

Opinion – Notes To The People

Sri Lanka: Whither Tamil Politics?

Friday 28 August 2020, by [LIYANAGE Sumanasiri](#) (Date first published: 28 August 2020).

When a judge becomes a politician, they may think they can pass judgment on any subjects. C.V. Wigneswaran, a new Parliamentarian, in my opinion totally out of context, made an attempt to show that he was an anthropologist, archaeologist and a historian all at the same time as he is a politician.

Since, I have no knowledge or training in either of those subjects, I will not even attempt to either prove or refute his judgement. Nonetheless, I believe his statement should not be scrapped from the Hansard as it reports Parliamentary proceedings accurately. Moreover, Wigneswaran’s statement may be used as a hypothesis to be tested through serious research based on archaeological and chronicle evidence by the experts in their respective fields of study.

Having listened to his brief speech the purpose of which was to congratulate the newly elected Speaker, I assume that Wigneswaran might have thought that by speaking like that he could create a tumult in Parliament on its first day by provoking extreme Sinhala nationalists in it and give a space for an international campaign that there was no freedom of speech for Tamils even in the Parliament. The judge misjudged on that occasion belated responses to his speech notwithstanding.

Tamil politics is in flux. What I intend to do here is to add a few notes to my previous column on New Trends in Tamil Politics two weeks ago [\[1\]](#).

Wigneswaran’s speech I think reflects the desperation and despair of Tamil politicians who used to think that their hegemony in the post LTTE era might not be questioned by the Tamil people.

Results of the Parliamentary Election 2020

In my previous column, I recognised three trends in Tamil politics. While the results show the decline of the position of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). This is much more visible when the results of the 2020 Election are compared with the Parliamentary Election 2015.

Year	TNA Votes	TNA Seats	Other Parties Votes	Other Parties Seats
2015	1,000,000	10	1,500,000	10
2020	634,000	0	1,500,000	10

Table 1 shows the TNA votes reduced in 2020 by 36.59 per cent. This is a significant reduction. Does it mean the Tamil voters moved from the moderate TNA position to the more radical Tamil position? Such a movement may be seen in the Election results.

However, the tendency is that they moved to EPDP, TMVP and the SLPP. Table 2 shows the

Parliamentary Election results in 2020. While radical Tamil parties received 13.27 per cent of votes from Northern and Eastern Provinces, EPDP, TMVP, SLFP and SLPP received 50.18 per cent of total votes in the five electoral districts. More importantly, EPDP and TMVP jointly got 14.43 per cent of votes.

Of course, these figures should be studied with the utmost care for two reasons. First, in calculation we left out the votes that the small parties and independent groups obtained. If we add those votes, percentage figures may slightly change. The second factor to be taken into account is there are a substantial number of Sinhala voters in the Vanni, Trincomalee and Digamadulla electoral Districts. In order to reduce the impact of the second factor over the results we also calculated votes leaving Digamadulla District aside.

Militant Tamil Nationalism on its way out

Does this mean an end to Tamil nationalism, including its secessionist wing? Or does the result show a need for a different approach for nationalist politics? My reading is that the events unfolding since 2009 signify that there is no bourgeois solution for the Lankan national question. Strictly speaking, the solution that the Sinhala bourgeois class can offer to the national question is the one offered to it by the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime in 2009. After the end of the peace process that began in 2002, the country fell into a trap where only two solutions were possible. Either the LTTE under its leadership should form a separate Tamil Eelam or as it happened the Government dominated by the Sinhala majority should vanquish the Tamil militant project of the LTTE.

The failure of the last Yahapalana regime to offer it some kind of constitutional solution proved time and again that no bourgeois solution beyond what is mentioned above is possible.

Trotsky in his theory permanent revolution informed us that in backward capitalist countries, some conventional bourgeois democratic tasks cannot be performed by the weak and dependent bourgeoisie. Only working people can resolve those belated bourgeois tasks. Hence, the solution to the national question is closely linked with the systemic transformation of the existing socio-economic and politico-cultural system. Such a transformational task is not class-neutral and falls on the lower strata of the society, in short, on the working people.

By organising the working people irrespective of their ethnicity and on the basis of their day to livelihood issues we may think a different and novel approach to the national question, which is just, democratic, and humane.

The Election results have clearly shown that a different politics is possible on the basis of unconditional defence and protection of peoples' right to land, water and sea.

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Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF (article 54566), [Sri Lanka: New Trends in Tamil Politics](#).