conflict by international mediators? What are the elements that best characterise the conflict today? How can one seek a way out of the crisis?

### **A Process-Oriented Approach<sup>5</sup>**

‘Process’ is defined as a naturally occurring or designed sequence of operations or events, possibly taking up time, space, individual initiative or other resources, which produces some outcome. A process may be identified by the changes it creates in the properties of one or more objects under its influence. Process theory is a commonly used form of scientific research in which events or occurrences are said to be the result of certain *input state* leading to a certain outcome (*output state*), following a set process. In social sciences, process theory can be readapted by removing the iron law of conditional recurrence<sup>6</sup> which means that certain inputs will lead necessarily to certain outputs under certain conditions.

The process-oriented approach, in clear departure from other approaches— which lay emphasis on events, personalities and community or group-oriented behaviour— seeks to study political developments through social and political processes that underlie such phenomena. This

approach is based on the social constructivist argument that socially constructed reality is an ongoing, dynamic process and social phenomena are created, institutionalised, and made into tradition by human perceptions which are products of these processes and are born out of reflexive participation of human beings in that process. Sometimes individuals are aware of it sometimes they are not. Human history is the product of social, political and economic processes that often determine the direction as well as orientation of political developments. However, this approach is not premised on any social determinist frame work and seeks to avoid any formalist interpretation. Although the social constructivist school of thinking has adopted identity or culture-oriented framework, the process-based approach takes a departure from there and seeks to argue that “culture” and “identity” are products of highly interactive socio-political and economic processes and thus eternally evolving dynamic categories and not fixed, unalterable and immutable concepts. Such a process-based approach foregrounds analysis in an evolutionary context making transformative politics immensely possible. At the same time it enables researcher to isolate the reflexes that characterise a political process or event. This approach accommodates the hypothesis that the processes may themselves be driven by ideas and for that matter may not be entirely autonomous. Thus it reaffirms the position that any study of social phenomena is limited by the fact that all variables in a social context are interdependent unlike in the physical world ruled by more dependable rules of causality.

Coming to the Sri Lankan conflict, this paper seeks to argue that the processes of political organisation at work at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are largely responsible for the conflict framework that emerged in the colonial and post-colonial states in South Asia and elsewhere. The remedies to these conflicts have been rather difficult to find because these processes, with their legitimating principles (i.e., sovereignty, one-state-one-nation and territorial integrity) their populist and majoritarian reflexes and centralising tendencies, continue to determine the course of politics in these societies. This is why in these societies it has been very difficult for pragmatic politicians to come out with measures to transform the process of political development.<sup>7</sup> They have all along been products of these processes and have only affected the locus of processes marginally. But here lies the hope that change can be effected if well-directed efforts aimed at transforming the nature of politics or political process are undertaken.

## **The Colonial and the Post-Colonial Context**

In the history of human civilization the bases of power-legitimation have changed from time to time in favour of ever larger popular approbation. The post-Westphalian state system in Europe, which emphasised on mono-national states, later adopted democracy (post-1789) as the ruling principle for political organisation. The status of the minority nationals in such a system was not too well-cared-for and largely overlooked. The assertion of many ethno-national identities from within the interstices of such supposedly mono-national states today reveals the insensitivity of the Westphalian state system towards (as well as incapability of the democracies to absorb) the minorities. The concept of federalism was less in vogue in these societies and was often regarded as a recipe for disaster. Unity and integrity was the ruling norm.

The same system of state and administration and the same principle of political organisation had appealed to the native elites in the colonised terrains. However, if the state was to be composed of citizens, the "nation" or the so called "soul" of the state had to be composed of people having a sense of community about themselves. The elites thus invented<sup>8</sup> "nations" in the same way as the German, French or Italian nations were carved out of disparate masses either speaking a common language or sharing common past or subject-hood of a dynastic ruler.

In the colonial world such processes began towards the middle of the nineteenth century. The birth of cultural nationalisms in these societies was facilitated by a very passionate group of Orientalists who helped the people in assembling their cultural past and manufactured a sense of community across regional divides. The method of head-counting 'logoisation of space'<sup>9</sup> through "census" and mapping of the geographical space for the people by the colonial administration on the other hand strengthened a sense of nationalistic identity. Such cultural nationalisms, which emerged later, were based on the popular awareness of their numerical strength or weakness, their territorial concentration or spread and the belief that they should and must be a self-legislating sovereign community. The majority communities in all these societies were quite zealous about guarding their own predominance and less responsive to what one may call "the aspirations for sovereignty" of the neighbouring minority ethnic groups. What destabilised the territorial unification brought about by colonial administration was the sad reality of the artificiality of

the notion of “territorial integrity”, which was a misnomer in pre-colonial days. Out of the disjunction between the “territorial infatuation” of the majority community and the “suicidal aspirations for sovereignty” emerged the crisis of the post colonial state structure.

Sri Lanka was no exception to such process of state formation. The inadequacies of the democratic politics in poly-national or multi-ethnic societies are visible in many autonomist and secessionist movements within South Asian states. Some scholars have interpreted it as “complexity of inter-group interactions”<sup>10</sup>, but the root cause lies in the system of democracy that has been adopted more in form than in spirit in all these societies.

### **Limits of Constitutional Politics**

The constitutional experiment that was initiated by the colonial administration (the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931 and the Soulbury Constitution of 1947) sought to bring in majoritarian representative system in a multi-ethnic society.<sup>11</sup> Before this the colonial administration had advocated a system of equal communal representation in the largely nominated legislative councils. The Soulbury constitution, which advocated territorial constituencies, gradually made the elites of the two communities aware of their respective numerical strengths and weaknesses. By the time of the departure of the British from the scene, the power struggle between the two communities had already begun.

However, the process of sharper delineation of the contours of their ethnic ‘identities’ had started within the two communities during the early years of the twentieth century through revivalist movements which were based on their separate exclusivist puritanical traditions. This process of construction of identity, which was so common to all the colonised terrains in South Asia during those times, was marked by clear exclusivisation of cultural idioms, symbols, norms and principles, which sought to differentiate a particular group from another throughout history. In this process obvious historical facts were pushed to background. The fact that there were other processes of mutual accommodation at work— like the case of every Buddhist temple had an accompanying *Devala* (or Hindu temple) or for that matter the evolution of a pan-Ceylon colonial-subject identity— were conveniently overlooked in this process of identity construction. The elites of both the communities, who had come together

under the colonial rule, were seen to be drifting apart after independence and rooting for their own separate communities and seeking to safeguard their communitarian interests. The theory of two communities living apart from each other for centuries took deep roots during this period. The process of identity building thus went hand in hand with a simultaneous process of selective forgetting of history. In the community based politics that emerged out of the legitimacy of the concept of 'democratic nation-state', the mutual translatability of ethnic group, nation and state automatically accorded legitimacy to multiple cultural groups who would demand their separate self-legislative power structures. This process was in fact inevitable.

The independent state of Sri Lanka emerged as a state which was unable to enforce its legality upon a significant section of the populace and adopted a type of democracy which has been termed by O'Donnell as a "democracy of low intensity citizenship".<sup>12</sup> The problems inherent in competitive, free-wheeling democratic politics in the pursuit of maximising votes to gain power were too much for Sri Lanka divided along ethnic lines. It is also equally true that the principles that ensure high intensity citizenship participation flows out of the system of democracy if the real spirit of democracy is made operational instead of overemphasis on the numerical-electoral dimension of it. The principles like the frank recognition of plural identities, legal protection for group and individual rights, devolution of power to various localities and regions, and political institutions that encourage bargaining and accommodation at the center were to be injected into the Sri Lankan democracy right from the start. But that was not to be.

The democratic experiment of the post-colonial years saw an increasing assertion of the majority community which progressively shut one door of privilege after another on Tamils and took every step to cut down their disproportionately high presence in bureaucracy and administration. The Tamils in their turn had already overshot themselves during even colonial times by claiming fifty-fifty representation too. The Tamil resentment against the Official Language Act of 1956— which sought to project Sinhala as the only official language— was initially taken note of by the Sinhalese elite but the agreements (Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957 or Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1965) could not take off due to intransigent attitude of the Sinhalese leaders.

It is ironical that leaders like S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike who advocated a

federal form of government to accommodate the Tamil aspirations came out with *Swabahsa* movement after he left the United National Party (UNP) led by Don Stephan Senanayake and introduced the Sinhala only Bill in 1956 immediately after his party, the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP), led an alliance to power in 1956 elections. He had to pay dearly for his pact with S.J.V. Chelvanayakam which agreed to accommodate Tamil as the official language in North and East in addition to Sinhala in rest of the country. The pact triggered the first ever anti-Tamil riots in 1958<sup>13</sup> and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was assassinated by a Buddhist monk in 1959. Later also, Dudley Senanayake was forced to abandon a bill which granted devolution of power to the district councils after his pact with Chelvanayakam.<sup>14</sup> The process of majoritarian nation-building was at its peak during this period.

The Sinhalese radicals regarded any federal concession as synonymous with division of the country.<sup>15</sup> As an inevitable consequence of majoritarian reflexes of democracy, the leaders of the Sinhalese political parties were always vulnerable to the pressures of radical popular politics. With the birth of the leftist-radical-nationalist party like Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in 1968, the texture of Sinhalese politics in the southern part of Sri Lanka completely changed. It is also true that the leaders of the relatively liberal political parties like UNP and SLFP also participated enthusiastically in the populist nationalist-chauvinist politics all through betraying a sense of deep communal animus that characterised the nature of partisan politics in the Sri Lanka in the post-colonial years.

Tamil political thinking developed side by side under the impact of the anti-Tamil riots of 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981, and 1983 together with mounting discrimination and a series of broken promises by successive governments which promised to settle Tamil grievances. The change in nomenclature by the Tamil parties divulged it all. By 1949, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam who had refused to join the UNP, led by fairly moderate DS Senanayake, formed his Federal Party (in Tamil it was called *Illankai Thamil Arasu Katchi* or Lanka Tamil State Party). By 1954, he had articulated his ideas of a separate state. "It is better to have our own territory, our own culture and self-respect than be a minority in the island living on the good fortune of the majority community", he reportedly said in a public meeting.<sup>16</sup> There was no looking back from then ahead especially because the Sinhalese Sri Lankan leadership could not bring about any structural

change that could have evolved an effective power-sharing mechanism within the larger framework of the Sri Lankan state.

The new constitution of 1972 did away with the Section 29 of the Soulbury constitution which at least took care of the rights of the minorities to practice their own religion in their own way. The 1972 constitution, the Tamils alleged disregarded the minority communities by declaring Sri Lanka as a Buddhist state. Soon afterwards the standardisation policy was introduced in education to enable greater proportion of Sinhalese students in Universities. Thus the seeds of Tamil militancy (not separatism) were sown in 1970s in response to such policies. Moderates like Chelvanayakam were seen to be slowly conceding ground to radical politics. In 1972 in the presence of Chelvanayakam, a less known Tamil leader was seen to be baying against the Tamil collaborators: "Mr. Duraiappa, Mr. Subramaniam, Mr. Arulampalam and Mr. Anandasangeri are enemies of the Tamil nation. They do not deserve a natural death. Nor do they deserve to die in an accident. The Tamil people, especially the youth, must decide how they should die."<sup>17</sup> The precursor of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Tamil National Tigers (TNT) was born in 1972. The Mayor of Jaffna, Alfred Duriappa was assassinated in 1975 as one of the very first Tamils to fall at the hands of fellow Tamils who would not allow Duriappa, as a collaborator, to concede ground to the Sinhalese dominated administration in Colombo.

The moderate Tamil parties came together in 1972 as Tamil United Front which renamed itself as Tamil United "Liberation" front in 1976. The change in nomenclature was emphatic: from "federal" to "liberation front". The Vadukoddai Resolution of 1976 mandated the elected representatives of the Tamil people to establish an independent sovereign secular State for the Tamil people. The metamorphosis from moderate resistance to militant radicalism was complete. From 1978 onwards, the Sinhalese political leadership was seen to be adopting an accommodative posture as a throwback to the earlier pacts with Chelvanayakam. But the Tamil militancy had by then started celebrating its success by interpreting such gestures as forced concessions from the Sinhalese leadership. The basic suspicion that such moves were not supported by any sincere motive and that the larger Sinhalese populace were opposed to it characterised the pattern of response from the Tamil side.



The 1978 constitution by J. Jayewardene's UNP (which gave up the Westminster style in favour of a French style of democracy), accorded some concessions to the Tamils. Tamil language was given 'national language' status and was recommended to be used in some educational institutes and at some levels in the administrations in the North and East. But the offers were too little and came in too late for the Tamils to accept. Jayewardene's offer of devolution of powers to the district councils also failed to attract the Tamils. The riots of 1977 further alienated the Tamils and out of all the militant organisations the LTTE emerged as the most prominent by 1979. The emergency imposed in Jaffna since 1979 and the burning of Jaffna library allegedly by Sri Lankan security forces in response to the killing of Sri Lankan security forces in 1981 led to further deterioration of security situation. The riots in reaction to LTTE's ambush on Sri Lankan army patrol on 23 July 1983 became the proverbial last straw. Jayewardene never condemned the violence and went on air after five days implying the riots were natural.

The situation changed drastically after the 24 July 1983 Black Friday violence, when Sinhalese mobs reacting to a rumour that Tamil militants were out to attack Colombo, killed Tamils in Colombo and other places and Tamil casualty ran into thousands all over Sri Lanka.<sup>18</sup> From 1983, a steady stream of Tamil refugees started reaching the coast of Tamil Nadu. On the face of rising sympathy for the Tamils from Sri Lanka, the refugees were welcome by the people of Tamil Nadu in India with open arms. From 1980s, the Sri Lankan Government took the Indian prejudice in favour of the Tamil issue for granted and under the pretext of "transforming Sri Lanka's hitherto largely ceremonial security forces into a real fighting force",<sup>19</sup> the Sri Lankan Government pursued a policy of placating the Western powers and even made overtures to Pakistan, Malaysia and China. The Indian security and intelligence agencies then started the policy of supplying moral and material support to the Tamil insurgents who operated from the Tamil Nadu coast. This was also the time when Vellupillai Prabhakaran rose to prominence.<sup>20</sup>

### **The post-1983 Politics in Sri Lanka**

The Indian efforts at brokering peace since 1983-84 matured in 1986-87 through the Thimpu declaration of intent by Tamil delegates in 1985.

The Thimpu principles continue to guide the Tamil demands till now. The four principles were:

1. Recognition of Tamils in Sri Lanka as a separate and distinct nationality.
2. Recognition of an identified Tamil homeland and the guarantee of its territorial integrity.
3. Based on the above, recognition of the inalienable right of self-determination of the Tamil nation.
4. Recognition of the right to full citizenship and other fundamental democratic rights of all Tamils who look upon the island as their country

The Buddhist Mahasangha was quick to organise a meeting of major opposition parties and together they issued a memorandum which called upon the UNP government to call off Thimpu talks failing which they would launch a nation-wide agitation. It was clear that there was no southern consensus on the peace talks brokered by India. However, the economic crises that loomed large in the horizon then compelled the Jayewardene government to come out with a federal plan which advocated provincial councils in all 9 provinces. The proposal was further fine tuned by India in December 1986 to federalise Sri Lanka and create a Tamil majority province in the East, subject to the approval of the Muslims by slashing off the Sinhala majority areas in Ampara.

Even if TULF was ready to accept the deal, LTTE would not agree to anything sort of total independence. The Government of Sri Lanka's (GOSL) ferocious attack on Jaffna (when Jayewardene allegedly ordered the army to "to raze it to ground and rebuild it"<sup>21</sup>) in May 1987 and subsequent para-dropping of foods by India in June 1987, led finally to the acquiescence of both LTTE and GOSL for talks and on 29 July 1987, the India-Lanka Accord was signed which accorded even greater autonomy to Tamils in North and East in bargain for LTTE agreeing to give up demand for *Eelam*. However, the presence of the Indian troops, LTTE's inflexible demand that it would be counted as the only representative of the Tamils, the rising encounters between Tamil militants and Indian forces and the links between LTTE and GOSL forces to oust Indian forces ensured non-implementation of the India-Sri Lanka accord. By 1988 the accord was almost dead. Rajiv Gandhi was a villain for both the Sinhalese and Tamil nationalist— he

luckily escaped the attack by a naval rating in August 1987 only to be assassinated a Tamil militant in 1991.

During 1988-89 it was noticed that the GOSL led by UNP did everything possible to make sure that the provincial council experiment does not take off. Jayewardene as the architect of the deal faded out of the political horizon and the shrewd politicking by the UNP duo, Ranasinghe Premadasa and Lalith Athulathmudali, posed real problems for the Indian forces. Premadasa became president in 1988 and soon afterwards worked towards wrecking up the accord. The Tamil organisations (Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front or EPRLF and Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front or ENDLF) supported by the Indian forces in the provincial council elections were unwelcome for the GOSL and that is why there was a secret alliance between the ruling UNP and the LTTE to work towards the withdrawal of Indian Peace Keeping force from Sri Lanka, which India obliged in 1989. After the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, Indian government has not taken any serious interest in the Sri Lankan conflict anymore.

The withdrawal of IPKF did not resolve the Lankan ethnic crisis and the LTTE and GOSL have been locked up in an unending fight since 1989-90. LTTE systematically wiped out the leadership of most of the rival organisations— among others Amrithalingam of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), Uma Maheswaran of People's Liberation Organisation for Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). Since 1990 it has also liquidated the moderate leadership among the Tamils like Neelan Thiruchelvam in 1999 and Lakshman Kadirgammur in 2005. It has also launched attacks on Sri Lankan politicians— Premadasa was assassinated in 1993 and Chandrika Kumaratunga escaped a suicide attack in 2002. LTTE has projected itself as the sole legitimate representative of Tamil people of the North and East. By 1993, LTTE had even introduced visa system for entry into North.

### **The Peace Processes: Finding the Patterns**

One can find a pattern in the way the two parties have resorted to war and then welcomed negotiations for peace. Till now the offers of ceasefire have been made from either side at the tail end of a conflict spiral and the periods of ceasefire have been broken by sudden escalation of violence. The peace efforts in late 1980s were followed by a rising crescendo of violence only to fall off in 1994 for a brief lull when the two parties decided

to resume talks in January 1995. The talks went on till April 1995 and immediately afterwards one saw the display of might by the state forces in the Operation *Riviresa* (Sunshine), when the government forces captured Jaffna. The peace process that started in 2002 and was stalemated in November 2003 has also seen a rise in violence since mid 2004.

According to an analyst from Sri Lanka, the mindset of the Ranil Wickremesinghe-led United National Front(UNF) administration which sought to project its singular devotion to peace process by choosing to walk the extra mile in accepting LTTE as the sole representative of the Tamils was also conditioned by security(rather than peace) related issues. The UNF strategy was “to lock the LTTE through economic incentives, internationalisation of the process, persuasion of the LTTE to negotiate for a final solution etc., and this fits into the experiences related to security versus peace”.<sup>22</sup>

In the current peace talks there have been certain departures yet the end result has been more or less same. This time there has been an offer of a tentative federal solution from the government’s side. LTTE which has most often said no to anything sort of complete liberation has also tentatively accepted the idea of maximum autonomy bordering on independence within a larger Sri Lankan state.<sup>23</sup> However when it comes to putting their ideas to words both the sides in their respective proposals seek to bypass each other. The net result is conditioned by the fundamental positions on either side, i.e., the Sri Lankan government is not yet ready to go beyond devolving nominal federal powers to the Tamils and Tamils under LTTE are quite unready to compromise on their position of complete independence from the Sri Lankan government. The LTTE proposal for the “*Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) for the Northeast of the island of Sri Lanka*” was as unacceptable to the Government of Sri Lanka as the GOSL proposal for “*Provisional Administrative Structure for the Northern and Eastern Provinces*” was to the LTTE. The mutual sense of suspicion, acrimony and hatred still condition the political behaviour of the groups on either side.

But more than the LTTE, the conservative elements among the Sinhalese — the radical Buddhist organisations like the present Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU or National Heritage Party) and the Marxist JVP, which has displayed strong Sinhalese nationalist tendencies in recent years — have, of late, played the *spoil-sport* for any serious proposal from the government’s

side. The rise of JHU and JVP in Lankan politics in recent years— in fact they are alliance partners in the government led by SLFP now — will make it difficult on the part of any government in Colombo to offer LTTE anything that the latter will like to accept.

At another level, the two most popular parties (UNP and SLFP) have also tried their best to trump each other. Thus devolution proposal put forward by the SLFP-led alliance in 1997 met with opposition from UNP and similarly the peace process set into motion in 2002 by the then UNP Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was summarily rejected by the president Chandrika Kumaratunga of the SLFP. More than the differences between the two political parties, the prospect of Prime Minister and President coming from two different parties has often rendered the government ineffective, with both the personalities busy checkmating each other's moves, often locked in a fight for one-upmanship. The recent show of support by Ranil to the peace proposals by the new President Mahinda Rajapakshe, in that way, is a departure, but whether that will signify any change in the political processes of the country remains to be seen.

The peace talks are thus *checkmated more by the lack of what many call "southern consensus"* than anything else. The Southern leadership has also displayed tendencies that do not quite go well with the spirit of democracy. As has been shown above, there is sense of acute competition going on between the leaderships of the two principal political parties who behave identically while in power or in opposition. The leaders in power have always sought to *maximise their power and assume near-dictatorial tendencies*. There has been a near-total *lack of trust* between the leaderships of the two parties. Thus even if it would have been proper on the part of Ranil Wickremesinghe to take the President Chandrika Kumaratunga into confidence over the Cease Fire Agreement of February 2002, due to the existing trust-deficit, he would not show the draft to her lest she would preempt the move. The party in opposition has always felt tempted to raise the issue of Sinhala nationalism and thanks to the nuisance potential of the radical chauvinist nationalist forces, all constructive proposals collapse before even they have been discussed seriously.<sup>24</sup>

As an indication of an immature democratic polity, the *relationship between the electorate and the leadership* of the political parties has not risen above some kind of a patron client relationship. Thus one sees in recent years (between 2000-2005), even if there has been an overwhelming

popular support in favour of peace, any effort at peace has been scotched by the party which is not in power by appealing to the nationalist sentiments of the people. The political mobilisation of people on the basis of Buddhist-Sinhala nationalism has been a remarkable success. Rather than guiding public opinion in such cases, the political elite has tried to appeal to the emotions of the people and successfully translated such intense nationalist feelings into political capital.

Even if there have been escalations of conflict at regular intervals, *the economy of the country* has not been rendered dysfunctional by the long protracted civil war.<sup>25</sup> There is a point of view that situation is not “ripe” and has not reached the “hurting stalemate” level for the parties to come to the negotiations seriously.<sup>26</sup> Some observers have said that “war is pursuit of economics by other means” and the three important forms of economies that characterise the war economy are— combat economy, shadow economy and coping economy.<sup>27</sup> All three of them come together to prevent any collapse in the economic conditions and influence the conflict dynamics in a way that perpetuates the war economy.

There is also an argument that the popular enthusiasm for war partly comes from the way the war economy has ensured dependence of the combatant population from each of the community on the ongoing war itself. For example Tamil families in the North and East are dependent on effective channels for flow of funds from Tamil diasporas. Similarly the Sri Lankan security personnel employed in the north who make a living out of the war hail basically from the interior South and West Sri Lanka, where most villages have lost a son to the ongoing war, which explains their dependency on war at one level and an aggressive enthusiasm to avenge for the deaths from their villages. The subaltern recruits from these regions are also known to be involved in extortion and other criminal activities to profit from the conditions of war. “The knock-on effect of this situation is that the support for ‘war for peace’ in the south is basically driven by an economic dimension that mirrors the North-East Tamil peasantry’s reliance on the parallel system of remittances”.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time it is also being argued that there is a realisation in Sri Lanka especially among the Sinhalese political leadership that if the Tamil issue is resolved the economy will grow at a faster pace. They argue that the fact that the donors have attached the condition of progress on peace talks to their aid to the tune of \$4.5 billion in the last donors’ conference in

Tokyo is pushing the government to the table.

When it comes to the issue of genuine negotiation or dialogue between the contending parties, there has been a *total lack of trust* between the two over the years. The summary rejection of proposals advanced from each other's side is an indication of this mutual lack of trust. As has been pointed out earlier, if Tamils have rejected the government's offers of devolution as half-hearted and unacceptable, the government has been even more hostile to LTTE proposals for Interim Self-Governing Authority (in October 2003) in the Tamil areas.

There has also been seldom any attempt by the Sinhalese political elite to seize the opportunity of setting up any forum where both the parties can work together at least for noble purposes like carrying out humanitarian assistance. The United National Front (UNF) government led by Ranil was unable to reach an agreement on rehabilitation in the northeast due to constitutional constraints in disbursing money. The Sri Lankan constitution forbids institutions outside the purview of parliament to disburse funds. Such financial controls did not allow bodies like the Northeast Reconstruction Fund (NERF) or the Sub committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs Sub committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN) envisaged under the CFA, which would have disbursed funds directly for rehabilitation and reconstruction in the war-affected areas, and would have gone a long way in building trust between the two conflicting parties. Similarly the opportunity provided by the natural disaster, which did wonders in Aceh in Indonesia (by bringing the Aceh rebels and the state of Indonesia together) has been totally squandered only due to lack of trust on the part of the GOSL. The Supreme Court's rejection of the Post Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) shows the lack of national vision on the part of the Sinhalese people as a whole.

### **Transforming the Conflict in Sri Lanka**

It is in this context that one has to bring in the "Conflict Transformation(CT)" approach. Unlike "Conflict resolution approach" which implies that conflict is a short-term phenomenon that can be resolved permanently through mediation or other intervention processes and "Conflict management approach" which assumes that conflicts are long term processes that often cannot be quickly resolved but can be controlled

and managed, CT approach lays emphasis on bringing about internal, relational and structural change in the conflict. It is regarded almost as a spiritual process where the end-result is not resolution of conflict but the transformation of it. It draws upon the formulations of 'conflict formation' theorists and concludes that conflicts are natural and dynamic and it is difficult either to resolve them for good or to manage them.<sup>29</sup> This approach recognises the dialectical nature of conflict and seeks to understand conflict from a relational perspective.

CT theorists argue that once conflicts are formed, they undergo a variety of transformational processes: articulation or disarticulation, conscientisation or de-conscientisation, complexification or simplification, polarisation or depolarisation and escalation or de-escalation. It is also suggested by CT advocates that the incompatibility which arises between conflicting parties may be eliminated by transcending the contradiction, by compromise, by deepening or widening the conflict structure, and by associating or dissociating the actors.<sup>30</sup> They would claim that asymmetric relationships can be transformed, through a shift from unbalanced to balanced relationships achieved through a process of conscientisation, confrontation, negotiation and development.<sup>31</sup> Unlike Conflict resolution initiative which operates within the established structure of power relations and tries to eliminate the causes of violence by satisfying the needs and interests of the parties in conflict, CT approach believes that the nature of conflict and its components are continuously transforming and if this process of transformation is guided properly it can bring resolution to intractable conflicts of values and interests. Raimo Vayrynen would argue that transformation can take place in the following ways: actor transformation, issue transformation, rule transformation and structural transformation.<sup>32</sup> Vayrynen supports the idea that pluralism and interdependence, or a "civilizational process," reduce violence and promote peace.<sup>33</sup> Through the process of greater democratisation, economic liberalisation and globalisation, which according to some analysts aim at pacific transformation, conflicts can be "civilized" and made receptive to intervention.<sup>34</sup>

According to the CT theory, conflicts are 'embedded in relations at the individual, interpersonal, organisational, community, and international levels, and include psychological, socio-cultural, spiritual, political, historical, and economic dimensions'.<sup>35</sup> Conflicts change 'relationships' in



predictable ways, altering communication patterns and patterns of social organisation, altering images of the self and of the other. One of the most ardent advocates<sup>36</sup> of the approach, John Paul Lederach, would argue that CT also involves transforming the way conflict is expressed. It may be expressed competitively, aggressively, or violently, or it may be expressed through “nonviolent advocacy, conciliation, or attempted cooperation”. Unlike many conflict theorists and activists, who perceive mediation and advocacy as being in opposition to each other, Lederach sees advocacy and mediation as being different stages of the CT process which can transform the expression of conflict from “mutually destructive modes toward dialogue and inter-dependence.” Almost as a spiritual process, such transformation, Lederach suggests, must take place at both the personal and the systemic levels.<sup>37</sup> The keys to both kinds of transformation are truth, justice, and mercy, as well as empowerment and interdependence.<sup>38</sup>

Another important dimension of the transformative approach is to emphasise the primacy of process over outcome. For Lederach, “at times of heated conflict too little attention is paid to how the issues are to be approached, discussed, and decided. There is a push toward solution and outcome that skips the discipline of creating an adequate and clear process for achieving an acceptable result. Process.....is the key to the Kingdom.”<sup>39</sup>

Transformative approach lays emphasis on building up a web of relationships. Lederach would argue that “Time and again where the shackles of violence are broken we find a singular taproot that gives life to the *moral imagination*: the capacity of individuals and communities to imagine themselves in a web of relationship even with their enemies. This kind of imagination envisions and gives birth to relational mutuality.”<sup>40</sup> Transformation aims at instilling such a “moral vision” as the heart and soul of peace-building exercises.

It is also useful to take into account the conflict transformative approach developed by Kumar Rupesinghe (a Sri Lankan scholar) here. Rupesinghe<sup>41</sup> argues in favour of a comprehensive, eclectic approach to conflict transformation that embraces multi-track interventions and proposes building peace constituencies at the grassroots level and across the parties at the civil society level. He advocates creation of peace alliances with groups who may bring about change, such as business groups, the media and the military. Like other CT theorists he also argues that “...the notion of being able to resolve (conflicts) once and for all has been superseded by an

understanding that such dynamic and deep-rooted processes call for dynamic and sustained responses".<sup>42</sup>

The transformative process can be initiated, most of the transformative theorists would argue, in following ways.<sup>43</sup>

1. By broad-basing process of participation and making it inclusive by ensuring multi-level participation irrespective of their role in the conflict.
2. By seeking to empower the parties in the conflict to bring them to equal levels
3. By ensuring that those directly involved in the conflict can control the transformation processes to their own satisfaction and thus make sure that any outcomes have the approval and support of those affected.
4. By focusing not merely on immediate issues but also on long standing traumas and hurts, and on any deep-rooted sense of past injustices.
5. By ensuring mediation by appropriate intermediaries who understand the culture and social structures in which the adversaries are embedded.
6. By initiating and encouraging new understanding of the conflict, emphasising on its life-affirming features which may lead to a conscientisation process.
7. By creating an ability to create and put in place procedures that will maintain and continue the changes found necessary to resolve the current conflict and prevent others arising in future.
8. By initiating mutual, inter-active education of adversaries about the nature of the socio-political and economic systems from which the conflict arose and of the dynamics of that conflict; and their training in skills that will enable them to deal with that conflict and others that may arise in future.
9. By building relationship across communities affected by conflict through an inclusive, participative and flexible organisational structure and emphasising on relationships that encourage growth, change, and learning for either communities.

All these strategies are being practiced by different organisations seeking

conflict transformation at the ground in Sri Lanka. In fact, there have been many organisations working at the grassroots in Sri Lanka focusing on conflict transformation. Some prominent ones among them are: Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), Foundation for Co-existence (FCE), Initiative for Political and Conflict Transformation (Inpact), Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies (Sri Lanka Branch) and Facilitating Local Initiatives for Conflict Transformation (Assisted by German GTZ). These organisations are seeking to translate CT principles into actionable programmes and working at multiple levels to transform the nature of conflict in Sri Lanka which seems to have created the condition for peace-building at the moment.

In the prevailing atmosphere of distrust and hostility the very fact that the two parties agreed to come together in February 2006 in Geneva is an encouraging sign that the seeds of a transformative process could be at work. Keeping the different processes of reconciliation that were at work since independence one can isolate how the process has been overtaken by attitudes of intransigence and led to violent confrontation. From this one can draw one's lessons and devise the necessary transformative interventions to ensure that the process of peace stays the course this time.

One has to be aware of the points of similarities and departures in the post-2002 attempts at reconciliation and the tentative attempts at brining the two communities together in 1950s and 1960s and the 1980s. One factor common to all these phases has been the realisation of the Sinhalese leadership, more than the Tamil leadership, that some reconciliation with the Tamils is absolutely necessary. However, there are departures in the sense that unlike the 1980s there is no external pressure on the government and the international community is more helpful in making reconciliation possible. It is encouraging to note that the process is on in spite of the hitches and snags. Another important departure has been the rising popular support for peace in southern Sri Lanka in spite of the fact that there have been electoral gains for parties like JHU and JVP who are opposed to any concession to LTTE. Sinhalese people, now as ever, want peace at one level and do not want to concede anything that will affect the unity and integrity of the state.

The obvious solution, as many Sri Lankans would agree in private, is to go for a confederal solution (short of a consociational arrangement) but the Sri Lankans will have to understand the real significance of it and then

endorse it. Without a change of hearts at the popular level it is impossible to imagine any political party in Sri Lanka to risk its political fortunes by suggesting any confederal solution to the conflict. In fact it is instructive to point out here that G. I. Peiris, the architect of the devolution plan under Chandrika Kumaratunga, clearly excluded the possibility of a confederation in his response to the media after the December 2002 agreement between the LTTE and GOSL.

To enable such an environment the leadership of the two principal communities, as also the Tamil Muslims, who have come up as another distinct political group since the 1990s, will have to shun the practice of mobilising political support on the basis of ethnic and communal hatred. They need to transform the nature of conflict by making joint initiatives between two communities possible. Many foreign NGOs are currently working on conflict transformation in Sri Lanka. Along with the political parties, they need to work towards creating an atmosphere of trust between the two communities.

There has been a surge in community-based organisations (CBOs) working at the grassroots level among the people sowing the seeds of peace and understanding. The popular support for peace in recent elections is often attributed to the invisible role of these enabling organisations who have gradually worked towards a culture of peace in a society seething with hatred and violence for years. The impact of many genuine initiatives in this regard are rather offset by the negative influence of the partisan media in Sri Lanka, where it is very difficult to find any neutral coverage of any political issues. In 2003, while visiting Sri Lanka, famous peace theorist Johan Galtung commented that the debate on the peace process in Sri Lanka has an overarching pessimistic tone.<sup>44</sup> Looking at the Sri Lankan media he said there is a tendency to advocate “war journalism” which he said seeks to portray everything negative and urged all to advocate peace journalism instead by taking care to promote peace through media reports and build an atmosphere of trust among people. Organisations like International Federation of Journalists, Belgium and United States Institute of Peace (USIP) have played a big role in sensitising Sri Lankan journalists towards issues like violence and human rights, inculcating the skills for truthful reporting in recent years.

Coming to the present state of conflict in Sri Lanka such a transformative approach has to furnish the bedrock of the facilitative or

mediational approach undertaken by the external actors. The role played by the Norwegian facilitators needs to be propped up by grassroots level peace building exercises which will go along way in giving birth to the taproots that will sustain the process of peace.

As the conflict stands today, there is a non-directional popular craving for peace, which is immensely vulnerable to sectional and communal appeals. The parties to the conflict are using all available opportunity to develop their military might to break out of the process of peace with a more escalated level of violence. The efforts to find out a solution through force are still on, on both sides. The Sri Lankan government seeks to divide the guerrilla leadership and harbours the leader of a breakaway faction with the hope of utilising that option in future. The LTTE guerrilla leadership on the other hand seeks to maximise its efforts at collections of arms and ammunitions to take on the government forces as and when the process breaks apart. It is a strategic lull that prevails now which has to be altered into a lasting period of disengagement. As the transformative approach says, processes will have to be secured and made to run.

### **Conclusions**

As the discussion above shows, lot of efforts will have to go into the making of a plural democratic polity in Sri Lanka where emphasis will be on accommodation rather than neglect or assimilation of diversity. It is also necessary to de-emphasise the communitarian calculus in the functioning of democracy and primacy should be given to an individual-citizen centric political order. All this is easier said than done. The proclivities of democracies to communitarian mobilisation is too well known even in most advanced of societies but a beginning can be made by undertaking a constitutional transformation that redefines the state as a non-communitarian system impartial to all and accords equal rights to all groups large and small, all individuals irrespective of their communal or religious affiliations.

In this connection one Sri Lankan peace activist has argued that the biggest possible challenge confronting peace builders is the issue of how to change the structure of the Sri Lankan state. All efforts at conflict transformation he would argue ought to begin with the 'grand project' of 'root and branch' transformation of the Sri Lankan state through a constitutional settlement which will move away from the existing unitary

biases and allow asymmetrical power sharing.<sup>45</sup> This can only take place if the two most powerful political parties come together to initiate a step towards a genuine federalist solution. The devolution plans proposed by the Kumaratunga government in 1997 can be taken up as a departure point or they may start afresh with a clean slate.

At another level the spirit of democracy and federalism will have to sip into popular consciousness through active people-oriented efforts by the civil society based organisations operating at the grassroots level. The potential of different groups to proliferate into sub-groups has to be identified and acknowledged too. It is imperative in this context, on the part of leaderships of both the warring parties to be aware of the divisions within their ranks and tolerate dissent rather than seek to steamroll everything in a hegemonic manner. Particularly, the Tamil leadership will have to give due recognition to regional differences and accommodate them. The strategy adopted by the LTTE to eliminate all possible nodes of resistance is an ill-founded one and will not last long. The personality cult that has been built up around a single individual and the authoritarian structure that has emerged in the years of guerrilla politics is an unstable one and the structure of political organisation that is slowly taking shape in the Tamil regions will have to adopt an open, transparent and democratic style of selection of local level leaderships. The federated regional autonomy that LTTE itself is demanding ought to be made available to different regions under the LTTE control as well.

Warring politics has its own way of sustaining authoritarian frameworks. On the one hand it perpetuates an over-centralised state structure on the Sinhala side and sustains the cult of absolute and totalitarian authoritarianism on the Tamil side on the other. These issues will have to be isolated and addressed on both sides to make peace really available to the people. As an eminent Sri Lankan scholar argues, Sri Lankan leadership will have to undertake the task of “re-making” the state to accommodate the federalist impulse of the LTTE.<sup>46</sup>

“Who wants peace?”, a Sri Lankan intellectual once pointed out quoting Pierre Bourdieu and argued that “the irrationality of violence and the psycho-social effects it inflicts, do not just come and then go. They become part of everyday life or ‘habitus’ as Pierre Bourdieu would define such a state of affairs. In Sri Lanka, thanks to the culture of violence well in place, hatred, distrust, harassment, and discrimination have become facts of

everyday life. In fact as has been argued earlier the southern highlanders in Sri Lanka who have traditionally supplied the manpower for the Sri Lankan military have an existential dimension attached to the ongoing war. The reluctance to toe a line of compromise is often attributed to the fact that JVP has a strong following in the area which is committed to war. On the other hand the “coping economies” on the Tamil side have created their own committed champions.

Thus, there is a systemic reflex driving such policies— which is certainly both the cause and consequence of the culture of war— which needs to be dislodged in favour of a humanistic and emancipatory socio-political transformation. The existing process of “othering” and hence legitimisation of violence, as well as the contingent values and the survival practices that go along with it, will have to be disempowered and delegitimised through a process of re-perception and re-analysis to sift the overly irrational from the rational and set up an alternate discourse of power that best expresses itself through celebration of liberty and human freedom.

A leading scholar of conflict transformation points out that “participants in a conflict do not primarily aim at winning; their aim is preventing the “other” from winning”.<sup>47</sup> In this context one can say the pattern of politics that the two warring parties have advocated tends to attest this view. So far the two forces have thought of appropriating win for themselves at the cost of the other. However, the evolving process of peace, howsoever fragile, suggested initially that they are in fact finding a way out in which the end result will be a win-win solution for both. So far, both the parties have demonstrated some will at least to pursue the cease-fire, if not peace, track in spite of the obstacles on the way. It is thus tempting to argue here that the foundations, even if shaky at the moment, of a transformative politics oriented towards peace has already been laid. The political elite in Sri Lanka, the Tamil militants and the international community and the civil society in Sri Lanka should seize this opportunity and let this “process” take roots.

The process of nation-state formation, as has been argued at the outset which has engendered the communitarian identity-politics and in Sri Lanka may not have run its full course and it may be still emitting its unitarian reflexes, but it is certain that a parallel process of transformative peace building is at work. Without resorting to pessimism, it can be said that if the process is made to continue beyond the public glare it has the capacity to transform the combative politics in Sri Lanka. Once the economic

dividends start coming in, as in all probability they will, it will not be difficult to transform the last constituencies of war.

The Sri Lankan transformation will have to be assisted duly by international community which has to play a persuasive role in keeping the process alive for the sake of seeking alternative paradigms for peace building in Sri Lanka. The journey from conflict to peace may well be a long and arduous one.

### References/End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank all the three anonymous referees who had critically reviewed the initial draft of this paper. Without their punishing comments this paper would have remained even more incomplete and less presentable. The author also thanks some Sri Lankan and Indian scholars (who had taken time either to go through the draft paper or discussed the principal strands of arguments with the author but would like to remain unnamed) for their excellent insightful comments during the preparation of this paper.
- <sup>2</sup> See for example the following books: For details see K.M. De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, OUP: New Delhi, 1981, Nath Yogasundram, *A Comprehensive History of Sri Lanka, From Prehistory to Tsunami*, Vijitha Yapa Publications, Colombo, 2006, K.M. De Silva. *The "Traditional Homelands" of the Tamils: Separatist ideology in Sri Lanka: A Historical Appraisal*, Kandy, Sri Lanka: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1995, K.M. de Silva and Howard Wriggins, J.R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka: A political biography, Honolulu : University of Hawaii Press, 1988, A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, S.J.V. *Chelvanayakam and the crisis of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism, 1947-1977: A political biography*, London : Hurst & Co., 1994, A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *The break-up of Sri Lanka : The Sinhalese-Tamil conflict*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988, A. Jeyaratnam Wilson ed., *Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947-1979*, London: Macmillan, 1979, Satchi Ponnambalam, *Sri Lanka: National conflict and the Tamil liberation struggle*, Thornton Heath, Surrey: Tamil Information Centre; N.J., U.S.A 1983, Chelvadurai Manogaran, *Ethnic conflict and reconciliation in Sri Lanka*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987, Hellmann-Dagmar Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers : Armed Struggle for Identity*, Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1994, Neil De Votta. *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*. California: Stanford University Press, 2004, Rajan Hoole, Daya Somasundaram, K.Sritharan and Rajani Thiranagama; *The Broken Palmyra*, Claremont, CA: The Sri Lanka Studies Institute, 1990
- <sup>3</sup> For example the books by Tamil authors does show a prejudice in favour of the Tamils and books written by Sinhalese scholars do have an undercurrent of sympathy for the dominant Sinhalese position on the conflict. Thus one finds A. J. Wilson, Satchi Ponnambalam taking a position which suggests that Sinhalese chauvinist politics is to be blamed for the conflict whereas K.M. de Silva taking a position that Tamils were intransigent, even when he would say that Sinhalese



politicians also shared the blame at times.

- <sup>4</sup> For example see Lionel Bopage, *A Marxist Analysis of the National Question of Sri Lanka*, Niyamuwa: Colombo, 1977 and, Lionel Bopage and Rohan Wijeweera, *The Policy Declaration of the JVP*, Ginipupura Publications: U.K., 1975. In both these books the two authors, supporters of Marxist party, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), advocated a line close to the Marxist- Leninists philosophy and supported the idea of Tami separate nationalism. However, after Bopage left the JVP over the issue of nationality question, Wijeweera advocated a line which rejected the question of right of self determination for the Tamils.
- <sup>5</sup> Apart from the social emphasis on process by constructivist school in social sciences no significant effort has gone into the making of any well-laid theoretical or analytical framework which emphasises on “process-based perspective” as a possible alternative in analysing social phenomena. The attempt by Barry Buzan and Richard Little to bring in ‘World Systems Theory’ argument in a remote way takes up a process-based reading of history. It is also being made clear here that the approach departs from any of determinist approaches and hence it need be bracketed with any formalised theoretical formulation.
- <sup>6</sup> Process theory holds that if an outcome is to be duplicated, the process which originally created it must be duplicated, and that there are certain necessary conditions for the outcome to be reached.
- <sup>7</sup> Thus one finds a “proto-consociational federalists” like Bandaranaike (as Jayadev Uyangoda calls him in his paper “Sri Lanka’s Crisis: Contractarian Alternatives”, *Pravada* 2, pp.5-11) shifting to radical Sinhala-nationalist politics. Or even one finds Ranil Wickremesinghe, (the architect of the current peace process) talking about peace at one level and claiming responsibility for dividing the Tigers by inciting Karuna away from the LTTE.
- <sup>8</sup> For much of the argument here I draw extensively upon the works of Benedict Anderson, E.J. Hobsbawm, Walker Conors and Ernest Gellner.
- <sup>9</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso; Revised edition, 1991.
- <sup>10</sup> For a very discursive and engaging study on the theme of ethnic conflict in south Asia see P. Sahdevan, “Ethnic Conflict in South Asia”, Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, June 1999 and for a detailed analysis see his paper “Lost Opportunities and Changing Demands: Explaining the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka”, University of Kent at Canterbury, 1994. Available on <http://www.kent.ac.uk/politics/research/kentpapers/Sahadevan.html>
- <sup>11</sup> For details see K.M. De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, OUP: New Delhi, 1981, Nath Yogasundram, *A Comprehensive History of Sri Lanka, From Prehistory to Tsunami*, Vijitha Yapa Publications, Colombo, 2006.
- <sup>12</sup> O’Donnell, Guillermo. 1993. On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Postcommunist Countries. *World Development*, Vol. 21, Issue 8, pp.1355-1370.
- <sup>13</sup> For a detailed discussion on these riots see T.D.S.A. Dissanayaka, *War or Peace*

in Sri Lanka, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 2004.

- <sup>14</sup> For details see Rajan Hoole, Daya Somasundaram, K.Sritharan and Rajani Thiranagama, *The Broken Palmyra*, Sri Lanka Studies Institute, Claremont, CA; April 1990.
- <sup>15</sup> See Jaydeva Uyangoda, 'A Political Culture of Conflict', in Robert I. Rotberg, edited, *Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1999. He summarises it thus: "The resistance to sharing state power has been emphatically seen as a virtue among the elites and ethno-political cadres (Sinhalese as well as Tamil), and to a considerable extent among the masses too. The democratic political culture with which Sri Lanka has been so intimately associated excludes power-sharing based on ethnicity. Indigenisation and domestication of democratic institutions and practices has occurred in such a way that they are presupposed to serve exclusive sectional interests. This is the discursive raison d'être of majoritarian unitarism as well as minoritarian separatism".
- <sup>16</sup> A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and the Crisis of Ceylon Tamil Nationalism, 1947-1977*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1994
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> For a very detailed and relatively impartial discussion see T.D.S.A. Dissanayaka, *War or Peace in Sri Lanka*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 2004.
- <sup>19</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka—The Role of India's Intelligence Agencies*, South Asian Network on Conflict Research, Colombo, 1993, pp. 11.
- <sup>20</sup> Sri Lanka also tried to convince the world that Tamil Terrorism posed a grave threat to its unity and integrity. It said that the Tamils had the support and encouragement of the government and people in India and that there would be a direct military invasion by India for the creation of an independent sovereign Tamil state on the model of Bangladesh. For detailed discussion see: S.D. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity—India and Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis* (New Delhi: Sage, 1993), pp. 52
- <sup>21</sup> Quoted in Nath Yogasundaram, *A Comprehensive History of Sri Lanka, From Prehistory to Tsunami*, Vijitha Yapa Publications, Colombo, 2006
- <sup>22</sup> Saman Kelagama, "Transformation of a Conflict via an Economic Dividend": Dr. Saman Kelegama. May 2005, (Institute of Fundamental Studies, Colombo)-page 23. This unpublished paper which was delivered in a Workshop organised by the Centre for Policy Alternatives, has been quoted in a paper by Austin Ferenando, "Peace Process and Security Issues", February 2006 available on <http://www.tamilnet.com/img/publish/2006/02/CFAbbyAustin.pdf>
- <sup>23</sup> In fact in the Oslo declaration LTTE agreed to "explore a settlement based on internal self-administration for the Tamil speaking peoples of the North and East in their areas of historic habitation within a federal structure and within a united Sri Lanka." In fact in a surprising act of climb down, Prabhakaran had given a hint about this in his November 2002 Hero's day speech: "We are

prepared to consider favourably a political framework that offers substantial regional autonomy and self-government in our homeland on the basis of our right to internal self-determination”.

- <sup>24</sup> The nature of fractured polity in its latest shape is analysed by Jayadev Uyangoda in his article, “Sri Lanka: A Fractured Mandate”, *South Asian Journal*, Volume I, Issue 5, 2004.
- <sup>25</sup> Twenty years of civil war has no doubt slowed economic diversification and liberalisation but apart from a negative growth rate in 2001, the Lankan economy has not reached crisis levels.
- <sup>26</sup> I am alluding to William I. Zartman’s concept of ripeness here. Zartman lays out his basic concept of ripeness and the hurting stalemate in his paper “Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond”, in *International Conflict Resolution after the Cold War*. Edited by Stern, Paul C. and Daniel Druckman, eds. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, September 2000.
- <sup>27</sup> See for example Karen Ballentine and Heiko Nitzschke, “The Political Economy of Civil War and Conflict Transformation”, Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2005, Available on [http://www.berghof-handbook.net/articles/BHDS3\\_BallentineNitzschke230305.pdf](http://www.berghof-handbook.net/articles/BHDS3_BallentineNitzschke230305.pdf), Also see Nicola Palmer, *Defining a Different War Economy: the Case of Sri Lanka*, Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2005, available on [http://www.berghof-handbook.net/articles/BHDS3\\_Palmer.pdf](http://www.berghof-handbook.net/articles/BHDS3_Palmer.pdf)
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> In many ways the CT approach builds upon the conflict formation approaches developed by Johan Galtung and Edward E. Azar. Johan Galtung for example argues that conflicts have both life-affirming and life-destroying aspects. They arise out of inherent contradictions in the structure of society which get manifested in individual attitudes and behaviour. See Johan Galtung, “Conflict as a way of life”, in H. Freeman, *Progress in Mental Health*, London: J. & A. Churchill, 1969, and “Conflict Resolution as Conflict Transformation: The First Law of Thermodynamics Revisited”, in K. Rupesinghe, ed., *Conflict Transformation*. London: Macmillan, 1995. Also See Edward E. Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict*. Hampshire, England: Dartmouth, 1990.
- <sup>30</sup> See Johan Galtung *Peace by Peaceful Means*, London: Sage, 1996.
- <sup>31</sup> Adam Curle, *Making Peace*, London: Tavistock Press, 1971
- <sup>32</sup> Actor transformation means changes within the parties or the emergence of new players. Issue transformation implies finding common ground, which might require deep political changes within the parties. Rule transformation changes the norms of the parties’ interactions. Structural transformation is the most significant way of altering the conflict. A new power distribution, increase in interdependence or isolation will bring changes in the structure of the relationships between the parties. He would say that transformation of interests can be pursued as a way of improving the conflict structure.

- <sup>33</sup> Raimo Vayrynen, "To Settle or to Transform? Perspectives on the Resolution of National and International Conflicts", in *New Directions in Conflict Theory: Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation*. Ed. Raimo Vayrynen. International Social Science Council, SAGE Publications: London, Newbury Park, New Delhi, 1991. Pp. 1-25.
- <sup>34</sup> Dieter Senghaas, "The Civilization of Conflict: Constructive Pacifism as a Guiding Notion for Conflict Transformation" Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2003.
- <sup>35</sup> For literature on conflict transformation see <http://conflicttransformation.org/> or <http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/contrns.htm>
- <sup>36</sup> Apart from John Paul Lederach leading advocates of the Conflict Transformation theory are Mark Chupp, Louis Kriesberg, Terrell A. Northrup, Stuart J. Thorson, Raimo Vayrynen, Paul Wehr, Heidi Burgess & Guy Burgess and many others. Some of their works are: Mark Chupp, "Conflict Transformation: A Spiritual Process." *Conciliation Quarterly*, Vol. 12, Issue 3, Summer, 1993, pp. 6-7, and "When Mediation is Not Enough.", *Conciliation Quarterly*, 10:3, Summer, 1991, pp. 2-3, P. Wehr, Heidi Burgess & Guy Burgess (eds.). *Justice Without Violence*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994, Terrell A. Northrup, "The Dynamic of Identity in Personal and Social Conflict", in Louis Kriesberg, Terrell A. Northrup and Stuart J. Thorson Eds.), *Intractable Conflicts and Their Transformation*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989, pp. 55-82.
- <sup>37</sup> At the personal level, CT involves the pursuit of awareness, growth, and commitment to change which may occur through the recognition of fear, anger, grief, and bitterness. These emotions must be outwardly acknowledged and dealt with in order for effective conflict transformation to occur. At the systemic level too the process of increasing justice and equality in the social system as a whole must be set into motion. This certainly involves the elimination of oppression, sharing of resources, and approaching conflict between groups of people in a non-violent way. Transformation of personal relationships facilitates the transformation of social systems and systemic changes facilitate personal transformation.
- <sup>38</sup> John Paul Lederach, "The Meeting Place", Chapter 8, *Journey Towards Reconciliation*, Herald Press, Spring 1998. In his article titled "The Meeting Place", he writes: The four (Truth, Mercy, Justice and Peace) were now huddled in a small circle. "And what," I asked, "is this place called where you now stand together?" "This place," they responded in a single voice, "is reconciliation.". Adopting a relational approach Lederach would argue that "Reconciliation is restoring and healing the web of relationship that has been torn".
- <sup>39</sup> Lederach, John Paul. *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*. Syracuse University Press, 1995, p. 22
- <sup>40</sup> John Paul Lederach , "The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace", Annual Conference Keynote Presentation at the Association of Conflict Resolution 2004 Sacramento, September 30, 2004, available on <http://>

[www.acrnet.org/conferences/ac04/lederachspeech.htm](http://www.acrnet.org/conferences/ac04/lederachspeech.htm)

- <sup>41</sup> K. Rupesinghe, in his introduction to the book edited by him, *Conflict Transformation*. London: Macmillan, 1995.
- <sup>42</sup> Rupesinghe calls for ideational interventions which will bring about “sustainable structural and attitudinal changes...within the society and (build) new institutions...to address outstanding issues”, and emphasises on “the building and/or revival of indigenous political, social and economic mechanisms and attitudes which militate against the use of violence to resolve conflicts”. Thus he advocates a shift in thinking from “resolutionary” to a “transformative” in trying to analyse and diagnose conflicts.
- <sup>43</sup> I rely on the summary developed by Christopher Mitchell, “Beyond Resolution: What does Conflict Transformation Actually Transform?”, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, May 2002, Volume 9, No. 1, available on <http://www.gmu.edu/academic/pcs/CM83PCS.htm>
- <sup>44</sup> A. T. Aryaratne makes a mention of it in his piece on Sri Lanka in *Himal*, Vol 16, Issue I, January 2003.
- <sup>45</sup> Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, “Pitfalls and Possibilities”, in B. Raman, N. Sathiya Moorthy and Kalpana Chittaranjan, eds., *Sri Lanka: Peace Without Process*, New Delhi: ORF and Samskriti Publications Ltd, 2006. pp. 21-22
- <sup>46</sup> Jaydeva Uyangoda, “Pluralism, Democracy and Ethnic Conflict Resolution: Trajectories in Sri Lanka”, paper presented in University of Oslo, Norway in May 2003.
- <sup>47</sup> Dov Ronen, “Can There Be A Just Resolution Of Conflict?”, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, June 1998, available on <http://www.gmu.edu/academic/pcs/table51.htm>

Ashok K Behuria is a Research Fellow at IDSA.