

## ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

Ethnic conflict is one of the biggest problems in the modern era. The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka showed a new dimension of conflicts that crippled the whole nation for a long time. The aim of this article is to explore the core problems of the ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka. The first part of this article deal with the definitional terms and the causes and consequences of ethnic conflicts. The second part explored the pre-colonial conflict situations as well as the colonial period. The third part examined the traditional singhala-tamil scenario and dealt with other issues like politics, language, land reforms etc. The fourth dealt with a comparative ethnic conflict situational comparison between former Yugoslavia and Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and by thus developed a linkages and mislinks between the two conflicts. Finally we tried to draw an attention of the readers with the manipulations and politicization of ethnicity.

**KEYWORDS:** Ethnic Conflicts, Manipulations and Politicization of Ethnicity, Democratic Politics and Ethnicity, Regional Politics and Ethnicity

### INTRODUCTION

In the modern age, ethnic problem is a worldwide problem. Almost no country of the earth is free from it. However, the dimension of ethnicity in all countries is not same, some countries are less affected and some are more affected. In the recent era especially in last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 1<sup>st</sup> decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the south Asia became a hot-bed of ethnicity. The countries in south Asian Region is mostly affected by terrorist activities, it is affected by thousand types of terrorist activities.

### ETHNICITY AND NATION

The terms "ethnicity" and "ethnic group" are derived from the Greek word *ethnos*, normally translated as "nation" or commonly said people of the same race that share a distinctive culture. Nations today are interested in integrating their ethnicities. The two operative words here that can be molded into several convenient definitions are "ethnic" and "nation". Ethnic means relating to a people or group that shares a culture, religion or language. "Nation" is a group that (1) shares one or more identifying characteristics, such as common history, language, religion, racial background, culture, and/or territory; and (2) is politically mobilized and/or amenable to such mobilization. Most countries in South Asia right now nations in the making and ethnicity has become a critical variable in the formation and reformation

### DEFINITIONS

An **ethnic group** is a group of humans whose members identify with each other, through a common heritage that is real or assumed. This shared heritage may be based upon putative common ancestry, history, kinship, religion, language, shared territory, nationality or physical appearance. Members of an ethnic group are conscious of belonging to an ethnic group; moreover ethnic identity is further marked by the recognition from others of a group's distinctiveness.

Here are some definitions of ethnicity:

- According to "Challenges of Measuring an Ethnic World: Science, politics, and reality", a conference organized by statistics Canada and the US census bureau (April 1–3, 1992), "Ethnicity is a fundamental factor in human life: it is a phenomenon inherent in human experience."
- Many social scientists, like anthropologists Fredrik Barth and Eric Wolf, do not consider ethnic identity to be universal. They regard ethnicity as a product of specific kinds of inter-group interactions, rather than an essential quality inherent to human groups.
- The modern usage of "ethnic group", however, reflects the different kinds of encounters industrialized states have had with subordinate groups, such as immigrants and colonized subjects; "ethnic group" came to stand in opposition to "nation", to refer to people with distinct cultural identities who, through migration or conquest, had become subject to a foreign state.
- The modern usage definition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*' is
  - Pertaining to race; peculiar to a race or nation; ethnological. Also, pertaining to or having common racial, cultural, religious, or linguistic characteristics, esp. designating a racial or other group within a larger system; hence (U.S. colloq.), foreign, exotic.
  - *Ethnic minority (group)*, a group of people differentiated from the rest of the community by racial origins or cultural background, and usu. claiming or enjoying official recognition of their group identity. Also *attrib.* —*Oxford English Dictionary* "ethnic, a. and n."
- German sociologist Max Weber, who defined it as

Those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for group formation; furthermore it does not matter whether an objective blood relationship exists.

## **ETHNICITY THEORY**

Ethnicity theory says that race is a social category and is but one of several factors in determining ethnicity. Some other criteria include: "religion, language, "customs," nationality, and political identification" (Omi & Winant 15). This theory was put forth by sociologist Robert E. Park in the 1920s. It is based on the notion of "culture". This theory was preceded by over a century where biological essentialism was the dominant Ethnicity theory was based on the assimilation model. Park outlined his four steps to assimilation: contact, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation.

## **ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA**

Sri Lanka is another terror prone country in the South Asia. It has been affected by diverse kinds of terrorist activities especially the secessionist movement by The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam LTTE is a separatist organization formerly based in northern Sri Lanka. Founded in May 1976, it waged a violent secessionist campaign that sought to create an independent Tamil state in the north and east of Sri Lanka. This campaign evolved into the Sri Lankan Civil War, which was one of the longest running armed conflicts in Asia until the LTTE was militarily defeated by the Sri Lankan Military in May 2009. From 1976 to today lots of lives are lost by the LTTE with politicians, celebrities, and prominent persons e.g. Thangathurai Arunasalam, Lalith Athulathmudali , D. M. Dassanayake, Gamini Dissanayake; Alfred Duraipappah; Clancy

Fernando, Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, Rajiv Gandhi, C.V. Gunaratne, Balanadarajah Iyer, Lakshman Kadirgamar, Denzil Kobbekaduwa, Parami Kulatunga, Mahattaya, Kumaraswamy Nandagopan, Tuan Nizam Muthaliff, Ranasinghe Premadasa, Chelvy Thiyagarajah, Neelan Tiruchelvam, Larry Wijeratne, Ranjan Wijeratne, Vijaya Wimalaratne, Sarojini Yogeswaran.

Despite the secessionist or separatist movement in Sri Lanka we can find many types of terrorist, religious, cultural and ethnic conflict. As we know that Sri Lanka has others ethnic groups such as 73.9% Sinhalese, 12.6% Tamil, 7.4% Moors, 5.2% Indian Tamil, 0.5% Others. The Sinhalese always try to exploit the others mainly Moors and Tamils. As a result there lots of conflicts are raised in Sri Lankan society. But the present Rajapakse Govt. tries to overcome all kinds of problems.

Sri Lanka is a multi-faith state composed of 69% Buddhists, 15% Hindus, 8% Christians and 8% Muslims. As a result of oppression by the ruling majority Sinhalese community -- who are mostly Buddhist -- the Tamils -- who are mostly Hindu -- had agitated for an independent Eelam state in the North and East of the island. A vicious civil war resulted which lasted for 19 years and resulted in the death of 65,000 people.

## CAUSE & CONSEQUENCES

The Srilankan conflict has furthered immensely because the Sinhalese continue to feel economically discriminated. One group accuses the other of enjoying supremacy in the bureaucracy, governmental patronage and ruling the elite-based institutions. Demands for state divisions reduce when the economic benefits are fruits of hard work. The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has many root causes and consequences that are closely inter-linked. In general, these themes can be broadly identified-

- Ethnic politics and the interpretation of the past
- Politics of language
- Politics of education
- Other factors, including employment and land

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ETHNIC CONFLICT

### The Pre-Colonial Situation

The peopling of Sri Lanka has been a continuous process of migrants from India with indigenous and other earlier migrant groups [Bandaranayake:1985]. The Sinhala or Sinhalese (74%) constitute the major ethnic group; the Sri Lankan Tamils, who inhabit the north and east form 12.6% and the group known as Indian Tamils (19th century migrants for work on plantations) 5.6% of the population. While Muslims constitute the third largest ethnic group (7.4%), there are also small minorities such as Burghers (people of mixed descent), and Malays. All the major groups in Sri Lanka belong to a similar ethnic mix of migrants from various parts of India, especially South India, to which there have been Southeast Asian, Arab and European admixtures. In spite of this, each ethnic group today has a distinct identity with strongly held myths of origin; the Sinhala believe that they are Aryans from Bengal, the Tamils claim pure Dravidian origin, and the Muslims aspire to descent from Arabs. The history of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is the history of emergence of consciousness among the majority community, the Sinhala, which defined the Sri Lanka society as Sinhala-Buddhist, thus denying its multi-ethnic character. The growth of this consciousness impinged on the minorities in Sri Lanka to the extent that internal resolution of the problems become impossible.

The Sinhala dominated the country from about 5th century BC and succeeded in establishing a kingdom with its centre in the North Central Province of the island.

The term 'Sinhala' was first used to indicate the royal family of the island, then extended to cover the royal retinue and then further extended to include the people; this social process dating to about the 6th century AD is simultaneously the process of the ethnic consolidation of the Sinhala people. [Gunawardena: 1984:55-107] The Sinhala kingdom which controlled the entire island most of the time entered into relations both of alliance and hostility at various periods with the Chola, Pandiya and Chera Kingdoms of South India. This long history of links with South India is still present in popular Sinhala consciousness, with perhaps the aggressive acts being best remembered.

In the 12th and 13th centuries, certain developments in Sri Lanka determined its ethnic demography in a decisive way with effects that have continued to the present. The demographic distribution lays down a territorial basis for the major ethnic groups; in the case of the Tamils, the territorial concentration grew into a concept of a 'traditional Tamil Homeland'. This did not arise for Muslims since they were scattered over the whole island, with a majority presence in only a part of the Eastern province. Religion also played a dominant ideological role in ethnic consolidation. Buddhism, introduced from India in the third century BC, became the religion of the Sinhala as well as the state religion. Hinduism remained the religion of the Tamils. Apart from the conversion of a section of both Sinhalese and Tamils to Christianity during the colonial period, the congruence between Sinhala and Buddhist on the one hand, and Tamil and Hindu on the other, was total.

### **The Colonial Period**

Social and economic developments during the early colonial period under the Portuguese and then the Dutch - commercialization of agriculture, the registration of title to land, registration of births and deaths, proselytization - contributed towards a freezing of ethnic boundaries. This meant in effect the consolidation of the Sinhala community in the central and south-western parts of the island and of the Tamil community in the north and on the eastern seaboard. Economic developments during the occupation of the island by the British gave rise to two other phenomena which made the ethnic picture in Sri Lanka even more complex.

First, the coffee plantations established by the British in the 19th century brought to Sri Lanka, as plantation labour, a population of over one million Tamil workers from South India. These were at first seasonal migrants but with the development of tea plantations the majority became permanently domiciled on the plantations. The question of their citizenship rights became an issue that subsequently soured relationships between India and Sri Lanka. Second, economic developments during this period were mainly in the central and western areas of the island. This left the Tamil community in a disadvantaged position.

The opening up of the plantations transformed the economy of Sri Lanka and created opportunities for indigenous entrepreneurs to make large fortunes; some of them converted to Christianity and sent their children to Britain for education. These filled the expanding needs of the state services as well as the need for doctors, engineers, lawyers etc. The local bourgeoisie thus created was multi-ethnic, but predominantly Sinhala, with Burghers and Tamils too entering the various professions and the state services.

### **SINHALA BUDDHIST IDENTITY**

In asserting a Sinhala identity and in legitimizing Sinhala control of the country's polity, the leaders of the Sinhala revivalist movement reconstructed an image of the Sinhala past using many elements of the 'origin' mythology. The

Sinhala, it was claimed, were descended from Aryan migrants from Bengal in the fifth century BC; the arrival of their leader, Prince Vijaya, in Sri Lanka coincided with the death of the Buddha. It was claimed that the Buddha in his infinite wisdom saw that his doctrine would be preserved for 5000 years in Sri Lanka by these immigrants and their descendants; he therefore visited the island three times, consecrated it to his doctrine and on his death-bed instructed Sakra, the chief of the Gods, to safeguard Vijaya and to ensure his supremacy in the land. Thus Sri Lanka becomes the land of Sinhala and the land of Dharma - the Buddhist doctrine. The belief was that the survival of the Buddhist religion was dependent on the survival of the Sinhala people; the people surviving as long as they espoused the doctrine and controlled the land consecrated to the religion. Thus the religion, the people and the land were bound together in an indissoluble unity.

Such a revivalist ideology attempted to establish a Sinhala - Buddhist hegemony of the island antagonistic to non-Sinhala, non-Buddhist groups. It is this Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness that has resulted in the denial of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of Sri Lankan society and in a refusal to accept the collective rights of other minority groups. This consciousness was counterpoised by its ideologues against the British imperial state, which was seen as foreign and Christian; the revival was thus more anti-Western than anti-imperialist, asserting a Sinhala Buddhist identity against all foreigners and minorities. Over the last 100 years, it has been asserted against Muslims, Christians, Tamil plantation workers, Malayalam and Sri Lankan Tamils. [Jayawardena 1986: 14].

## **POLITICAL REFORMS**

The agitation spearheaded by the political reformers of the early 20th century was primarily intended to expand the scope and powers of Legislative Council (unreformed from 1833 to 1911) by extending representative government based on a limited male franchise.

The British Governor (following the old stratagem of divide and rule) had nominated members to the legislature on the basis of ethnicity (Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burger); the agitation initially rejected ethnicity as a basis of representation and served to bring together the emerging bourgeoisie of all ethnic groups into a common front. Even though this constitutional agitation did not penetrate far down into population, it nevertheless presented a picture of ethnic harmony with the first president in 1919 of the main political organization, the Ceylon National Congress, being a Tamil, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam.

The unity of bourgeoisie broke down over the question of ethnic representation, more particularly after 1931 when the British constituted a State Council with territorial representation based on universal suffrage.

These reforms of 1931 did not meet with the favor of minority ethnic groups who believed the constitution would ensure the dominance of the Sinhala majority; they argued, at the least, for constitutional safeguards for the rights of minority ethnic groups. However, the United National Party (UNP), formed in 1947 in preparation for the first post-independence election, included members of all ethnic groups, as did the Left parties. Nevertheless all these fell prey at various times to chauvinist tendencies that manifested themselves after Sri Lanka gained its independence in 1948.

The United National Party took power after independence; among its MPs were many of those who had been members of legislature before independence and was, in its origin and intentions, a party dedicated to the ideal of a plural Sri Lanka. One of their first acts was to define Sri Lankan citizenship in a way that (in 1948) disenfranchised plantation Tamil workers who had enjoyed the vote since 1931.

The UNP tried to maintain itself in power by adjusting to the Sinhala nationalistic current. It even went back on a pledge to make both Sinhala and Tamil official languages by agreeing to the policy of 'Sinhala Only'. But these moves

were insufficient. In 1956, the UNP was voted out and a coalition led by S.W.R.D, Bandaranaike came to power in a landslide victory. This coalition represented mainly Sinhala "petit-bourgeois" and rural elements and its dynamism was supplied by the Sinhala intelligentsia, including Buddhist monks, teachers and "ayurvedic" (non-Western) physicians. In its policies, it was populist and radical and one of its first act was to replace English by Sinhala as the only official language. Insistence on the knowledge of Sinhala as a necessary requirement, quickly reduced the Tamil intake and, by the late 1970s, Tamils were seriously underrepresented in terms of ethnic percentages in the state services. [Abeysekera 1985:243]

The effort to achieve this kind of ethnic Sinhala hegemony was also demonstrated in the field of education. Primary and secondary schooling had generally been conducted in Sinhala and Tamil; the scheme of using 'mother tongue' was extended into the universities in the 1950s. This created an intense competition which government sought to answer in the 1970s by a system of 'standardization' for science students, whereby 'the minimum entry requirements for a Tamil student were higher than for a Sinhala medium student.' [Bastian 1985:220] This was clearly discriminatory and created the impression that the government, having deliberately reduced the opportunities available to Tamil youth in government service, was now bent on also denying them educational opportunities in the prestigious fields of medicine and engineering.

While discrimination against the Tamil-speaking people was growing in the period after independence in the fields of employment and education, there was another sphere in which the Tamil ethnic group felt itself imperilled, that of land colonization.

All this took place in a context of violent riots against Tamils which occurred with increasing frequency (1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983) and cultural vandalism such as burning down by soldiers of the Jaffna library.

## **THE TAMIL FACTOR IN POLITICS**

The Tamil ethnic group sought to counter this growing discrimination by demands at a political level. Before independence, the Tamil Congress unsuccessfully demanded balanced representation - 50% seats for the Sinhala and 50% for the combined minority ethnic groups. It was in this period of accelerated demands and rejection that Tamil political leaders concluded in 1976 that only a separate state could ensure the security and welfare of the Tamil people, a state carved out of the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka to be called Tamil Eelam.

The main political parties were not totally insensitive to this process, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, Prime Minister and leader of the SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party) arrived at an understanding with the leader of the Federal Party (the Bandaranaike - Chelvanayakam Pact of 1958) which gave Tamils a degree of regional autonomy, including control of the land settlement in their areas. However, Bandaranaike had to abandon the pact in the face of opposition from the United National Party (UNP) and was killed by a monk in 1959. Likewise, when the UNP was again in power, Dudley Senanayake, the Prime Minister, worked out a somewhat similar understanding in 1967; this too was scuttled in the face of opposition, this time mainly from the SLFP. The demands of the Tamil people had by this time become a major factor in Sinhala Politics. Sinhala political hegemony was also becoming institutionalized. The republican Constitution of 1972, while proclaiming Sinhala as the official language, declared that Buddhism had the 'foremost place' in Sri Lanka, thus almost affirming a Sinhala-Buddhist state. It is precisely this history that persuaded the Tamils that co-existence with the Sinhala in a single polity was no longer possible.

While the established political party of the Tamils - the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) - was demanding a separate state and using parliamentary democratic processes towards obtaining it, some Tamil youth, dissatisfied with the

non-violent policies of the TULF, formed groups which took up arms in the same cause. It is only necessary to state that it led to a protracted and bitter war in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka during the course of which the state security forces were guilty of severe excesses, attacks on civilians and serious violations of human rights of the Sri Lankan citizens, while the armed groups in turn resorted to brutal killings of both the Sinhala civilians and those Tamils thought of as 'informers'. The number of deaths has been estimated at 6000 by the government and 15000 by Tamil groups; damage to property has been incalculable.

At the ideological level, the response to Sinhala chauvinism was the emergence of Tamil chauvinism and extreme forms of nationalist mythmaking. According to Radhika Coomaraswamy, these include the myth that the Tamils are pure Dravidian by race, that they are heirs to the Mohenjadaro and Harappa civilizations of India, that they are the original inhabitants of Sri Lanka, that the Tamil language in its purest forms is spoken only in Sri Lanka and that the "Saiva Siddhanta" form of Hinduism has 'a special homeland' in Sri Lanka [Coomaraswamy 1987:79]. Many of the Tamil militant groups have also been sustained by such ideologies, and expressions like 'Dravidian Drive' and 'Chola charisma' have been used in their literature to mobilise support for armed struggle.

Another effect of the Sinhala-Tamil strife has been that the class solidarity among workers of all ethnic groups has been replaced by a sense of trans-class ethnic solidarity on the part of both the Sinhala and Tamils. As Newton Gunasinghe has observed, in both the Sinhala and Tamil ethnic formations "class contradiction are over determined in the Althusserian sense, by ethnic conflict", while among the Tamils, "class contradictions are softened and even submerged" in the face of a perceived "danger to its collective social existence"; among the Sinhalese masses, "dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs has taken a false external direction against what is perceived to be the unreasonable demands advanced by already privileged Tamils." [Abeysekera and Gunasinghe 1987: VI]

## **THE EMERGENCE OF ETHNIC POLITICS**

Relations between Tamils and Sinhalese have not always or consistently been antagonistic. This happened only in times of external threats from South India after the formulation of clear Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic or cultural identities in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century. These wars were wars of dominance fought between regional rulers and were not 'race' wars as defined later. Historical chronicles compiled by Sinhalese Buddhist monks defined these wars as campaigns undertaken to protect Buddhism and the Sinhalese nation. Mainly reinforced by formal education, many Sinhalese accept these problematic interpretations as fact today. In the eyes of many Sri Lankans, these interpretations seem to suggest a long and bloody tradition in which hope for reconciliation is minimal. Significantly, these interpretations—with their potent and emotional contents—have also found their way into school textbooks, which is an important aspect of social and political socialization in contemporary Sri Lanka. Forces of Sinhalese nationalism perpetuating notions of eternal conflict with Tamils had been gathering strength since before independence. Many of them were Sinhalese-educated rural people whose nationalist aspirations for cultural transformation, power and status did not automatically materialize with independence. Soon after independence it was clear that a conflict was emerging between Sinhalese-educated rural elite and the English-educated urban ruling elite. Meanwhile, one million Indian Tamils were disenfranchised in 1948 under the Ceylon Citizenship Act. Of this, approximately 350,000 were repatriated to India under the Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1964. Over the years, subsequent governments conferred citizenship rights to the rest. The Ceylon Citizenship Act served to reinforce ethnic politics and reduced the electoral leverage of the Indian Tamils who remain an impoverished community today.

## **ETHNIC CONFLICT AND LANGUAGE**

In addition to the barriers imposed by the continued use of the English language as the official language after

independence, the emerging nationalist forces perceived that Sri Lankan Tamils had access to a disproportionate share of power as a consequence of educational opportunities in the colonial period and were also disproportionately represented in the civil administration. Moreover, considerable mercantile interests were also controlled by non-Sinhalese groups. These fears and concerns were a basis for the politics of language that was to emerge.

As early as 1944, politicians proposed resolutions in Parliament to declare Sinhalese the official language, while other amendments proposed both Sinhalese and Tamil as official languages.

Sinhalese and Tamil would become the languages of instruction in schools, examinations for public services and legislative proceedings. The resolution was approved by 27 to 2 in the Sinhalese-dominated legislature. Committees were established to advise on how these changes were to be implemented, however, there was little progress in implementing the policy. In 1956, S.W.R.D Bandaranaike was elected Prime Minister with a main election promise of establishing Sinhalese as the official language of the country, replacing English. The new government fulfilled this promise—through the passage of the so-called “Sinhalese Only Bill” (Official Language Act, No. 33 of 1956)—soon after the election giving no status of parity to the Tamil language.

The language issue in many ways brought the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict into the forefront of Sri Lankan politics. In terms of the dominant strands of Sinhalese nationalism, the Sinhalese language along with the Buddhist religion necessarily had to occupy the pre-eminent position in society. This was perceived to be the only way the glory of ancient Sinhalese civilization could be revitalized. Even though Tamil has been decreed an official language along with Sinhalese in terms of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution (in 1987), the damage caused by the politics of language generally remain unaddressed. Moreover, the vast gap between the official recognition of Tamil as an official language and the practical implementation of the provisions and conditions it entails, is yet to be bridged the passage of the so-called “Sinhalese Only Bill” (Official Language Act, No. 33 of 1956)—soon after the election giving no status of parity to the Tamil language.

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## **ETHNIC CONFLICT AND EDUCATION**

Since the 1970s, access to education—particularly access to higher education—has been ethicized. In addition, many other aspects of education—including the structural organization of schools and universities, contents of textbooks and training of teachers—have impacted directly on ethnic conflict. Compared to other ethnic and religious groups in the country, Tamils have had strong cultural norms which valued education. Many Tamils attended English language schools which were the passport to higher education and better employment in the colonial period. As a consequence of well-funded American missionary activities, the Tamil-dominated Northern Province had comparatively better facilities for English language and pre-university education.



There was also a limit beyond which Tamils could not be absorbed within the traditional land-based occupations in the arid areas where they predominated. This further encouraged many to seek employment through education. The net result was the relative over-representation of Tamils in higher education, professions and the administration in comparison to their status in the general population.

In this context, post independence Sinhalese nationalism sought to curb the Tamil presence in education and thus also in the professions and civil administration. While the passing of the “Sinhalese Only Bill” was one attempt in this process, more direct hurdles were placed on the path of Tamils’ realization of educational goals since the 1970s. The constitutional provisions in the 1972 Constitution favoring the Sinhalese language and Buddhist religion, along with their educational policies, convinced many Tamils that they had been perceived as a marginal community.

From 1971 onwards, a new “standardization” policy was adopted, which ensured that the number of students qualifying for university entrance from each language was proportionate to the number of students who sat for university entrance examination in that language<sup>6</sup>. In real terms this meant that Tamil speaking students had to score much higher than Sinhalese speaking students to gain admission to universities. This also meant that for the first time, the integrity of university admissions policy was tampered with by using ethnicity as a basis. In 1972, a district quota system was introduced in order to benefit those not having adequate access to educational facilities within each language. These changes had a serious impact on the demographic patterns of university entry.

In general, these policies seriously impacted upon not only the chances of Tamils to gain access to higher education, but also on the overall process of ethnic relations as well. In 1977, the language-based admission policy was abolished and since that time various adjustments have been introduced on the basis of merit, district quotas, disadvantaged area quotas, etc. While the obvious ethno-linguistic discrimination of the 1971 policy has long been dismantled, many Tamil youth still feel that they are discriminated against in access to higher education.

Furthermore, the ethnic divisions in Sri Lanka tend to manifest within the education structure in a number of other ways—i.e., the organizational structure of educational institutions, the training of teachers and the content of textbooks and syllabi—which are much more long lasting and far more insidious than the more visible ethno-linguistic policies of the 1970s.

Related to the organizational structure of educational institutions, it is clear that language-based segregation takes place. This does not apply to privately-owned institutions in which instruction is in English, but applies to institutions with more than one language of instruction (such as some universities, mixed media schools and technical institutes) where a system of internal segregation takes place. In real terms Sinhalese students are segregated into Sinhalese-language schools and Tamil and Tamil-speaking Muslim students are segregated into Tamil-language schools. If they enter universities or technical institutes, this segregation is likely to continue unless they opt to, and have the money to receive, a non-segregated further education in English in private institutions.

The training of teachers poses similar problems, as most teachers in the system today are products of the segregated education system they are teaching in. Moreover, they are all trained in institutions that are internally segregated except in the training of teachers specializing in subjects such as English. Few teacher training institutions in operation today, have seriously taken into account the need to train teachers who can teach in a context keeping in mind the challenges of a multicultural society. There is a clear disjuncture between current state policy towards ethnic relations and the manner in which teachers are trained.

Since the early-1980s, many have stressed the role school texts play in shaping ethnic relations in the country. Ideally, school texts (e.g., texts used for teaching religion, language, social studies, etc.) should portray the multi-cultural reality of Sri Lankan society and address issues that are important in this context while approaching the prescribed subject matter. School texts have been written, supervised, produced and distributed by agencies of the state, meaning that their contents reflect state policy or thinking. Furthermore, ethnic politics have also been played out in the process of text production. In recent times some of the more problematic contents in these texts have been removed in the process of revision and re-writing<sup>9</sup>. Ironically however, sometimes this has gone to the opposite extreme—e.g., in some texts all references to ethnicity and related issues have been removed. Education and Teacher Deployment (Cr. 2881-CE).

### **ETHNIC CONFLICT AND EMPLOYMENT**

As mentioned above, both language and education policies have placed barriers on employment, especially in the administrative and professional ranks in which Tamils were at one point “over-represented.” In the private sector—which for the most part continued to work in English—employment opportunities for Tamils and other minorities remained relatively open. As a result, today some of the leading business ventures in the country are Tamil-owned. However, as a result of the discrimination that has occurred in state sector employment practices over time, there is a tendency among many Tamils to perceive of themselves as generally discriminated against in employment. According to the census of public sector and corporate sector employment in 1990, Sri Lankan Tamils accounted for 5.9% of those employed in the state services. This represents a significant drop from earlier years.

### **ETHNIC CONFLICT AND THE ISSUE OF LAND**

The issue of ownership over and access to land has also been a consistent area in which ethnic politics in Sri Lanka have manifested, and have sustained themselves over the years. As noted, one of the peculiarities in the demographic patterns in Sri Lanka is the relative concentration of certain ethnic groups in certain geographical regions. The clearest site of politics of land and ethnicity has been in the sparsely populated areas of the dry zone in the North Centre Province and the Eastern Province<sup>10</sup>. When post independence governments decided to settle poor Sinhalese farmers from the densely populated wet zone areas of the country, many Sinhalese politicians and people in general viewed the process as a “reclamation and recreation in the present of the glorious Sinhalese Buddhist past.” The so-called “colonization schemes” became an integral aspect of Sinhalese Buddhist ‘nation-building.’ Not surprisingly, the Tamils had a completely different perception of the colonization of the dry zone. The notion of the ‘traditional Tamil homeland’ became a potent component of popular Tamil political imagination. Since Sinhalese irrigation settlements in the North Central and Eastern Provinces occurred under direct state sponsorship, it appeared to many Tamils as a deliberate attempt of the Sinhalese-dominated state to marginalize them further by decreasing their numbers in the area. The colonization schemes did alter the demographic patterns, particularly in the Eastern Province in a significant way<sup>11</sup>.

A decision was made in the late-1970s to accelerate the development of the dry zone through the “Accelerated Mahaweli Program,” that provided for the opening up of dry zone areas further for agriculture and resettlement of people. Only in 1986, as a result of continuing Tamil agitations, did the government agree to allocate the remaining land under the Mahaweli Program on the basis of the ethnic distribution of each ethnic group in the total population.

Meanwhile, the Muslim community tended to reject the countervailing notion of a traditional Tamil homeland in the North East region. Growing cooperation between the security forces and Muslim home guards led to LTTE attacks on Muslim villages in the East, armed counter attacks on Tamil communities in the South East and to the eviction of 55,000 Muslims from the North in 1990 most of whom remain displaced today.

## **LOSS OF CONFIDENCE IN NON-VIOLENT AND DEMOCRATIC POLITICS**

Ethnic politics and fears of discrimination led Tamil politicians in the Federal direction from a very early stage of recent Sri Lankan politics. Since the 1930s, and much more clearly since the 1950s, Tamil political parties have been asking for greater political autonomy for the areas in which they predominate. Such a devolution of power has been recognized at different times as a means to diffuse tensions between the two groups. A number of pacts had been formulated to define the modalities for devolution of power, including the Bandaranaike Chelvanayagam Pact in July 1957 that offered a framework for regional devolution. But due to various political pressures, the provisions of the pact were never implemented. In 1965, the Dudley-Chelvanayagam Pact was formulated and agreed upon. But, yet again the provisions of this pact—quite similar to the earlier one—were annulled.

The failure to implement these proposals led to Tamil demands for separation, instead of Federalism that they had been mostly seeking up to that point. On the part of many Tamils—particularly Tamil youth from the north—the failure of these pacts also marked a disintegration of confidence in parliamentary politics in general. In 1977, the Tamil United Liberation Front won an overwhelming electoral victory on a highly charged political platform of separatism. In 1980, the District Development Council Act was passed in Parliament and elections to the councils were held in July 1981. But given the lack of government commitment to decentralization of power, this attempt also proved to be failure.

After this point, there were clear indications that the politics of Tamil society were shifting from the commitment to parliamentary democracy (held by its conservative leaders) to a commitment to armed struggle (held by considerable sections of Tamil youth). In 1979, the government enacted the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act as an interim measure, but in 1982 it was amended to be part of the permanent law.

## **THE EMERGENCE OF ARMED CONFLICT**

Until the early-1980s, ethnic conflict was primarily limited to the political arena where destruction to property and life was minimal. However, violence had occurred on number of occasions, such as in the passing of the “Sinhalese Only Bill” in 1956. Similar ethnic riots involving Tamils and Sinhalese occurred in 1958, 1977 and 1981, with the most violent and destructive taking place in July 1983. Many observers see the violence of July 1983 as a turning point in the conflict.

After the early-1980s, such sporadic cases of violence gradually gave way to institutionalized political violence which became a main feature of the conflict. At this stage, organized or institutionalized political violence was widely utilized by both the political parties in power and Tamil youth who organized themselves into armed guerrilla outfits. This development marked the militarization and the steady brutalization of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict.

The failure of parliamentary politics and the entrenchment of ethnic politics which led to frustration among Tamil youth, eventually made some of these youth organize themselves into armed groups for the ostensible purpose of seeking independence from Sinhalese domination. The first of these groups was the Tamil Tigers which later came to be known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam or LTTE. In 1978, the Tamil Tigers carried out a series of bank robberies and also assassinated a number of police officers, many of whom were Tamil. Bank robberies and selected assassination of individuals within the Tamil community (who were considered traitors) later led to massacres of Sinhalese and Muslim civilians in the border villages and contested areas. By the 1980s, this phase in the evolution of political violence expanded to include indiscriminate bomb attacks in the Sinhalese-dominated south, particularly in Colombo. Subsequently, the conflict reached civil war proportions and Indian peace-keeping forces were sent to Sri Lanka in 1987. The Indian forces

left in 1990 and the civil conflict between the Government and LTTE resumed three months later. The conflict escalated in the late-1990s with conventional battles being fought to capture territory.

## **ETHNIC CONFLICT IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA**

The current ethnic conflict in what was formerly Yugoslavia has roots that extend far back into history. The nationhood of the different ethnic groups in Yugoslavia was always somewhat artificial, brought about by the force of circumstances after World War I more than by a desire on the part of the different groups to be joined together under one banner. The nationalistic feelings in Yugoslavia extend back to the nineteenth century, to the era of nationalism throughout Europe. The ethnic groups in the region have long been divided by cultural differences, religion, and language. Efforts to unify the region failed until after World War I, when the impetus to come together increased for economic and security reasons. Yet, the nation that emerged was always tenuous because the union did not satisfy the needs of all the groups equally.

## **ROOTS OF YUGOSLAVIA'S ETHNIC CONFLICT**

Yugoslavia was a nation under the Soviet sphere of influence, yet it was largely an artificial nation made up of entities that did not get along and that tried to divide up the region once the threat of Soviet force was removed. The current ethnic conflict in what was formerly Yugoslavia has roots that extend far back into history. The ethnic groups in the region have long been divided by cultural differences, religion, and language. Efforts to unify the region failed until after World War I, when the impetus to come together increased for economic and security reasons. Yet, the state that emerged was always tenuous because the union did not satisfy the needs of all the groups equally. The former Yugoslavia is perhaps the most unstable of all the former Soviet satellite states, and even though the direct attack on Kosovo was stopped by U.N. forces last spring, stability is unlikely in the foreseeable future.

The peoples of Yugoslavia were linguistically and culturally differentiated after they had migrated to the Balkan Peninsula in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. For nearly six centuries prior to the beginning of World War I, the Croats and Slovenes were subordinated to the Germanic and Roman Catholic Habsburg Empire, and the Eastern Orthodox Serbs, Macedonians, and Islamized Slavs were ruled by the Ottoman Empire for much of the period between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries

## **THE ROLE OF ETHNICITY FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE YUGOSLAVIA'S CREATION**

Yugoslavia came into existence in the aftermath of World War I, in 1918, as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. (Jenkins and Sofos, 1996, p: 254). The creation of the new state was based on the concept of ethnicity, i.e. that the South Slavs share an ethnicity and they should therefore be in the same state. (Schöpflin, 2000, p:330). Yet, the term ethnicity used at that time to imply only the notion of race and its content was partly biological. Its essence was language. Thus, it was assumed that people speaking the same language were members of the same nation and should in accordance be living in the same state. Hence the South Slavs were all members of one nation (Schöpflin,2000,p:330).Such projects of social engineering were common in the nineteenth century. However, the exclusive emphasis on language as the basis of the state is creation implied that other key elements of identity-such as the South Slavs' distinct histories and previous experiences, their diverse expectations and claims as well as their various religious affiliations- were ignored (Schöpflin,2000,p:331). This was an important flaw in the creation of the state, as it did not take into serious account the different ethnic identities of its groups and it did not try to form a system that could assimilate them in a way that they would not constitute the base of the 1991 conflict.

Yugoslavia under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito and his communist regime came into being at the end of World War II. It was the federation of six republics (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Slovenia) and of two autonomous provinces (Kosovo and Vojvodina) under the name of The socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1974 constitution). Its creation was based on the principle of *bratstvo i jedinstvo* (Jenkins and Sofos, 1996, p:258), i.e. on the brotherhood and unity that was necessary for the state is coherence. The communists did not found the state is re-creation on ethnic and language ties. They rather based the paradigm for solidarity among Yugoslav ethnic groups on two supra-ethnic elements (Hapken in Bokovoy, Irvine & Lilly, 1997, p:82). First, they stressed the all-Yugoslav, not just South Slav, historical experience of a common struggle for freedom and independence during the war and secondly, they relied on a shared sense of ideological values, symbolized on the term self-managed socialism. In that way, the regime attempted to emphasize the similarities and suppress the divisive characteristics among the ethnic groups (Jenkins and Sofos, 1996, p: 258). It tried to impose to the groups the doctrine of Yugoslavism (Schupflin, 2000, p: 338), i.e. a common Yugoslav identity that was beyond the individual ethnic ones.

Education played a crucial role in this attempt, since it is one of the most important means of identity formation. The principles of self-managed socialism as well as brotherhood and unity, as the key concepts of the common Yugoslav identity, were the most desired values in the educational objectives. Yet, the communists attempt to create a common identity through the educational system based on these two paradigms proved not to be successful; instead, it brought forward more contradictions than it had expected. This result is due first of all, to the fact that the books of that period did not familiarize students with the idea of the multicultural society in which they had to live. They did not teach them effectively how to deal with ethnic diversity and distinctiveness, as they did not provide them with the knowledge that each ethnic group had its own historical identity, which definitely deserved the respect of the others, but at the same time it had to be peacefully embodied within the larger spectrum of a common Yugoslavian one. Instead of that, history textbooks dealt mostly with the history of the Partisan movement and of each group is history, which in turn created the feeling thus left little space for the teaching of an ethnic identity losing its historical basis. In addition, the ideological values were often linked with Tito himself, identifying thus the system strongly with the leader. In identifying the system with the ruler, the educational system did not prepare students for post-Tito conditions. As a result, historical education proved unable to develop a didactical concept linking a respect for individual historical identity with a kind of common Yugoslav identity and therefore produced a vacuum in the historical memory of each group, which would be easier to be filled in with myths and prejudices against each other rather than with the values of respect and loyalty, which are essential for the peaceful cohabitation of the various ethnic groups within a multiethnic society.

With the death of Tito in 1980, the communist regime began to weaken and tensions between Yugoslavia is ethnic groups emerged. This was due to the fact that the communists never managed to build viable political institutions to codify and regulate relations among the groups (Kupchan, 1995, p:105). The authoritarian leadership of the communist regime did not prove successful in creating a civic identity and in dealing effectively with the ethnic individual ones. As a result, the process of transition toward a multiparty democracy caught Yugoslavia with a weak central authority and its people organizing themselves into political parties along ethnic boundaries (Vuckovic, 1997, p: 155). It was as if Tito himself fanned the flames of the following ethnic tension (Cornell, 1998, p: 146). Thus, in the years after his death, conditions were ripe for ethnicity to emerge as a dominant source of social and political cleavage (Kupchan, 1995, p: 105).

From that point on, ethnicity was used instrumentally to further interests by the political elites who needed to mobilize large followings to support their goals in the struggle for power. In this struggle ethnicity became a very useful tool. (Smith, 1991, p:20). It also became a distinguishing feature, in the sense that the various ethnic groups identified

themselves with their own ethnic identity, which excluded the rest. Ethnicity became thus a matter of contrast (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998, p: 20) and excluded the groups that did not share the same identity.

This exclusiveness that ethnicity can provide was used by the ethno nationalist elites for political ends and power. From the end of 1988 and especially in the months preceding the elections of 1990, Yugoslavia is groups were polarized along ethnic lines.

This is made explicit in Arnautovic's observation of the situation in Yugoslavia of that period. ethnic identity was the basis of political representation or political legitimacy (Arnautovic in Burg and Shoup,2000,p:49. It was the nationalist party leaders that mobilized these ethnic identities of the people and aggravated the differences in their ethnicities so as to provoke nationalistic feelings for their own purposes. They used all the power that ethnicity has to offer with horrifying results (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998, p: 151). My research is now going to focus on how the most crucial elements of ethnicity were manipulated and politicized by the elites for their specific political goals and the extent to which they contributed to the conflict.

## **THE MANIPULATION AND POLITICIZATION OF ETHNICITY**

### **Historical Memories and Myths**

Historical memories constitute a crucial element of ethnicity according to Smith's definition. An ethnic group is thus a cultural collectivity that shares the same historical memories of a common past (Smith,1991,p:20). These memories are supposed to link the group with bonds of loyalty and thus provide cohesion.

Yugoslavia's ethnic groups did not share the same historical memories and as a result, the myths created were not at all converging. I will refer to the myths of Serbia and Croatia, as they were the ones that dominated the political ideologies after the weakening of the communist regime and formed the basis of the manipulation of ethnicity by the elites.

The Croat historical myth is based on the medieval kingdom of kings Tomislav and Krešimir (Pavkovic,1997,p:7). The kingdom lost its independence in 1097 and from 1102 it passed to the kings of Hungary. Within this context, the Croatian Diet is portrayed as a political struggle for the preservation of old historical rights of the Croatian state against the encroachments of the Austrian Hapsburgs-that had gained the Croatian crown-aiming at assimilating Croats and their lands (Pavkovic,1997,p:7). The goal of this mythical struggle was a sovereign and independent Croatian state and became the focus of Croat national ideologies in the nineteenth century.

Also, the historical past of Croatia during World War II was connected to the Ustaša regime, the ideology of which was based on the hatred against the Serbs.

The latter were considered by the Ustaša as having deprived the Croats of their historical liberties and in this way they developed a mystical fascination with rituals of violence and terror (Pavkovic,1997,p:37) that linked them with the Nazis and Fascists. These myths and memories of the past were used by Croatia's elites and by the president of the Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ), Franjo Tuđman, in order to mobilize the Croatian ethnicity for the persecution of an independent and ethnically cleansed state (Jenkins and Sofos,1996,p:269). The Serb historical myth harks back at their medieval state that included the territory of Serbia, Herzegovina and Macedonia. Under Dušan the Mighty, the state extended over the areas of present-day Greece, Bulgaria and Albania. Within this myth, the history of the state was viewed as liberation of the Serbian territories from foreign rule. After Dušan's death, the empire disintegrated and conquered by the Islamic Ottoman empire.

The battle on Kosovo is Polje in 1389 against the Ottomans became another myth. In this battle, the Serb nobility, according to the legend, sacrificed their lives for their faith and liberty. Prince Lazar, who lost his life in the territory, was canonized as a saint and the date of the battle became one of the central feast days, the day of the Kosovo martyrs. During Milosevic's years, this myth was used to mobilize popular support for the realization of political plans, mainly of a Greater Serbia, which I will refer to below.

Consequently, the myths of the past became part of the Serbian memory during the nineteenth century and were being transformed by the Serbian elites into ideologies for the fulfillment of their political agendas. According to Horowitz, history can be a weapon and tradition can fuel ethnic conflict (Horowitz in Diamond, 1994, p:118) but it is when these two elements are politicized that people become polarized along ethnic lines and are led to a conflict.

### **ASSOCIATION WITH A HOMELAND**

Another main feature of ethnicity is the attachment with a specific territory. Smith argues that it is the attachments and associations, rather than residence in or possession of the land that matters for ethnic identification (Smith, 1991, p:23). Hence, an ethnic may persist, even in the case that it is long divorced from its homeland, through an intense nostalgia and spiritual attachment. Thus, the territory is an integral aspect of ethnic identity, as it represents the origins and the past of the group living in it or being attached to it, as well as its struggles to conquer it. In this way, it becomes a holy ground, or a sacred land of our forefathers, our kings and saints. (Smith, 1991, p:23).

The case of Kosovo is of particular relevance to Smith's theory of symbolic attachment with a given territory. Kosovo was for Serbs the cradle of their culture and nation. They called it our Jerusalem emphasizing thus their rights on a territory that, as it was considered, was threatened by the existence of another ethnic group, that of Albanians. On the other hand, Albanians had also developed strong symbolic attachments with the land, as they claimed historical rights derived from the ancient Illyrians who populated the Balkans before the settlement of the South Slavs (Pavkovic, 1997, p:87). Kosovo is case reveals the passion and the hatred that ethnicity can rise if it is manipulated by ethno nationalist political leaders. In Kosovo, the emotional attachment to the land of the two ethnic groups excluded one another. Milosevic played an important role in the ethnic conflict that followed, by appealing to the deep patriotic feelings of the Serbian people, by becoming their voice and by fueling nationalistic feelings when making statements like Serbian nationalism is a serpent deep in the bosom of the Serbian people (Bokovoy et al, 1997, p: 328). From this point on, I am going to analyze how Milosevic used the historical memory and the attachment of the Serbian People to the homeland of Kosovo for achieving his vision of a Greater Serbia under his own political control. Milosevic's programme was based on the nationalist ideology. Bette Denitch referring to the ideology of nationalism says that it involves the exploitation of symbolic processes that mediate the communication between leaders and populace invoking them to think, feel and act according to its premises. This is the manipulation of symbols with polarizing emotional context.<sup>15</sup> Milosevic accordingly, used the emotional ties of the Serbs with Kosovo is territory in order to pursue his dream of a Greater Serbia that would not only incorporate Kosovo, but also lands where many Serbs lived, such as Eastern Slavonia and Karina. Milosevic tried to manipulate peoples patriotism and fuel nationalism in them by appealing to their traumatic historical memories on the Land. During his 1987 visit in Kosovo is Polje, he mobilized aspects of the Serbian ethnicity, such as the sacrifice of Prince Lazar, so as to strengthen people's attachment with the land. He urged them in an indirect way to fight for their rights in the area and reassured them that Yugoslavia and Serbia will not give Kosovo away.<sup>16</sup> At Polje, Milosevic had cannily identified the instrument necessary for his political advancement<sup>17</sup>, that was the politicization of ethnicity is attributes, mainly that of historical myths and the association people have with a particular land.

Milosevic also tried to achieve this purpose and to instill his nationalist ideology through the manipulation of the mass media. The Croatian government was portrayed by the broadcast media as fascists seeking to exterminate all Serbs and Germany and Austria were blamed for supporting the Croatian fascism. This image of the Croatian authorities as Ustaöe was reinforced by their decision to replace the flag with the traditional Croat shield with chequered squares resembling the insignia used by the Ustaöe during World War II (Pavkovic, 1997, p:38). Also, the war in Croatia was presented as the struggle of the Serbian people against the processes of genocide by the Upstage Croatian party of Franco Tudjman. The Serbian media spread the fear All over Yugoslavia. Ethnic hatreds and the Balkan ghosts were coming more and more to the surface, as the nationalist propaganda continued by the Croatian media, after 1990 that the HDZ took over their control. Consequently, the historical myths and memories of Yugoslavia is ethnic Groups as well as their attachments to particular territories became central devices in the process of national emancipation, which resulted in the most violent conflict in the history of the Balkans.

### **FEATURES OF COMMON CULTURE (RELIGION)**

Religion is considered as the most important element of a common culture. Religious affiliations case became a significant marker of ethnicity (Pavkovic, 1997, p: 6) and religious symbols, ritual and institutions were used to Activate aggressive nationalistic feelings for the promotion of political agendas.

Yugoslavia is ethnic groups were differentiated in their religious beliefs. Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians are Eastern Orthodox. Croats and Slovenes are Roman Catholics, while in Bosnia-Herzegovina there is a sizeable Muslim population. (Kupchan, 1995, p: 105). The differentiations in terms of the various religious affiliations created distinctive customs, rituals and beliefs which shaped the everyday life of the groups. The separate calendars- Julian for the Eastern Orthodox and Gregorian for the Roman Catholic- prescribed a separate set of feast days even for the common Christian celebrations. In particular, Serb Eastern Orthodoxy developed two distinct cults; that of the medieval founder of the Serb Orthodox Church, St Sava, and that of the Kosovo martyrs. The celebration of these two cults clearly marks off the Serb Orthodox from the Roman Catholic believers (Pavkovic, 1997, p:6). However, these differences in the way of life and religion, although they differentiated the culture of Yugoslavia is groups, they could not have shaped a national ideology capable of leading to an ethnic conflict. It was again the politicization of these religious identities and the polarization of the people along ethnic lines that created the conditions for the conflict. An example proving that is the dramatic rise of the Muslimism religious identities in Bosnia. Such identities had not been so strong before their politicization. The Serbs, Croats and Muslims of the area lived peacefully for many years as neighbors, even though there were differences in their religious dogmas. As Huntington mentions, Muslims were Bosnians who did not go to the mosque, Croats were Bosnians who did not go to the cathedral and Serbs were Bosnians who did not go to the Orthodox church's (Huntington, 1997, p:269). It was when the elites started to play upon these differences that religious beliefs became a marker of ethnic identity and, to quote Huntington again, each ethnic group identified itself with its broader cultural community and defined itself in religious terms (Huntington, 1997, p:269).

In 1990, the Muslims of Bosnia voted for the Muslim Party of Democratic Action (SDA) led by Alija Izetbegovic. He was a devout Muslim, imprisoned for his Islamic activism by the communist government. Izetbegov introduced to the Muslim society the pan-Islamist version of Muslim nationalism, which regarded Islam as the immutable core of Muslim ethnic and political identity (Pavkovic, 1997, p:95). In his book *The Islamic Declaration: A programme for the Islamisation of Muslims and Muslim peoples*, he aimed at the revival of an authentic Islamic consciousness and he argued for the incompatibility of Islam with non- Islamic systems. There can be neither peace nor coexistence between the Islamic religion and non-Islamic social and political institutions (Huntington, 1997, p:269). Thus, as Pavkovic argues, Izetbegovic



affirmed the Islamic religiously-defined ethnic identity in politics and tried to promote a project of an Islamic society, where non-Muslims (Serbs and Croats) were second class citizens with no political civil rights (Pavkovic,1997,p:97). This resulted in the reaction of the Serbs and Croats, as it was viewed as a force towards the political dominance of the Muslims in Bosnia. Soon the conflict took dimensions of genocide, as the Serbs cleansed the Bosnian town of Zvornik of its 40.000 Muslims and the symbols of the opposing religion became destroying mosques and Croats blowing up Orthodox monasteries (Huntington,1997,p:272). Consequently, religion, as a fundamental aspect of ethnicity, became a useful political tool in the hands of the elites for the promotion of their own plans.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research leads us to the conclusion that ethnicity did play an important role in ethnic conflict. From the beginning of the state is creation, ethnicity was an important flaw. The communist regime suppressed the various ethnic identities of the groups and tried to create a Yugoslav & Srilankan one based on supra-ethnic elements. Yet, the imperial suppression of these identities proved costly indeed, for when they permitted expression they took shape in ferocious forms(Davis,1996,p:50). The culpability of the political elites for giving expression to these identities and for emphasizing and politicizing their differences for their own political purposes cannot be denied. In Yugoslavia is ethnic conflict, all the symbolic power that ethnicity can provide was manipulated in such a way that fanned the flames for an aggressive ethno nationalism to emerge as a force that finally led to chaos.

Ethnicity became the most prevalent element of the group's identification. The political elites played a central role in it. According to Bourdieu, it is political leaders who emphasize the differences, who have the power of imposing the vision of divisions, that is the power of making visible and explicit social divisions that is implicit. It is the power to make groups, to manipulate the objective structure of society.

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