

Post war reconstruction and peacebuilding in Sri Lanka: Tamil Diaspora as a decisive factor

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Abstract— *Since the beginning of the Internal War in Sri Lanka, many people of the International community including Tamils, supported the concept of a separate state in Sri Lanka due to their lack of confidence in the availability of ethnic security in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, the effort of solving the ethnic problem failed most of the time because of the lack of understanding between the GoSL & Tamil Parties. In May 2009, The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was militarily defeated by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) together with Sri Lankan Security Forces to build & establish confidence on Rule of Law in war affected areas. Since the end of War, GoSL needs an actor, who has financial strength, International support and a trustworthy party to the local Tamil community in order to complete post reconstruction & peacebuilding process. In this way GoSL needs a positive contributor such as the Tamil Diaspora. They have all requirements mentioned above, but both parties refuse to help each other and want a Win-Win outcome. GoSL should be in cooperation with the Tamil Diaspora in order to get their support to achieve those objectives.*

Keywords— **Post War Reconstruction, Peacebuilding, Tamil Diaspora**

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) threatened the ethnic security of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, a lot of Tamil people fled from the country in 1980. Western countries especially Canada, the United States of America, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and France considered them as refugees seeking Political Asylum and fulfilled their basic needs. Moreover, the Tamils were granted citizenship and were well treated by the Western countries. The Tamils who were outside the country provided their fullest assistance & try to establish a Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. The establishment of the Tamil Diaspora (TD) was a global attempt to ensure ethnic security for the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. The Vision of the Diaspora can be defined as “commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland to its safety and prosperity; and personal or vicarious relation to the homeland in an ethno-communal consciousness” (Safran, 1991). Sivasupramaniam (2007) argues that TD came into

existence even before 1980 and was strengthened with the incident “Black July” that occurred in 1983 in Sri Lanka.

Being a trustworthy party to the local Tamil community facilitating their welfare and the concept of a separate state, TD carried out propaganda and financial missions during the internal conflict in Sri Lanka. In this way, TD succeeded in having a global recognition as a representative body of Sri Lankan Tamils. Consequently, TD provided support from overseas political administrations in order to achieve their objectives. The overseas support was strengthened by western human rights norms and minority policies. During the war, the internal community and the GoSL was highly influenced by TD. It is important to note that the LTTE carried out military strategies while TD carried out political strategies to achieve their common objectives.

II. MILITARY VICTORY

The GoSL believed bringing a military solution to Tamil minority is necessary & it will help to establish ethnic harmony in the country and resolve issues faced by the Tamil minority. The majority of Sinhala community believed same way and the development and peace in the country could not be achieved due to the enmity of the LTTE. This belief leads to the elimination of terrorism through humanitarian missions in Eastern and Northern areas (President.gov, 2007). In May 2009, LTTE was militarily defeated by the GoSL to build & establish a confidence on Rule of Law in war affected areas. There is no military obligation or oppositions for the rights and dignity of Tamil people. Therefore, peace gained by defeating the LTTE is negative in nature.

The significance of the LTTE defeat to the GoSL could be viewed in two ways. In the first place, the LTTE defeat ended the internal conflict in the country. In the second place, it provided a golden opportunity to become a trustworthy party for local Tamil community. In addition, TD could act more independently and could work with the GoSL in post war development programmes. As a responsible state party, the Sri Lankan Government’s plan for post war development was announced by President Mahinda Rajapaksa on 3rd June 2009 at Galle Face Victory Day Parade (President.gov, 2009). GoSL, Donors of Sri Lanka, and Non-State actors such as TD have prioritized

peace building together with development progress in Northern Province. The reconstruction of the war affected areas was commenced with the development programmes called “Reawakening of the East (Nagenahira Navodaya)” & “Northern Spring (Uthuru Wasanthaya)” The implementation of these programmes demonstrates State responsibility on their community.

III. DECISIVE ACTOR IN POST WAR ERA

The military defeat of the LTTE, tended extreme separatists to believe TD as their saviour. The military defeat left them no option unless deploying their propaganda through the Diaspora. In addition to that, the sudden ideological conflict within the TD leads them to decide their own way during post war era. (Hariharan, 2009) As a result, LTTE leaders such as Kumaran Pathmanathan (KP) ask the Diaspora to look forward with GoSL (*Abeywickrema, 2010*) and Cabinet Spokesmen Hon. Minister Keheliya Rambukwella officially confirmed that GoSL was dealing with Diaspora to achieve post war reconstruction and peace building process (*Ibid*).

A. International Factors

TD played a major role in post war rehabilitation and IDP settlement programmes. They asked GoSL for immediate settlement of all matters in order to provide moral stability and physical capability for all people to resume normal civilian life. The GoSL announced that it would prioritize the provision of basic needs for IDPs and settle other matters immediately. The GoSL also mentioned the sensitivity of those matters for national security. Therefore, GoSL planned to take actions to the demands of the Diaspora under a well supervised and a step by step process (Priu, 2009). Apart from that, TD wanted the international community and GoSL to conduct an independent international investigation on war crimes, which was rejected by the GoSL as it would interrupt the national security of the country. (President.gov, 2009).

International community pressurizes on GoSL under the previous assumptions. The weaknesses in diplomatic services created poor communication between GoSL and the international community. Apart from that, international community believed that TD represents local Tamil communities in post war era. In the next stage, they extended their fullest support to TD to promote and reach their objectives under international norms. Moreover, the international support was in favour of TD due to the failure of the GoSL to address the issues of local Tamil community. In this way, TD became a decisive actor in a country where there is post war reconstruction and Peacebuilding.

B. Financial Factors

Since 1983, TD was strengthened financially. More western political administrations and parties financed TD. The donations made by volunteers and non-volunteers strengthened their financial capacity. More financial support from the international Tamil community for post

war reconstruction could be highlighted. In this way, they become a decisive factor in post war reconstruction and Peacebuilding process.

C. Local Factors

The civil establishments in war affected areas provided opportunity to Northern and Eastern local Tamil communities to have the freedom of transportation & freedom of communication to develop direct connections with the world and TD. Meanwhile, local community also had a strong communication with their relatives who left the country during war. The GoSL had alliance with TD with the intention of maintaining security and peace in Sri Lanka.

IV. CHALLENGES

The challenges faced by GoSL in dealing with TD are two faced. On one side, the demands of TD challenged National Security and state sovereignty. On the other side, those attempts indirectly help to provide validity to Diaspora demands on separate and strong Ethnic base political Solutions for Tamil communities in Sri Lanka. Apart from that, the Sinhalese would create more issues within and outside the government.

In response to the above challenges, GoSL used an unofficial mediator and later, an official mediator to have negotiation between the GoSL & TD. These attempts brought out the readiness of the GoSL to negotiate with Tamil representatives and to provoke the post war anger in Sinhala nationalist movements to the international community. However, those attempts also made negative effects on post war reconstruction and peacebuilding because lack of confidence, recognition on each other and indirect approach for conflict resolution made a critical stage. Later, GoSL used direct approach to TD such as having direct meetings with TD representatives and Government officials to resolve the resettlement matters in Northern and Eastern provinces (Ceylon Today, 2012).

The ex-LTTE carders together with TD accused GoSL & Sri Lankan security forces for violating international humanitarian law (IHL) during last stage of war & lobbied western countries to investigate or implement sanctions on GoSL and conduct International observation and fact finding mission in Sri Lanka. Based on Channel 4 video and TD facts, USA together with western counties brought two United Nations Human Right Council Resolutions (A/HRC/RES/19/2, 2012; A/HRC/RES/22/2, 2013) against GoSL to take further actions on reconciliations and peace building between the communities. Those claims threatened Sri Lankan sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is evident that both parties never wanted to be flexible to resolve this matter through negotiation. Recently, President Mahinda Rajapaksa decided to appoint a commission to look into the incidents of the missing people during the 30 years of conflict in response to the Lessons Learnt

Commission report (LLRC). Moreover, a National Action Plan was implemented and addressing of human rights violations during war times was also done (Perera, 2013:1). The positive approach of GoSL to TD allegations was not appreciated by TD as a positive contribution to Peacebuilding in the country. It is important to mention that the above positive approaches of the GoSL was not highly coordinated and co-operative with TD and did not allow them to access sources within and outside the Sri Lanka or allow them to deploy their own investigation with independent investigators. It was also necessary to win international trust on GoSL to avoid future international pressure, which would be more forceful. The positive approach of GoSL on TD will build up positive attitude towards local and International Tamil communities. Apart from that, GoSL can build-up more comfortable approach with TD for reconstruction and Peacebuilding in post war era.

Since 2009, Rehabilitation and resettlement issues have been creating tension between decisive parties. In this matter, TD became more vulnerable because within the rehabilitation process they have post rehabilitation employment opportunities gained through foreign investments to Sri Lanka. These investments supported ex-LTTE carders to develop their post rehabilitation life style and prevent them going back to a military way. Moreover deploying rehabilitation programmes along with TD created less traumatic stress for GoSL and it was highly successful. Another aspect is getting the support of ex-LTTE carder to develop Northern and Eastern area. Recently, GoSL in cooperation with TD & Ex-LTTE carders deployed social welfare programme in North. For example, Sencholai children home in Pudahkudiyiruppu was restored with TD finance and it was guided by former LTTE leader Kumaran Pathmanathan. Those are the positive ways of getting more contribution from TD for reconstruction and peacebuilding. It is evident that the support provided by TD for reconstruction and peacebuilding was essential in post war era. At the same time, TD makes it as an opportunity to show their interdependency and necessity in state system to post war development

Resettlement in Jaffna withdrawing SL security forces critically challenged national security and might lead chaos between Northern and Eastern Muslim and Tamil communities. Therefore, negotiation was not possible in Jaffna and alternative solutions such as providing suitable lands to refugees and displaced people in war could be implemented. The GoSL should get the support of TD to put these solutions into action as it has already won the trust of local as well as international communities. The role of TD is evident as decisive actor in peacebuilding and reconstruction process rather than other parties in internal and international level.

The vulnerability of TD for stabilizing and normalizing the societies in war affected areas could be viewed with

the conflict transformation and positive peacebuilding process. Practically, GoSL is unable to solve all the issues itself, and having an ally trusted by the Tamil community would facilitate the GoSL to build up a positive peace. However, it seems that allies with TD create more problematic situation in the South as Sinhala nationalists perceives the TD negatively. Therefore, the two parties should display their genuineness and willingness to help all community by deploying a dual hybrid mission in war affected areas and in the South with the commitment to achieve positive peace stage. It is also important to deploy a proper resettlement plan and more inter and intra cultural activities to help people to exchange mutual feelings. The need of TD to have positive peace in Sri Lanka is questionable. While some parties in TD believe in positive or long lasting peace as a necessity for their kith and kin, the majority of them seem to believe that the achievement of positive peace will affect their citizenships or international benefits. GoSL should get the support of the former group thus exposing the latter's intentions to the local Tamil community.

The enforcement of grass root democracy in war affected areas should be established with the participation of Tamil representatives such as Tamil political parties and TD. Moreover, GoSL is responsible for ensuring their political rights. Recently TD and the major political parties such as Tamil National Alliances (TNA) refused to participate in All Party Representative Committee (APRC) held with the intention of reestablishing political and social hegemony among ethnic communities (President, 2009). In addition, they decided to boycott Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) to review the 13th Amendment due to the challenge of federalist ideology and democracy (Priu, 2013). TD including TNC pressurized India to abolish PSC process on the 13th Amendment. India; a South Asian regional power since independence, was highly influenced by TD. It points out the co inherent right of TD as a governing and crucial power to influence other states especially Indian policies towards Sri Lanka. TD also got the opportunity of being a crucial power in the Northern Province election which is recently announced under democratization in Northern areas. The massive impact created on the voting Pattern in Northern areas due to the ethnic bond between local community and TD facilitated TD to gain crucial power. This election also resulted in influencing democratization process, reconciliation and peacebuilding in post war era.

Providing a political solution or addressing the root causes of conflict are necessary in peace building. These solutions should be accepted by TD and GoSL. It is also essential that North and Southern ethnic communities should be willing to transform the conflict paradigm in Sri Lanka. This solution would be socialized when the GoSL allies with TD for negotiation and get the ideas of TD to bring a lasting solution. This solution could be presented first to the local community and then to the international community.

In conclusion, the positive steps taken by TD and GoSL in a friendly approach with each other and their expectations to take more actions in the near future should be highly appreciated. Both parties' unwillingness to be more flexible on negotiation terms and their preference to settle matters with win-win situation would cause issues. The issue of their unwillingness to negotiation could be avoided by following a co-operative approach by both parties and respecting each other's ideas. However, it is proved that lack of co-operation has become a barrier in post war reconstruction and peace building.

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