

Quashing the Inner Demons by Embracing Peace

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Sri Lanka is a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious nation strategically located in the Indian Ocean; she is of high economic value as well as rich in culture. Due to the diversity in composition, any country becomes vulnerable to threats, which are internal as well as external. Therefore, the government is duty-bound to combat national security threats and ensure peace and stability in the nation. However, the element of diversity can also be equipped to reign the country in the international arena. By boosting the economy, promoting peace and reconciliation, eliminating the roots of violence and extremism. Sri Lanka endured a three-decade war with one of the world's notorious terrorist organizations known as The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is proscribed by many nations. The article assesses the post-war context in Sri Lanka's peacebuilding process, stratagems that were taken to ensure peace and measures that can be taken to foster peace.

There is an array of reasons behind war and nothing can be further from the truth; a war is caused when there is a denial of rights. Therefore, it is important to look into the acts of the past, which initiated enmity and created a rift. The turmoil between Tamils and Sinhalese came into existence due to series of reasons, committed by both parties. It is important to mention the chaos created by Sinhala Only Act in 1956, which was passed by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. The Act opened doors for the underprivileged Sinhala community to rise and engage in administration by eliminating the language barrier. However, this laid a negative impact on the Tamil community where the majority were English speaking. They faced a real threat with the new imposed language restraint. The Tamil having a less population and the barrier existing in the educational, economical sector created an estrangement between Sinhalese and Tamils.

Velupillai Prabhakaran formed the Tamil New Tigers group to set up a separate homeland - the Tamil Eelam. Tamil Tigers group is designed to fight for "self-determination". The motive by the LTTE does not serve the purpose of harmony, which Tamils wanted; Prabhakaran claimed a part of the land, which is an infringement of the interest of all population. Therefore his struggle was not a depiction of all the Tamils it is rather motivated by extremism to come into power by attempting to oust the legitimate governance. The oppressed sector of violence was composed of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, and Burghers, who craved for peace and to live without terror.

In 1981 marks a dark spot in the history where Jaffna Library was burnt. The literature lost was precious and the damage done is irreversible to the whole nation. On the other hand, there were major human rights law violations and humanitarian violations committed by LTTE, the terrorist organization. They attacked religious places including the Temple of Tooth Relic Kandy, Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi. They closed the gates of Mavil Aru preventing water, which is a basic right;

they bombed economic places such as Central bank and Colombo International airport. LTTE killed many leaders, army personnel, public irrespective of their race and country, such as Rajiv Gandhi, Ranasinghe Premadasa, Nataraja Raviraj, Lakshman Kadiragamar, Late Admiral Clancy Fernando, Matara Kithalagama Sri Seelalankara Thera. The said attacks on nonmilitary targets and attacking noncombatants are strictly in breach of human rights as well as laws of armed conflict. These movements demonstrate the gravity of ethnic tension; it is indisputable that the aforementioned acts create animosity.

The resulting hatred and continuous provocation gave rise to violence by both parties. With the failure of the ceasefire agreement, due to lost hope Sri Lankan government, took the hurdle in defending the lives of all the civilians by conducting a humanitarian mission, consequently quashing terrorism and upholding peace. The popular opinion and the accusation posed by western countries is that, Sinhalese are against Tamil, however, the reality suggests otherwise. It is an obvious fact that there are conflicts in any country and diversity in the composition becomes an intensifying factor. However, it does not prove the point of hatred between the two races. There is no humanity in terrorism, nor love and nor warmth, the battle was always against LTTE the terrorist group, and the Government of Sri Lanka.

The rights vested on people are enshrined in the Constitution of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978. Article 02 of the Constitution states that the “Republic of Sri Lanka is a **unitary state**”, this explicitly displays that the division of the land is in contravention to the law as well as against the best interest of the people. However “unitary” is not a mere fabrication. The constitution displays the protection provided to the diverse population of Sri Lanka notwithstanding ethnicity or religion. Chapter II of the constitution is much disputed for giving **Buddhism** the foremost place nonetheless it states that “while **assuring to all religions the rights granted** by Articles 10 and 14(1) (e)” which shows that religion will not be subordinate to another. Therefore, all other religions are treated justly.

Article 12 is on **right to equality**, which states all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to the equal protection of the law. Article further states, “no citizen shall be **discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth, or any one of such grounds**”. Furthermore, it states that it shall be lawful to a person to acquire within a reasonable time sufficient **knowledge of any language as a qualification** for any employment or office in the Public... employment or office”. Article 12(3) is wide in scope it display language does not become a barrier, thus the word “**any**” **language** upholds the fact that all ethnicities are welcomed and diversity is not an issue. Proviso lists that no persons shall on the **grounds of language, caste, sex, or any one of such grounds, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction, or condition** concerning **access** to shops, public restaurants, hotels, places of public entertainment, and places of public worship of his religion.

Article 14. Shed lights on a plethora of rights such as the **freedom of speech and expression** including **Publication**, the freedom of **peaceful assembly**, the **freedom of association**, freedom, either by himself or in association with others to... **manifest his religion or belief in worship**, observance, practice and teaching, **the freedom of movement** and of **choosing his residence** within Sri Lanka; and the **freedom to return** to Sri Lanka. The all rights discussed showcase that all ethnic groups are qualified for protection irrespective of the race you are born.

Measures taken aftermath of the war to ensure peace and stability of the nation,

- 2010 Lessons learned and reconciliation commission (LLRC)
- Secretariat to coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms (SCRM) The Right to Information Act No 12 of 2016 2018 Office for Reparations Act No 34 of 2018
- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka
- Election Commission
- Office for missing persons
- Office for reparations
- ILO Convention on Employment Policy
- Witness Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act Gestures

The afore mentioned steps demonstrates attempts taken to ensure harmony and discourage violence. However it must be taken into attention that effective implementation is essential.

Another remarkable step taken by the previous government is to sing the National Anthem in Tamil for the first time since 1949 the Independence Day celebrations in 2016 creating the acknowledgment of the Tamil population. Tamil Minister Mano Ganeshan appreciated this gesture, *“Tamil Minister Mano Ganeshan said: "Yes, it is a very small act but it goes a long way. This is a victory for our coexistence.”* However, there are infringements in promises, it is apparent that implementation needs to be immediate and error-free. Distribution of lands of Tamils bestowed property rights back to the owner, however, lapses and delay in distribution will obstruct justice leading to justice undone, therefore, it is crucial to take immediate measures to serve justice.

His Excellency president Gotabaya Rajapaksa in his National Policy Framework Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor mentions an array of steps to be taken to achieve National Unity through Democratic Governance.

- Establish an Inter-Religious Advisory Council under the chair of the President.
- Rehabilitate the LTTE cadres and force persons who are charged with various offenses and integrated them into society as free persons.
- Establish a National Land Commission to prepare land use policy with consideration of historical and archeological factors, natural resources, and urbanization, and future necessities.

- Bridge the communication gap by making it mandatory for Sinhala medium students to learn Tamil and Tamil medium students to learn Sinhala.
- Give priority to its inhabitants in recruiting employees for government jobs in these areas and people that can converse in the Tamil language when recruiting police officers to serve in the above areas.
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The president of the country is duty-bound to serve the people, to keep the promise, and ensure justice. The implementation of the above measures will be an asset to the country as it enhances stability between races. It is also imperative to prevent acts of intimidation, violence and extremism. It is vital to prosecute the perpetrators and hold them accountable. Conviction of perpetrators provides closure to victims. Prevention of hate speech, promotion of healthy dialogue, community engagement are beneficial steps that can be employed as a nation.

A journey to attain peace cannot be achieved overnight. Peace is a process that needs to be accomplished mutually and not individually. Therefore, civilians too have harmonized with one another. The beauty of living in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic country is that the said diversity itself makes them unified. Covid 19 pandemic proved that we are divided by race but united during a struggle, there is no segregation when it comes to charity when people are in need ,we share and care among each other. When we see a differently abled person we do not hesitate to help, we do not ask what your race is. When a baby is smiling, you hold their little hand, appreciate the beauty. We cheer the same way when Murali takes a wicket and Sanath scores a six. If we as a nation heal the wounds of the past and acknowledge the efforts we have taken, quashing the inner demons of hatred will lead to peace and reconciliation.

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** The opinion expressed is her own and not necessarily reflective of the institute.*

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National Policy Framework Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor

The LTTE has been designated as a terrorist organization by 32 countries, including the European Union, Canada, the United States, and India.

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