



## **An anthropological study on issues and challenges through ethnic conflict (With Special Reference to Mahakongaskada Village in Medawachchiya; Sri Lanka)**

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### **Abstract**

Sri Lanka is in a period of revival after the end of a civil war which was fought for several decades. The roots of this ethnic conflict traces back to certain administrative decisions of colonizers as well as of successive governments which expanded the conflict into a complete civil war between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority represented by the terrorist organization, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. This study has been designed to explore and explain the impact of socio cultural change during civil war on individual's daily routine, from an academic point of view and there ascertains the current situation with an in-depth analysis of the victim's present and past way of life. The general objective of this study is to identify the pattern of socio cultural change while comparing the civil war period and its post conditions of the civilians. The research takes up mixed method approach on the basis of field research in Mahakongaskada village in Madawachchiya which has been done on scheduled interview method while using 150 households as the sample and to that end it gathers secondary sources that asses the post-war situation in Sri Lanka. The research findings manifest that internal and external factors affect to the alienation of individuals due to the sociocultural change in research area. Lack of social network and lack of supportive mechanism were identified as issues among villagers. Lack of transport and road network are major challenges to achieve the opportunities for the job market. Moreover, while the villagers were fluently speak both Sinhala and Tamil it's difficult to get the jobs due to poor educational qualifications specially lack of knowledge in English as well as IT. Mass media usage is in a better situation while comparing to the civil war period. The conclusion of the research was rehabilitation and reconciliation process has to be regenerate while understanding the social and cultural change due to civil war. The remaining physical and sociocultural environment has proven that the victims were lost in sociocultural change with the scars of civil war even after ten years from the victory. Government and organizations should establish vocational training centers and skill develop programs in village level to recreate the social network and to give supportive mechanism to the victims.

**Keywords:** Sri Lanka, ethnic conflict, victims, reconciliation, sociocultural change

### **Introduction**

Almost ten years from end of civil war in Sri Lanka, but war conflicts still not to be an end. The government of Sri Lanka's current approach to accountability does not correspond to basic international standards that emphasize truth, justice and reparations for victims. Moreover following the defeat of the LTTE and the government force that caused massive harm to civilians including the death of tens of thousands, the government of Sri Lanka fails to make legal justice. After an end of civil war in Sri Lanka much has improved, but each of the major ethnic groups Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims have suffered massively. Conflicts have not only left hundreds of thousands dead and injured, but have also under with fears and misunderstandings in each community.

### **Concept of Culture**

Culture is neither ambiguous, nor a residual. It is a social phenomenon that manifests itself quite clearly, even if the manifestations are not always easy to explain. Accordingly, Culture cannot be viewed as a single variable; being an extremely complex system, it is to be analyzed in terms of its components and their relationships. E. B. Tylor's definition in its entirety; first because it became the foundational one for anthropology; and second because it partly explains why Kroeber and Kluckhohn found

definitional fecundity by the early 1950s. Tylor's definition of culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1874, p.1) <sup>[8]</sup>.

Moreover 'culture is the way of life of a people; while a society is an organized, interacting aggregate of individuals who follow a given way of life. In still simpler terms, a society is composed of people; the way they behave is their culture' (Herskovits 1955, p.316). To understand a particular society completely, we have to study briefly about its culture. If we can understand its cultural aspect it means we have understood its suitable society. Culture and society doesn't play two separate roles. The both have bound each other (Shankar 2003, p. 189) <sup>[6]</sup>. Simply understanding a society means understanding their culture.

### **Socio Cultural Change and War**

While the socio cultural change impact on individuals, War has a catastrophic effect on the health and wellbeing of nations. Studies have shown that conflict situations cause more mortality and disability than any major cause. War destroys communities and families and often disrupts the development of the social and economic fabric of nations. The effects of war include long-term physical and psychological harm to mass, as well as reduction in material

and human capital.

Death as a result of wars is simply the "tip of the iceberg". Other consequences, besides death, are not well documented. They include endemic poverty, malnutrition, disability, economic, social decline and psychosocial illness, to mention only a few. Only through a greater understanding of conflicts and the myriad of mental health problems that arise from them, coherent and effective strategies for dealing with such problems can be developed.

### **Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict**

The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict was a civil war fought on the island of Sri Lanka. Beginning on 23 July 1983, there was an intermittent insurgency against the government by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (the LTTE, also known as the Tamil Tigers), which fought to create an independent Tamil state called Tamil Eelam in the north and the east of the island (Winslow and Woost 2004, p.31) <sup>[9]</sup>. After a 26-year military campaign, the Sri Lankan military defeated the Tamil Tigers in May 2009, bringing the civil war to an end. As Sri Lanka completes 10 years since the brutal and decisive war against Tamil militants came to an end, it must be acknowledged that the country has not achieved much tangible progress towards ethnic reconciliation, accountability for war-time excesses and constitutional reform that includes a political solution (Salter 2015, p.52) <sup>[5]</sup>.

The fruits of peace are limited to the revival of economic activity, but the pervasive grievances of the Tamil minority remain. Some progress has been made in resettlement and rehabilitation, but complaints abound. Many say their land continues to be held by the military, which also controls huge swathes of state-owned land. Preliminary steps were taken towards forging a new Constitution, but the process seems to be at a standstill.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

This study has been designed to explore and explain the phenomena of the impact of socio cultural change during civil war to the individual's daily life style, from an academic point of view and there ascertains the current situation with an in-depth analysis of the victim's present and past way of life. Accordingly, the central problem of this research study is to identify the cultural change which was impact on individual personality during the Sri Lankan Civil War and Post War period. A thorough analysis of the relationship between the socio cultural change and issues and challenges in the society may be useful in developing new concepts and projects to the path of success as a nation.

### **Objectives**

This research is an analytical to identify the impact of ethnic conflict and post- civil war conditions on victim's culture. Moreover, this study tend to identify the pattern of socio cultural change while comparing the civil war period and it's post conditions of the civilians which have to be identified on making recommendations and suggestions to prevent alienation of the individual in sociocultural change.

### **Sample and Procedure of Data Collection**

Medawachchiya Divisional Secretariat Division which is located in Anuradhapura district is one of the twenty three Divisional Secretariat Divisions here. Medawachchiya Division is bounded by the Vavuniya district in the north,

making it a boundary to the conflict zone of the Northern Province. The Anuradhapura-Vavuniya, Medawachchiya-Mannar, Medawachchiya-Horowpatha main roads traverse through the Medawachchiya Divisional Secretariat Division. Mahakoongaskada is the study area which suffered a serious onslaught on on 10<sup>th</sup> October in 1988 which claimed 45 lives. Thereafter, the villagers resettled themselves in another location close by, deemed to be relatively safer. Random samples of households were selected by paying attention to the size of the population in the specific village. In this manner, 50 households out of a total of 84 households in Mahakongaskada were selected for the study. When the information was collected from the relevant household unit either the head of the household or a responsible elderly person was contacted. The majority of the sample represents the middle aged persons. There is a considerable representation of the youth too. It is important for the success of the research.

### **Methodology of Data Collection**

The major method of data collection being the scheduled interview method, accordingly an interview schedule was designed to capture the livelihood practices, livelihood outcomes and living conditions before and after the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The interview schedule covered the following spheres of information and was used for collection of data at the sample household level.

- Economic situation
- Usage of Media
- Sociocultural and religious background
- Education

In this research both primary and secondary sources are important. The primary illiterate sources of data collected through interview, focus group discussion and observation methods. Grama Niladari and Grama Niladari Reports, reports of the department of census and statics, books, Internet, newspapers, articles, journals, magazines and etc. were used as secondary literary sources.

### **Result and Discussion**

#### **Economic Situation**

Economy is a major factor which affects to the daily life and culture of human being in the modern world. According to the research area, the villagers are remotely located close to the conflict zone. Irrigation water in the villages is obtained from minor tanks, but not from the major irrigation schemes or from the Mahaweli Project. Agricultural production depending on minor tanks is severely constrained as the little water available in the tanks is hardly enough for the farmers to pursue their cultivation on a year round basis. After the ethnic conflict the villagers were engaging to chena cultivation. However sometimes crops fail totally due to the scarcity of water. Population is always in a stress about their livelihood. 32% from the sample engage in providing manual labor to earn a living. Some are working in the development projects nearby to their village and some have migrated to cities to the post of labor. Young crowd go to Colombo in search of employment and are also going to the army. One of the main concerns of the older generation is the lack of interest of the younger generation to preserve the culture. As elaborated above, the main economic activity is chena cultivation followed by providing manual labor and paddy cultivation.

Women affected by the war in the North and the East also bear the brunt of economic problems, particularly with the loss of land, livelihoods and economic networks, which are often aggravated by the death or disappearance of men because of the continues attacks from terrorists. However, the social and economic costs of the war borne by women are yet to be fully accounted for and ranges from loss of livelihoods and reduced school years to early marriage and more. Post-war militarization has also placed additional risks and burdens, especially on girls and women heads of households.

### **Usage of Media**

Adoption of modern mass communication and media was most discernible change in the study villages after the ethnic conflict. According to the research schedule it can be pointed out Radio and Television as the main access on mass communication. In 1988, when the terrorist attack Mahakongaskada, there were only one television to connect with the newly updates of the ethnic conflict. This factor also largely affect to victims to identify themselves as a direct victim in ethnic conflict.

On the present situation of mahakongaskada population the villagers have shown the telephone and smart phone usage in 73% as a higher percentage. In this village, most of households have very modern type of television. They have even a Land phone or a Smart/ Cellular phone with them. There is a perception to television than Radio programs. The whole sample was enriched with either television or radio. Often children practice to watch cartoons on Television and elders have more preference to watch Indian tele-dramas which were casting through local channels.

### **Sociocultural and Religious Background**

The post ethnic conflict ten year of time gave the sample households more time to engage in both religious and socially productive activities. Security concerns shortened the working hours of the people in Mahakoongaskada during the conflict period. For example, in the afternoon, most of the people in village did not travel far from home in fear of terrorist attacks or because of their apprehension about coming back before dark. They were reluctant to work on lands located far away from home in the evenings. Social activities and religious functions needing assembly of people had also been curtailed. Therefore the whole population was not bound with their religious places. In the night they also used to have their dinner early and put off the kerosene lamps and sleep early as the lights and voices could attract terrorists.

The data analysis proved that the situation is quite different than the conflict period. Both men and women engaged in their livelihood while children stay in houses alone with their grandparents or any other relative. Children are engaging in playing with their friends or siblings or watching cartoons on Television. But in the ethnic conflict period which remain for three decades was a factor which largely affected on social network and kinship bond of the villagers. Moreover, it was revealed during the fieldwork that the Mahakoongaskada villagers were seriously inconvenienced in accessing drinking water after the terrorist attacks, which threw them out of their traditional

village. At their new place of occupation, this problem surfaced. This was mainly because the ground water resources at the new place were meager and the rock layers underneath the surface soils would not permit sinking wells using traditional technologies that the villagers had access to.

### **Education**

Mahakoongaskada village school has classes only up to grade five requiring those pupils intending to proceed beyond primary education to seek schools elsewhere. Therefore, after the primary schooling, the pupils from Mahakoongaskada go to Ulukkulama, punewa or Medawachchiya for their secondary education. 72% from the sample only had the primary education and only 2% of the sample had the higher education. Major reasons for the disruption of education of the indigenous children are induced by the lack of enthusiasm of parents, economic poverty, the current education system discouraging failing of weak students leading to children not being able to grasp higher standard of subject matter in senior classes.

But the main reason which identified through the data collection was children also largely engaging in economic activities by helping their parents. Moreover, while the villagers were fluently speak both Sinhala and Tamil it's difficult to get the jobs due to poor educational qualifications specially lack of knowledge in English as well as IT. Further education can be identifying in a critical stage in Mahakongaskada young generation because of the addiction of tobacco and kasippu (most among after Ordinary level students and school leavers).

### **Conclusion**

The Sri Lankan civil war is an example of the dimensions intercultural conflicts can acquire, if the root causes are ignored and the management of the conflict is focused on "solving the problem" instead of addressing the issues that have generated the conflict in the first place. Protracted conflicts are not easily solved through mediation and this is the case as well. The military victory of the Sinhalese Army over the Tamil Tigers was achieved with an immense human cost and has left behind a scarred society. Traumatic impact of the conflict in Mahakoongaskada has been severe. Some incidences reported by the members of sample households clearly indicate the need for psycho-social attention to the affected families.

There is an observable upward trend in income in the two conflict affected villages after the ethnic conflict. This fact is reflected not only in reported incomes, but also in food consumption, housing improvement and investment in transportation and alternative livelihoods. Improvements in access to health care, schools, telecommunication and electricity were also reported in the research area which can be largely attributed to the peaceful environment created as a result of the signing of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. According to the research, even though the war has officially ended in 2009, it will take many years to heal, if ever.

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