S. I. Keethaponcalan*

I. INTRODUCTION ........................................ 921
II. SOCIAL CUBISM ................................... 923
III. GEO-DEMOGRAPHY .................................... 924
IV. HISTORY ............................................. 926
V. ECONOMICS ........................................ 931
VI. POLITICS ........................................... 934
VII. CIVILIZATION ...................................... 937
VIII. PSYCHOLOGY ...................................... 938
IX. CONCLUSION ....................................... 939

I. INTRODUCTION

The conflict between the ethnic Sinhalese and the Tamils in Sri Lanka is one of the prominent ethnic problems in the world today. Sri Lanka is an island nation located in the Indian Ocean south of the Indian subcontinent. Its population of approximately eighteen million is comprised of of three major social groups. According to the 1981 census, which was the last proper headcount undertaken, Sinhalese constitute 74.6 percent, and Tamils form 18.1 percent, of the total population. A vast majority of the Sinhalese are religiously Buddhists. On the other hand, the Tamils are mostly Hindus. Muslims, who constitute 7.4 percent of the total population, include both Tamil-speaking and Sinhala-speaking Muslims. However, as a religious minority the Muslims in Sri Lanka have developed a distinct identity different from that of the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Apart from these major social groups, there are small numbers

* Ph.D., Department of Political Science, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

1. For detailed description of demographic information, see SUNIL BASTIAN, DEVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT IN SRI LANKA (1994).

2. Most members of the Muslim population, the third largest social group in the country, speak Tamil but do not consider themselves as part of the Tamil community. Complexity of the Muslim status in the country lies in the fact that it neither belongs to Sinhalese nor Tamil ethnic groups with large number of especially urban Muslims embracing Sinhalese as their language and medium of education. Since, however, the Muslims in Sri Lanka have developed a distinct Muslim identity based on religion, they are considered as a separate social group. Theoretically, the Muslims remain neutral in the conflict. In practice however, their position always tilts toward the government of Sri Lanka.

of indigenous people and Burgers. Christianity is professed by Sinhalese, Tamils, and Burgers, and it is the religion of approximately 8 percent.

The two major ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamil, are in conflict over territorial claims. The Tamils are in a war against the state of Sri Lanka for a separate state in the Northern and Eastern provinces of the island that they claim is their "traditional homeland." Although the confrontation between these groups could be traced to a historical and pre-colonial era, the post-independence period witnessed intense conflict and a war. The Sinhalese and the Tamils are two different ethnic groups with distinct characteristics. Linguistically, the Sinhalese speak Sinhala, which is described as an Indo-Aryan language. Tamil, which is spoken by ethnic Tamils, is Dravidian. The Tamils live mostly in the Northern and Eastern parts of the island while Sinhalese are concentrated in all other provinces, although the ethnic war has severely altered the demographic patterns in the recent past.

Sri Lanka was ruled by three western colonial powers (Portuguese, Dutch, and British) for almost four centuries. At the end of the British rule there emerged a Christianized, educated, and English-speaking elite comprised of members of both ethnic groups. This group represented not only cordial ethnic relations but also a successful forum for constitutional reform for the then-Ceylon. Differences began to emerge in the early 1920s and culminated in the mid-1980s with violent expression and the struggle for a separate state for the minority Tamils.

The Tamil separatist movement resulted from a demand for greater Tamil autonomy in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. Tamil dissatisfaction with the national politics of Sri Lanka, then called Ceylon, was expressed even before the island nation was granted independence in 1948. The cry for greater autonomy that provided the foundation for the separatist movement gained force with the emergence of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, considered by many to be the founding father of Tamil nationalism. Chelvanayagam's movement for regional autonomy was fundamentally a nonviolent struggle very much modeled on the Gandhian way of satyagraha. The nonviolent struggle, which lasted for about thirty years, not only failed to produce any substantial results in favor of the Tamil but in later years forced the

6. Id.
radical elements among the Tamils into the forefront of the national struggle.\textsuperscript{8} This state of affairs was in a sense caused by the belief of the Sri Lankan State, as well as in later years the belief of Tamil militants, that excessive violence resolved conflicts.

The vicious cycle of violence was perpetuated by the actions and reactions of the parties involved in the conflict, and the conflict turned into an intense war. The war, which has claimed tens of thousands of lives in both sides of the spectrum, is fought by the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamils Eelam—the major fighting force among the Tamils. Because both parties lack the power to impose a military solution on the other and lack confidence on peaceful means to achieve their goals, the war has continued for about eighteen years without any signs of peaceful solutions.\textsuperscript{9}

Because the predicament in Sri Lanka, apart from its internal implications, is highly dangerous regionally as well as internationally, a substantial academic attention is paid to analyzing the causes, consequences, and ways to deal with the conflict. These studies, however, either embrace a historical descriptive method or take one factor as the basic cause of the conflict and focus on that particular element. For example, economic factors are most often analyzed as the major cause of the conflict.\textsuperscript{10} This study, however, argues that psychology of the people is the fundamental factor for this conflict, and that all other factors influence the shape of that psychology.

II. SOCIAL CUBISM

Social Cubism provides a comprehensive tool to look at ethnic conflicts and understand the multiple forces behind them. Therefore, it is a useful framework for conflict analysis.\textsuperscript{11} Moreover, Byrne and Carter consider "the social cube of conflict as having six interrelated facets or forces: history, religion, demographics, political institution and non-institutional behavior, economics, and psychocultural. These six facets or social forces combine to produce patterns of inter-group behavior."\textsuperscript{12} This article, therefore, analyzes the Sri Lankan conflict using the social cube as the framework. This chapter, however, does not embrace all the six forces as provided by the original cubism framework, because the Sri Lankan conflict requires a slightly modified framework for a better understanding of the conflict.

\textsuperscript{8} Id.

\textsuperscript{9} Keethaponcalan, supra note 3.


\textsuperscript{11} Sean Byrne & Neal Carter, Social Cubism: Social Forces of Ethnoterritorial Politics in Northern Ireland and Quebec, in PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES 3(2), 52-71.

\textsuperscript{12} Id. at 4.
One facet of the original cubism framework is demography. In Sri Lanka, although demography plays a prominent role in the origin of the conflict, it is very closely involved with geographic factors inside as well as outside of the island. Therefore, it is imperative to give equal weight to the geographical factors as well. However, because demographic and geographic factors are not two independent variables but are very much intertwined, I replace demography in the original cubism model with “geo-demography.” This enables the researcher to consider geographic and demographic factors equally.

The term “politics” or “political” is not only much-debated in scholarly literature but still remains vague as a concept. Byrne and Carter in 1996, although they did not define the “political facet” of the cube, discuss boundaries and terrorism as political factors. In this article, I take as political factors (1) (political) institutions and (2) constitutions. The original cubism framework is insufficient for the Sri Lankan conflict, as it does not provide space for discussion of the ethnic factors that form one of the fundamental facets in this conflict. Byrne & Carter apply Social Cubism to the Northern Ireland and Quebec conflicts that are primarily religion-based conflicts. Therefore, it is understandable that they used religion as a facet in their analysis. While the Sri Lankan conflict is primarily ethnic, it has a religious angle to it. In order to accommodate these different facets, I consider psychology separately from culture, and I expand civilization to include ethnic, racial, religious and cultural factors.

In essence, my cubism model includes the following six facets: (1) Geo-demography (geography and demography), (2) History, (3) Economics, (4) Politics (constitutions and institutions) (5) Civilization (ethnic, racial, religious and cultural), and (6) Psychology.

III. GEO-DEMOGRAPHY

I have argued elsewhere that the principal cause of conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in Sri Lanka is the “fear of extinction,” intertwined with suspicion, and superior and inferior complexities. These factors will be analyzed in detail under the sub-title “psychology.” However, the psychological factors have been deeply influenced by other facets of Social Cubism. In that sense, the geography and demography of the country have played a crucial role in escalating the conflict between the protagonists.

As far as the demographic distribution of the country is concerned, the Sinhalese and the Tamils are the two major social groups. However, there are internal divisions within these groups. The Sinhalese are divided into (1)
Kandyan Sinhalese and (2) Low Country Sinhalese, depending on the geographical location of the people. Divisions between these groups were obvious and clear in the pre-independence period. However, after the independence these differences have largely disappeared. The Tamils, on the other hand, are divided into two social groups: 1) the “Ceylon Tamils” (or now the “Sri Lankan Tamils”) who consider themselves the original inhabitants of Northern and eastern regions; and 2) the so-called “Up-country Tamils” (or “Tamils of recent origin”) who were brought to the country by the British colonial administration to work in the tea plantations. Up-country Tamils are concentrated mainly in central Sri Lanka and urban areas such as Colombo, the capital city. In spite of the commonalities between the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Up-country Tamils, they are officially considered two different groups. The Up-country Tamil do not have a direct role in the conflict. Therefore, when referring to “Tamil” in this article, I mean the Sri Lankan Tamils.

When Sri Lanka was granted independence by the British in 1948, the Tamils enjoyed absolute majority in the Northern and Eastern provinces of the country, which constitute nine provinces in total. The Tamils not only considered the Northern and Eastern provinces as their homeland but also had pushed for greater regional autonomy for Tamil majority areas even before independence—they were suspicious about the intentions of Sinhala leaders on the eve of independence. One of the circumstances that created much reaction from the Tamil people was, as they preferred to call it, the “state sponsored settlement” of Sinhala people by successive governments in the Tamil areas. The Tamils believed that the settlements were aimed at reducing the Tamil majority in these two provinces that were considered as fundamental for their survival as an ethnic group. Consequences of the settlement schemes, the Tamils feared, will lead to the weakening of their position politically as well as threaten their existence in the long term.

The Sinhalese, on the other hand, strongly disputed this claim and argued that it was necessary to establish settlements in order to accommodate the growing population in the south. The basis of the Sinhalese people’s argument is that it is unfair for a group that represents only twelve percent of the population to claim nearly one third of the total landscape of the country. Whatever the arguments by the competing groups, the net effect of the “state sponsored settlement” in the Northern and Eastern provinces is that it effectively reduced the Tamil dominance in the eastern province. Also, it broke the contiguity of Tamil majority areas and thus seriously challenged the homeland

---

15. This is not to suggest that these differences have disappeared completely. At a micro-level, one can still notice that people consciously refer to the cast differences within the Sinhalese society.

16. The Tamils currently have their demographic strength in the Eastern province.
concept and strengthened the threat perception that the Tamils had about their Sinhalese counterparts.

Threat perception does not only exist among the Tamils. Sinhalese also possessed a fear of Tamil dominance. The Sinhalese are, in a sense, a majority with a minority complex. Although the Sinhalese are the majority community within the state of Sri Lanka, regionally they become a minority to the Tamils: the Southern Indian State of Tamil Nadu constitutes approximately fifty-five million Tamils. Only a narrow water called Palk Strait divides Tamil Nadu and the northernmost point of Sri Lanka. The Tamils enjoy cultural, linguistic, as well as religious commonalities with their counterparts in Tamil Nadu. Interestingly, Tamil Nadu was the first state ever to openly demand separation from the Republic of India in the early 1960s. Although the separatist movement disappeared in the late 1960s, Tamil nationalism remained stronger. Some even suggested that the Tamil Nadu leaders’ desire for separation did not totally fade away.

Relations between the Tamils in Sri Lanka and India were so strong that the Tamil militant movement in its early days enjoyed tremendous support from the people of Tamil Nadu. After the ethnic riots of 1983 in Sri Lanka, in which the Tamils were brutalized, the political leaders in Tamil Nadu competed among themselves to support the Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka. The killing of the former Prime Minister of India Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, for which the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was blamed, to a great extent eliminated this support base. However, the collaboration between Tamils in India and Sri Lanka brought about a suspicion in the Sinhala psyche: they conceived the collaboration as a conspiracy to form a greater Tamil Eelam, centered around the separate state of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese basically apprehended the creation of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka as a launching pad for the creation of a greater Tamil state. In the Sinhalese mind, the greater Tamil state is a direct threat to the Sinhala state and race. The Sinhalese continue to resist any suggestion for devolution of power—the focal point of any attempt at conflict resolution—claiming that any devolved power would eventually lead to the creation of separate Tamil Eelam and greater Tamil state.

IV. History

History is one of the most debated factors in this conflict. It has been interpreted by the conflicting parties according to their positions and, to a greater extent, exploited to strengthen those positions. Analyzing the Tamil


exploitation of history to justify their demands, Rajanayagam points out that "the more relations between the two groups deteriorated the more history became a weapon in the battle to justify Tamil demand for autonomy and, in principle, independence." According to Nissan & Stirrat:

Both present the past in terms of the interaction of two opposed entities, Sinhala and Tamils, who have always been as separate as they are today. Second, they consist of arguments over events which allegedly occurred between the fourth century B.C and the tenth century A.C.D. Third, they present the two communities as historically and continuously opposed through warfare, joining an ancient past to the present with no regard for the hiatus of centuries. Fourth, the histories are both concerned with a "national people's claim to its own territory. Finally each side presents the other as little more than barbarians. Both sides in the present political context back up their respective claims through selective and competitive use of archaeological evidence."

Both parties claim that they are the original people of the island, and the others are invaders. Although, there is no evidence to prove who the original inhabitants are or who the first settlers are, one obvious fact that emerged from the existing theories is that both ethnic groups arrived on the island, probably from the Indian subcontinent, and settled in different parts. It seems there is no dispute over the concept that both ethnic groups settled on the island from India. However, some scholars believe that both groups arrived on the island approximately the same time. Regardless of the validity, these claims are providing moral foundations for the nationalist sentiments of both groups, and there are vicious debates about the rightful ownership of the land in printed literature as well as in public fora.

In 1815, Sri Lanka was brought under one administration only by the British. Prior to the arrival of western colonial powers, the island was under the control of several regional monarchs. For example, when the Portuguese arrived in 1505, the island constituted three kingdoms: two ruled by Sinhala kings and one by a Tamil king. The existence of a Tamil kingdom of Jaffna in the written history of the island provided the basic nucleus for the Tamil nationalism and still serves as the foundation for demand for the separate state of Tamil Eelam. On the other hand, the Sinhalese believe that there existed a


pre-historic Sinhala kingdom in Sri Lanka that dominated the whole island. This is also used to justify the Sinhala right to political control.

In addition to its contribution to the nationalist sentiments on both sides, history also functioned as a source of fear psychology and victimization in the minds of both ethnic communities. For example, the history of the island suggests that the Southern Indian rulers from the Indian subcontinent, believed to be Tamil kings, invaded the island a number of times. There is evidence that the Chola kingdom was expanded to include parts of the island centuries ago. These arguments were used to depict the Tamils as invaders and to claim that the Sinhalese were victims of alien Tamil invasion. In the same vein, Tamils contend that the Sinhalese attempted to ethnically eliminate the Tamils from the island, even from the ancient time. For example, charging the Sinhala history as Genocidal, Vanniasingham—an ethnic Tamil—writes in his preface as follows:

according to Sinhalese chronicles, King Dutta Gemunu waged a Holy War against the Tamils, with a contingent of five hundred bhikkus actually accompanying the Army in its campaign. He killed the thirty-two Tamil sub-kings who acknowledged the suzerainty of King Ellalan, and ultimately Ellalan also, and established himself at Anuradhapura. However, in his last days he did not have any peace of mind: he was worried that his killing millions of Tamils would debar him from entering Heaven. Ultimately he was consoled by the Buddhist hierarchy that the Tamils whom he had caused to be killed had not embraced Buddhism and as such were equivalent only to beasts; killing them was no sin and thus he would not be debarred from entering Heaven. Obviously, the “millions of Tamils” does not refer to soldiers in the battlefield but to innocent civilians. Thus the Sinhalese records admit a genocidal attack on the Tamils in the second century before Christ carried on in the name of Lord Buddha.

The post-independent history of the country also has the same impact in the Tamil perception. Some of the laws and public policies formulated by the Sinhala dominated governments immediately after the independence, making the Tamils believe that the Sinhalese seek to reduce Tamils to second class citizens and eventually terminate their existence. For example, one of the first acts undertaken by the first post-independence government, headed by the late D. S. Senanayake, was to disenfranchise the “Tamils of recent Indian origin,”

who are also called Estate Tamils. Although there are social differences between the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Indian Tamils, they share a similar culture, same language and religion.

The Indian Tamils were brought to the Island by the British to labor in the tea industry, mainly in the central region of the country.\textsuperscript{23} Presence of Indian Tamils—who formed nearly seven percent of the total population—later posed a threat to the Sinhalese people as well as the ruling United National Party (UNP) Government. While the local Sinhalese people felt that the Indian Tamils were taking over their land, the ruling UNP, which is capitalist in core, considered them politically unfavorable because the Indian Tamils tended to vote with the leftist parties.\textsuperscript{24} Therefore, the government intended to kill two birds with one stone and introduced the Citizenship Acts of 1948–49, which essentially made the Indian Tamils a stateless people.\textsuperscript{25}

The effect of this act on ethnic relations was that the Ceylon Tamils conceived this action as a step towards Sinhala dominance against all minorities, especially against the Ceylon Tamils. Although the predominant Tamil party at that time, the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) headed by late G.G. Ponnambalam, failed to oppose the Citizenship Act, Ponnambalam’s deputy Chelvanayagam did.\textsuperscript{26} Chelvanayagam split from the ACTC and formed a new political party called the Federal Party (FP), which soon became the spearhead of Tamil nationalism and its demand for regional autonomy. When the Federal Party was warning the Tamil people of the move towards Sinhala domination by successive governments, the Sinhala Only Act was introduced strengthening the argument that the Tamils were made second-class citizens in their own land.\textsuperscript{27}

The 1956 Sinhala Only Act was a direct result of the election pledge made by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) that was formed by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who defected from the UNP in the early 1950s. During the 1956 election for the national parliament, Bandaranaike promised the Sinhala people that if he were given a chance to form the government he would make Sinhala the only official language of the country. He kept his promise after a resounding victory in the election.\textsuperscript{28} The Sinhala Only Act required the public employees to qualify in the Sinhala language if they wanted to continue in their

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Perera, supra note 10.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} See generally K. LOGANATHAN, SRI LANKA: LOST OPPORTUNITIES, PAST ATTEMPTS AT RESOLVING ETHNIC CONFLICT (1996).
\end{itemize}
positions. This Act, though, affected all non-Sinhala speaking (minority) groups, and it had serious repercussion for Tamils, who dominated the public sector employment.

In addition to ensuring the "rightful position" of the Sinhala people in the national life, the Act was intended to reduce the Tamil dominance in the public sector employment. It effectively fulfilled that expectation. "With the implementation of Sinhala as the language of government," Mitra and Lewis claim, "the specter of Tamils being denied jobs in the government service and of Tamils losing their cultural heritage to the Sinhalese began to spread throughout the Tamil Community."29 The Tamils felt that by enacting the Sinhala Only Act, the government successfully pushed the Tamil language to an inferior position in terms of its relevance to national affairs.30

The Tamil writers, most often than not, cite state-sponsored colonization schemes as one of the major milestones in the inimical relationship between these two communities. The Tamil community looked at the colonization schemes as a conspiracy to divide their paramount position in the Northern and Eastern provinces. Colonization of Sinhalese peasantry in the North-central and Eastern provinces was launched almost immediately after independence, with the Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake leading the campaign. It was argued that the colonization was imperative for the agricultural development of the country as well as for accommodating the fast-growing population in the south by successive governments.31 However, one major but hidden aim was to reduce the demographic dominance of the Tamil-speaking people in the Northern and Eastern provinces. Referring to the impact of colonization schemes, the most senior leaders of TULF (Mr. S. Sivasithamparam and Mr. A. Amirthalingam) claimed that "serious inroads have been made into these homelands by policy of planned colonization with Sinhalese carried out by successive Sinhala governments since independence."32 The contiguous nature of these provinces supported the Tamil claim that these provinces were their homeland and formed the foundation of the proposed Tamil region.

By indulging in massive colonization schemes of Sinhala people in a region called Manallaaru or Welioya, the governments were successful in breaking this contiguous nature. Manallaaru or Welioya is still considered to be a highly strategic move by the government in its war against the LTTE. Nevertheless, the colonization programs strengthened the Tamil perception of

30. De Silva, supra note 18.
31. Mitra & Lewis, supra note 29.
32. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) was the prominent democratic party representing the Tamils in the parliament in the 1960s and 1970s. See, TULF, supra note 4, at 19.
Keethaponcalan

a "Sinhala conspiracy" to ethnically cleanse Sri Lanka, to make the Tamil people extinct, and to occupy the Tamil homeland.

Therefore, the history of this island has not only been used by parties to the conflict according to their interpretations, and to a greater extent to strengthen their positions, but it has also helped to reinforce their fears about the other ethnic group. Fear in turn forced the parties to take extreme measures in order to ensure their safety and, in a sense, their survival. The Tamil decision to lead a violent campaign against the State of Sri Lanka and many State policies against the minorities can be explained in terms of fear psychology.

V. ECONOMICS

Economics play a significant role in many modern ethnic and other deep-rooted conflicts. The Sri Lankan conflict is no exception, as economic factors contributed vastly for the origin and development of the conflict as well as the escalation of violence. The economic facet of the conflict can be traced to the colonial period, especially to the British rule. When the British attempted to fill their administration in Sri Lanka with local white workers, who were considerably cheaper compared to their white counterparts on the island, the Tamils—particularly Jaffna Tamils—were in a favorable position to occupy public sector employment. This was because of the educational advantages the Tamils had over their Sinhala counterparts. The Jaffna Tamils benefited immensely from American missionary activities centered on Jaffna during the colonial period. At the initial stage, Sinhalese were not enthusiastic about English education, partly for religious reasons. Therefore, over the course of time, the Sinhalese were not able to compete with the Tamils for public sector employment. Commentators point out that at the time of independence the civil service had a disproportionate number of Tamils in it, especially at its higher ranks. Tamils comprised about 30 percent of the upper levels of the civil service while comprising only 22.7 percent of the population in the 1946 census. The Sinhalese comprised 69.4 percent of the population and 57.6 percent of the upper levels of the civil service.

The Sinhalese, however, conceived this state of affairs as the British favoring the minority over the majority. This was understood in terms of the British policy of "divide and rule" and Tamil collaboration with colonialists. Naturally this perception fueled Sinhala animosity against the Tamils.


34. See generally, BUDDHADASA HEWAVITHARANA, ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE DEVOLUTION PACKAGE AND AN EVALUATION OF DECENTRALIZATION (1997).


36. MITRA & LEWIS, supra note 29, at 148.
However, the Tamils continued to dominate public sector employment even after independence. According to Rajanayagam, the Tamils had found their living mainly in government service and the professions, and education was said to be Jaffna's major "industry." The soil there is arid and can be made fertile only with a lot of hard work. Even then it does not support the population, and as a result the youth are dependent on civil service jobs and the professions for a living. Under British rule, this had indeed led to a certain over-representation of Tamils in these sectors, particularly because the Sinhalese resisted the mission-based education more than the Tamils and were involved in trade and commerce to a greater extent.37

Nevertheless, the Sinhalese conceived the Tamil dominance of public sector employment as a "historic injustice" committed against their race by the colonial masters with the assistance of the Tamil minorities.38 With independence literally transferring state power from the British to the Sinhalese political leaders, the Sinhalese were in a comfortable position to compensate themselves for past "injustice."39 Measures were introduced to ensure the interests of the Sinhalese community both within the legislative framework of the state and under the guise of public policy.

Unfortunately, these measures were proved to be detrimental to the aspirations of the minority communities. The language policies were of the utmost of importance in this regard. The 1956 Sinhala Only Act was, among other things, a major blow for the economic survival of the Jaffna Tamils because it required public sector employees to qualify in Sinhala language within a stipulated period. Tens of thousands of Tamils lost their employment as a result. Sinhala was further upgraded to be the language of the courts soon after.40

What the Sri Lankan government called "standardization" was introduced in 1972 as an education policy to help Sinhala students obtain the bulk of the admissions to the universities. Essentially, standardization "meant that students from the Tamil stream had to have disproportionately higher entrance exam marks than those from the Sinhalese stream to get a place in the university. This was openly designed to reduce the allegedly over-representation of Tamils in the universities."41 In addition, Rajanayagam points out that it was the standardization policy that "hit the (Tamil) youth hardest, and it can be said that

37. Rajanayagam, supra note 28, at 316.
38. Hewavitharana, supra note 34.
40. De Silva, supra note 18.
41. Rajanayagam, supra note 18, at 316.
it triggered the subsequent violent conflict, because it virtually foreclosed their future."  

The policy of "nationalization," which was characterized as "Sinhalesization" by the Tamils, also had the same effect on the economic survival of the Tamil population. The S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's government introduced the nationalization process, and a large number of institutions, including commercial establishments and educational organizations, were brought under the patronage of the government. According to Rupesinghe,

[w]ith the electoral victory of the SLFP in 1956, the pursuit of Sinhalese hegemony was provided with political power. This was used to introduce legislation against colonial economic interests, and to create the conditions for the Sinhalesization of the state. These policies are reflected particularly in language policy through the Sinhala Only Act, but also in other spheres such as education, employment, and land colonization.

These policies put the Tamils in a strongly disadvantaged position in competitions for employment in those institutions. Not only the business and educational establishments but also the state organs were radically "Sinhalesized" during Bandaranaike era and after. For example, the state's armed forces were filled with members of the Sinhala community. "From 1970 there was virtually no Tamil recruitment into the armed forces." Even today, these institutions remain very much Sinhala establishments.

The resulting lack of economic opportunities not only frustrated the Tamil community, particularly the youth, but also forced them to think about alternatives that would ensure their power and development. At that point of time a separate state seemed a viable alternative. The Tamils also realized, probably from past experience, that only a violent campaign could help create such a state. The decision to take up arms was made at the height of the frustration among Tamil youth. Frustration leads to aggression. This was proved to be true in the Sri Lankan Tamil case.

42. Id.
43. Rupesinghe, supra note 25, at 343.
44. Id.
46. See generally TED ROBERT GURR, WHY MEN REBEL (1971).
VI. POLITICS

The political facet of Social Cubism includes constitutional as well as institutional factors, including party politics, in contributing to the evolution of ethnic conflicts. In Sri Lanka all these factors were involved in the increasing dissatisfaction of the Tamils towards the Sri Lankan State and the enmity between the two conflicting groups.

The 1946 Soulbury Constitution provided the foundation for the independence of the country in 1948. Although local concerns were taken into consideration, the Soulbury constitution was essentially designed by the British and was in effect until 1972. In 1972 the new First Republican Constitution replaced this constitution. The Soulbury constitution provided some constitutional safeguards for the minorities because the Tamil had already began to raise their voices against Sinhala dominance in the body politics of the country. For example, the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), the chief political party representing the Tamil people, put forward a proposal popularly known as “50:50.” This proposal advocated a constitutional arrangement that would ensure that fifty percent of the parliamentary seats go to all the minorities. First, it did not conform to liberal democratic principles. On the other hand, the majority Sinhalese immediately rejected it. Therefore, this proposal enjoyed no major support at that time.

However, as mentioned elsewhere, the Soulbury constitution provided number of safeguards to the minorities against majority dominance. For example, Article 29 “specifically denied authority to the Parliament to make laws discriminatory against or in favor of any particular community. The Privy Council observed that this was an entrenched clause in that it was not within the power of the Parliament to amend or repeal the said clause.” Meanwhile, a Second Chamber (Senate) was also created in the parliament in order to, among other objectives, accommodate minority opinions. Also the constitution ensured that the state would remain secular because it is a multi-religious community. Effectiveness of these arrangements was a subject of discussion, because the principles were violated on several instances. For example, the 1956 Sinhala Only Act was passed in the parliament in spite of the fact that the constitution did not allow any legislation that favored only one racial or religious community (Article 29).

49. Vanniasingham, supra note 22.
51. Bose, supra note 47.
The First Republican Constitution of 1972 did not include Article 29, and it also abolished the second chamber in the parliament. This constitution made the country a unitary state. \(^5\) Buddhism was constitutionally given the foremost place, and the First Republican Constitution placed the responsibility on the state “to protect and foster Buddhism.” \(^5\) Sinhala was retained as the only official language of the state. These features of the new constitution reinforced the Tamil view that they were made second-class citizens within the country. The 1978 constitution did not make any major changes to these controversial features except for language policy. Tamil was recognized as one of the national languages in this constitution. \(^3\) Referring to the arrangement on Buddhism, Warnapala claims that “Chapter 11, which deals with Buddhism, is more or less the same as in the 1972 Constitution except that the word ‘Sasana’—the Buddhist dispensation – is included. The use of this traditional (Sinhala) description makes the chapter on Buddhism more effective.” \(^5\)

An important characteristic of these republican constitutions is that they centralized the state’s power to a greater extent both administratively as well as politically. Manor and Segal point out that “although Sri Lanka had an open, representative political system based on universal suffrage as far back as 1931, power was still grossly over-centralized. No representative institutions existed at any intermediate level between parliament in Colombo and the local level.” \(^5\)

Such a political environment left the Tamils with no power over either national affairs or their regional issues, because policymaking was and has been controlled from Colombo. Following the nonviolent struggle waged by the Federal Party led by S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, two pacts were signed. \(^5\) The first was made between Prime Minister Bandaranayake and Chelvanayagam in 1957, and the second between Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake and Chelvanayagam in 1965. The Banda-Chelva pact, as it is called, provided for devolution of power on the basis of Regional Councils. The Dudley-Chelva pact also agreed that the District Councils would be the principle unites for devolution. Unfortunately both these agreements were unilaterally scrapped by the respective governments, forcing the Tamils to lose any faith they had in reaching agreements with Sri Lanka’s governments. \(^5\)

---


\(^3\) Warnapala, *supra* note 52.

\(^5\) *Id.* at 917.

\(^5\) Manor & Segal, *supra* note 45.


\(^5\) Loganathan, *supra* note 27.
The nature of party politics in the country also helped escalate the tension between these communities. Two major parties, namely the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), represent the majority of Sinhala people. Both parties can be labeled as "Sinhala parties" in spite of the meager support they enjoy among the Tamil and Muslim populations, because their support base is predominately Sinhala. The Sri Lankan Tamils were represented first by the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) and then by Federal Party (FP). The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) was formed in the early 1970s as a combined force of Tamil people and enjoyed overwhelming support of the Tamils in Northern and Eastern provinces. While Muslim people tend to vote with the so-called national parties (the UNP and the SLFP), the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) has represented them since the mid-1980s. The Indian Tamils predominantly supported the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), and its support base has been confined to tea estates in central Sri Lanka as well as areas where people of Indian origin live densely. As one can conceive, party politics in Sri Lanka has been sharply divided along ethnic as well as religious loyalties.

This trend undoubtedly encouraged the political parties and their candidates to extensively employ ethnic and religious slogans in order to win the numbers game, which is an essential part of liberal democracy. Most often, ethnic and religious slogans turned against the "other" communities, and the "others" were depicted as foes. In fact, the political parties were competing to offer the strongest possible measure against the other communities if they were elected to power. The 1956 Sinhala Only Act, for example, was originally an election promise made by the SLFP. When the UNP also endorsed the one language policy, the SLFP leader promised the Sinhala people "Sinhala only within twenty-four hours" because (according to Vanniasingham) "Bandaranaike found that 'Sinhala only within twenty-four hours' would be the sure-fire-vote catcher."

Tamil parties, too, comprehensively manipulated racial slogans against Sinhala people and the state, particularly in Tamil majority areas. Thus, the resolution for a separate state of Tamil Eelam came into force as an election promise. Siriweera points out that "according to the TULF's election manifesto

61. Leitan, supra note 59.
the question to be resolved was whether the Tamils wanted their freedom or continued servitude to the Sinhala-dominated government. This sort of shortsighted “vision” of political parties in this country helped only to increase the vacuum between the conflicting communities.

VII. CIVILIZATION

At least in their minds, the Sinhalese and the Tamils are two different groups of people originating from different civilizations. The conventional wisdom is that the Sinhalese are descendants of a north Indian Aryan race and the Tamils are Dravidians, whose geographical base is in South India. It is imperative to note that there exists an interesting academic discourse which advances a number of theories regarding the origin and inter-relations of these groups. For example, some scholars suggest that the Sinhalese and the Tamils are descendants of same racial stock, probably Dravidian, and others maintain that the Sinhalese are in fact descendants of aboriginal people called Veddas who still live in small numbers in the remote mountain areas of Sri Lanka. Yet, these academic debates in reality do not make any substantial changes in the perceptions one group holds about the other, which are fundamentally negative.

Moreover, there are obvious differences between these groups. The Sinhalese speak Sinhala and most of them are Buddhist. The Tamils, on the other hand, speak Tamil and are predominantly Hindus. There is a Christian community that includes both Sinhalese as well as Tamil. The common factor of Christianity failed to make any impact in bridging the gap between the ethnically different antagonists, because the Sinhala Christians and the Tamil Christians feel emotional proximity to Buddhism and Hinduism, respectively. This emotional attachment is based on their ethnic loyalties as well as on cultural appreciation of those religions. This trend has even influenced some Tamil Christians and Sinhala Christians to declare that they are culturally Hindus and Buddhists, respectively.

Nevertheless, the religious aspect of the conflict is somewhat complicated. It is safe to assume that this conflict is essentially an ethnic one rather than religious, even though the groups entangled are religiously different. To a certain extent, religious factors are involved. The Tamil language and Hinduism are not intertwined to the same degree as Sinhala language and Buddhism. For the Sinhalese community, their language and religion are one and the same. In other words, one cannot survive without the other. Rupesinghe points out that “the Buddhist revival was associated with the conception of the Sinhalese as an ‘Aryan’ race, and that Buddhism and Sinhalese were synonymous with each

64. Siriweera, supra note 60, at 903.
other. Sinhala Buddhism is the foundation of Sinhalese survival and well-being, and it is an integral part of Sinhalese identity. The Sinhalese believe that Buddha himself chose the island of Sri Lanka as a place where his teaching would flourish. Therefore, it is the inviolable duty of the Sinhalese people to protect Buddhism in the land. Moreover, the Sinhalese also argue that the "Sinhala Buddhism" could be protected only in a unitary Sri Lanka. This argument is based on the presumption that any form of devolution of power will eventually lead to the separation of the country and cause the destruction of Sinhala Buddhism.

Tamil nationalism, on the other hand, does not represent a strong association with Hinduism. That may be one reason for the overwhelming support the separatist war extracts from Christian's particularly Catholic masses in the war zone. The Tamil Catholic Church is highly critical of the Sri Lankan government for the manner in which the Tamil people were and are treated in the Northern and Eastern provinces. For their part, the Sinhala hard-liners in the south accuse the Tamil Catholic Church of assisting the LTTE.

VIII. PSYCHOLOGY

In the final analysis, what is important is the psychology of the people who are involved in a highly intense violent ethnic conflict. The "fear of extinction" plays a major role in pushing the people to extreme violence in many modern ethnic conflicts. Reiterer believes that this "fear of extinction" is fueled often by memories of century-old massacres and other horrible events in the history of mutual relations. Groups have a "chosen trauma" that assists in the mobilization of their constituents. This is true for the Sri Lankan situation as well.

There is a fear of total extinction in both Tamil and Sinhalese psyches, which is rightly called "crisis of confidence" by students of Sri Lankan politics. Both groups lost faith that they can peacefully coexist within one system or even side by side. This fear is the fundamental reason for the Sinhalese desire to maintain tight control over the Tamil people and their affairs.

65. Rupesinghe, supra note 25, at 342.
67. Hewavitharana, supra note 34.
69. See generally VAMIK VOLKAN, BLOODLINES: FROM ETHNIC PRIDE TO ETHNIC TERRORISM (1997).
70. Gunewardena & Wesumperuma, supra note 50.
Any effort to devolve powers to regional units or share power with their Tamil counterparts is resisted on the premise that such a situation will lead to the creation of separate Tamil Eelam and eventually cause the destruction of Sinhala Buddhist race. The belief that there is a Tamil conspiracy to establish a greater Tamil Eelam remains very strong in the Sinhala psyche.\textsuperscript{71}

On the other hand, the Tamils believe that Sinhalese have reduced the Tamils to a second-class citizenry, primarily by using political power and imposing hegemonic policies over Tamil affairs. Examples of such tendencies are often cited from the distorted versions of Tamil history and culture in school textbooks to what is termed the "military occupation" of Sinhala armed forces in the North and East. Legislation and public policies affecting Tamil are seen as tools to reduce their presence in mainstream politics. The Tamil are convinced that all these oppressive policies will eventually lead to the extinction of their identity and people as an ethnic group. For them the only way to avoid such a predicament is to have the right to self-determination, or at least total control over their own affairs. Several options, including the creation of a separate state and the introduction of a federal structure, have been put forward on this supposition.

Therefore, the final positions of these groups are naturally diametrically opposed to each other. Fundamentally, the Sinhalese want to maintain the existing unitary status of the state, which ensures the central government's control of power over all units and levels. The Tamils want to create a unit that would ensure their survival and well being, be it within a separate state or a federal structure. This is where both the groups are stuck and are unable to move towards a peaceful solution. The nineteen-year-long war has proved that each parties lacks the power to impose a military solution on the other.\textsuperscript{72}

Therefore, an end to the war must be achieved through political dialogue. However the ground situation in the country does not provide any cause for hope, at least in the sort term. It seems that a change toward a peaceful resolution to the conflict is not possible without a strikingly major change in the political milieu of the conflict setting.

**IX. CONCLUSION**

As in many other ethnic conflicts, the Sri Lankan conflict too evolved out of soft political demands into an all-out war. The civil war has so far claimed more than sixty thousand lives, in addition to causing damage to tremendous number of economic resources. Social and political institutions were not immune from the destruction, either. A negotiated political settlement is of

\textsuperscript{71} Id.

\textsuperscript{72} Keethaponcalan, supra note 3.
utmost importance to insure a peaceful resolution with justice to all groups involved. A just solution cannot be achieved without a proper understanding of the multiple dynamics of the conflict. Sri Lankan conflict, although essentially an ethnic one, it is multi-dimensional.

We have already discussed in great detail the various factors involved in the conflict and their impacts on the other factors. We have examined, for example, how the historical factors have influenced the psychology of the parties, and how the psychology had an impact on the policymaking in terms of economics, politics, and the decision to use violence in order to achieve goals. The Social Cubism theory of conflict allows us to examine varied facets of a conflict by providing a multi-dimensional framework. In this sense, it is a useful framework for conflict analysis and can be applied to any deep-rooted ethnic conflicts.