



ANALYSIS OF GRIEVANCES BASED ON ECONOMIC FACTORS: THE EMERGENCE OF TAMIL MILITANT MOVEMENTS IN SRI LANKA IN THE 1970s*

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ABSTRACT

Sri Lankan Tamil politics until the early 1970s was mainly based on non-violent political persuasion and its leadership was held by high caste (Vellala) conservative Tamil politicians. However, from the early 1970s, the Tamil youth who succeeded the elderly Tamil leadership adopted a violent approach against the prevailing political hegemony of the state. Within a few years, the movement had gradually transformed into a powerful force posing a serious challenge to the Sri Lankan government by the 1980s. This study explores the connection between the economic deprivation suffered by particularly the Tamil youth, its consequent frustration, and the subsequent emergence of the Tamil militant movement. This study is qualitative in nature and based on both primary and secondary data. Field investigations were carried out in the Jaffna Divisional Secretariat Division. This study revealed that deprivation of economic mobility, underemployment, unemployment, and poverty related grievances were the most prominent factors that plagued the Tamil youth in the 1970s. Also, it was identified that the economic frustration of the Tamil youth and the resultant mental distress and social stigma attached to that condition provided a compelling motivation to resort to violent redress.

Keywords: Economic grievances, poverty, Tamils, unemployment

INTRODUCTION

A number of scholars have studied conflict in terms of the grievances approach. Prominent scholars such as Collier and Hoeffler (2001), Birrel (1972), Davies (1973), Gurr (2010), and Oberschall (1969) have identified grievances as different manifestations of

social deprivation, which act as the root cause of conflict. In Sri Lanka too, the Tamil militant movement emerged in the early 1970s in the Jaffna peninsula mainly due to grievances, as a violent anti-government movement. Gradually it became a serious and well-armed fighting force in the Northern Province. From 1983 the Tamil militants engaged in an all-out

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war with the Sri Lankan government that lasted until May, 2009. Ever since then, various researchers have focused their attention on the origin and rise of the Sri Lankan Tamil militant movement, and related issues from diverse perspectives. Though the problem was studied from various perspectives, the grievances approach appears to be the most pertinent at the grassroots level (Ebuldeniya 2013; Silva 1984; Tambiah 1986; Wilson 2000). It was grievances and the resulting frustration that drew the Tamil youth to gang up and launch violent attacks against the Sri Lankan government and its armed forces. Therefore, the background conditions of the Sri Lankan Tamil militancy were closely intertwined with the existing grievances of Tamil youths. It is possible to analyze such grievances from diverse perspectives such as socio-economic, political, historical, and psychological contexts. It cannot be explained by reference to a single cause, and so it would seem that the Sri Lankan Tamil militant movement emerged as a result of the multiple grievances they harbored. However, this research mainly focuses on identifying the significance of economic factors in giving rise to the Tamil militant movement.

This study was mainly based on qualitative research methodology. However, some statistical indications have also been included. These indications were included to support the main analytical findings of this research. The data for the research were collected using two primary methods, namely by perusing text documents and conducting interviews. As text material, various documents and reports that were published locally and internationally relating to the Sri Lankan conflict were used. Interviews and discussions were conducted by selecting key informants from the Jaffna Divisional Secretariat Division. The choice of location was encouraged by the fact that early Tamil militant activities emerged around this area. Most of the elderly people of that area have direct experiences of early Tamil

militant activities, and some of them were actively engaged in the violent incidents of the 1970s. In view of that, elderly Tamil civilians were in the main selected as key informants of this research. 11 Tamil civilians participated in the interviews.

YOUTH COMMUNITY IN SRI LANKA IN THE EARLY 1970S

At the beginning of the 1970s the Sri Lankan people were facing serious economic difficulties. The country allocated almost ten percent of its GNP (Gross National Product) each year from 1960 to 1977 to various welfare programmes, which no other fast developing country in the Third World could match (Peiris 2001). This mainly happened after the franchise was expanded, because politicians were making promises to expand welfare measures so as to gain popularity, votes, and power at every general election, without regard to its impact on economic growth (Ratnayake 2013). The extensive welfare system combined with the slow growth of the economy created an unsustainable contradiction in development (Abeyratne 2002). All these welfare measures mostly had the effect of increasing the population of the country, which nearly doubled during the period from 1950 to 1980. There was a steep rise in the number of young people compared to older persons. In fact, in the 1950-1970 period, as much as one-half of the population was below 20 years of age and one-quarter was below ten years of age (ibid).

Other than this, significant educational developments had occurred during the post-independence period in Sri Lanka. For example, by the 1960s the Sri Lankan people had achieved high literacy rates as a result of the free education system that was introduced in the 1940s (Obeysekara 1974, p. 380). The governments of the post-independence period had also endeavored to develop the Sri Lankan education system in accordance with the welfare model. In keeping

with that, a number of new primary and secondary schools were established, many of them in rural areas; school facilities were improved, teacher cadres strengthened, and scholarships were provided along with other forms of assistance to needy students (Peiris 2001, p. 20). Some new universities were also established. The medium of education was changed to the vernacular languages, which were Sinhala and Tamil (Little 2010, p. 6). During the colonial period an English language based Western education system had been established by the colonial rulers, especially to prepare Sri Lankan students to take up positions in the colonial administration (Ruberu 1962, p. 135). These educational privileges were not open to the entire population but were limited to students from the higher strata of society (Baldsing 2013, p. 4). However, as discussed above, during the post-independence period educational rights were expanded even to those at the bottom layers of society. As a result, in the 1970s, there was a significant increase in the number of educated youth within the Sri Lankan society.

as 80% were unemployed (Little 2010, p. 9). The mismatch between the number of aspirant educated youths and available jobs became apparent during the 1960s and culminated in a rise in the general unemployment rate from 7.6% in 1963 to 19.8% in 1975 (ibid, p. 7). This situation was observed by policymakers even in the 1960s and they recognized it as a big risk for the future of Sri Lankan society. For example, as pointed out by the Gunewardena Commission in Parliament;

Government must be aware of the dangers that may result from the release each year of a large number of young graduates who have no early prospects of profitable employment. While we do not underestimate these dangers we are of the opinion that if the young graduate has acquired along with academic training a good civic sense and a broad general education, he would find ample

opportunities to make a useful contribution to the life of a young developing nation (Sessional Paper XVI 1963, p. 132). However, the burden of maintaining the much vaunted Welfare State proved to be a big drain on the economy and growth began to lag behind that of other developing countries (Little 2010, p. 9). A high proportion of the large numbers of students graduating from state universities thanks to welfare education, were seeking jobs that were in proportion to their qualifications, but were only disappointed because the stagnant economy could not accommodate the demands of all of them. This included both Sinhala and Tamil youth (Little & Hettige 2016, p. 235). In 1971, out of the Sri Lankan labor force in the 15-24 age cohort, as much).

In the early 1970s, unemployment became more serious in Sri Lanka and the frustrated Sinhala youth, most of them from rural areas, rose up in insurgency against the government in 1971. This was the first JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna - in English, People's Liberation Front) insurrection, during which period many police stations were attacked. Tamil youths also were now in a belligerent mood and the JVP insurrection proved to be an inspiration to them.

Economic Factor Related Grievances of Tamil Youth in the Early 1970s

Most researchers have identified grievances based on economic factors as the most powerful cause that prompt conflicts (Stewart 2002; Tepfenhart 2013; Collier & Hoeffler 2001; Olazak & West 1991). As pointed out by Stewart (2002), eight out of 10 of the world's poorest countries are suffering, or have recently suffered from large scale violent conflict (ibid, p. 342). It is estimated that from 1960 to 1995, 0.5 percent of the population of low-income countries has died due to conflict, while the proportion was 0.3 percent among lower-middle-income countries and 0.1 percent among upper-middle-income countries. Econometric

analysis also shows that a low per capita income is a predisposing factor for conflict (Auvinen & Nafziger 1999). Therefore, it is clear that a strong relationship exists between economic grievances and conflict origination. In this respect it is worth observing that economic factor related grievances existed among Sri Lanka's Tamil militants as well, and proved to be a strong trigger of conflict.

Deprivation of Economic Mobility, Underemployment, and Unemployment of Tamil Youth

Even though Tamils are a minority in Sri Lanka, they represented a significant proportion of the fruitfully employed in the colonial period (Thambiah 1986). The divide and rule approach of the British contributed to this state of affairs in no small measure. High caste Tamils enjoyed favoritism over

the Sinhalese majority under British rule (Peiris 2001, p. 15; Bastiampillai 1988, p. 48). Tamils were also able to acquire excellent English language competency as the colonial rulers and Missionary organizations had established some very good English medium schools in the Jaffna peninsula (Peiris 2001, p. 15). As a result of the favoritism and special facilities, high caste Tamils particularly were able to enjoy maximum benefits and opportunities in the political, professional, and educational fields. Compared to these Tamils, the Sinhalese, despite being the majority, had access to fewer privileges under British rule. Table 01 shows how Tamil representation was comparatively higher in the administrative and professional fields.

Table 1: Racial Representation in the Prestigious Professions (1870-1946)

Year	Total	Sinhala	%	Tamil	%	Burgher	%
Medical service							
1870	32	2	8.7	9	14.4	21	91.3
1907	110	15	24.6	58	30.8	37	60.7
1925	188	80	42.5	58	30	50	26.7
1935	283	156	55.1	73	25.8	54	19.1
1946	345	205	59.4	115	33.3	25	7.3
Civil Service							
1870	07	07	07				
1907	12	4	33.3	2	16.7	6	50
1925	39	17	43.6	8	20.5	14	35.9
1935	33	13	40	11	33.3	9	27.3
1946	106	69	59.5	31	26.7	16	13.8
Judicial Service							
1935	30	8	26.7	10	33.3	12	40
1946	54	26	49	14	26.4	12	40

Source: Thambiah 1955

However, during the post-independence period the number of Sinhalese in administrative positions rapidly began to increase with successive governments expanding access (Abeysekera 1981). Most welfare projects and other government policies that were implemented by post-independence governments were designed to benefit the majority Sinhalese (Peiris 2001). Even when education and government employment were more or less exclusive to the English speaking upper strata of society, there was a strong movement to empower the vernacular educated population. This tendency was highly visible among the Sinhalese people. Tamils were not enthusiastic about vernacular education during the colonial period, because as discussed previously British policies placed them at an advantage and they were thus in a better position to gain access to English-based education (Waduge 2010). Therefore, after independence Sinhala Buddhist agitators strongly urged the government to make Sinhala the official language in place of English. Following this agitation, in 1956 the Sri Lankan government replaced Sinhala as the official language of Sri Lanka. This policy was directly instrumental in opening up government professions to the rural Sinhalese (Chattopadhyaya 1994). Tamils then faced great difficulties in securing jobs in open competition with the Sinhala job seekers who were in the majority (Samarasinghe 1984). At the same time, thousands of Tamils already in government service were forced to resign from their posts due to their lack of competency in the Sinhala language (Tambiah 1986). R.N. Kerney (1975) notes that, "A rapidly worsening employment situation was felt with particular severity by Tamil youths as they suffered not only from the general dearth of employment opportunities but from disadvantages and discrimination in obtaining the few existing jobs" (p. 49-50).

In this situation that arose during the post-independence period, Tamil leaders made

various attempts to restore the socio-economic status of Tamils. A number of discussions took place between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil political leaders. Most of the time Tamil leaders organized protest campaigns, civil disobedience movements, and hartals to demonstrate their displeasure at these acts of successive governments (Samaranayeka 2008). It is important to note here that the government also attempted to respond to the Tamil community by introducing various Acts and pacts. For example, the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact of 1958, Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958, and the Chelvanayakam-Senanayake pact of 1965, etc. can be mentioned. But none of these initiatives succeeded due to virulent protests of Sinhala political and non-political groups (Ebuldeniya 2013). This state of affairs prevailed until the 1970s, when the Tamil youth started to feel that they had become second class citizens of Sri Lanka. They realized that they were being continuously discriminated against in the socio-economic and political fields at the hands of the majority Sinhalese.

As discussed above, rural Sinhala students were the most privileged group in this new configuration, as they received maximum benefits from the educational and professional fields in the post-independence era (Peiris 2001). Their university entrance figures significantly increased during the 1960-1970 period. However, they were represented mainly in the social studies and humanities departments, and not in science-based programmes that led to lucrative careers (Bandarage 2009). The reason for this was that until the late 1960s, the overwhelming majority of students admitted to the science faculties were examined in English (ibid). Therefore in the 1970s, the proportion of Sinhala Arts graduates was very high in the country, resulting in unemployment and underemployment of such graduates. Governments were unable to provide adequate job opportunities to such a vast

number of Arts graduates as there were only limited openings. Consequently, this group suffered serious deprivations, and they vented their frustration with the government through the 1971 insurgency (Little 2010). However, as a result of their superior English language competencies, most Tamil youth were able to claim a disproportionate number of places in the science faculties even in the 1970s. It was nearly 50 percent in the Medical and Engineering faculties from 1970-1976 (De Silva 1978).

In order to address the situation, at the beginning of the 1970s, the government introduced various policies to make the composition of university students reflect the ratio between different ethnicities in Sri Lanka. Among those policies, the Standardization Act and District Quota System introduced profound changes to the procedure for selecting entrants to the universities. According to the Standardization Act, students would be selected for entrance to the science faculties (Engineering, Medical and Dentistry, Bio-Science, Physical Science) of the universities according to their racial representation in the total population. As explained by K.M. De Silva, "The qualifying mark for admission to the Medical faculty was 250 out of 400 for Tamil students, whereas it was only 229 for the Sinhalese; worse still, this same pattern of a lower qualifying mark applied even when Sinhalese and Tamil students sat for the examination in the English medium" (De Silva 1984, p. 107). Consequently, the number of Tamil students who gained admission to the university dropped from 39.8 to 19.0 percent over the period 1970-1975. However, total university admissions kept rising every year with the number of Sinhalese students keeping pace, but the admissions of Tamil students kept lagging behind (Cheran 2009).

By implementing the District Quota System, the government attempted to reduce the geographical imbalance in university

admissions as educational facilities were scattered about unequally across the country at that period. Therefore, through the District Quota System, the government hoped to provide more favorable opportunities to students coming from the less developed districts. As a result, Sinhala students from the rural provinces were offered significant opportunities to enter the science faculties of universities. For instance, Sinhala students made up 75.4% of the Science faculty, 78% of the Engineering faculty, and 70.0% of the Medical faculty in 1974. The percentage of Sinhala students who entered university increased in 1975, to 78.0% for the Science faculty, 83.4% for the Engineering faculty, and 78.9% for the Medical faculty. They held the most prominent place in the Arts faculty too, at 85% in 1975 (De Silva 1978). After the introduction of the District Quota system, representation of Tamils in the Science faculty had dropped to 20.9% in 1974 from 25.9% in 1973 and 35.3% in 1970. Likewise, their percentages in the Engineering and Medical faculties had decreased to 16.3% and 25.5% respectively. In 1973, about 337 Tamil students qualified to enter the science faculties of universities. In 1974, that number had decreased to 294. This situation worsened in 1975. Their percentages in the Science and Medical faculties decreased to 14.2% and 17.4% respectively (ibid). Their overall representation in all Science disciplines had decreased from 35.5% in 1970 to less than 21% in 1973 (Manogaran 1987).

University entrance is not really an economic resource by and of itself. However, it has the potential to assure economic prosperity later on in life because it enables people to access coveted employment and economic resources qualified by an educational bar. As discussed previously, during the 1950s and 1960s, employment based economic mobility was certainly limited for Tamil youth due to the policies of post-independence governments. However, up to the beginning of the 1970s, the

Vellalah caste Tamil youth continued to have more opportunities in the science faculties and the lucrative employment they ensured, thanks to their superior command of English. This situation changed after the introduction of certain policies governing university entrance in the 1970s. Consequently, the Tamil middle class youth in the Jaffna district perceived these government measures as acts of discrimination against Tamils (Ragavan 2009). They felt that the Tamil representatives in Parliament were not capable of protecting and maintaining their traditional leading position in the professional fields. They were, therefore, convinced of the necessity for an aggressive involvement on their part in order to correct things. This prompted them to form student associations centered on the Jaffna University. Ragavan (2009) observes that “The standardization policy, which affected

Jaffna Tamil middle class students, was the main catalyst for the militancy.” As pointed out by Ebuldeniya (2013) “the Government measures aroused deep despair among the Tamils along with the feeling that they were being systematically excluded in admission to higher education” (p. 142). Discussions with Vellala respondents corroborated these readings, whereby personal accounts of themselves or their loved ones being denied access to higher education, and the resultant frustration and bitterness, were shared. Table 2 reflects the decrease of the Tamil composition in the white-collar segment of the workforce over the period 1948-1980.

Table 2 : Ethnic Composition of Employees in Selected Government Services (as a percentage of the total employed in each field)

Field & Year/ Period	Sinhala	Tamil	Other
Executive Grades (General Administration)			
1948	53.9	24.7	21.4
1979	85.2	13.1	1.7
Doctors, Health Department			
1948	57.3	32.2	10.1
1979	57.3	43.5	0.9
Police (High Ranks)			
1948	39.0	5.1	55.3
1979	75.7	17.4	6.9
Engineers (Irrigation Department Only)			
1948	31.1	40.0	20.9
1981	57.1	38.9	3.7
General Clerical Service			
1949	53.7	40.7	5.6
1978-81	93.6	5.4	1.0

Source: Samarasinghe 1984

This data clearly illustrate the decline in the percentage of Tamil employees in elite professions and the simultaneous increase in the corresponding Sinhalese representation, except in the case of government doctors. The Tamils' share in middle grade government employment sectors like the clerical service suffered a drastic decrease as a result of the government's shift to Sinhala as the official language, prevented Tamils from securing employment there.

Deprivation of economic mobility was more apparent among lower caste Tamil youths than the upper layers of Tamil society in the 1970s. Even though superior educational facilities were established by the colonial rulers and missionary organizations in the Jaffna peninsula much earlier than in other parts of the country, Tamil students from the depressed castes were not allowed to enroll in those schools due to the traditional caste barriers of Tamil society (Bastiampillai 1988). But with the introduction of the free education system and the vernacularization of education in the post-independence period, lower caste Tamil children also gradually started benefiting from the educational opportunities provided by government schools. (Silva et al. 2009; Mahroof 2000). However, vernacular education made it difficult to find good employment in the post-independence society. Some non-Vellala respondents interviewed for this study shared how they were forced to take up agrarian occupations after receiving years of formal education in the vernacular.

In the 1970s their situation worsened due to the strong competition prevalent at the time. Following the introduction of an open economy in 1977, the private sector rapidly expanded in urban areas. However, English language competency and computer literacy became the key qualifications to enter the private sector (Peiris 2001). Against this backdrop, high caste Tamils still had a chance, but the lower castes with vernacular training did not.

As such, by the end of the 1970s unemployment among the Tamil youth had increased in every stratum of Jaffna society (Thambiah 1986). The most affected strata were the educated youths from the middle and lower-middle classes of Tamil society (Bandarage 2009). Unemployment among GCE Advanced Level qualified Tamil youths in 1979 was 41% (Thambiah 1986). According to a survey carried out in the Northern and Eastern provinces, a majority of Tamil youths did not like to join the private sector even when there were opportunities in it for elite Tamil youths (Hettige 2002). "In other surveys, over 50 percent of respondents overall and close to three-fourths of respondents from the Tamil-dominated Northern and Eastern regions said they preferred government jobs" (ibid, p. 123). The prestige and stability that come with government employment, coupled with their traditional association with the sector, may largely account for this perception among the Tamils. Though the Jaffna economy was traditionally in the main based on farming, fishing, toddy tapping and, among the upper classes, white-collar professions, after the introduction of free education and post-colonial welfare policies, education was opened up for the depressed caste groups as well (Sivathamby 1984). As a result, they also now expected to serve in white collar professions, seeking upward socio-economic mobility (Abeyratne 2002). As observed by Ragavan (2009), the Jaffna Tamil middle class family's aim was to educate their children and turn them into a doctor or engineer, reflecting a production line mentality. At least one child, preferably the elder child, should try and become a doctor, an engineer, or at least as an accountant. This seemed to be the only effective means of overcoming the lack of resources and/ or social limitations. Hence the increasing number of aspirants for government jobs increased demand for same, and consequently increased frustration at the structural barriers that prevented them

from accessing such jobs.

Further, the system of public sector recruitment based on political patronage also favored the Sinhala youths. Irrespective of whether the regime was UNP (United National Party) or SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party), opportunities existed for Sinhala youths to build up patron-client linkages with local politicians and press themselves forward. The Tamil youths, especially from the North and East did not enjoy this advantage, as their local politicians who belonged to the regional ethnic parties, enjoyed no power at the center. Thus, the expansion of the public sector was not merely intended to increase state regulation of the economy, it also served simultaneously as a method of expansion of job opportunities for Sinhala youths (Gunasinghe 2004, p. 101).

Therefore, at the end of 1970 a vast number of unemployed or underemployed Tamil youths were languishing in the Jaffna peninsula, facing a number of obstacles that stood in the way of their upward social mobility.

Poverty and Low Income

Poverty and low income also plagued the Tamil youth in the 1970s. As discussed above, poverty was not peculiar to the Tamil community. However, as a community the Tamils suffered significantly more from poverty related grievances. During the decade 1963-1973, the per capita income of the Tamils as a community decreased by 28 percent (Cheran 2009). The following statistics prove how the income of Tamils decreased during the 1963-1973 period compared to other ethnicities.

Table 3 : Per Capita Income by Ethnic Group 1963 and 1973

Ethnic Groups	Average Real Income per Earner 1963	Average Real Income per Earner 1973	1973 Income as percentage of 1963
Sinhalese- Kandyan	219	277	127
Sinhalese - Low Country	292	342	117
Northern/Eastern Tamils	327	309	94
Hill Country Tamils	148	148	100
Muslim and Malays	414	441	107

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka - Consumer Finance Survey 1963 and 1973

In the early 1970s Sri Lanka was ruled by a coalition government comprising the SLFP and a number of left wing parties. They introduced many left-leaning policies with the intent of developing a socialist society, including stern controls on spending. The per capita spending for education was reduced from US\$ 12 in 1972 to US\$ 8 in 1978, and health expenditure from \$6 to \$5 in the same period. Total government expenditure on food, education, and health declined from 42 percent to 26 percent of the budget between 1971 and the 1978-1980 period (Bandarage 1988). As a result, Sri Lankans had to suffer

extreme economic and livelihood hardships.

Tamils particularly witnessed a drastic decrease of their income from the 1960s onward, and by the 1970s their situation was critical indeed. The main sources of income for Sri Lankan Tamils were intensive commercial horticulture, and white-collar employment (Peiris 2001). However, as discussed above, Tamils were mostly deprived of white-collar job opportunities in the 1970s, directly resulting in increased poverty among the Tamil community. In addition, their agriculture based income also began to decrease because

post-independence land development projects in the Dry Zone did not benefit Tamils in any way, but made greater provisions for Sinhalese farmers (81% of all the land thus allocated), increasing the competition (Peiris 2001). In addition, due to various shortcomings of the post-independence administrative processes Tamil farmers did not receive sufficient quantities of fertilizers and seeds for their farming activities, leading to "... a common belief among the Tamils that the Sinhalese could rely on political officials to address administrative shortcomings that affected them, but the Tamils could not do so" (Ebuldeniya 2013,p.132).

Tamils were directly discriminated against in other development projects that were introduced after 1970 as well (Ratnayake 2013). For example, under the Mahaweli Development Programme, the Sinhalese received a significant share of lands. "Existing and projected lands (of land under the Mahaweli Programme) together resulted in a total of 151,037 allotments, of which 125,058 or 82.8% have been or will be given to the Sinhalese" (Peebles 1990, p. 47). In geographic terms too, the Mahaweli Development Programme mainly benefited the Uva and Central provinces, which are Sinhalese dominant areas. The government introduced around this time the Iranaimadu Scheme to develop the Jaffna districts also, but it was mostly the Tamil middle class who received the larger units of land allotted under this scheme (Peiris 2001). This made little sense, as it was the people in the lower strata of Tamil society rather than those of the middle class who were suffering the most from poverty related grievances during this period, and hence were in greater need of land.

In addition, the Northern and Eastern provinces were also neglected in industrial development projects that were introduced after 1977 (Ebuldeniya 2013,p.109). Over 80% of the industrial projects were

established in the Western Province, while the Northern and Eastern provinces were provided with a few industrial projects like the Prima Flour and Tokyo Cement factories in Trincomalee, the cement factory at Kankesanthurai, and paper factory in Valaichenai, etc. But gradually, underfunding and mismanagement led to the decline of the latter two factories (De Mel 2007). Therefore, these projects did not significantly support the promotion of economic development in those areas. Infrastructure facilities like safe water, sanitation, and electricity, while highly developed in the Western province, were in dismal conditions in the Northern and Eastern provinces (Ebuldeniya 2013 , p.109). Further, the bulk of the regional produce, which originated from fisheries and agriculture, towards the end of the 1970s, remained in the Northern and Eastern provinces without being distributed island wide.

Compounding these grievances was the liberal trade policy of the UNP government that resulted in a concentration of poverty in rural areas, and particularly affected the Jaffna farming populace (Nithiyanandan 1987). The prices of their agricultural produce were gradually falling to very low levels such that by March 4, 1981, the Jaffna market price of onions was not more than a rupee per pound (ibid). Therefore, after 1977, Tamil farmers had to suffer severe livelihood difficulties due to the sharp drop in their income. The 1977 economic reforms were by no definition 'protectionist', and the impact of it was soon felt in struggling domestic sectors, including and especially the agrarian market of the North and East (Bandara & Jayasuriya ,2009 .p 434).

The region's agricultural economy was badly affected by the ethnic riots of 1983 as well (Shastri 1994; Wilson 2000). As pointed out by Manogaran (1987), the per capita production of rice in the Jaffna District was only 10 kilograms in 1983, while it was more than 268 kilograms in many of the

other districts. Moreover, the per capita production of rice in the Northern Province in 1983 was only 182 kilograms, while it was 433 and 625 kilograms in the North-Central and the Eastern provinces, respectively. Therefore, the Northern Province, especially Jaffna District, came to lag behind other regions in the production of rice and in the capacity of the local population to rely on locally produced rice for survival (ibid).

In the Jaffna district alone, according to the census of 1981, peasants comprised more than half the population (Cheran 2009). With increasing poverty among Tamil parents, most of the children had dropped out of school at a very young age. According to the report on Consumer Finances and Socio-Economic Survey done in 1978-79, the 'no-schooling' figure for Tamils had increased from 19.45% to 23.54% over the 1971-78 period (Central Bank of Ceylon 1983). Such education levels provided hardly any prospects for improvement of income and elevation of social status for the Tamil youth. The fieldwork conducted for this study revealed that the extreme hardships of this time had pushed some Tamil youths to take up the military cause that was emerging in Jaffna at this time under these conditions.

If people suffer deep economic deprivation for a prolonged period, the resultant frustration and bitterness will be channeled against those occupying the higher tiers of society who seem to have access to all those things that are denied to others. As Collier et al (2003) have pointed out, such failures of economic development, which he termed the "poverty trap" (p. 53) that reinforces the marginality of one group, constitute the root cause of conflict. Stewart (2000) has similarly opined that any observation of conflict should expect to have "sharp economic differences between [the] groups and there will also be associated differences in their views about political control" (p. 9). The Sri Lankan case provides a classic exemplification of this understanding.

CONCLUSION

Sri Lankan Tamils were discriminated against in a gradually escalating manner on various socio-economic fronts through numerous post-independence policies that were introduced by successive Sri Lankan governments. In the 1970s this situation reached a high point. By this time, both Sinhala and Tamil people had to bear numerous economic burdens and hardships due to the prevailing economic crisis in Sri Lanka. However, the Tamil youth suffered particularly because of the dual marginalization they experienced in ethnic and general economic terms. The severe competition over scarce resources with the Sinhala youth typified the state of affairs at this point of history. Among Tamil youths, those of lower caste groups were deprived the most due to the additional constraints they faced within their own society that seriously hindered their prospects of upward mobility. As a result of such discriminatory practices, the Tamil youth largely became either underemployed or unemployed. Poverty and low income thus became the driving economic grievances that existed among the Tamil youth of the period, propelling them to take up arms against a state that had historically and systematically pushed them in to economic and social misery.

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