

# Sri Lanka's Post-War Political Economy and the Question of Minorities

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As Sri Lanka moves from a situation of war to no-war with the silencing of the big guns, the question of a peace with justice and democracy looms large. The first few months of this year culminating in the final offensive of in May saw horrendous suffering for the population of the Vanni region, held hostage by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and subject to the indiscriminate fire from the security forces. Even with the brutal termination of the LTTE, a fighting force of immense resources, the civilian suffering and deaths of this civil war are likely to leave deep scars that must be addressed in any process of reconciliation.

The armed conflict and its attendant repression have determined and indeed constituted "politics" in Sri Lanka over the last three decades. Tamil nationalist mobilizations in opposition to Sinhala Buddhist nationalist repression led to the emergence of this armed conflict. It is important to note however that the question of the minorities, historically framed as the 'national question', precedes the armed conflict and was a result of the politics of majoritarian democracy beginning in late colonial times and entrenched with the formation of the post-colonial state. The current situation, with the end of armed conflict, offers an opportunity to re-engage with these historical grievances. Furthermore, an analysis grounded in a political economy of the state is needed to understand how state-society relations have been affected by the intervening period of conflict and the future possibilities for state reform and democratization.

## The LTTE and the Tamil diaspora

The current moment is undeniably historic, marking the exit of the LTTE after twenty five years. The LTTE often unilaterally determined the

course of events in Sri Lanka and pushed the State into either making war or negotiating exclusively with it. However, following the final phase of the war, the LTTE has been decimated and its resurrection is not possible. The LTTE in reality only had a military structure centred on its leadership and particularly the personality cult of Prabhakaran. The LTTE's political wing primarily functioned to spin messages from its military leadership and its fighting cadres' politics was limited to absolute loyalty to their leader. With the decimation of its military structure and the elimination of its entire leadership, the LTTE has been buried once and for all.

The future of Tamil nationalism, on the other hand, remains uncertain; after all the LTTE was the militarized expression consolidated through a fascist political culture of the most extreme form of Tamil nationalism. Indeed, the political and economic base for the LTTE's separatist project was not the Tamil people of the North and East, whom it cynically used as cannon fodder and as a population to prop up the LTTE's interests, but rather, the mobilized section of the Tamil diaspora in the West which extended the LTTE unconditional support. While Tamil nationalist sentiments are likely to continue as long as the political rights of the Tamils are not addressed and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism continues to predominate, it is also important to note that the stronger current of Tamil nationalism exists only in the Tamil Diaspora. The bulk of the Tamil population living in the North and East have lost faith in Tamil nationalism as a consequence of their untold suffering over twenty five years of war. For many ordinary Tamils in these areas, the politics of everyday life and survival now overshadow the agendas of political parties, which they see as cynical manipulators of their fate.

The final months preceding the LTTE's defeat saw large sections of the Tamil diaspora mount massive protests in Western capitals. Indeed, the diaspora had not only become the LTTE's base but also the core of this extreme form of Tamil nationalism. While the call for a separate Tamil state may survive in the diaspora, the potential for nationalist mobilization and action is likely to reduce drastically in the months and years ahead for two reasons. First, diaspora support for Tamil nationalist politics depended on a powerful actor inside Sri Lanka. For example, in the 1980s there was considerable Tamil diaspora support for other militant movements, but all that support quickly shifted to the LTTE following its emergence as the only Tamil military force inside Sri Lanka having decimated all the other militant groups. Second, minus the clear control of the LTTE the mobilized Tamil diaspora could not have constituted such a coherent and powerful political force. Over the last two decades, while claiming the sole leadership of Tamil nationalist movement, the LTTE exerted a mafia-type control over most social and economic institutions in the Tamil diaspora. By building enterprises as if it were a multi-national corporation, the LTTE built an international infrastructure that transformed the diaspora into an effective political and economic base. In the vacuum left by the LTTE, the Tamil diaspora already shows signs of disarray; infighting for leadership of pro-LTTE forums and enterprises are likely to continue to weaken the diaspora's

coherence and power.

Over the past few years, there was increasing discussion of a larger political role for the Tamil diaspora in the political process. However, the irresponsible manner in which pro-LTTE sections of the diaspora mobilized around the humanitarian crisis in the Vanni early this year has excluded such a role. Indeed, the massive protests in capitals around the world were hijacked by the LTTE lobby and its cult-like iconography of Tiger flags and Prabhakaran's pictures. These protests and mobilizations lost credibility as it became increasingly clear that their objective was more to save the LTTE leadership than the civilians held hostage by the LTTE; the criticism was clearly one sided and did not condemn the LTTE for shooting civilians attempting to flee its territory. With the military defeat of the LTTE, these mobilizations also suffered a political defeat. Indeed these pro-LTTE mobilizations, calls for a separate state and the demonization of the Sinhalese by these sections of the Tamil diaspora have only served to polarize Sri Lankan communities further and helped reinforce Sinhala Buddhist nationalism inside Sri Lanka. If the Tamil diaspora is to play any kind of a constructive role going forward, it will first need to engage in deep reflection and self-criticism and show a willingness to work with sections of the Sinhala community in pushing for reform of the State.

The LTTE's politics can be characterized as suicidal, not only in terms of its cadres' practice of carrying cyanide capsules, but also in the political extremes issuing from its all or nothing gamble for a separate state. The LTTE was built around protecting the figure of Prabhakaran, who alone it claimed could deliver a separate Tamil state. It is hardly surprising therefore that the LTTE would first have to be decimated, before Prabhakaran was killed. Furthermore, the LTTE's variety of Tamil nationalism has also suffered an irreversible setback with the defeat of the LTTE. This is perhaps the logic of organizations built around a fascist political culture: their seemingly invincible power collapses when the leadership is eliminated.

Despite the end of the LTTE, however, the political problems of the Tamil community remain, and it is those problems that have to be addressed even as we continue to mourn for the estimated one hundred thousand lives lost in the course of this brutal war. Amongst those dead are scores of Tamil democracy activists; both thousands of less known activists and those prominent figures such as Rajani Thiranagama, Neelan Tiruchelvam, T. Subathiran and Kethesh Loganathan. Sadly, of these activists, many of whom were systematically assassinated by the LTTE, only their vision and inspiration for a just and democratic society remain.

### **Tamil democracy and a 'minorities consensus'**

Over the last twenty-five years, the LTTE not only scuttled every effort with the political process, it also eliminated other Tamil voices capable of taking that process forward. The LTTE also isolated the Tamil

community from other communities, particularly the Muslim community through ethnic cleansing of the entire Northern Muslim population in 1990 and repeated massacres and violence against the Muslims in the East. The post-LTTE era then calls for different kinds of Tamil voices, democratic voices that take the political process within a united Sri Lanka seriously all the while mending relations between the Tamil community and other communities. Here again, the Tamil diaspora, which for the most part has been frozen in a particular mindset following the horrendous riots of July 1983, has its limitations; large sections of the diaspora are unaware of the changes inside the country from the developments with the political process and the devolution debate to the emergence of other political actors. Indeed, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress itself was formed in the late 1980s and the prominence gained by Muslims political actors with their claim to a separate ethnic identity beyond their religious identity rarely figures in political discussions in diaspora forums.

The emergence of a genuinely democratic Tamil politics is bound to take time, given that much Tamil opposition to the LTTE within Sri Lanka was also armed and has not completely come out of the militant movement mindset. While it may require the emergence of a new generation from within Sri Lanka to change the course of Tamil politics, there is an urgent need for a Tamil democratic voice from a range of actors to articulate the immediate concerns of the war ravaged population. Such a voice might incorporate the clergy, academics, professionals and community activists involved in humanitarian work. The greater the space accorded to such actors, the greater the chance of a democratic transformation in the Tamil community.

Now more than ever, the Tamil community also needs to establish stronger links with the other minorities, particularly Muslims and Up-Country Tamils. The days of the Jaffna Tamil community's hegemony over the other minorities is long over and now the survival of Tamil politics itself may be contingent on developing a 'minorities consensus' through which all the minority communities can agree on a set of principles to address their collective grievances against the discriminatory State. The Lankan Tamil community may now need the support and leadership of the other minorities rather than the other way around. Minorities can find much common cause on a range of issues. In fact, one major contradiction even in relation to devolution of power to the North and East was the concerns of the Muslim community, particularly, its perceptions and fears of being oppressed by the Tamils backed by the military might of the LTTE. Other issues beyond devolution, including the political rights of minorities living in the South are also important. Currently, there are discussions about forms of power-sharing at the centre, with for example greater representation in a bicameral legislature, greater access to education and state sector employment, implementation of bi-lingual language policy, and protection of fundamental rights and an end to discrimination. These are all concerns that minorities share.

This framing of the problem of Sri Lanka as one of a question of the minorities differs significantly from a nationalist framing as a

Sinhala-Tamil problem; as a conflict between two nations. The alternative framing looks at the problem as the legacy of a majoritarian democracy which has marginalized minorities. In other words, it is a history of regimes constituted by elite Sinhalese who have mobilized Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in order to control the State to the detriment of the minorities. Crucial in this analysis is the distinction between state and regime and the fact that this mobilization has not necessarily benefited the larger Sinhalese population. Rather conflict, war and the broader politics of the regimes have also negatively impacted the Sinhalese community as a whole. In this context, any serious challenge to majoritarian democracy might have to begin with a 'minorities consensus', paving the way to forge links between the minorities and progressive Sinhalese actors towards state reform. Such reform should ensure an end to manipulation of state institutions and state policies for narrow partisan interests and usher in broader democratization.

### **Elections and the government's blueprint**

In the context of this majoritarian democracy and with insufficient checks on the centralized structure of the State, electoral democracy has in fact been more a problem than a solution. The two major political parties, the UNP and the SLFP, have used electoral politics cynically to advance their own partisan interests, often to the detriment of minority communities, resulting in many missed opportunities to address the conflict. This manipulation of electoral politics towards the dominant political parties' interests has also not addressed the long-term concerns of the larger Sinhalese community, particularly the rural communities as evident from the two very costly insurrections in the early 1970s and the late 1980s. Thus the shedding of majoritarian politics, state reform and a deeper democratization in the country is in the interests of all the communities.

This point about electoral politics and its relationship to state reform is also important in the current context. The Rajapaksa government's strategy for the North is likely to replicate its course of action in the Eastern Province when, following the 2007 defeat of the LTTE there, local government and then Provincial Council elections were hastily called. Rushing into elections in the North could have very negative implications for the emergence of Tamil democratic politics. First, it could entrench armed actors, particularly remnants of the militant groups aligned with the government in its war against the LTTE. Second, both the militarized situation and a population that has been repeatedly displaced do not bode well for an environment supportive of peoples' democratic expression. Third, without structures that address the problems of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment which underlies the Provincial Councils, including contentious issues surrounding devolved powers, any elected Provincial Council, as with the one in the Eastern Province, is likely to be manipulated by the Centre using the powers of the Governor. Thus moving forward with the elections - which may well be in the interest of the Rajapaksa government - could further exacerbate the parlous situation of the Tamil community in the North.

It is notable that elections following military operations were not always the stated objective of this government. As early as June 2006 when the war escalated following repeated provocations by the LTTE, the President appointed an All Party Conference to come up with a far reaching political solution. However, by January 2008 the President himself had undermined this very process in favour of the Eastern blueprint discussed above. The last two years saw the undermining of the political process as the military approach and objectives became the government's sole imperative, while the Rajapaksa regime consolidated its political power in the context of the war. Finally, over the next year, the Rajapaksa regime is likely to entrench its power further by moving on early Presidential followed by parliamentary elections, cashing in on the euphoria surrounding the war victory.

### **Militarization and the Rajapaksa regime**

Given the history of the last thirty years, the Rajapaksa regime enjoys the unique position of having crushed a protracted armed struggle and civil war. The war and war politics have also done much to entrench the regime's power, and with that, its authoritarian and oligarchic tendencies.

Its success at war has not only come at great civilian cost, but also at the expense of the lost lives of security forces personnel and through the mobilization of the Southern population around war propaganda and support for the military. The military was given both an important role and afforded great amount of immunity to achieve the Rajapaksa regime's single objective of achieving the military victory. Thus one important question is the future role of the military and militarization more broadly in the politics of the country.

Here demilitarization would mean: disarming all armed groups and paramilitaries, downsizing the military and reducing the large swaths of land taken over by the State and designated as High Security Zones. An end to constant harassment and lack of free movement for Tamil civilians, as well as curfews in the North and the culture of human rights abuses and impunity that have characterized the warring years should be a priority. Resettlement of the peoples displaced both in the recent war and over the decades is another priority. The long interment of the population displaced from the Vanni over the last six months - which the government claims is to screen for LTTE cadres - can lead to further bitterness among the population. The government's stated commitment to allow the resettlement of most displaced people over the next six months is an important test of its commitment to its Tamil citizens who had until recently lived under the jackboot of the LTTE. Finally, demilitarization should mean repealing the Prevention of Terrorism Act brought about in 1979 and an end to the state of emergency which has given successive regimes immense draconian powers.

The war politics of the Rajapaksa regime also gave centre stage to Sinhala

Buddhist nationalism and labelling all those opposed to the war as “traitors”. The regime’s mobilization around militarized nationalism also led to unprecedented support from the Sinhalese population which wanted to see an end to the LTTE once and for all. One of the LTTE’s colossal mistakes was to target hundreds of Sinhalese civilians in 2006 and 2007 through the use of landmines and massacres. Next, the war propaganda was also sustained through the brutal disciplining of the media and dissent and the constriction of the democratic space in the country.

It is in that context that the 17<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution, which stipulates democratic governance by constituting a Constitutional Council to appoint independent commissions such as the Judicial Services Commission and the Human Rights Commission, is important. The deterioration of democratic governance in Sri Lanka has been characteristic of not only the war politics, but also the centralization of power and political interference and manipulation leading to the deterioration of state institutions. The non-implementation of the Constitutional Council brought about in 2001 to check the powers of Executive Presidency which came with the 1978 constitution, has now led to Presidential interference in various independent bodies. The office of the Executive Presidency is an institution that has assisted the entrenchment and consolidation of regimes.

With the end of the war and attenuation of war politics, questions emerge about the sustainability of the current political order and the overwhelming support for the Rajapaksa regime. The latter’s oligarchic aspirations have been consolidated through war politics, a highly centralized administration and populist economic policies centred on foreign aid and infrastructure development. Three factors are favourable towards a continuation of the regime’s continued consolidation. First, the main political opposition consisting of the United National Party (UNP) is in a very weak state and continues to be fronted by former Prime Minister Wickramasinghe who has led his party to a string of election defeats. Second, the politics of patronage that has become common place means that the ruling regime can buy over both the members of opposition as well as the numerous and fragmented political parties in the country. Third, given the war euphoria, the Rajapaksa regime is likely to sweep both the Presidential and Parliamentary elections over the next year, limiting any serious electoral challenge in the near term.

Over the next year, two scenarios are possible; either there will be a greater opening including the space for dissent and democratization, or there will be greater repression particularly in the South. Nationalist mobilization and support for the Rajapaksa regime cannot continue in the same vein as during the war and there is bound to be social and political pressures towards greater opening. If the regime desires to maintain the current political order, increased repression in the South will be necessary, but that will have significant risks for any ruling regime in the absence of strong support from a powerful external actor. Furthermore, in the post-Cold War age, Sri Lanka lacks the geopolitical significance for such external support for any overtly repressive regime.

In any event, while both scenarios are possible, significant changes in state-society relations are unavoidable with the shift from war to no-war.

### **The political economy of the question of minorities**

While politics in the South is going to shape politics in the entire country, the political parties are not necessarily going to lead political change. Rather, it is economic developments within the country aggravated by the global economic crisis that may well become the significant factor shaping politics over the next few years. The two years from 2007 to 2008, saw very high levels of inflation leading to a dramatic increase in the cost of living mainly propelled by the rapid increase in global oil and commodity prices. The deflationary fall in global oil prices over the last year have led to a significant fall in inflation, with inflation now in the single digits, but the country is nevertheless facing a serious balance of payments problem. During the last two years of war the broader population was asked to tighten its belt, justified as the cost for winning the war; but such bottled up economic pressures are now likely to come to the fore. In the next few years, the Rajapaksa regime will have to address the economic discontent in the country. Here, reconstruction efforts centred on the North, particularly infrastructure projects as was the case with the post-Tsunami reconstruction and with the economic blue print of the Rajapaksa regime, may provide some economic relief. While investment in the form of foreign aid and foreign direct investment are likely to increase, trade and particularly exports are likely to fall significantly over the next few years.

Many of the issues relating to the political economy of Sri Lanka were over-determined by the politics of war and the ethnic conflict. Issues of the rural poor, uneven development characterized by the rural-urban divide, high levels of unemployment, including disguised unemployment, the suppressed wages of workers many of whom are state sector employees and cuts in social welfare are now likely to surface with some force over the next few years. Populist politics and the politics of patronage will not be able to address such pressures. The conjunction of problems triggered by the global economic downturn with political economic questions long suppressed by the war could shift politics in a dramatic manner. It could provide room for new forms of opposition, political mobilization, social movements, a loosening of the political grip of the Rajapaksa regime, and ultimately democratization.

The social, economic and political contradictions likely to come to the fore in the ensuing years find their roots in two manoeuvres by different regimes in the late 1950s and late 1970s. Both these manoeuvres are essentially symptomatic of how the structure of majoritarian democracy and the corresponding limitations of the post-colonial state have historically vitiated the equitable treatment of minorities' issues by successive regimes. Indeed both instances had significant deleterious consequences for the national question in Sri Lanka, creating new conditions that amplified the predicament of its minorities. In both instances therefore,



it important to note how regimes responded to issues arising from the political economy of the postcolonial state by disempowering the minorities.

The manoeuvre by the rightist UNP Jayawardena regime elected in 1977 in the aftermath of the import substitution experiment of the left-leaning United Front government was to push for an open economy through massive restructuring of the economic sector. The Jayawardena regime's move established the essential terms for Sri Lanka's economic course for the next thirty years, as Sri Lanka became one of the first Third World countries to embrace liberalization, well ahead of the global regime of the Washington Consensus articulated a number of years later in the mid-1980s. A precondition for this manoeuvre was a massive extension of the Jayawardena regime's control over the state apparatus and it is no coincidence that the autocratic Executive Presidency and the entrenchment of the unitary state were part of the 1978 constitution that provided the legal underpinning for the new political economic order. The repression of the Tamil minority assisted by the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) of 1979 and the wide powers of Emergency were also used at that time to crush organized labour in the country. This legal architecture of emergency, PTA, Executive Presidency and state impunity with the effective undermining of Parliament as an effective body, has formed the structure of national security within which subsequent regimes have governed. It is important to note here that more recently with the Rajapakse regime, the approach to the question of minorities has been reduced to an issue of national security and state-led reconstruction of the war affected regions. It remains to be seen how the destruction of the LTTE will impact the continuation of this national security state.

The second, earlier manoeuvre in the late 1950s was by the Bandaranaike regime which brought to the fore nationalist politics through the implementation of the Sinhala Only Act of 1956. That discriminatory language policy mobilized the Sinhala community fresh with anti-colonial sentiments by channelling the disaffection against the English speaking elite against the Tamil community as a whole. The Bandaranaike regime's manoeuvre was necessitated by the intrinsic weakness of a postcolonial ruling elite, dependent on alliances with subordinate and "intermediate" classes to govern. Here, the lack of economic opportunities for segments of the Sinhala rural population in particular was a vital condition for the regime's mobilization of class alliances through the manoeuvre of 'Sinhala Only' that promised greater employment in the state sector for these classes. Tragically, the opportunism of the Left parties also became manifest as they shifted from a principled position of parity of status on language policy to aligning themselves with Sinhala Buddhist nationalism by the late sixties and early seventies. However, the essential instability of the Bandaranaike manoeuvre and the precarious ability of the state to guarantee Sinhala social mobility was evident from the JVP insurrection of the early 1970s when thousands of Sinhalese youth took up arms against the State. For the purposes of this discussion, the importance of Bandaranaike's manoeuvre lies in the creation the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), as the second major political party next to the UNP

which dominated politics at independence. Regimes emerging from both the UNP and the SLFP have over the last fifty years sought to secure support from key segments of the majority population through a variety of populist measures. However, none of the successive regimes have been able to make a serious dent on the economic problems affecting the population. Ethnic politics and eventually the escalation into civil war became the most important factor deflecting attention away from the economic contradictions that should have posed a serious threat to the ruling regimes and the Lankan elite.

The legacy of the civil war and nationalist politics is also the legacy of the failure of the Sri Lankan elite. And here the elite from both communities, Sinhalese and Tamil alike could not put forward and sustain a vision for building a post-colonial state and a liberal democracy that could avoid the ravages of conflict and war. Left politics since the 1960s also has to share the blame for this tragedy that has led to the immense suffering and the loss of lives that have come about with the two insurrections in the South and the civil war. The inability of the elite to politically resolve the conflicts and the question of minorities is also symptomatic of the limitations of bourgeois class power and its contingent claims on state power in Sri Lanka.

### **Future possibilities**

The end of the war and the decimation of the LTTE and Tamil nationalist politics may well be the beginning of the unravelling of nationalist politics more broadly in Sri Lanka. The consequences of the two historical manoeuvres mentioned above may now reach closure if nationalist politics in the South also loses its rationale following weakening of the Tamil community and its construction by Sinhala Buddhist nationalism as the cause of the problems facing the Sinhalese. Over the decades, attempts to bring about an agreement between the two main political parties the UNP and SLFP towards an elusive 'Southern Consensus' have failed due to ethnic politics. We must add to this the diminishing possibility of appeasing the Sinhalese communities with state patronage, the termination of the over determination of economic contradictions through ethnic politics and an end to the two party system of politics which provided room for competing regimes.

While the economic contradictions may now come to the fore, the end of the war and the Rajapaksa regime's moves have also placed the various political formations in a precarious situation. The UNP led by Ranil Wickramasinghe, is in a very weak state after its failed lead in the Norwegian peace process that was characterized by conflict resolution with the LTTE coupled with a neoliberal economic agenda. The JVP, the third largest party, which opposed the Norwegian process and supported the war along Sinhala nationalist lines was hamstrung by its support for the war and outflanked by the Rajapaksa regime, leading to an unprecedented split in what was hitherto perceived to be a monolithic party structure. The Rajapaksa regime continues to hold its parliamentary majority with a weak

coalition consisting of a range of parties from the Sinhala nationalists to the minority parties to remnants of the Left. The Rajapaksa Presidency itself would not have come about if not for the LTTE's assistance through a forced boycott of the elections in the North, as the LTTE wanted a nationalist regime in the South to aggravate the conflict. The tenuous hold the Rajapaksa regime has in parliament is reflected by the politics of patronage that provided over a hundred ministries, with parliamentarians from a variety of fragmented political parties including those who split from the UNP and JVP. Finally, further repression in the interests of the consolidation of class power is unlikely given that the capitalist class will only advance cautious support for the Rajapaksa regime, which in the interest of its broad and populist platform cannot align within any single class.

With possibilities for the fuller emergence of contradictions in state-society relations in the South, the weak state of oppositional political parties means that it will be difficult for the UNP or for that matter the JVP, both of which continue to follow the lead of the Rajapaksa regime in ethnic politics, to exploit the opportunity afforded by these contradictions. The political ground is open for a third force to emerge, even if it may begin in the realm of social and political movements and lack the coherence of a political party. This is not new, as 1994 was a similar moment when for the first time the South was won on a peace platform by President Chandrika Kumaratunga; a victory contingent on tremendous support from a range of social movements; of constituencies both opposed to the war and others mobilizing on economic issues. The possibilities and success of any new third force may well be contingent upon addressing two problems that have plagued post-colonial Sri Lanka; the question of minorities and the contradictions inherent in the political economy of the country. The resolution of both problems will require state reform and democratization leading to changes with the unitary and centralized power of the state. It is such politics characterized by democratic struggle around the political rights of minorities that may challenge the authoritarian and oligarchic aspirations of the Rajapaksa regime.

The question of minorities can not be solved by external actors, whether it is the broader international community or for that matter the powerful neighbour India. One of the lessons of the much internationalized peace process and subsequent war over the last eight years are the limitations of international engagement. While such engagement can be constructive or destructive, given the geopolitical insignificance of Sri Lanka, international actors may only tip the scales in the context of competing regimes conditioned by an internationalized political economy. The important lesson of the longer cycle of Sri Lankan history is that the exclusivist politics of the nationalism cannot address the question of minorities. The Tamil nationalists including those from the Federal Party and the TULF made the mistake in not recognizing that the Tamil question was tied to the question of minorities more broadly and a deeper democratization of the entire country. The ethnic minorities forming only a quarter of the population will necessarily have to make common cause

with sections of the Sinhalese community in order to struggle for a share of state power and to bring about changes to the majoritarian democracy and the centralized unitary state. There is an older tradition of progressive and Left politics in the Tamil community which saw the 'national question' as inextricably linked with class politics and democratization in the entire country. That tradition which also struggled with issues such as caste within the Tamil community lost ground in seventies with the escalation of nationalist mobilization and armed struggle. It is such politics grounded in political rights of minorities, social justice and democratization that can now move on reconciliation and sustainable peace.

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