

Other Titles in this Series

- International Conflict Resolution: Some Critiques and a Response
Tom Woodhouse, June 1999 *Working Paper 1*
- The Failure of State Formation, Identity Conflict and Civil Society Responses - The Case of Sri Lanka
Sunil Bastian, September 1999 *Working Paper 2*
- International Non-Government Organisations and Peacebuilding - Perspectives from Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution
Nick Lewer, October 1999 *Working Paper 3*
- From Conflict Resolution to Transformative Peacebuilding: Reflections from Croatia
A. B. Fetherston, April 2000 *Working Paper 4*
- Women, Gender and Peacebuilding
Donna Pankhurst, August 2000 *Working Paper 5*

This series of papers represents work in progress. Our objective is to share current research as quickly as possible with a wide academic and practitioner community. The papers do not represent finished projects or debates. Authors welcome feedback and comment.

The editor welcomes submissions to the Centre for Conflict Resolution Working Paper series. Please contact: Dr Nick Lewer. Tel: 01274 234192; E-mail: n.lewer@bradford.ac.uk

Papers are available from the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, Bradford BD7 1DP, at a cost of £2.50 each, including postage.

This paper was commissioned as part of a research programme *Complex Political Emergencies: From Relief Work To Sustainable Development*. The research is being undertaken by the Consortium for Complex Political Emergencies (COPE) which consists of: the Centre for Development Studies at the University of Leeds; the NGO umbrella organisation ACORD; the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex, and the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford. It has involved fieldwork in the Great Lakes Region (Africa), Eritrea/Ethiopia, Somalia/Somaliland and Sri Lanka, and also includes commissioned studies on Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Latin America, Central Asia and India, and on the theme of justice and impunity in CPEs.

The field research in Sri Lanka was carried out by the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford working closely with Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester. For a 'work in progress' article which provided an overview of the conceptual background and preliminary fieldwork findings of the research see: Goodhand, J and Lewer, N. 'Sri Lanka: NGOs and peace-building in complex political emergencies', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.20, No.1, 1999, pp.69-87.

Sunil Bastian is a free lance consultant and can be contacted through the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2 Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka. He is the author and editor of numerous articles and books including *Devolution and Development in Sri Lanka* (1994), and *Assessing Participation: A Debate From South Asia* (1996).

The views and opinions expressed in the paper are those of the author alone.

Contents

Introduction	1
Failure of State Formation in a Multi-Ethnic Society	4
Political Institutions	5
Development, 'Nation Building' and Public Policies	8
Identity of the State	12
Response of Sri Lankan Tamils	13
Post-July 1983 and the Establishment of Provincial Councils	18
Towards Federalism?	21
The Politics of the LTTE	24
Conflict and Civil Society Organisations	25
Contradictions of Civil Society Activism	39
Limits of Constitutionalism	40
The Relationship with Mainstream Politics	41
Peace versus Democracy	42
Politics of Humanitarianism in a Conflict Situation	43
Foreign Aid, the Discourse of NGOs, and the Conflict	45
List of Abbreviations	51
Civil Society Organisations of the 'South'	52

Introduction

This paper is a contribution to a larger study on “NGOs in complex emergencies.” In the case of Sri Lanka the term “complex emergency” has been used to describe the situation in the North-East province, where an ongoing civil war has continued for the past fifteen years.

The starting point of this paper is to view the Sri Lankan conflict as a reflection of failure in the process of state formation during the post-independence period. This is a situation that is also found in many other countries that have emerged from a colonial experience. However, in contrast to some countries in Africa, Sri Lanka is not a case of a so-called collapsed state. Nor is it a situation like that in Eastern Europe which has come out of an experience of state socialism. It is in South Asia that we can find the closest analogies to the situation in Sri Lanka. This is primarily because of commonality in the histories of the countries of the sub-continent.

This paper is based on those traditions of scholarship that take into account the historical processes and experiences of particular countries. For such traditions conflict situations such as those in Sri Lanka are part and parcel of the process of formation or breakdown of nation-states. As shown by the history of many other parts of the world, such as Europe, the formation or breaking up of nation states is accompanied by wars and conflicts. There is no reason to believe that it will be not so in the sub-continent.

A fundamental premise on which this paper is written is the need to understand the specificity of the history of the societies in which conflicts are taking place if we want to do anything about it. This is not to argue against generalisation, but is an attempt to bring to the attention of those involved in studying conflicts both the general methodological debates in social sciences about the interaction between universal categories and specific historical experiences, and the methodological issues that social science research has to face when universal categories are utilised in any specific historical circumstances.

Perhaps more than any other publication, it was Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* which forcefully brought to our attention the problems of universal categories trying to generalise across diverse historical experiences. He showed how the creation of categories like Occident and Orient during the colonial period missed many of the nuances of colonised societies and, what is more, how these categories served the purposes of colonialism. In recent times within much of the dominant scholarship, such generalisations have remained in the study of post-colonial societies. For example, for many years there were attempts to classify post colonial societies in a traditional/modern dichotomy or, in the field of development, after the construction of categories like the ‘Third World’, many countries were lumped together and there was a search for something called ‘third world poverty’.

In social science scholarship carried out both in developing countries and developed countries, there has been a backlash against these generalisations, not only showing their limitations in understanding these societies, but also showing the relationship of power embedded in such exercises. For

example, the entire subaltern studies tradition from India has been an attempt to unravel ‘subaltern’ trends in Indian society which have not been captured by the traditional scholarship that Said criticises. Or French writers like Jean-Francois Bayart, working in Africa, show the need to reject terms like ‘Third World’ if we are to get some understanding of African politics. He argues for a methodology that maps out ‘political trajectories’ of these societies in its own terms.¹

These debates are extremely relevant for the study that we are involved in because it is in the aid business that these broad generalisations persist without considering the implications of these debates. This is principally because of the way aid bureaucracies are organised and operate. If one takes a look at any aid agency it has to operate through an institutional mechanism that lumps very different countries together in order to provide aid. In order to work in such an institutional environment you need to construct a form of knowledge and categories that can be used all over the world and legitimise the use of aid. This necessarily means squeezing the complex reality of these countries into a set of a few categories that these agencies are comfortable with.² Thence the simplistic manner in which terms like ‘conflict’ and ‘conflict analysis’ are used in this industry which allows them, for example, to talk about conflicts in Sri Lanka, Uganda and Afghanistan in the same breath.

There is another historical process which sustains the use of broad categories uncritically. This is the phenomenon of globalisation. In a period of globalisation it is not surprising that there are attempts to construct knowledge by institutions that operate globally. Through this process universal answers are prescribed for the ills of the whole world. Thus markets have become the answer to economic problems; liberal democracy and civil society have become the answer to political problems.

Given this background of both social science debates and the context within which this project is carried out, it is essential that a project like the one we are engaged in brings out these debates about the universal and particular in understanding conflicts in the countries that the study is concerned with. Since this is also a comparative study, looking at the historical experience of a number of societies, it gives an excellent chance to explore these debates within the theme of conflicts.

In our view the principal issue in this debate is how you let the universal and the particular interact with each other as much as possible, without letting either dominate. For example, speaking about the study of capitalism on a global scale (a subject that is extremely amenable to generalisations on a global scale and one that has been analysed in this manner by the supporters as well as opponents of capitalism), one Indian scholar argues that “any interpretation of the development of capitalism as a social and economic system on a global scale, for instance - an undoubtedly important theme in

¹ Byart Jean-Francois, ‘Finishing with the Idea of the Third World: The Concept of Political Trajectory’, *In* Manor, James(ed.), *Rethinking Third World Politics*, London, Longman, 1991

² Recently this author had a chance to study a rural development project that has been in operation in one of the districts of Sri Lanka for more than a decade. I was amazed to find the similarity between the concepts and categories that were used to plan the Sri Lankan project to those used in a project in Lesotho. The concepts used for project formulation in both places were very similar implying what is ‘rural’ in Sri Lanka is very similar to what is ‘rural’ in Lesotho.

modern world history - is enhanced and sharpened while at the same time rendered more complex and variegated through a careful sifting of South Asian evidence.”³ Such formulations help us to explore a specific historical experience without ignoring universal categories, while at the same time not trying to squeeze the complex historical experiences into universal truths in a simplistic way. We should also be open to clarifying, sharpening, reformulating or even sometimes abandoning universal truths in the light of historical experiences. The following analysis of Sri Lanka’s conflict is presented within this broad perspective.

The paper that follows consists of four sections. In the first section we elaborate on our basic position of analysing Sri Lanka’s conflict as a case of the failure of state formation. There are a number of dimensions in this phenomenon - the failure of institutions, failure of public policies and failure in the identity of the state. These dimensions are elaborated in section one.

The major political response to this failure of state formation came from the Sri Lankan Tamil minority. The second section looks at this response and traces the history of the armed conflict. It also looks at various attempts to resolve the conflict and discusses the proposals that have emerged to reform the centralised state.

While the discussion of the first two sections of the paper revolves around the state and conflict, the third and fourth sections focus on civil society. We begin the third section by clarifying how we understand the term civil society. There are three principal points that we make here. First, we accept it as an arena that should be targeted as an avenue for social transformation in addition to reforms of the state. Secondly, for us, civil society is an arena of contradictory social forces and ideologies. It harbours many progressive elements as well as reactionary, regressive ones. Therefore for us civil society is not “all good” as suggested by neoliberalism, and the promotion or strengthening of civil society *per se* is not going to get us anywhere. Thirdly, we do not equate NGOs with civil society. They constitute a section of civil society and also contain contradictory social forces.

On the basis of these theoretical positions, section three of the paper looks at the responses of civil society to Sri Lanka’s conflict, concentrating more on what we call progressive efforts within civil society. These efforts are discussed in two groups. First, those who have tried to find answers to Sri Lanka’s conflict by promoting values of pluralism, democracy and individual rights. Secondly, efforts to take care of the social costs of the conflict. We then go on to explore the limitations and contradictions of these efforts.

Finally, in the last section we make some brief comments about the effort by foreign aid to promote a section of the civil society - NGOs, and issues arising from this effort. First we point out the limitations in the way NGOs are analysed in the bulk of the literature that circulates within the aid business and try to analyse the ideological underpinnings in these analyses. In our view, what foreign aid does is to give a new meaning to a section of the civil society and construct a particular discourse

³ Bose, Sugata, ‘Introduction: Beyond the General and the Particular’, in Bose, Sugata (ed.), *South Asia and World Capitalism*, Oxford University Press, 1990

about NGOs around this process. Very briefly, we try to point out the political implications of these exercises and argue for an analysis which places these organisations in the historical developments of these societies in order to get a more politically-informed idea about their role in social transformation.

Section 1

Failure of State Formation in a Multi-Ethnic Society

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic society. According to the 1981 census, the major ethnic groups are Sinhalese (74.0%), Sri Lankan Tamils (12.7%), Indian Tamils (5.5%) and Muslims (7.3%), [Moors (7.0%), Malays (0.3%)].⁴ Sinhalese, who form the majority of the population, speak Sinhala and more than ninety percent of them are Buddhist. The majority of the Tamil-speaking people belong to the Hindu religion. It is only among Christians, who form six percent of the population, that one finds both Tamils and Sinhalese. In the context of identity politics, language rather than religion has become more important for political identity among the Christians.⁵ In contrast, religion has become the main source of political identity for the Muslim population.

This matrix of ethno-religious identities is further complicated by differences in the regional distribution of these ethnic groups. The present North-Eastern province of the country has a greater concentration of the Tamil-speaking minority. The North is predominantly populated by Sri Lankan Tamils, whilst the East has a mixture of Sri Lankan Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese. Of the other provinces of the country (called the 'South' in current parlance) there are some districts, such as Colombo, Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya and Badulla, with a multi-ethnic population. At the time of the 1981 census around twenty eight percent of the Sri Lankan Tamil population lived outside the present North Eastern province.

The conflict situation in Sri Lanka can be conceptualised as a failure in the process of state formation in post-independence Sri Lanka. Post-independence Sri Lanka has been unable to develop a state where different identity groups can live together. It also reflects a fundamental failure of a project of the elite or the bourgeoisie who inherited power from the British to form a nation-state. This elite has not been able to form a state where all identity groups of Sri Lanka are able to live peacefully. As a result, at present, the jurisdiction of the state formed by this elite does not even run in some parts of the country. The conflict precipitated by this failure has cost Sri Lankan society enormously and a resolution to the conflict is nowhere in sight.

The failure of state formation in Sri Lanka can be viewed by looking at three different dimensions. First, Sri Lanka does not have a structure which allows political power-sharing between ethnic

⁴ Department of Census and Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 1981*, General Report, Vol.3, Ministry of Plan Implementation, 1986

⁵ See Stirrat, R.L., 'The Riots and the Roman Catholic Church in Historical Perspective', in Manor, J., (ed.) *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis*, Croom Helm, 1984, for an account of the response of the Catholic community of Sri Lanka to the deterioration of ethnic relations

groups. This is failure of the institutions. Secondly, there are failures in a number of areas of public policy. Finally, the identity of the Sri Lankan state is dominated by the identity of the majority Sinhala-Buddhist community.

Political Institutions

Multi-ethnic societies with systems of representative democracy based on one-person one-vote elections for the choice of their leaders, always face a problem in safeguarding the rights of minority ethnic groups. The electoral process gives an inbuilt advantage to the majority group due to their numerical majority in the population. In such a context, other measures have to be introduced in order to safeguard the rights of minorities.

The liberal answer to this issue has been to treat every individual equally, irrespective of their ethnic or religious background. However, this has not been an adequate answer to the problem of group rights. International experience shows that countries have adopted several methods to safeguard the rights of minorities in such a context. These are:

- Regional autonomies that devolve a certain degree of power to regional bodies so that the power of the central legislature, where the majority dominates, is limited;
- Checks and balances at the centre in order to safeguard the rights of minorities. These can include various measures to share power at the centre.⁶

Some countries have adopted a combination of these two methods.

In Sri Lanka, 'the political and administrative unification of a politically segmented society was carried out by the British in the first half of the 19th century. The Proclamation of 1818, which administratively linked the Kandyan Kingdom with the maritime provinces, and the Colebrooke Reforms of 1833 which established the unified administrative system for the entire island, were the main turning points of the colonial project of centralising state structures.'⁷

At the time Sri Lanka was moving towards independence, her multi-ethnicity became the crucial issue in the discussions of the future constitution and the future political system of an independent Sri Lanka. In the late 1920s some political leaders and representatives of certain ethnic groups had put forward the idea of a federal constitution for Sri Lanka, but the political leadership of newly independent Sri Lanka did not accept the concept of regional autonomy. The transition to

⁶ See Hannum, H., *Autonomy, Sovereignty and Self Determination. The Accommodation of Conflicting Rights*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990 for an extensive survey of identity-based conflicts of the present world and various formulae that have been adopted to meet these problems. For a shorter survey of the same issue see, Ghai, Y., *Decentralisation and the Accommodation of Ethnic Diversity*, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1995

⁷ Uyangoda, J., 'The State and the Process of Devolution in Sri Lanka', In Bastian, S., (ed.) *Devolution and Development in Sri Lanka*, International Centre for Ethnic Studies/Konark Publishers, 1994

independence, where the reins of power were handed to the local elite, did not in any way change the centralised nature of the state. On the contrary, 'the post-independent state was primarily conceived in accordance with the colonial legacy of centralisation. There was hardly any argument against the unitary model during the transfer of power.'⁸ Thus the local elite inherited the centralised state created by British colonialism.

Sri Lanka emerged as an independent nation with the status of a dominion within the British Commonwealth. The constitutional structure was based on the Westminster model with two legislative chambers, a Prime Minister with a Cabinet of Ministers having executive power, and an appointed Governor General remaining as the representative of the British Crown. For the purpose of safeguarding rights of minorities, Sri Lanka adopted various mechanisms of checks and balances at the centre. These measures were:

- Distribution of seats in Parliament so that there was some degree of balanced representation between majority Sinhalese and all minorities. Multi-member constituencies in electorates with pockets of minorities was one device used to ensure this end.
- A second chamber into which minority representatives could be appointed.
- A special clause in the constitution, 29 (c), made it unconstitutional to 'confer on persons of any community or religion any privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religions.' By this it was hoped that the constitution could prevent special privileges being granted to the majority community.

The history of ethnic relations in post-independence Sri Lanka is a history of the ineffectiveness of these safeguards. The articulation of political power of the majority through the political system saw the breakdown of these checks and balances.

The first landmark of this breakdown was the disenfranchisement of the bulk of the Indian Tamil population. Most of them formed the working class in the plantation sector. They had been brought to the country during the British period. Immediately after independence Sri Lanka enacted the Citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistani Resident (Citizenship) Act of 1949. These laws created two categories of citizens: citizens by descent and citizens by registration. The latter category was aimed at deciding the status of so-called recent immigrants. These were mainly people who had come into the country in the wake of economic changes carried out by the British. They had to fulfill extremely stringent criteria to qualify for Sri Lankan citizenship.

The political outcome of the legislation was to make the bulk of the Indian Tamil population stateless and therefore disenfranchised. This diminished their influence in parliament and had an important impact on balanced representation. Balanced representation would have meant that there would have been a sizeable number of minority representatives so that the ruling political parties who represented the majority could not ignore them. But the disenfranchisement of the majority of Indian

⁸ Uyangoda, J., *op. cit.*

Tamils undermined this notion. Subsequent changes in delimitation shifted the political balance in the parliament towards the majority to a very significant degree. Thus, from one of the very first Acts of independent Sri Lanka, a process of undermining the checks and balances that were incorporated to safeguard rights of minorities had begun. This also meant a section of the minorities was excluded when defining who was a citizen in the newly independent country.

The second turning point was the emergence of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism as a dominant political force. The elections of 1956 brought into power a government with a hegemonic Sinhala-Buddhist ideology. Although the influence of this ideology was seen even prior to independence, it was after 1956 that it became the dominant ideology of the ruling elite.

The passage of the Sinhala Only Act in 1956 made Sinhala, the language of the majority community, the only official language. This was the first major signal of the emergence of this ruling ideology. It effectively ended the two-language formula that was accepted by the Sri Lankan polity. The Official Language Act also demonstrated the ineffectiveness of Section 29 (c) as a means of protecting minority rights in the country. The Act was followed by many other policy decisions which helped to establish the Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony. Within the first decade of independence the state had alienated the minority communities.

The next important point in the deterioration of ethnic relations was the enactment of the first republican constitution in 1972. This constitution ended the dominion status of Sri Lanka. It created a political structure that ensured the superiority of the legislature. Framers of this constitution had little regard for minority demands. They removed the safeguards in the previous constitution, gave a pre-eminent position to Buddhism in addition to the Sinhala language and, most importantly, concentrated all power in the Sinhala-dominated legislature. The ethnic polarisation at this time was such that scant attention was given to any demand for regional autonomy. The Federal Party, representing the Sri Lankan Tamil minority, put forward a proposal based on the concept of regional autonomy. The constituent assembly that formulated the new constitution rejected this proposal and the representatives of the minority boycotted the proceedings.

The dominance of the Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony in the political structure was reflected in society at large. Several attempts by political leaders to find answers to Tamil grievances were thwarted by dominant extremist sentiments in Sinhala society. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact signed in July 1957, and the Senanayake-Chelvanayagam Pact signed in 1968, were two significant attempts to work out a form of regional autonomy as an answer to Tamil grievances. Both these attempts were opposed by the Sinhalese. The campaign was led by whatever party was in opposition. The United National Party (UNP) spearheaded the opposition campaigns in 1958. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), with the support by some of the left parties, opposed the Senanayake-Chelvanayagam Pact in 1965. On both these occasions they were joined by various sections of Sinhala extremist opinion. Once ethnic consciousness began to dominate the electoral process, it was used by all political groups for their own political ends. Mass consciousness was also dominated by ethnicity. Both the rulers and the ruled formed part of a society where ethnic consciousness was pervasive. The ultimate outcome of the breakdown of the political contract with minorities that was established at the time of independence was the strengthening of a highly

centralised state.

The final outcome of the breakdown of institutions that were adopted at the time of independence, and which were meant to protect minorities, was the emergence of a highly centralised state in which the representatives of the majority Sinhala-Buddhist community had enormous power.

Development, ‘Nation Building’ and Public Policies

There is a close link between development that strengthens a centralised state and the ideology of ‘nation-building’ that dominated post-colonial societies after independence. Rulers of most post-colonial societies used the ideology of ‘nation-building’ to deal with the presence of various ethnic groups. Once these countries emerged as new states, this juridical entity called the state was equated with a nation. The new rulers saw the building of a new nation as the task ahead of them. To achieve this it was important to overcome ‘narrow, parochial or communal’ identities associated with ethnic groups, and forge an over-arching ‘modern national’ identity. In this process of ‘nation building’ and replacing ethnic identities with a ‘national identity’, development was a major force. Thus one of the main concerns of development was to strengthen this nation-state and thereby contribute towards ‘nation-building’.

In the case of Sri Lanka, dominant ideologies of development that emphasised the role of the state have multiplied the power of the centralised state. The state sector was first promoted by the Left under the guise of socialism. Later, the dependence on a centralised state in Sri Lanka went beyond the rhetoric of the Left. Political parties across the spectrum have looked upon the central state as an engine of economic growth and as a mechanism to deliver social justice.

Some writers⁹ have used Kalecki’s model of ‘intermediate regimes’ to explain the political economy of the state-dominated development policies that emerged in the Sri Lankan context. Intermediate regimes have a state with a multi-class character. In the class coalition, middle-level landowning classes and petit bourgeois sections play a key role. The petit bourgeoisie will include many others, like sections of the trading class, those employed in minor positions within government and vernacular intelligentsia. Their role is crucial in intermediate regimes, and often they are the greatest beneficiaries of the policies. The phase of capitalist development where state domination is emphasised, is a phase where the influence of such class forces increases.

While Kalecki’s theory of intermediate regimes throws light upon the class forces behind state-dominated populist development policies, it has to be supplemented with an analysis of nationalism. The state in multi-ethnic societies not only has a class character, but is also influenced by nationalist forces. Nationalist forces have been an important force that promoted the expansion of the state in the economy in addition to class forces.

The nationalist character of the demand for state expansion is unmistakable in the rhetoric of anti-

⁹ Shastri, A., ‘Evolution of contemporary political formation of Sri Lanka’, *South Asia Bulletin*, Vol. III, No.1, Spring 1983

imperialism. The demand for a greater role of the state in the economy has been a major plank of nationalists in their fight against foreign domination. Nationalism is a strong component in the framework of analysis used by dependency theorists, whose main preoccupation is to fight against foreign domination in the economy.¹⁰ Therefore the expansion of the state has been a mechanism supporting nationalist projects as well.

The nationalist, anti-imperialist argument for the expansion of the state runs into trouble when state power is dominated by one single ethnic group, as is the case in Sri Lanka. Then the intervention of the state in the economy and other spheres of society carries with it the interests of the majority community.

The state-centric development ideology that operated within the framework of the nation-building thesis in fact strengthened one ethnic group in Sri Lanka - namely the majority community. In other words, the dominant development discourse that went along with the nation building thesis served the interests of dominant nationalism, which, as in many countries, coincided with the ethnic nationalism of the majority ethnic group.

One can identify several structural mechanisms that seem to have operated in the Sri Lankan context to the detriment of minority interests with the expansion of the state in the economy. The expansion of the state in the economy would mean the take-over of areas of economic activity where minorities have been involved. The most important area where state expansion went against the interest of the minorities seems to have been the export and import trade.

The expansion of state regulation of the economy has meant that quotas, permits and licences have been introduced even for the economic activities of the private sector. Political patronage and the influence of the state bureaucracy play a significant role in granting these licences and permits. It is well known that in such circumstances a variety of social linkages, of which ethnicity is one, play an important role in deciding who gets the benefit of these quotas and licences.

The expansion of the state in the economy made it a major avenue of employment. However the imposition of Sinhala as the Official Language, or Sinhalisation of the state, went against the opportunities that the Tamil speaking population had to obtain state sector employment. This was a blow to a population whose opportunities for social mobility depended very much on getting an education and becoming professionals and obtaining employment in the formal sector. The limited opportunities for social mobility that land and agriculture provided for the population in the Jaffna peninsula were at least part of the reason for this trend. Over the years the Tamil population in Jaffna had perfected this avenue of social mobility with the growth of good schools in the peninsula. The Official Language Act became a barrier for this well-established avenue of social mobility.

The opportunities for state sector employment became even more curtailed for the Tamil speaking population because of the role played by political patronage for these jobs. This was a direct

¹⁰ See Warren, B., *Imperialism Pioneer of Capitalism*, Verso, 1980, for a Marxist critique of the dependency theory illustrating its nationalist content

outcome of electoral politics. Doling out state sector jobs to the activists and supporters of political parties that won power became a tradition in Sri Lankan politics. Since the political power was always in the hands of two parties supported largely by the Sinhala population, political patronage networks discriminated against the Tamil speaking population. Before Sri Lanka began its open economic policies the state sector generated the largest number of jobs. In this context the discriminatory effects of the political patronage system were multiplied severalfold.

Education has been the other area where state policies discriminated against the minority community. Except for a small minority of the population, the bulk of Sri Lankan children have always been educated in monolingual schools. The emphasis on promoting the national languages through the education system, in place of English, meant a further intensification of this process of the division of children on the basis of language within the education system. Thus in Sri Lanka most children go through their education in a monolingual environment that emphasises one ethnic identity.

Researchers have identified a number of problems that arise in such an education system that are detrimental to ethnic relations. On the one hand there are elements in the system that go against the interests of minorities. For example, there are ethnic minorities like the Indian Tamil population whose educational facilities have been consistently neglected in the past. Their educational standards are still way below the rest of the population. The presence of different streams of education on language has meant competition for the state resources between these streams. There are indicators to show that Tamil streams have been neglected in the distribution of state resources for education. Some parts of the curriculum that is followed in general education within the state system promote highly prejudicial views about the other community, which in the long run do not allow the development of amicable relations between the communities.

However, more than all these policies, the one that led to violent protests from the Tamil community was the discriminatory policy for university admission that was introduced in the seventies. Popularly known as 'standardisation', the final outcome of this policy was the drastic reduction of the number of Tamil students entering university. Some authors have argued that the introduction of these discriminatory university admission policies was a turning point in the emergence of Tamil militancy.

¹¹

There are also examples of specific development policies where the influence of majority nationalism and the link with the deterioration of ethnic relations is direct. The most glaring examples of such a policy are the large-scale irrigation schemes in the dry zone of Sri Lanka - part of which is in the North-East. Sri Lanka has settled a large number of peasant families through such schemes in the dry zone. These 'colonisation schemes' have a continuity in the agrarian policies of Sri Lanka

¹¹ See de Silva, C.R., 'The Impact of Nationalism on Education: The Schools Takeover (1961) and the University Admissions Crisis 1970-75', in Roberts, M., (ed.) *Collective identities, nationalisms and protest in modern Sri Lanka*, Marga Institute, 1979; and Bastian, S., 'University Admission and the National Question', in *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka*, Social Scientists Association, 1984, for a discussion of how changes in education backed by Sinhala nationalism influenced ethnic relations

despite changes in regimes. They began in the late twenties, before Sri Lanka gained independence, and represent one of the well-established orthodoxies of development. They constitute a part of several policies that were meant to protect the smallholder peasantry as a class. Subsidising peasant production, providing various infrastructure facilities and distributing lands in a variety of ways, are other elements of this agrarian populism. The need to continue with these policies of agrarian populism has also been a major argument for maintaining central control of state land.

The biggest colonisation scheme implemented by the Sri Lankan government was the Mahaweli development programme, which was formulated in 1967 and then implemented at an accelerated pace after 1977. The Mahaweli programme accounted for the largest proportion of foreign assistance that Sri Lanka received at that time. Much of that assistance was absorbed by private contractors, who undertook the construction of infrastructure facilities. The large contractors came from the donor countries assisting the projects.

In Sri Lanka, the close link of these colonisation schemes with Sinhala nationalism is very clear. At an ideological level these projects are legitimised through a nationalist discourse. The opening of the dry zone areas through state intervention has been equated with the restoration of the 'glorious ancient civilisations of the Sinhalese'. These historical memories are often evoked in legitimising these development policies. Most publications, both by government and other propagandists, evoke these nationalist sentiments when discussing these schemes. Politicians who have been in charge of these development schemes have often compared themselves with kings who built the ancient irrigation schemes. Anthropological analysis has shown how these nationalist narratives are incorporated in the modern-day opening ceremonies.¹²

The most critical and crucial relationship between these policies and the ethnic conflict arises because the demographic changes brought about by these settlements have contributed to breaking the Tamil-speaking contiguity between the North and East. This change confronts the geographical basis of the minority demand directly. It has been viewed by Tamil political representatives as an attempt to undermine their political claims to these areas. The fact that the policies have been implemented by a highly centralised state, where the majority community has overwhelming power, gives support to the argument that they are part of a political project to undermine the power of the minorities. These policies have a direct bearing on worsening the ethnic relations in the country. The demographic changes brought about by these settlement policies have also changed the electoral balance in the East. As a result of the expansion of the Sinhala population in the East new electorates dominated by Sinhalese have been carved out. This has altered the electoral power balance in the East.

What the experience of Sri Lanka shows is how these policies of agrarian populism, when implemented in a multi-ethnic society through a highly centralised state where the majority ethnic group wields greater political power, lead to ethnic conflicts. The discourse of agrarian populism,

¹² See Tennekoon, S., 'Rituals of Development: The Accelerated Mahaweli Development Program of Sri Lanka', *American Anthropologist*, 1988, Vol. 15. Reprinted by Social Scientists Association, Reprint Series 7, March 1991

however, only looks at questions such as that of land distribution through the prism of class inequality. It does not deal with ethnic contradictions. It just ignores the ethnic discourse of the link between land and ethnic identity, and the political implications of demographic changes.

Identity of the State

The centralised nature of the state was complemented with a state ideology that gave prominence to the identity of the majority community - the Sinhala Buddhists. The signs of this were there right at the time of independence. For example, the designing of the national flag after independence led to a great deal of controversy. The flag that was adopted ultimately was not accepted by the minority representative of the commission that was set up to design the flag. The controversy was over the positioning of two coloured stripes (yellow and green stripes to represent Tamils and Muslims respectively). While the minority representatives wanted it to be a part of the border surrounding the lion emblem, together with the maroon colour representing the Sinhalese, they were ultimately placed outside. For the minority representatives this symbolised an exclusion.

As we have pointed out earlier, the newly independent Sri Lanka defined its citizenship excluding the bulk of the Indian Tamil population. Although Sri Lanka did not adopt an ethnic definition of citizenship, the construction of two categories of citizenships - citizens by descent and citizens by registration - gave an advantage to one section of the population. There is an implicit assumption here that those who became citizens by descent are the true 'sons of the soil'. They were given citizenship automatically and their citizenship cannot be taken away. Others have to fulfill certain criteria and their citizenship could be taken away.

The hegemony of the Sinhala Buddhist identity within the state apparatus acquired a more prominent position in the mid fifties after the election of the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), which came into power on a wave of Sinhala nationalism. Making Sinhala the only official language was the beginning of a series of measures that led to the Sinhalisation of the state apparatus. This was followed by the 1972 constitution which proclaimed the special role that the state has to play in protecting Buddhism and was continued in the 1978 constitution.

With these developments the identity of the state was firmly linked to the majority community. This is now upheld not only by constitutional measures, but also through various practices that the state indulges in. For example, there is always a prominent place given to Sinhala Buddhist symbols, Buddhist clergy, and various Sinhala cultural practices in state functions. In many of these, while there is a token presence of minority representatives, the pride of place is given to the symbols of the majority community.

The Sinhala Buddhist symbolism became dominant in different parts of the state apparatus. Of these, what happened in the armed forces is perhaps the most important development in the light of the prevailing conflict. After the enactment of the Official Language Act, Sinhala was adopted as the language of command in the armed forces. Various regiments in the army were named after Sinhala kings who were known to have defeated Tamil invaders. The armed forces began to play an active

role during Buddhist festivals. If we add to all this the fact that more than ninety percent of the armed forces come from the Sinhala ethnic background, Sri Lanka has completed the process of Sinhalisation of its armed forces.

The hegemony of the symbols of the majority community is seen even in apparently ethnically neutral arenas like development projects. In a brilliant analysis of the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project, Serena Tennekoon has shown how Sinhala symbolism is interwoven into the opening ceremonies. This reflects a much larger phenomenon of the influence of Sinhala Nationalism in development ideologies.

As in the case of the armed forces, many state institutions indulge in practices associated with the majority community. The chanting of *pirith* by Buddhist monks has almost become the accepted practice within state institutions on special occasions. Some state institutions have become very active during Buddhist festivals like *Wesak*. Many have shrine rooms and Buddha statues within their premises. All these symbolically identify these institutions of the state with the majority community.

In this section we have tried to look at Sri Lanka's conflict as a reflection of the failure of the process of state formation during the post-independence period. We have tried to elaborate on this theme by looking at political institutions, public policies and the identity of the state. In all these areas what we have tried to show is the failure to incorporate the interests and needs of the minority identity groups. The major political response to this failure of state formation came from the Sri Lankan Tamil minority. In the next section we turn to look at this political response

Section 2

Response of Sri Lankan Tamils

The response of the minorities to the emergent hegemony of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism came primarily from the Sri Lankan Tamils. Numerically they form the biggest minority. The Tamil political leadership agreed to the safeguards at the centre at the time of independence, although some of their leaders had wanted more than was agreed. With the ascendance of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, the demands soon changed to ones based on regional concepts. In 1949 the Federal Party was formed and Tamil political representatives put forward the demand for a federal system of government. This was a direct outcome of developments around the Citizenship Act.

The principal modes of political action of the Tamil leadership during the early period were peaceful forms of protests. Methods adopted were action within the parliamentary framework, and *Satyagraha* of the Gandhian tradition. But these protests were repeatedly met with violence. It was only a matter of time before conditions were created for more militant forms of politics to emerge.

The enactment of the Sinhala Only Act was marked by the first serious 'ethnic riot' in post-independence Sri Lanka. The term ethnic riot usually denotes an unorganised conflagration between

ethnic groups. It gives the picture of a civil commotion, in which members of one ethnic group attack the other. However, so called 'ethnic riots' are better understood as a form of political intervention dealing with political questions. They also have an element of organisation supported by interested parties. The 1958 'ethnic riot' associated with the passage of the Sinhala Only Act, undermined the politics of accommodation reflected in the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact. It was the first significant violent incident in post-independence Sri Lanka linked to the question of ethnic relations, laying a foundation for what was to come.

The emergence of the separatist demand coincided with the enactment of the first republican constitution in 1972. Several other events in the seventies contributed significantly to the deterioration of ethnic relations. These included an incident involving shooting by police in Jaffna at the time of the Tamil Researchers Conference, and the introduction of new admission schemes for entrance into the universities. As argued above, these admission schemes had discriminatory elements *vis-à-vis* Tamil students. In the context of these developments, in 1976 the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which had replaced the Federal Party as the major political representative of Sri Lankan Tamils, adopted a resolution demanding a separate state comprising the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka at a party convention held at Vadukkodai.

This period also saw the beginning of activities of Tamil militancy. Sporadic attacks by Tamil militants on police stations, killing of informants, etc., indicated the beginning of a new form of political struggle among Tamils. With armed militancy as the dominant form of political struggle, a new political leadership emerged among the Sri Lankan Tamils. The new leaders had a different social background to that of the Tamil political leadership at the time of independence. They were less westernised and were based in the North. Several militant groups took up arms as a means of achieving a separate state. Of these, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF) and Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) were the main ones. Subsequent developments gave birth to another political group called the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP).

In Sri Lanka, the early seventies was a turning point for the stability of the political framework inherited from independence, not only in relation to the question of managing ethnic relations but also with regard to the more general issue of democracy. The 1971 insurgency showed the alienation of a section of the younger generation from the political mainstream. The enactment of the 1972 constitution was also the beginning of a process of constitutional manipulation by the ruling elite. 1972 produced a constitution which made it very easy for the party that enjoyed a majority in parliament to do almost anything.

By the time Sri Lanka held her general election in July 1977, the Tamil political demand had evolved decisively towards winning power over the North-East of the country. In the 1977 elections, the TULF, which fought the election on a separatist demand, not only swept the electorate in the North and to a lesser extent in the East, but also became the major opposition party. For the first time in Sri Lankan history, Parliament reflected the ethnic polarisation in the country. The UNP, with a five-sixths majority obtained largely from the Sinhala majority, formed the government. The TULF led

the opposition after winning the Tamil vote on a separate state demand.

In its 1977 election manifesto, the UNP described its policy towards the minority issue. It put forward answers to the minority question under three items. 'First, a reference to minority rights in the section on constitutional reforms; second, a reference to decentralisation of administration down to village level, to "make people partners in the planning, organisation and implementation of policy".' There was also reference to the administrative machinery to be established for this purpose: District Development Councils headed by a District Minister at the apex, consisting of Members of Parliament (MPs) of the District, elected heads of local bodies, and government officials. Third, a whole section of the manifesto was devoted to 'Problems of Tamil-speaking People.'¹³ In this section the manifesto accepted that Tamil-speaking people faced problems in the areas of Education, Colonisation, Use of Tamil Language, and Employment in the public and semi-public corporations. It promised to summon an All Party Conference to consider these matters among many other issues concerning minorities.¹⁴

But the UNP regime, which came into power with a massive five-sixths majority, made use of this to make many changes which limited the democratic space that was prevailing in Sri Lanka. The most important feature of the constitutional reforms carried out by UNP in 1978 was the introduction of a presidential form of government. Under this constitution, the President is elected directly. There was no thinking during the promulgation of this constitution of tackling the minority issue through the establishment of regional units with devolved powers. On the contrary, the presidential system, with a powerful presidency, centralised the state structure even further. The overarching centralisation that it achieved went against the need to grant a degree of autonomy to regions.

The UNP used the excessive powers conferred on the President under this constitution to suppress opposition groups such as trade unions and student organisations, and to remove the civic rights of the main political opponent. A turning point of this process was the infamous referendum carried out in 1982, which did away with the general election of 1983. This referendum, marked by widespread electoral malpractices and electoral violence, approved the continuance of the earlier parliament, where the ruling UNP enjoyed a five-sixths majority, by slightly over fifty percent of the vote. This itself was gained by vote rigging, thuggery and intimidation of political opponents. The constitutional manipulation which began in the seventies has not ended yet.

The 1978 constitution had two elements which attempted to meet some of the grievances of the minorities. The first was the special status given to Tamil as a national language. Secondly, in the section on fundamental rights, the distinction between citizens and the stateless was removed, accepting the fact that even the stateless had fundamental rights. This was a concession to the Indian Tamil community. It was expected that by strengthening the fundamental rights section, the rights of minorities would be safeguarded.

¹³ de Silva, K.M., 'Decentralisation and Regionalism in the Management of Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict', *International Journal of Group Tensions*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1989

¹⁴ United National Party manifesto, in *8th Parliament of Sri Lanka*, Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd.

With the escalation of the ethnic conflict, the UNP regime came round to establishing a system of district administration which decentralised the implementation of development activities. These District Development Councils (DDCs) were established in 1981. As proposed in the manifesto, they consisted of MPs in the district and elected members of the DDCs headed by a District Minister. The Government Agent¹⁵ of the district acted as the chief representative of the bureaucracy. Through the DDCs, there was an attempt to co-ordinate development activities in the district, decentralise decision-making, and obtain the participation in development of members elected at district level. The DDCs were the first regional units with decentralised powers and representatives elected at regional level established since independence. What is more, the government managed to get the participation of the TULF both in the commission that made the recommendations on the establishment of DDCs, and subsequently in the DDC elections. The TULF did so despite enormous pressure from the militant groups.

The DDCs faced difficulties right from the start. There were many irregularities in the electoral process itself. The elections to the DDC in the Jaffna district were marred by violence. It was during this violence that the Jaffna Public Library was burnt down, allegedly with the connivance of government politicians and security forces. The effect of this on the Tamil psyche was significant. Even after their establishment, these bodies faced enormous difficulties in becoming effective at the district level.

Though the government involved the parliamentary representatives of Tamils in setting up DDCs, it reacted towards the armed militants principally through military means. In 1979, the government enacted the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), and sent armed forces to the northern part of the country. President Jayewardene issued a public proclamation, more in the style of a feudal monarch, in which he gave orders to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army to crush the Tamil militancy in six months and report to him. This extremely optimistic expectation has not materialised even after decade and a half. The armed struggle in the North continued. Armed forces did not succeed in defeating the militant movement. What happened instead were frequent reprisals against and harassment of civilians, arrests, detention, torture, etc., which alienated the Tamil population more and more from the Colombo government.

The armed struggle of the Tamil militancy reached a qualitatively new stage after the anti-Tamil pogrom¹⁶ of July 1983. Most of the southern part of the country was affected by this pogrom. This

¹⁵ The Government Agent is the chief administrative officer at district level

¹⁶ The term 'pogrom' which has been traditionally used to identify anti-Jewish violence, specially in Eastern Europe, has been used here for several reasons. The usual term that has been used for this type of event in South Asia has been either 'communal riots' or 'ethnic riots'. Both these terms are inadequate due to several reasons. Ethnic riots gives the picture of unorganised conflagration between two identity groups. The image usually depicted by this term, which has a long history, is that of an eruption of barbaric and irrational passions in so called 'traditional' societies driven by deep-seated hatreds towards each other generated by ethnic identities. This is usually the way that 'primordialist' interpretations of ethnic identity understand ethnic identities.

A close look at these riots questions this image on several grounds and therefore, also, the term 'ethnic

event had a devastating effect on the entire question of relations between Tamils and Sinhalese. Many Tamils were killed and thousands made homeless. Thousands were shipped to the North by the government, clearly indicating that the area that the Tamil political leadership calls its 'traditional homeland' was the safest place for them. The event also resulted in the migration of more than one hundred thousand refugees from Sri Lanka to Tamil Nadu in India. This migration not only gave new recruits to the Tamil militant movements, but also paved the way for the direct involvement of India in the Sri Lankan conflict.¹⁷ After the July 1983 pogrom, Sri Lanka's conflict deteriorated into a civil war within a very short period of time.

The July 1983 pogrom also demonstrated the strength of Sinhala extremism both inside and outside parliament. The political response of the government to the anti-Tamil pogrom was not to condemn and prosecute those responsible for it. Instead the country saw the spectacle of senior ministers of the government appearing on national television legitimising the anti-Tamil pogrom as a justifiable Sinhala response to Tamil militancy.¹⁸ In addition, the government passed an amendment to the constitution which advocated that a separate state would be illegal. After the passage of this Act the TULF, representing now the moderate Tamil opinion, had to leave parliament and the Tamil minority was left with no political representation in the legislature.

With these developments the armed conflict in the North increased in intensity. It also spread to the East. The conflict continued to take a heavy toll on civilians. Human rights violations against civilians continued. Several non-government agencies, both national and international have recorded these violations. The situation also resulted in several resolutions against the Sri Lankan government in the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, and in Sri Lanka's record on human rights being scrutinised by the Commission.¹⁹

riots'. First, these so-called riots are not really unorganised. There are many organised elements in them. Sometimes important political issues are sorted out through these riots. Secondly, the identities on the basis of which riots are played out are constructed in a historical process and therefore do not have the characteristic of a deep-seated primordial identity whose origins go way back into history. Finally, violence in these events cannot be explained totally on the basis of these identities. It is because of these considerations that many scholars have begun to use the term 'pogrom' at least to depict the organised character of the July 1983 event.

See Das, Veena (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence, Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990, for a general discussion of these issues in the case of South Asia, and Bastian, Sunil, 'Political Economy of Ethnic Violence in Sri Lanka: The July 1983 Riots', in the same collection, for a discussion on July 1983, which tries to look at some of the organised elements of this event.

¹⁷ See Manor, J., (ed.), *op. cit.*, for a series of articles analysing the anti-Tamil pogrom of July 1983. Also see Kanapathipillai, V., 'July 1983: the Survivors' Experience', *In* Das V., (ed) *op. cit.*; and Bastian S., 'Political Economy of Ethnic Violence in Sri Lanka, The July 1983 Riots', *In* Das V., (ed), *op. cit.* for two other discussions of this horrific event.

¹⁸ See Nissan, E., 'Some thoughts on Sinhalese Justifications for the Violence', *In* Manor, J., (ed.), *op. cit.*, for a discussion on the speeches made by cabinet ministers after the July 1983 pogrom

¹⁹ There are many reports that have recorded the human rights violations which accompanied the aggravation of ethnic conflicts. Numerous reports of Amnesty International on the non-governmental side and the annual US State Department Report on Human Rights on the governmental side can be cited as sources. In addition, see Leary, V., *Ethnic Conflict and Violence in Sri Lanka*, Report of a

Post-July 1983 and the Establishment of Provincial Councils

The escalation of violence also increased the pressure to find a political answer. During the post July 1983 period the war was interrupted by negotiations for a political solution. These negotiations brought back the concept of regional autonomy, rejected by the Sri Lankan majority as a solution to the ethnic problem, into the political arena. Of course, this time it emerged with the ethnic contradiction at a much higher stage of development, and with the participation of India in the process.

The first mention (after July 1983) of a scheme for devolution of power through a regional autonomy framework as a solution to the ethnic conflict came about in a document popularly called “Annexure ‘C’”. This was a document that resulted from discussions between the President of Sri Lanka and an emissary of the Prime Minister of India, who came to Sri Lanka immediately after the July 1983 event. Annexure ‘C’ was presented to the All Party Conference (APC) that was summoned to look for solutions to the ethnic conflict. This was the conference that the UNP had promised in its manifesto of July 1977. It was called only after the violence of July 1983.

Representatives from almost all political parties as well as various religious organisations took part in the APC. Despite the fast deteriorating situation in the country, they failed to offer anything beyond the discredited DDCs as an answer to the ethnic conflict. The concept of a regional autonomy, which was reflected in Annexure ‘C’, could not get the approval of the APC. However, after the July 1983 pogrom it was extremely difficult to expect that a decentralisation package could be a solution to Sri Lanka’s ethnic problem. Meanwhile, the conflict intensified significantly, with India’s direct involvement expanding in many ways. The conflict also generated much international publicity, and pressure to find a political answer to the conflict became greater.

Two unsuccessful rounds of discussions were held in Thimpu, the capital of Bhutan, in 1985. All Tamil political groups, including the militants, took part in these negotiations where India played the role of mediator. In 1986 another round of discussions began in Colombo with the direct participation of India. By the end of 1986 this process had resulted in a set of ideas which included the setting up of a system of Provincial Councils to devolve power to an amalgamated North-East. The discussions, with India’s mediation, culminated in 1987 in an Accord signed between India and Sri Lanka. This Accord had a section which formulated principles for resolving the ethnic conflict, where the Sri Lankan government agreed that ‘Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual plural society consisting, inter alia, of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims (Moors) and Burghers,²⁰ and that ‘the

Mission to Sri Lanka in July-August 1981 on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists; Sieghart, P., *Sri Lanka, A Mounting Tragedy of Errors*, Report of a Mission to Sri Lanka in January 1984 on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists; Rubin, B.R., *Cycles of violence: Human Rights in Sri Lanka since the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement*, Asia Watch, 1987; Nissan E., Sri Lanka: Minority Rights Group International Report, 1996.

²⁰ Burgher describes an ethnic group who are the descendants of inter-mixing between the Portuguese or Dutch and the local population.

Northern and the Eastern Provinces have been areas of historical habitation of Sri Lanka Tamil peoples, who have at all times hitherto lived together in this territory with other ethnic groups'.²¹ The government also agreed to merge the Northern and Eastern Provinces into a single unit on a temporary basis, and to establish a system of Provincial Councils with devolved powers.

All these principles marked a significant departure from the hitherto held positions regarding the minority problem. The Indo-Lanka Accord was the first official document signed by a head of state in Sri Lanka that accepted the multi-ethnic character of Sri Lankan society, and the need for devolution of power on a provincial basis in order to meet the grievances of the Tamil people. It also agreed to merge the Northern and Eastern Provinces to a single unit, although on a temporary basis.

As expected, these principles were opposed by the Sinhala extremism of the South. The principal opposition party, the SLFP, opposed the Accord and the Provincial Council system. It campaigned against them both inside and outside parliament. The SLFP also boycotted the elections of the Provincial Councils which followed. However, the major violent opposition was led by the extreme nationalist, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). The JVP, which began with a radical Marxist platform with a Maoist orientation, transformed itself into an extreme nationalist political force opposing the Accord and concessions to Tamils in the form of a regional autonomy. Its campaign not only led to violent street demonstrations, but also to a strategy of individual assassination and terror against those who supported the Accord and the concept of regional autonomy.

The methods that were adopted by the state to put down the insurgency were equally barbaric. Since the beginning of the seventies, Sri Lanka has lived more years under emergency than under normal law. The extensive use of emergency regulations, coupled with measures undertaken to quell the Southern insurgency of 1989/1990, made Sri Lanka an internationally renowned case of human rights violations and disappearances.

The Accord brought in a very short period of relative peace to the North-East. It managed to get the agreement of almost all the major militant groups to give up the armed struggle and enter into the democratic mainstream. An Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) was sent to the island, as a part of India's role to oversee disarming of the militants. However the peace agreement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was short-lived. LTTE by this time had become the strongest militant group. Compared to the other groups, the LTTE had been consistently nationalist in its ideology and therefore less amenable to give up its separatist demand. A series of events led to a breakdown of the truce between the LTTE and the implementors of the Accord. In October 1987 a full-scale war broke out between the LTTE and the IPKF, centred on highly-populated Jaffna.

Despite these developments the government proceeded to establish Provincial Councils. The necessary legislation to establish eight Provincial Councils covering the entire island was passed in November 1987. These were the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution, and the Provincial Councils Bill. The election to the amalgamated North-East Provincial Council was held in November 1988. It was held with the presence of the IPKF in the area, in conditions not conducive

²¹ Text of the Indo-Lanka Accord, Articles 1.2 and 1.4

to a free and fair election. The election was won by the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), who assumed power in the North-East Provincial Council.

The LTTE and other Tamil political parties rejected the Provincial Council System due to several reasons, despite the fact that some of them decided to give up the armed struggle. Although some Tamil political representatives participated in the early stages of the negotiations of the details of the Provincial Council system, they were not fully involved when these were finalised. The outcome was primarily a product of negotiations between representatives of the Indian and Sri Lankan governments. Once the details of the Provincial Council system were known, there was opposition to what was offered in the package from most Tamil representatives. The EPRLF was the major exception.

From all accounts, the attempt by the EPRLF to establish a provincial administration under the 13th Amendment was a frustrating experience. The political will of the Colombo government to devolve power depended to a large extent on President Jayewardene, the architect of the Indo-Lanka Accord. Once he was succeeded by Mr. Premadasa, this evaporated. In the absence of a political will in Colombo to devolve power, the severe limitations of the provisions of the Provincial Council system became apparent.

Premadasa's opposition to the Accord, to the presence of the IPKF in the country, and to the Provincial Council system, was well known. He boycotted the ceremonies associated with signing the Indo-Lanka Accord. His election campaign in December 1988 for the Presidency had a strong anti-Indian element. This was also his way of politically outsmarting the JVP, whose violent campaign had reached a peak by this time. The JVP also campaigned for a boycott of elections as a way of de-legitimising and undermining the entire political system. Although, as the leader of the government group, Premadasa proposed the Provincial Council Bill in parliament, his distrust of the Provincial Council system was apparent after he assumed power as President. During his term of office, parliament passed an Amendment that gave powers to the President to dissolve Provincial Councils. This was a significant move that undermined the autonomy and the stability of the Provincial Council system.²²

Premadasa came to power as President in one of the most violent elections Sri Lanka has ever seen. In June 1989 he proceeded with his demand for the withdrawal of the Indian troops from Sri Lanka. In a surprising political move, he began direct negotiations with the LTTE, which at this time was in direct confrontation with the IPKF. The political interest of Premadasa and the LTTE was mainly to get Indian troops out of Sri Lanka, rather than finding a political answer to the ethnic conflict. Almost one year of negotiations between the LTTE and the Premadasa regime did not result in any solutions. What it did achieve was the destabilisation of the North-East Provincial Council. The withdrawal of the IPKF began in December 1989 and was completed by March 1990. The North-East Provincial Council collapsed in June 1990. After these events, the Premadasa-LTTE talks did not last more than a month. Having achieved its political objectives of the withdrawal of the IPKF

²² See Shastri, A., 'The Provincial Council System: A Solution to the Ethnic Problem?', in Bastian, S., (ed.) *op. cit.*, for an account of the politics of President Premadasa at this time.

with whom they were fighting, and the collapse of the EPRLF-led Provincial Council which had become a political challenge, the LTTE withdrew from the ceasefire and talks. Large-scale fighting broke out between government troops and the LTTE in mid-1990, and has continued since then.

Towards Federalism?

The Provincial Councils established through the 13th Amendment currently exist as a system of devolution of powers to regional units. The boundaries of these units coincide with existing provincial boundaries. There are eight such Provincial Councils at present. The Northern and Eastern Provinces were merged into a single North-Eastern Province with a single Council. However no Provincial Council has been functioning in the North-Eastern Province since June 1990.

In the other provinces there are elected Provincial Councils with Chief Ministers at the head, and Governors appointed by the centre. There are three lists which stipulate powers reserved for the centre, powers that are shared by the centre and province, and powers that are conferred only to the province. These are the Reserve List, Concurrent List and Provincial List respectively. In addition, two special appendices on Law and Order, and Land and Land Settlement, set out the powers devolved in these two areas.

As discussed above, historically the establishment of the Provincial Councils was a significant step. It was the first taken by post-independence Sri Lanka that accepted a political framework granting a degree of self-governance to regional units, thereby reducing the powers of a highly centralised state. The regional unit of the North-East coincides with a Tamil linguistic area and denotes the acceptance of Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic society, and the Tamil language as a factor determining the identity of the North-East Province. Lastly, the Northern and Eastern Provinces have been merged into a single unit. This is temporary in a strict legal sense, but has the possibility of being a permanent feature politically. Given the long history of opposition to any form of regional autonomy backed by Sinhala extremism, the very fact that regional bodies were established on a provincial basis was in itself significant.

Even though the 13th Amendment and the Provincial Council system have established the principle of regional autonomy in the state structure of Sri Lanka, the Provincial Council system lacks legitimacy within the Sri Lankan Tamil community. A closer look at the Provincial Council package shows that it does not offer a degree of self-governance that satisfies the demands of the Tamil minority. Central government has further eroded the powers of the provinces through the enactment of certain amendments since the 13th Amendment was passed. This position is shared by major parties representing Muslims as well as Indian Tamils. In other words, there is almost a minority consensus that the presently existing system is not an answer to the ethnic conflict. Because of the flaws in the political process and the limitations on the degree of autonomy, the Provincial Council system as it exists now does not address the concrete historical reasons for the ethnic conflict.²³

²³ See Shastri, A., *op. cit.*, for a survey of the provisions of the 13th Amendment and their inadequacy to meet the grievances of the Sri Lankan Tamil minority

At the same time, Sri Lanka cannot go back on what she has achieved through the Provincial Council system. There is no question of discussions about any other smaller unit, such as the district, as the unit of devolution. Nor is there room for anything that gives fewer powers to the provinces. In the future, Sri Lanka will have to evolve a state structure that confers a greater degree of self-governance to the provinces.

The most recent attempts at resolving the ethnic conflict are the August 1995 proposals of the Peoples Alliance²⁴ (PA) government, that was elected to office in August 1994. The basic rationale and concepts of these proposals were spelt out in a speech by President Kumaratunga to the nation and published in the newspapers. On the same day the press carried the outline of the proposals.

There is no doubt that the ideas embodied in these proposals go far beyond anything that any government had tried to do in order to meet the grievances of the Tamil minority. In her speech to the nation, the President openly admitted that, 'during the 50 years since the end of the colonial era, the aspirations of the Tamil people were not adequately fulfilled within the parameters of the political process'²⁵ and as a prerequisite for finding a solution there is a need for 'a new approach predicated on the unqualified acceptance of the fact that the Tamil people have genuine grievances for which solutions must be found.'²⁶ Such a candid acceptance of the grievances of the Tamil people has been rare for a head of state of Sri Lanka.

In the outline of the proposals there are concepts which transcend the limitations of the 13th Amendment. The objective is to set up Regional Councils within a constitutional framework in which Sri Lanka will be a Union of Regions. In this Union of Regions legislative power and executive power will be exercised both by the centre and the regions.²⁷ The proposals reflect a willingness to do away with the notion of a unitary state. The idea of a unitary state, introduced in the 1972 constitution, has been a stumbling block towards greater devolution. The PA government has also proposed to delete articles in the present constitution which prevent parliament from alienating its powers to any other institution. These elements in the new proposals are certainly a move towards a federal form of government, although the words have not been used in the text.

The other welcome features in the proposals were: a search for ways of re-demarcating the East in order to begin a fresh discussion about the unit of devolution; limiting the powers of the Governor to intervene in regional affairs; doing away with the concurrent list; giving more powers to the regions in financial and investment matters; and the idea of a permanent commission on devolution that would deal with centre-regional disputes. At present, the proposals are being discussed by a parliamentary select committee on constitutional reforms.

The proposals of the PA government met with severe opposition from the Sinhala extremist

²⁴ The Peoples Alliance is a centre-left coalition of parties. The largest single member is the SLFP

²⁵ *Ceylon Daily News*, 4th August 1995

²⁶ *Ceylon Daily News*, 4th August 1995

²⁷ *Ceylon Daily News*, Text of the Government's Devolution Proposals, 4th August 1995

elements. This was to be expected. However, what is more crucial, is the position of the major opposition party - the UNP. Given the balance of power in the parliament, the support of the UNP is essential to bring about constitutional reforms in line with the PA proposals.

Unlike the behaviour of the opposition parties in the past, the UNP has not taken to the streets to oppose the new proposals. This was a welcome development. Nevertheless, it has been vacillating regarding changes in the unitary character of the state. Its opinion about some of the other controversial points is also not clear. In the face of the opposition from the Sinhala extremists the government also seems to be bent on diluting the original proposals. Some statements in the press indicate that the government could go back on reforming the unitary character of the state. It is difficult to see how the government could secure the support of the Tamil parties if the proposals are diluted in this manner.

What is even more distressing for any prospects of peace and political settlement is the renewed escalation of the war with the LTTE. The PA government opened negotiations with the LTTE immediately after it came into power, but the negotiations were short lived and did not achieve much. The factors which led to their breakdown are still to be analysed. In April 1995 the LTTE unilaterally broke the ceasefire that was established. From this point onwards it has been an all-out war in the northern and eastern part of the country with all its social consequences. The government launched a military operation code named 'Operation Riviresa', with the objective of wresting control of Jaffna from LTTE. The operation lasted for about seven weeks and the army moved about a dozen miles and secured Jaffna town. However the operation has added thousands more to the category of so-called 'internally displaced'. Except for a few families, the bulk of the population left the area either because of pressure from the LTTE, or simply to escape getting caught in crossfire. Hundreds of thousands became refugees. Since then many have trickled back into the peninsula. But the fact is thousands of civilians continue to become victims of a cruel war game in which civilians have become components of politico-military strategies. This impact of the war makes the legitimacy of the proposals among the Tamil population a very debatable issue. The LTTE has withdrawn into the jungles to wage a classic guerilla war. Thus at present the government that has put forward the most radical proposal for devolution of power from the central state is involved in the most intense military confrontation with the strongest militant group.

If the proposals of the PA government are given a chance of being implemented, they will not only go a long way to redress the grievances of minorities, but they will also contribute towards the democratisation of Sri Lanka's state structure as a whole. It is important to remember that the demand to reduce the powers of a highly centralised state is a democratic demand. The centralisation of power in Sri Lanka has gone against not only ethnic minorities, but also political minorities. The ideology of supremacy of the elected parliament, which was the hallmark of the 1972 constitution, has led Sri Lanka to concepts of majoritarian notions of democracy which not only denied the rights of ethnic minorities, but have also violated the rights of political minorities. The question of minority rights in Sri Lanka is part of the broader question of development of democracy and democratic institutions. A degree of genuine devolution should change the highly centralised

structures of the state significantly and should create space for democratic development.²⁸

The Politics of the LTTE

Over the years the politics of Sri Lankan Tamils, specially in the arena of armed struggle, has come to be dominated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Considering themselves as the sole representatives of the Tamil minority, the LTTE has allowed no space for any form of democratic politics within the Tamil social formation wherever possible. Many Tamil political leaders have become victims of the LTTE's assassination strategies. In fact the LTTE has killed more Tamil political leaders than Sinhala leaders. Their armed strategies have a combination of behaving like a conventional army holding territory, guerilla strategies and terror tactics that have inflicted heavy casualties on civilians. Depending very much on their armed strength, they have continued to wage an armed struggle for a separate state.

Its military action against any form of alternative Tamil political leadership, the authoritarian character of its organisations, the extreme nationalism in its ideology and its readiness to resort to terrorist acts in achieving its political objectives, do not give any hope for any early settlement. Thus the most likely scenario at present is a long drawn-out war with all its negative consequences.

The dominance of the LTTE within the Tamil community has also resulted in weakness in the civil society activism that works with values of pluralism and democracy. It is not that there are no such groups, but compared to the 'South' these are fewer in number and they find it difficult to make an impact on the Tamil society. Political parties represented in parliament are the other representatives of Sri Lankan Tamils. These, while having a certain degree of electoral base in the East, have very little legitimacy in the North.

The phenomenon of the LTTE also shows the limitations of political movements fired by extreme nationalism. These nationalist movements can generate fanatical loyalties simply based on ethnic identity. Although they could represent oppressed minorities there is very little space for values of pluralism and democracy within the movement itself. In fact there is quite a lot of similarity between the ideologies of extreme Tamil nationalism represented by the LTTE and extreme Sinhala nationalism.

For example, if one looks at the debates between these groups around concepts like 'traditional homelands', the structure of the argument and logic is very similar. While one side tries to prove with so-called 'facts' that they are the first settlers on a piece of land, the others try to prove the contrary, using 'facts' to their liking. In this search for the 'true sons of the soil' it is assumed that the further one can go back in history in their 'facts', the greater the claim one can make on a piece of land. Although these sides are politically opposed, the structure of the argument they use is similar. Both

²⁸ See, Tambiah, S.J., *Sri Lanka, Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, University of Chicago Press, 1986 for an illuminating discussion on the link between aggravation of the ethnic conflict and destruction of democratic structures in Sri Lanka.

sides in this debate believe in two things: (a) that there is something called a Sinhala and Tamil identity that has an unbroken history going way back in time, and (b) if one of the groups occupied a piece of land before the other it has some special rights. Both these assumptions - we have a longer unbroken history (the basis of primordialist interpretations of ethnicity) and therefore have a better claim over land (true sons of the soil) - are classic tenets of chauvinism the world over.

Section 3

Conflict and Civil Society Organisations

In mapping out the history of the conflict in Sri Lanka in the previous two sections, we have focused on failure in the process of state formation. Our concentration has been on political institutions for sharing state power, public policies and the identity of the state. However, the roots of the problems in Sri Lanka are not confined to the state and the ruling class who have ruled the country. Some of the reasons for the conflict are found in society as well. Prejudices, dominant nationalist ideologies, and various groups in society who supported them, have been as much a reason for the present situation faced by Sri Lanka as the centralised state structure and its policies.

From this complexity in society, sections three and four of this paper focus on various forms of organised voluntary activism and their role in the conflict. We shall use the term 'civil society' to denote this activism. In our understanding of the term civil society there are two elements, one sociological and the other political. Sociologically, what we understand by civil society is "an intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organisations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests or values"²⁹. Hence it is a realm of voluntary association that lies between the state and the other basic building blocks of society such as family and kinship groups.

Politically we would accept it as an arena for social action in addition to reforms of the state. The idea of looking at civil society as a focus for social transformation has been elaborated by Antonio Gramsci who has been one of the few Marxists to point out the limitations of state centrism of the left. Making use of the concept of 'hegemony', he pointed out a variety of mechanisms that permeate "throughout the civil society - including a whole range of structures and activities like trade unions, schools, the churches, and the family - of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs, morality, etc., that are in one way or other supportive of the established order and the class interests that dominate."³⁰ This means that there is much that can be done in order to bring about progressive social transformation by struggling for the independence of civil society and by interventions in civil society. It is possible to undermine the hegemonic structures of the established

²⁹ White, Gordon, 'Civil Society, Democratization and Development (I): Clearing the Analytical Ground', *Democratization*, Vol.1, No.3, Autumn 1994. White's definition of civil society does not include firms.

³⁰ Boggs, Carl, *Gramsci's Marxism*, Pluto Press 1976

order by focusing on civil society. The recent advances achieved by the feminist movement give us a very good example of this strategy.

While accepting 'civil society' as an arena for social action, it is necessary to look at it as a social space where contradictory social forces are at play. Civil society consists of a diversity of forces and organisations and there is nothing positive in civil society *per se*. Rather than theoretically imposing progressive values onto 'civil society' as liberals tend to do, it is necessary to unravel and identify the variety of social forces operating in it empirically in order to understand what hope can be placed on it.

It is important to point this out in a period when 'civil society' has become part of the "magic trio of development panaceas which emerged in the 1980s and now dominate the conventional prescriptions for the ills of the nineties"³¹, (the other two being market and democracy). Armed with the liberal notion that promotion or strengthening of the 'civil society' *per se* is an answer to many problems in developing countries, civil society has "now been recognised as a legitimate area of external intervention by aid donors as part of the ever-deepening process of international social engineering". These strategies, unless we understand the specificity of civil society and therefore the forces that are being promoted, can create more problems than answers for developing countries.³²

In the aggravation of the conflict in Sri Lanka sections of civil society have been a part of the problem. The beginnings of the social and political forces that have become barriers to the resolution of ethnic relations in Sri Lanka, even today, can be traced back to the Sinhala-Buddhist revival of the nineteenth century, which was one part of the movement for independence from British rule. This element of the independence movement always had an anti-minority stance. At different times in the history of this revivalism, different groups of minorities were the target. During the pre-independence period the attacks were directed primarily at Christians, Muslims and Malayalis. In the immediate aftermath of independence it was the turn of Indian Tamils. In the mid fifties, the rights of the major minority group, Sri Lankan Tamils, were under attack.³³

Many civil society organisations were active members of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist wing of the independence movement. These voluntary activities within society emerged in various spheres. For example, the temperance movement, whose politics at one time turned into an anti-Christian agitation, was made up of organisations from civil society. This movement operated through a network of village level organisations that drew in the rural middle class as well as rural masses.³⁴

³¹ White, Gordon, *op. cit.*

³² In recent times strengthening of civil society has become a major preoccupation of donors. Often this discussion equates strengthening of civil society with the promotion of so called 'NGOs'. NGOs form only a section of civil society and in certain societies they might be an insignificant section as far as social transformation is concerned. In the same way as many other constituent elements of the civil society, NGOs represent diverse ideologies.

³³ See Jayawardena, Kumari, *Ethnic and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka*, Centre for Social Analysis, 1985, for an account of this history.

³⁴ See de Silva, K.M., *A History of Sri Lanka*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1981, P374 for an account of the activities of the temperance movement.

Buddhist organisations, such as the Theosophical Society, formed to promote Buddhist education, newspapers such as Sinhala Jathiya and Lakmina which carried out agitation against Muslim traders, and the earliest labour organisations like the Ceylon Labour Union which turned into an organ for anti-Malayali agitation, were all activities that arose from civil society during the pre-independence period.³⁵

In the mid-fifties, when Sinhala Buddhist nationalism had a new upsurge, several civil society organisations played a leading role. “The two issues, language and religion, were combined in the Sinhala mass consciousness not only by various mythic and symbolic factors, but also because Sinhala was the linguistic medium by which Buddhism was ‘reproduced’ among the Sinhalese”. The Buddhist resurgence during this period was inspired by the preparations for Buddha Jayanthi - the 2500th anniversary of Buddha’s death. The feeling of dissatisfaction that Buddhism was still not given its due place in independent Sri Lanka was frequently articulated and this discontent was expressed in the famous report of the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress in 1956, entitled ‘The Betrayal of Buddhism’. In this document, an open denunciation was made of political leaders who were “completely dominated by an alien outlook and values and estranged from their national history and culture”. The social forces of the civil society behind this agitation played a major role in the victory of the SLFP in 1956 and subsequent enactment of the Sinhala Only Act. They were also part and parcel of the political forces that led to the breakdown of negotiations between Prime Ministers and representatives of the Tamil minority in 1959 and 1965, which attempted to find an answer to the problem of aggravating ethnic relations.

Today we can observe the continuity of these political forces within civil society among those organisations who have been opposing any form of devolution or reforms of a centralised state, either directly or indirectly. Those organisations within the Sinhala ethnic formation who are explicit about this political position believe that the ethnic conflict is an unjust attempt to divide Sri Lanka and argue that it should be handled primarily as a law and order problem. In fact, with both major political parties accepting the notion of devolution as an answer to the conflict, it is likely that much of the opposition to constitutional reforms will coalesce around a few smaller political parties and these organisations in civil society. There are others whose positions are not so explicit, but they tend to support the strengthening of a highly centralised state for various reasons and, through that, support forces that are against reforms of the state that are necessary to meet minority grievances.³⁶

However, being an arena for contradictory social forces, there are organisations within civil society who have responded to this crisis in a positive way. They have rejected the notion that the conflict situation in Sri Lanka is a mere ‘law and order’ issue or a ‘terrorist problem’ that can be resolved purely through military means. By and large they see the need to find a political solution to the conflict. They have accepted that Sri Lanka has a serious problem to resolve through reforms of both state and society. They have also been sympathetic to the plight of the minorities and have worked in different ways to highlight their problems and to ameliorate their conditions.

³⁵ Jayawardena, Kumari, *op. cit.*

³⁶ For example, some organisations have been supporting a highly centralised state in order to protect the environment. This became a major argument for maintaining central control over land.

This progressive civil society activism will be discussed under two headings focusing on the two sets of issues that they tackle. The first includes activities that have looked at Sri Lanka's conflict through notions of pluralism, democracy and a discourse of rights. The discourse of rights includes both individual rights as well as group rights. We shall include in this group those who have approached the problem through concepts of conflict resolution as well. In the second group we have those whose preoccupation has been mainly with the social costs of the conflict.

A. Pluralism, Democratisation, Rights and Resolution of the Conflict

The organisations covered in this section have been concerned with some of the central issues like reform of a centralised state, its identity and public policies, which have been analysed in the previous sections of the paper. We have identified these as the principal reasons behind the conflict. Therefore our interest is how these groups dealt with these issues, the strategies they adopted and their contradictions. We shall do this through an historical account of their evolution, making use of this history to understand how they have responded to the key issues around the conflict.

The beginnings of this type of civil society activism can be traced back to the early seventies. As we have mentioned in our brief historical survey, the 1971 insurgency, its fall-out in terms of emergency laws and violation of human rights, the promulgation of the 1972 constitution, beginning of the Tamil militancy in the North, the introduction of standardisation policies for entry into universities and the Vadukkodai resolution for a separate state, all happened in the first half of the seventies. Behind all these historical events was a larger process of alienation of some sections of the population from the mainstream political system. Most of this population was from a relatively younger age group, which came from a more rural background and was educated either in Sinhala or Tamil speaking schools, in contrast to the urbanised English educated elite. Events of the early seventies showed that Sinhala speaking sections of this alienated youth voiced their dissatisfaction primarily in terms of the distribution of resources and other benefits in Sri Lankan society, while the Tamil speaking sections added on the demand for self determination of Tamil nationality to these demands.

The contradictions of Sri Lankan society in the early seventies coincided with a number of developments which began to change the political landscape. These were:

- The establishment of several new left wing political parties and groups by breaking away from the established parties of the left. The principal trends were the emergence of several Trotskyite parties and several smaller political groups ideologically linked to Maoism. These developments began in the mid sixties and the insurgency led by the JVP was the event that demonstrated their arrival in the political scene.³⁷
- Some of the political activists who took part in the 1971 insurgency moved into a new type of organisation in civil society dealing with various issues. These individuals provided a leadership in some of these organisations.

³⁷ See Keerawella, J.B., 'The JVP and the 1971 Uprising', *Social Science Review*, No.2 1980, for an account of the evolution of some of these political groups

- The establishment of organisations to defend human and democratic rights. These were mainly the initiative of individuals with liberal or left oriented thinking. The violation of human and democratic rights associated with the government's reaction to the insurgency was the main reason behind this development.
- The articulation of radical tendencies within the Christian Churches. These were influenced by the events in the country as well by international developments like Latin American Liberation Theology, Vatican II, writings of Paulo Frierier, etc.
- The establishment of new initiatives in research and advocacy outside the state institutions and universities. The people who began this trend had had close links with mainstream institutions, or sometimes were leading members of them. The limitations faced by them in these institutions, especially due to the influence of party-based partisan politics, can be seen as a principal reason for them leaving these organisations. The primary focus of most of this research has been on social science issues.

The historical roots of most of the organisations that this section is concerned with can be traced to these tendencies of the early seventies. Today most of these organisations (except for clearly identified political parties) have acquired the title of 'NGO' in the lexicon of foreign aid discussions. We shall discuss the history of the activism of these organisations in the context of some of the major political events that we have discussed in the previous sections of the paper. The periodisation and the major events which mark the periodisation that we shall follow is as follows:

- Early 1970s to July 1983 pogrom
- July 1983 to July 1987 when the Indo-Lanka Accord was signed
- July 1987 to end of 1989 marked by crushing of the second JVP insurgency
- End of 1989 to mid 1994 that marks the end of the UNP rule of seventeen years
- Mid 1994 to present.

Being products of the history of Sri Lankan society, these political events have profoundly affected these organisations. Our objective, in the historical account that follows, is to understand how this civil society activism dealt with or did not deal with the principal issues surrounding the conflict of Sri Lanka.

While the 1971 insurgency and the political fall-out from it became the principal factor underlining the emergence of this type of civil society activism, in the northern part of the country the key issue was the growing crisis on ethnic relations after the promulgation of 1972 constitution. In the early seventies the new political trends and civil society groups in the 'south' paid very little attention to the question of ethnic relations and the fundamental problems of the structure of the state in Sri Lanka. This was despite the fact that all the major Tamil political groups put forward the demand for a separate state in 1974. The major concerns of these 'southern' civil society groups were motivated by the insurgency in the 'South'. The left leaning sections of these groups explained the insurgency through the capitalist nature of Sri Lankan society, issues of resource distribution,

unemployment problems of the youth, etc. Most of them expected the problem of ethnic relations to be resolved through a transformation of the total society.

When it came to the question of democracy, most of these groups adhered to populist and majoritarian notions of democracy. For example, the ideology of most of these groups, by and large, was in favour of the move to concentrate power in the popularly elected parliament by the 1972 constitution. This also meant that there was very little recognition of the contradictions between some of the elements of the ideology espoused by these groups and minority rights. The majoritarian notions of democracy have been a major reason for the undermining of minority rights. The groups that emerged within church circles also fell broadly within this ideological spectrum.

It is also necessary to remember that the regime in power between 1970 and 1977 in Sri Lanka was not only a coalition government, where two of what were called 'old left' parties were constituent members, but also carried out distributive policies through state intervention. This meant that some of the groups and individuals saw the government in power having positive trends in terms of their own ideology, (e.g., Educational Reforms of 1972, Land Reforms of 1972 and 1975: the Land Reforms of 1975 nationalised the plantation sector, which was a longstanding demand of the left) and were not ready to be a critic of the government in all issues. All this resulted in a kind of a 'love-hate' relationship with the government in power. Their attitude towards the JVP, which led the insurgency, was also ambiguous. While they agreed with the main elements of the criticism that the JVP provided of the prevailing social system, at a political level there were many rivalries.

The preoccupation of liberal minded groups was very much with institutions of democracy and individual rights. The expectation was that minority rights could be defended if proper liberal democratic institutions functioned and individual rights were taken care of, irrespective of ethnic origins. In other words, the answer was the classic liberal recipe, and there was very little debate about the nature of the state.

If there was any hint at all about the impending crisis based on ethnic politics from the progressive sections of civil society, it came from a few individuals in the academic community. These were researchers who had all along focused their work on issues like caste and ethnicity. The most distinguishing feature of the individual academics in this group was their steadfast refusal to see society purely in class terms, as the more left leaning academics were used to. Their research looked at issues like caste and ethnicity. They voiced concerns, based on their work, about the ethnic polarisation that was taking place in Sri Lankan society.

The next important event in understanding the evolution of this civil society activism was the July 1977 election and the coming into power of the UNP. The economic policies and constitutional reforms that the UNP initiated brought a sea change in the environment within which these groups had to work. Especially for those with left leaning ideologies, the coming of the UNP into power was seen as a disaster for the country and even a threat to their existence. Traditionally, the UNP was seen as the true representative of right wing politics by these groups. Within the UNP, J. R. Jayawardene, who led the UNP to victory in 1977, was seen not only as the representative of big capital, but also as an agent of 'Western Imperialism' (his nickname within left circles was Yanki

Dicky).

There were several events between 1977 and 1982 that convinced these groups even more about this negative scenario facing them. These events also brought into focus the importance of ethnic relations and the politics of identity. The coming into power of the UNP was followed with an 'ethnic riot' in August 1977. It was confined largely to Colombo and Jaffna. In 1978 the UNP promulgated the presidential system which brought into being a powerful presidency. In 1979 the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which curtailed human rights to a significant degree, was passed and the army was sent into the North in large numbers. In 1980 the UNP crushed a general strike with all the power they had. This weakened the opposition trade union movement significantly. This was followed by moves to deprive the leader of the opposition of civic rights and the postponement of general elections through a fraudulent referendum in 1982.

From these events it was the August 1977 riot and the TULF election victory in the North and East which prompted some of these groups to look at the issue of ethnic relations much more seriously. The August riot, which was the second biggest such occurrence in independent Sri Lanka after 1958, affected both Jaffna and Colombo. It also meant the end of the experiment to make Jaffna University a multi-ethnic campus. Sinhala students who were studying there were removed after the riot. A Commission was set up to look into the causes of the riot. The election victory of the TULF made it the largest opposition party. It was no longer possible to ignore the central issues around the ethnic question. The confrontation between the army and Tamil militants highlighted many cases of human rights violations in the North.

In the face of these events, one finds the establishment of several new organisations dealing with issues like democratic rights, women's rights, workers' rights, plantation people, etc. New initiatives were launched in research.

However, for most of these groups, the focus of their concern was by and large the socio-economic fall out of the new development policies and the violation of democratic rights. The events in the immediate aftermath of UNP coming into power prompted these concerns. But there were important exceptions to this trend. Exceptions that began to focus specifically on ethnic relations. The establishment of the Movement for Interracial Justice and Equality, the establishment of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies totally devoted to the issues of ethnicity, some of the research programmes of organisations like the Social Scientists Association and initiatives like the establishment of the Citizens Committee for National Harmony within the Centre for Society & Religion, can be given as such examples.

These developments clearly indicated that some of these civil society groups in the 'South' were taking notice of the deterioration of ethnic relations much more seriously. However, the analysis and debates within these groups revolved around discriminatory elements in state policies in various spheres and individual rights. The implication was that the problems of the Tamil minority could be solved by redressing shortcomings in these policies and ensuring individual rights. There was little attention paid to the centralised nature of the state and the need for substantial reforms in order to manage ethnic relations. In other words, the demands of the TULF, the principal political party of

the Sri Lankan Tamils, which had also at that time won a mandate from the Sri Lankan Tamils and was in parliament on the basis of a separatist demand, had still failed to impress these groups.

The other area of activism was fact finding, monitoring of human rights violations, and international lobbying. This type of work expanded due to the militarisation of the North and frequent confrontations between the armed forces and militants. There were many instances when Tamil civilians were at the receiving end of actions by the armed forces. The interest of international human rights groups like Amnesty International helped to promote these activities. Nevertheless even these activities could be contained well within the liberal discourse of individual rights and democratic rights without any serious debates about the nature of the state.

During this time it was in the activities that began to pay attention to questions like ethnic identities, Sinhala nationalism and other issues within the ideological plane that one finds attempts to tackle some of the fundamental questions related to the conflict. One part of this work began to look at the hegemonic identity of the state. These writings were critical of the domination of the Sinhala-Buddhist identity within the state structure and some of the policies (e.g., school curriculum) that promoted this identity. The second strand of work focused on the identity formation within the Sinhala social formation and began to question some of the fundamental beliefs that the Sinhalese had about themselves.

The July 1983 pogrom brought to an end this initial phase of civil society activism. In the unstable environment that prevailed during this event a number of organisations that had taken up the issue of Tamil rights in the South came under attack. Some of them had to cease their activities temporarily. As we have shown earlier, July 1983 was a watershed in many aspects of the conflict. It had its own influence on these civil society groups as well.

The four year period between July 1983 to July 1987 was characterised by an intensification of the conflict in the North/East, a flow of refugees from the country, the involvement of India in the conflict and a greater degree of international involvement in the Sri Lankan conflict, some of which came through international NGOs. It was also the period when the international image of Sri Lanka got transferred from a country with an interesting model of development (this was the image promoted by those who admired Sri Lanka's social development despite a low per capita income) and an interesting ancient culture, to a country characterised by an ethnic conflict, refugees and civil wars. The culmination of this period was the Indo-Lanka Accord and the establishment of a system of provincial autonomy through the Provincial Councils.

One of the clear developments during this period within the civil society organisations that we are concerned with in this section, was the beginning of serious work to look into the structure of the state and the hegemony of the Sinhala/Buddhist ideology of the state. More than anything else the activities carried out by these organisations in the intellectual and ideological plane through research, writings, seminars, etc., have been an important factor that has helped these groups to tackle some of the fundamental issues around the conflict. As we have mentioned above, the first mentioning of the need to restructure the state to give some sort of an autonomy for Sri Lankan Tamils was stated in a document called Annexure 'C', which was the result of discussions between India and Sri

Lanka. The first public articulation of this idea by a civil society group came from the Christian group that participated in the Round Table Conference that was called in the aftermath of the July 1983 pogrom.

Between 1983 and 1987, the need to restructure the Sri Lankan state and grant a degree of devolved power to the Tamil population in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka became a main theme among these groups. The other central concern was the work at ideological level which questioned some of the dominant myths of Sinhala nationalism. This is not to say that other work on issues like human rights had ceased. But it is worth noting that it took the July 1983 pogrom to get the attention of these groups on some of the vital issues relating to the conflict.

The Indo-Lanka Accord and the establishment of Provincial Councils led to deep divisions in the Sinhala society. As we have mentioned earlier, the major opposition party and the JVP led a campaign against these reforms and the JVP campaign was marked by violence and individual assassinations. Some of the civil society organisations that we are concerned with openly supported the establishment of the provincial system. In fact several of them petitioned the Supreme Court, supporting the bill to devolve power and establish Provincial Councils, when it was challenged by Sinhala extremist elements in the Supreme Court. These acts made them targets of the JVP terror campaign. It was a difficult period for some of the organisations. Almost all of them received threatening letters from the JVP to stop their work. A number of activists who were members of these organisations were killed. It was also not clear who was really after them, because the JVP, as well as sections of the establishment that supported Sinhala extremism, had branded these organisations as 'traitors' to the Sinhala nation.

The attacks on these organisations also came from many civil society organisations. As we have argued above, many civil society organisations have been champions of Sinhala extremism. These, and many other new ones who emerged in the context of the unstable situation, became vehement critics of the attempts to devolve power. The attempts to question the hegemony of the Sinhala Buddhist ideology also came under fire. In fact, there is enough evidence to show that the questioning of some of the long held beliefs of Sinhala nationalism was the most difficult thing for Sinhala extremists to accept. This was seen as a conspiracy to undermine the Sinhala nation. Bad publicity received by Sri Lanka abroad and various attempts by international agencies and foreign governments (specially India) to intervene in Sri Lanka's conflict were seen as the other side of this conspiracy. In this context it was quite easy to tarnish the activities of these groups as a foreign funded conspiracy to undermine the Sinhala nation.

Human rights activities expanded severalfold during the 1983 to 1987 period partly because of the interest of international organisations. The activities at international level had several focal points: various agencies of the UN system, especially the UN Human Rights Commission; the World Bank and the Aid Group sponsored by the World Bank; and various bilateral donors. During this period several resolutions were passed against the Sri Lankan government in the UN Commission on Human Rights.

From mid 1987 to almost the end of 1989, the 'South' was dominated by the terror campaign of the

JVP and counter-terror by the security forces which left many deaths, disappearances and violation of human rights in their trail. This obviously made the human rights issue in the 'South' a key concern. New organisations and networks were established at this time primarily to monitor violations of human rights and to highlight the situation in Sri Lanka internationally. The killing of several well known personalities, allegedly by the security forces, gave enough ammunition for human rights organisations.

The end of the period of instability in the 'South' coincided with the coming into power of President Premadasa and the establishment of the second UNP regime. Premadasa's politics alienated sections of the UNP and liberals whose sympathy was traditionally with the UNP. His politics also undermined the provincial council system, leading eventually to the dissolution of the North-East Provincial Council. The violations of human rights that accompanied the suppression of the JVP were also blamed on Premadasa. What was more, during his period a Presidential Commission to look into the activities of 'NGOs' was established. Although human rights organisations were not the target of the inquiries of this Commission, many who supported civil society activism were very suspicious of this move.

The result of Premadasa's politics from 1989, until his assassination in 1993, was the consolidation of the activities of civil society groups under the themes of devolution, democracy and human rights. In other words, in terms of the focus of work, the objective of restructuring of the state was closely linked with protecting individual human rights and the promotion of democracy. The issue of the North-East conflict was not viewed in isolation of the question of human rights and democratic rights in general. This perspective still remains the characterising element of the politics of most of the groups that are under consideration in this section. The other plank was the questioning of the hegemonic Sinhala-Buddhist in society as well as the state. During this period the linkages between the liberals and left leaning sections mentioned above were consolidated. This was also the time when many of the opposition political parties began to see greater potential in these organisations and many linkages developed between these parties and organisations at various levels.

Another development during this period was the crystallisation of two democratic issues - free and fair elections and freedom of the press, where the activism of these groups began to have some effect. This is in addition to the question of devolution, which was beginning to get accepted by major political parties as the possible way out of the conflict after Provincial Councils were established through the Indo-Lanka Accord.

The reason for the focus on the theme of free and fair elections was the impending elections both at the provincial and national level. Since the infamous referendum of 1982 the 'South' had not seen an election that was not marred by violence. The election that brought Premadasa into power in 1988 was one of the most violent elections that Sri Lanka has ever seen. Using these means the UNP had been in power since 1977. The impending election provided an opportunity to get rid of the UNP. It was clear that by this time forces which wanted this to happen were expanding. Given this background, many groups saw the objective of making forthcoming elections free and fair a major issue to be tackled. By this time there was enough interest internationally on these issues of democracy, in addition to the North-East conflict and it also generated support internationally.

The first attempt to monitor elections was at the time of the 1988 presidential election, followed by the 1989 general elections. This activism expanded severalfold by the time provincial council elections were held in 1993. But it was in the presidential and parliamentary elections of 1994 that the effectiveness and degree of success that this work had achieved was shown. At the initial stages, the focus of the work around elections was around measures that could prevent election violence. Later on it expanded to cover a whole gamut of issues which included election laws and procedures.

The freedom of the press became an important concern for civil society activism due to several factors. The use of both legal and extra-legal means to suppress media freedom by the regime in power was a main one. Harassment of journalists and the disappearance of some of them highlighted the issue of the freedom of the press in a stark manner. The killing of one of the well known journalists became a celebrated case of human rights violations. New organisations emerged to protect the freedom of the press.

The limitations of the mainstream media became apparent when the political crises due to ethnic conflict and southern insurgency came to dominate the politics of the country. Therefore, in addition to setting up organisations devoted to the freedom of the press, these groups also launched several newspapers, sold in the open market. Writing and publishing has been a significant activity that all these groups engaged in, right from their beginning. But it was in the early nineties that these activities reached maturity and civil society groups could talk about an alternative media.

In the consolidation of the activities of these groups during the Premadasa regime, no doubt the need to get rid of the UNP, that had been in power for so long, was a major factor which brought many groups together. Many of these groups were against the UNP due to policies that it had followed. They held the UNP responsible for the human rights situation as well as the continuing war in the North-East. Similar views were held now by sections of the liberals, as well as by breakaway groups from the UNP. As a result, many of the political parties in the opposition saw the usefulness of these groups in their own politics. This led to many linkages between the activism of these groups and opposition politics.

The presidential and parliamentary elections of 1994 were an occasion which demonstrated the degree of maturity that this branch of civil society activism had reached in Sri Lanka. The exercise of election monitoring undertaken during these elections brought together a large number of these groups. The alternative media promoted by these groups played a role in the defeat of the UNP. This was openly accepted by some of the leading UNP politicians. Much more than anything else, these events marked the result of many years of activism.

The coming into power of the PA government once again changed the context in which the activities of these groups had to be undertaken. The proposal for devolution of power put forward by the PA government received enthusiastic support from these organisations. Some individuals linked to these organisations even took upon themselves the task of propagating the need for constitutional reforms and the PA proposals. The PA government also undertook certain steps to redress the human rights situation. This too met with approval from these organisations.

But much of this euphoria was short lived. Although there is a proposal for devolution it is nowhere near to becoming a legal reality. On the other hand, the PA government has given the leadership to the largest military operation that has taken the troops into the Jaffna peninsula. Their commitment to human rights can also be questioned in many ways. In the area of development policies the PA government has followed the UNP, sometimes with a greater degree of enthusiasm in certain areas. This, too, has made the PA government unpopular with many of these groups.

Finally conflict resolution and peace building is an activity that has emerged within some of these organisations. Although it is possible to look at most of the activities of the groups that we are concerned with as activities that are seeking some sort of a peaceful solution to Sri Lanka's conflict, (i.e. if we talk of a peace movement it has to include all these organisations) the activities called peace making seem to stand out due to certain conceptual distinctions. These activities are based on a notion that the primary issue that needs to be tackled is the overt conflict. Therefore there is the need for the different actors in the conflict as well as the identity groups in society to understand each other, and to resolve conflicts amicably or through peaceful means.

What is not clear is whether it is possible to discuss peace activities based on these notions in organisational terms. Often in the history of the emergence of the groups that are engaged in specific peace activities there is a certain amount of overlap with work related to issues like reforms of the state, promotion of democracy and individual rights. In other words, there is considerable overlap with the desire for peace, issues of justice and redressing grievances in society through various means. In some ways this is not surprising, given the historical context in which peace activities have to emerge in our societies. For example, unlike the historical experience of some European countries, where the more recent peace activities emerged because of the traditions of neutrality during world wars that engulfed the European continent, peace activists in our part of the world have to face structures of injustice and oppression that pervade our societies due to internal as well as external factors . As a result of this context, the most well known non-violent political tradition of South Asia linked with the name of Gandhi had the political objectives of Indian independence from British rule and issues of social justice within Indian society as its focus. It is very difficult to visualise this movement gaining the popularity that it got, and what it achieved in the Indian context, if it did not tackle issues of oppression and social injustice through the non-violent methods it espoused. It is quite possible that there can be a crystallisation of distinct peace activities in this country without addressing issues such as the transformation of the state structure or questioning of hegemonic identities. Possible contradictions of such a strategy are discussed in the next section.

Before concluding the history of civil society activism of these groups, a special mention should be made of those groups that have focused on women's issues. Women's groups have been active in most of the civil society activism mapped out above. This means one of the distinguishing features of women's groups is their ability to take on wider political issues while having their special focus as well. This is an unusual feature of the so-called NGO world, where more and more organisations are bent on narrow specialisation, usually at the expense of a wider political perspective.

The political activism of civil society groups that has been covered in this section has revolved around reforms of the state, questioning of the hegemonic ideology of the state, defence of

democratic rights and human rights and the resolution of the overt conflict. Many of the organisations whose historical evolution we have described above have played a key role in first articulating this demand in Sri Lankan society. They have carried out activities to elaborate the concept of regional autonomy, clarifying and propagating it in Sri Lankan society. They have contributed significantly to the process of making the idea of regional autonomy an accepted position in the Sri Lankan polity. Today, both major political parties in the country accept the concept of regional autonomy as an answer to the ethnic conflict.

One of the indicators of effectiveness of these groups is the backlash against them by the extremist Sinhala opinion. The extremist Sinhala opinion often argues that the proposals of the incumbent government to set up a virtual federal system of government is a part of 'a conspiracy of foreign funded NGOs' to support the cause of division of the country. The attempts to question the hegemonic Sinhala-Buddhist have met with even more virulent attacks from Sinhala extremists. Sometimes responses to this type of work have been more violent because it questions some of the fundamental beliefs that Sinhala-Buddhists had about themselves. These reactions at least confirm that the activities of these groups have taken on some of the powerful forces in Sinhala society which have been a barrier to the resolution of the conflict.

There have been a number of occasions in the brief history of these organisations when they have faced intimidation, threats and sometimes danger to their own existence. At the beginning most of these threats came from the state apparatus, but with the ascent of Sinhala extremism, specially in the guise of the JVP, threats came from the non-state actors as well.

A high point of human rights work was when resolutions on human rights violations were passed against the Sri Lankan government at the UN Commission on Human Rights. The Sri Lankan record of human rights is still scrutinised by the UN Commission on Human Rights. The resolution also requested the Sri Lankan government to allow ICRC and UNHCR to operate in Sri Lanka. This is also an achievement for human rights groups. Generally, human rights work has helped to expand the international scrutiny of the record of the Sri Lankan government.

At the national level, Sri Lanka's signing of the international covenant on human rights coincided with the expansion of the work of these organisations. Sri Lanka signed the optional protocol more recently. Human rights activism has resulted in the setting up of several commissions to investigate violations of human rights. These groups contributed very much in the setting up of permanent commissions such as the Human Rights Commission and the Official Language Commission. The intervention by these groups within the ongoing debate on constitutional reforms has identified specific reforms that need to be carried out. Perhaps clear identification of these institutional reforms is the best that has been achieved on this front.

The media, the influence of civil society groups is mostly felt within the Sinhala media. There are two weekly newspapers that have established themselves with the Sinhala reading public. A number of journalists who work in the mainstream press have been influenced by the ideology promoted by these groups. In this manner the influence on the media is much larger than what has been achieved through newspapers. The Free Media Movement has become an established body that speaks for

media freedom and standards among journalists. As we have already mentioned, the general election of 1994 showed the social base of the efforts to promote free and fair elections. It is possible to argue that the activities of these groups contributed in no small way to the peaceful regime change that Sri Lanka witnessed through the August 1994 election.

B. Taking Care of Social Costs

Although there were some types of relief activities in the aftermath of August the 1977 riots, the turning point of the expansion of this type of activity was the anti-Tamil pogrom of July 1983. Relief and rehabilitation work has expanded on a more permanent basis with the prolonged civil war in the North-East province. The entry of international NGOs in all these areas of work has been another significant development

The principal focus in this type of activism has been to take care of the social costs of the ethnic conflict. The planning document for the “Emergency Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Programme (ERRP) - Phase II” in April 1995 stated that “there were nineteen international and local NGOs who worked in the NEP and border areas.” It further stated that “most of them worked through local organisations”. Presumably these are smaller organisations and what are termed ‘included larger organisations’.

The report identified the principal activities of these organisations to be:

- Agriculture* - Providing seed and other inputs and arrange for marketing,
- Shelter* - Providing temporary roofing materials and also providing assistance for permanent housing,
- Health* - Providing camp sanitation, child care and immunisation
- Education* - Construction of schools, providing teachers, supplying furniture
- Vocational training* - providing training to youth and affected persons
- Micro-enterprises* - Social mobilisation and participatory role with government organisations.

Apart from these activities there are international organisations helping the government to run certain hospitals in conflict areas.

Civil society organisations have become active outside the conflict areas in order to take care of social costs. Setting up projects to care for children orphaned by the conflict and projects to service victims of trauma are two such activities that can be mentioned. Some of these initiatives cover the Sinhala population from border areas and there are Buddhist monks active in such initiatives.

A number of factors seem to influence the extent to which these organisations are able to be active. The most important ones among them seem to be government policy, non availability of government

funds for certain activities, the effectiveness of the local government authority (Divisional Secretary) and the presence of organisations that can carry out work.

Most of the observations that have been made about the efforts to take care of social costs would certainly accept that the activities of civil society organisations are fulfilling an extremely important service. However, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the role of these organisations is important in this area. Sri Lanka is a country where the state system has not totally collapsed even in conflict areas. Secondly, the conflict areas are not devoid of 'normal' economic activities. Even people in refugee camps earn part of their living through their normal economic activity. Given this context, it is necessary to get a better assessment of the nature of the 'gap' that civil society organisations are able to fill.

Contradictions of Civil Society Activism

In discussing the contradictions and therefore limitations of these activities it is important to remember that all this social activism has been undertaken under severe pressure and threat from the champions of the hegemonic ideology. It has come under threat both from state institutions, who have viewed these activities as detrimental to national security, as well as from non-state actors, who have violently opposed any concessions to minorities. LTTE, with their own brand of extremist politics, has been another source of pressure and threat.

Despite the numerous difficulties faced by the groups involved in these activities, their interventions have made a significant contribution to promoting the idea that Sri Lanka has a serious problem in her ethnic relations, and there is a need to find a political answer to it. The activities have also made some progress in the acceptance of the notion that Sri Lanka is a plural society, where identities and rights of various ethnic and religious groups have to be accepted and be given a space if Sri Lanka is to resolve the ethnic conflict. They have not only kept the social and economic problems faced by people affected by the conflict in public fora, but also implemented specific projects to meet these needs.

It is also important to note that there is participation of people of different ethnic groups in these positive responses within civil society. In most organisations working on these issues there are representatives of different ethnic and religious groups. The conflict itself has generated a process in society which has a multi-ethnic character.

While recognising the importance of all these interventions for the protection of human rights and defence of democracy, it is also necessary to take stock of the contradictions and limitations of the different strategies of these groups. This is done below under the following headings: (a) Limits of Constitutionalism; (b) The Relationship with Mainstream Politics; (c) Peace versus Democracy; (d) Politics of Humanitarianism in a Conflict Situation.

Limits of Constitutionalism

Historically, the grievances that have been articulated by the Tamil minority covered many areas. They included the nature and structure of the Sri Lankan state, the impact of Sinhala nationalism in various public policies which covered the field of socio-economics, language, culture, and finally the question of their security as an ethnic group. Black July 1983 was a turning point on the issue of security. In the period that followed, the security dimension of the conflict (security of the state versus security of an ethnic group) became dominant. The emergence of the LTTE as a dominant group, and the LTTE's political as well as military capacity to deal with various governments in Colombo, has led to the military question of dealing with the LTTE becoming a prominent issue. Parallel to this, various types of pressure for a political answer to the conflict have brought the question of power sharing and institutional reforms of the state to the forefront. It is these two issues that dominate the popular discussion through the usage of terms such as 'political solution' or 'military solution'. The dominant concern of civil society groups is the 'political solution' by which they mean the reform of the constitution.

There is no doubt that the constitutional reforms are critically important, but at the same time, it is necessary to treat this objective in a manner that does not lead to a perspective which reduces the resolution of the ethnic conflict to institutional reforms of the state. The limitations of a reductionist perspective on any social issue have come under criticism in recent discussions of social theory. The resolution of the question of ethnic relations in Sri Lanka is a much wider issue than constitutional reform. Even if we confine ourselves to the question of state reforms to meet the grievances of the Tamil population, what has to be done with state institutions is much wider than a passage of constitutional reforms. Implementing bilingual policies in areas such as language and media, decommunalising state institutions, and identifying new initiatives that would lay the foundation for a multi-ethnic society, are crucial.³⁸ All these reforms in the state sector do not necessarily follow from constitutional reforms. There are interlinkages but they are not reducible to constitutional changes. These are also policy areas where one does not have to wait for the resolution of the conflict in order to initiate policy decisions; they are critically important for the day to day living of the Tamil population, and also to win their confidence.

Equally important are the interventions that need to be done at societal level. There are deep-seated prejudices on both sides of the ethnic divide that have led to the situation that we are in. It is difficult to think of a civil society imbued with values of democracy and tolerance without challenging these prejudices in society.

These comments on the limitations of constitutionalism are relevant for many other strategies of institutional change that these groups are aiming at. As our account of civil society activism shows, the bulk of the activities have revolved around reforming and designing institutions. Devolution of power, democratisation of society and protection of human rights have been the main areas where

³⁸ See Young, Crawford, *Ethnic Diversity and Public Policy: An Overview*, Occasional paper No.8, World Summit for Social Development, UNRISD, Geneva, 1994, for a recent overview of different areas of public policies that are relevant in multi-ethnic societies.

these groups have attempted to reform and establish institutions. However, the problem is that the legal and normative base of institutions by themselves cannot democratise societies, protect human rights and ensure the rights of minorities. These institutions operate in a specific historical context. There are many factors which operate in this historical context, that shape these institutions and determine what can be achieved through them.

A more historical approach of looking at these institutions essentially means focusing on the relationship between institutions, the social structure of our society and different manifestations of power in society through a multiplicity of categories. In this debate, power arising from unequal distribution and control of resources will be a principal one, but not the only one. But it needs to be mentioned here especially because these days there is a tendency to ignore the impact of unequal control of resources on power relations, although the expansion of market forces is allowing resources to be controlled by a few. The capacity of every liberal institution to expand the democratic space in society is limited, because of this unequal control of resources which results in the control of liberal institutions by the powerful in society. In addition to control of resources, gender and identity are important categories deciding power relations in society, which cannot be reduced to resource allocation. What is needed is to expand the perspective on democracy beyond institutions, taking account of this multiplicity of sources of power. What we need is a truly pluralistic perspective of democracy which takes all these categories into account, rather than an attempt to find a primacy of one of these categories or trying to reduce one to the others.

The Relationship with Mainstream Politics

There is little doubt that the institutions of representative democracy that were introduced into Sri Lanka during the colonial period have been internalised into Sri Lankan society much more than some of the sceptics from various ideological backgrounds would like to accept. There is mass mobilisation around these institutions. However, this very same process of the internalisation of these institutions has generated a particular political culture that not only creates a great degree of dependency on political parties for various needs by the electorate, but also limits the space for any other form of autonomous civil society mobilisation. This tendency is strengthened when particular development policies allow politicians to play a significant role in fulfilling the day to day needs of people.

The most pernicious effect of this dependency on politicians and political parties is the development of a political culture that numbs the sensitivity of the electorate when undemocratic acts are carried out by parties which they support. In the case of party activists, this leads to an extreme version of loyalty politics where the use of violence and many other undemocratic methods is no barrier. In other words, this particular relationship between the electorate and the party and the political culture developed is not only a barrier for the emergence of an independent democratic consciousness in society, but is also an important contributor towards political intolerance and many other fundamentally undemocratic attitudes. It is a simple step from this political culture to political parties where internal party matters are decided much more through kinship networks, patron-client

relationships, etc., rather than through democratic means.

Political parties form a critical element in a liberal democracy, but at the same time they have been instruments in limiting democratic space and violating human rights. Sri Lanka has been no exception. What is important to note is that in this process there is direct or indirect support from an electorate which is used to a particular political culture. Therefore the strengthening of a democratic civil society that is able to relate to political parties independently is a critical issue that needs to be addressed.

Given the internalisation of institutions of liberal democracy in Sri Lankan society there is no way that civil society groups in Sri Lanka can ignore mainstream politics if they are to be effective. Mainstream politics has a wide social base in Sri Lanka and ignoring it would be tantamount to ignoring an important social space that these groups can utilise for their activism. Our historical account of these groups shows that these groups have not been averse to taking part in mainstream politics.

However, this participation in issues related to mainstream politics brings them close to political parties as well. There are clear indications that mainstream political parties are keen to build up a relationship with civil society groups. These trends pose new dangers and challenges to civil society groups. The issue is how to get involved in issues relating to mainstream politics while at the same time maintaining independence and autonomy from political parties and posing questions about reforms in mainstream politics. In our view the civil society groups have not addressed this issue systematically. This poses great dangers for the future and could lead to many problems and contradictions within this type of activism.

Peace versus Democracy

We have argued in the earlier section that there is a close link between activities labelled as peace and other forms of civil society activism such as human rights and democracy. But today there is certainly a tendency to construct a special sphere called conflict resolution and peace. More than anything else, the discourse of conflict and conflict resolution constructed within the foreign aid discourse is instrumental in promoting this distinction. These trends are bound to create a special activity called peace and it is bound to create contradictions within civil society groups.

The fundamental issue faced by those groups concentrating on peace making is the contradiction between those who would simply like an end to the violent conflict and those who argue that the conflict cannot be resolved without fundamental structural reforms of the state and development of values of pluralism and democracy. Behind these two positions there are two different approaches to the question. The first approach focuses on the conflict as an epiphenomenon, while the other tries to focus on structural reasons behind the conflict. The latter schools of thought would look at the resolution of the conflict as a part of a larger democratic project, while the former would be happy with a cessation of the violent conflict.

Already there have been several occasions when the contradictory politics generated by these two approaches came to a head. For example when President Premadasa began negotiations with the LTTE in 1990, for those who valued peace and democracy this was a negotiation between an authoritarian leader and an organisation with a tradition of authoritarian politics. Therefore they were sceptical about these negotiations and were concerned that the outcome would be the consolidation of the power base of two authoritarian leaders if the negotiations succeeded. This example shows that the question about the relationship between peace and democracy will pose questions for the civil society movement whether they are dealing with the Sri Lanka state or the LTTE, who are the two main armed antagonists. In our view, the sooner the peace movement of Sri Lanka links peace with the need for democratisation of the society at large, the more effective will its role be in Sri Lankan society.

There is a more populist version of peace activities that lays emphasis on communities and their capacities as an answer to the conflict. These approaches also do not take into account the institutional changes necessary for the resolution of Sri Lanka's problems. These approaches have also been given prominence by the donors because of the popularity of the so-called, 'community based' approaches within the donor discourse. There is a growing literature that is critical of these notions of 'community' in other more established fields such as development. When it comes to the conflict situation in Sri Lanka the so-called community based approaches have two main drawbacks. On the one hand they idealise something called the 'community'. It is not clear what these approaches mean by 'community' and how the notion of community deals with divisions, conflicts, prejudices and therefore the contribution of 'communities' to the conflict. Secondly, it is also not clear on what basis so much faith is placed on these 'communities' to resolve the conflict. At best, this hope looks more like a faith-based populist ideology. At worst, it is pandering to the 'flavour of the month' among the donors.

In societies like ours, where violence and conflicts are linked to unjust structures and institutions, it is extremely difficult to build up peace movements which do not tackle these issues of social injustice. What can be more pernicious is the possibility of such movements being used to maintain the existing order. Therefore, much more than the slogan of peace and conflict resolution, what are relevant for us are non-violent strategies for tackling social injustice. As we mentioned before, the success story of Gandhian politics was precisely this and there is a need to renew this tradition in South Asia against the modern day oppressive structures.

Politics of Humanitarianism in a Conflict Situation

Although there has been a wide ranging discussion internationally on the limitations and contradictions that relief and rehabilitation activities face in a context where extremely complex political issues are played out, there has been very little debate of this nature in Sri Lanka. In these debates there are two main strands of argument which take into account the politics of humanitarianism at internal and external levels.

First, the critics of humanitarian relief in conflict situations have shown how humanitarian relief becomes structurally linked to the politics of the conflict. For example, in the case of Sri Lanka it is not difficult to demonstrate how the major protagonists in the Sri Lankan conflict have made use of relief as a political weapon. Secondly, at the international level, it is difficult to look at relief in isolation from the politics of donor governments. The provision of relief has become a political response in the hands of these governments. In situations where relief is accompanied by troops of alien powers entering into sovereign territory this is much clearer.

The fundamental political issue that arises from these debates is the notion of 'neutrality' that is used by humanitarian agencies when working within sovereign states. "The concept of sovereignty does not enter into the narrative of the relief organizations. 'Neutrality' is used to define the social space in which they perform. This social space is the boundary, the border zone, a no man's land, an area of conflict and tension where state and counter-state sovereignties clash. Relief organizations have constructed their role in a post-sovereign world. The concept of neutrality suggests nothing less than politics without sovereignty."³⁹ In other words there is a certain type of politics associated with humanitarian action. In some situations in the world where humanitarian action follows foreign troops entering into countries, this is blatant. In other situations like in Sri Lanka, the politics is more subtle.

It is also important to remember that the populations among whom these humanitarian organisations work have political perspectives of their own. These perceptions are also articulated in ethnic terms. In a study carried out by this author in Batticaloa district about the perceptions of a population in conflict areas, it was clear that the social world of the population was identified in ethnic terms. For example, the Muslim representatives of Batticaloa continuously identified humanitarian NGOs as organisations supporting Tamils. The issue here is not whether this perception is 'correct' or not. Such positivist questions miss the whole point about perceptions in a conflict situation. The issue is not whether these perceptions fit with so called 'facts' but the very presence of these perceptions. What the study showed was how perceptions have politicised these organisations in ethnic terms, and in conflict situations perceptions can be more important than facts.

At least part of the reason why Sri Lankan discussions on the politics of humanitarian relief among organisations engaged in such activities is so poor is because generally they have been working with an extremely apolitical discourse, even in areas where there is relatively stability. This can be illustrated by looking at the dominant discourse of these groups in the field called 'development'.⁴⁰

The economic project of capitalism is dominated by the attempt to expand the resource base of the country, making use of market forces. Within this context, there are interventions by various groups in order to increase the share that disadvantaged groups get from this economic development. But the principal defect of the discourse of development used by these groups is the absence of a discussion on issues of power, and relationships in society that determine power. The fundamental

³⁹ Wickremasinghe, Nira, *Humanitarian Relief Organisations and Challenges to Sovereignty: The Case of Sri Lanka*, RCSS Policy Studies 1, RCSS, Colombo, 1997

⁴⁰ See Bastian, Sunil, 'Development NGOs and Ethnic Conflicts', *Nethra*, Vol. 1 No. 3, April-June 1997 for an elaboration of this argument.

objective of social activism that hopes to intervene in a capitalist context so that the disadvantaged have a stake in it, is to change these relationships so that the capacity of the less powerful to determine their own living conditions is enhanced. Even if we confine the word development to mean distribution of fruits of economic growth or social development, it is the power relations into which the poor are locked that need to be changed, if they are to have a better share. For example, in the day-to-day struggle of a peasant farmer to obtain what mainstream economics calls 'factors of production', there is a series of relationships that the farmer has to enter into with a variety of actors. It is the capacity of the farmer to control issues of power found in these relationships which matters when it comes to the question of his or her survival. The term 'factors of production' does not tell us about this human drama and the power struggle that goes on. The question of development is how to change these power relationships for the benefit of the farmer. But rarely does one find any attempts to look at such issues of power by groups involved in 'development'. Therefore, when such organisations enter into areas of conflict where issues of power are played out with arms, the limitations of these perspectives become even more glaring.

Clarification of the politics of humanitarianism is extremely important for organisations who have entered into the area of conflict in order to take care of social costs. If they do not, they could be very much part of the problem. There have been extremely disturbing trends of this nature in other parts of the world. With the increased amount of assistance to relief in conflict situations being channelled through NGOs, there are many organisations bidding in this deregulated funding market without considering the political implications of their activities. This is especially true of international NGOs that operate in many parts of the world. In situations of protracted conflicts, when these organisations become a permanent feature within the country, their activities tend to develop numerous linkages with political issues that underlie the conflict. These linkages could be with the internal political process or with the political positions taken by various international actors. The longer they are involved in conflict situations, the more difficult it becomes to cover these political roles with notions of humanitarianism. Such a situation has already arisen in Sri Lanka and the sooner these organisations face these political issues the better it will be for NGO activism in this country.

Section 4

Foreign Aid, the Discourse of NGOs, and the Conflict

This paper is written in an environment where a set of organisations called NGOs have acquired a great degree of prominence in the international arena. At least part of the reason for this situation is the importance given to these organisations by aid agencies. Some even argue that there is something called an emerging 'international civil society' constituted by these organisations. Much faith is placed on this development. This paper is also written for a project that is exploring the possible role that these organisations can play in the conflict situations of several countries. Therefore in the final section of this paper it is necessary to make some comments about how we look at the dominant discussions about NGOs that are prevalent within foreign aid discussions.

The two previous sections of this paper have been devoted to activities of organisations that can be identified by the term NGOs within this donor discussion. But we have deliberately used the term 'civil society' to identify the social space they occupy. It should be quite clear to any reader, from what we have written, that we see many positive aspects about these organisations. To that extent there will be a certain amount of agreement between us and the donor agencies who try to promote NGOs in order to achieve various purposes. But there are a number of issues on which there could be disagreement mainly on conceptual grounds that have political implications. It is on these issues that we shall make some comments now.

In our view, because of the prevailing enthusiasm in promoting these organisations, what dominates within foreign aid debates is a very narrow instrumentalist discussion - i.e., a discussion that focuses on what to achieve through these organisations and how to go about it. Whatever differentiation and categorisation of these organisations is carried out is motivated by these instrumentalist objectives. On this basis organisations are divided on the basis of categories such as legal status, content of the activities, membership/non membership, etc. Then the next question is looking for ways and means of making them effective. The recent preoccupation of improving management of NGOs is also within this tradition.

A direct corollary of the ahistorical, instrumentalist vision of NGOs is to treat them as a homogeneous group. Similarly since there is little understanding of their role in a particular society they are treated as a politically neutral set of actors through whom various objectives can be achieved. They are also treated in isolation from the state, regime and the classes that dominate society. This vision is rounded up with a mythology that considers these organisations to be close to the people, decentralised, democratic, flexible, creative and therefore more effective, whatever these terms mean. This is contrasted with a state which is bureaucratic, centralised, away from people, less flexible, rigid and therefore ineffective. NGOs and donors who support them have been keen on perpetuating these dichotomies, and it has become more than anything else a 'halo' that justifies the existence of NGOs. Most of the positive accounts of NGO achievements seem to come from project reviews done within the limits of the above mentioned instrumental perspective.

We see a close link between this instrumentalist vision about NGOs and the neoliberal ideology which dominates the discourse of donors. The promotion of NGOs, either national or international, without considering the historical context has become a principal element in what can be called a new consensus in development assistance. Together with other elements of the liberal package such as liberal democracy and the market, promoting national and international NGOs has become the third element of the triad.⁴¹ As much as liberal democracy and market are promoted as a part of an overall ideology of neoliberalism, NGOs are promoted with the same zeal without paying much attention to historical specificities or the role they could be playing in relation to different social forces in society.

⁴¹ See, *Participatory Development and Good Governance*, Development Co-operation Guideline Series, Development Assistance Committee, OECD, 1995 for summary of this new consensus on development assistance.

Neoliberalism has spearheaded an attack on the state in various spheres. In the areas of production and distribution of resources this is being done with the emphasis on markets and private capital. Promotion of NGOs in many other areas such as social development, human rights, gender, etc., is the other plank.

Finally, writings within this tradition give a political legitimisation in promoting NGOs through the familiar ‘civil society’ argument which we have already criticised. For this argument strengthening civil society has a positive value in itself, and, what is more, strengthening NGOs is equated with strengthening civil society.

The principal difference between us and those who are merely bent on promoting NGOs in order to achieve various objectives, arises from the fact that we would like to view the organisations that are called NGOs as we view any other organisation in our society, i.e. as a product of the historical developments of Sri Lankan society. If we view these organisations in this way, then it is necessary to understand the linkages between these organisations and various aspects of Sri Lankan society such as the state, social classes, institutions, regimes, ideologies, events, etc., in order to know what these organisations are and what can be expected from them. Our discussion on the contradictions and limitations of the activities of the organisations that we have covered reflects some of the issues that emerge from such an analysis. As should be clear from what we have presented in previous sections, taking this perspective does not mean that we do not recognise the progressive aspects of these organisations, but we can do that without getting trapped into neoliberal mythology.

We would like to view international NGOs through a similar prism. In the first place international NGOs, at least the main ones that operate in this country, have emerged as a result of the accumulation process in developed capitalist countries and societal changes accompanying it. This itself sets the basic parameters of the structural characteristics of the relationship between these organisations and those in developing countries. They have begun to expand into developing countries under particular historical circumstances. It is not surprising that the expansion of international NGOs in the way we see now accompanies the process of globalisation. These organisations represent different ideologies, ways of looking at the world, and discourses.⁴² When they come into developing countries they ally themselves with some sections of that society. Through that they strengthen them. Hence their role is political in the sense that they become allies of certain types of social and political forces. We believe an analysis that takes into account these aspects will throw more light on what these organisations are doing in developing societies.

NGOs form a part of the voluntary action in civil society. As we have pointed out earlier, the beginning of civil society activism as we understand it today goes back to the last century. This activism seems to have been widespread, capturing various sectors of the population. The temperance movement already mentioned in this paper drew in people from many walks of life. For example the Hapitigama complex of temperance societies that was located in the Gampaha district

⁴² See Wickremasinghe, Nira, *Humanitarian Relief Organisations and Challenges to Sovereignty: The Case of Sri Lanka*, *op. cit.*, for an analysis of some of the organisations that operate in Sri Lanka

just north of present Colombo district “drew crowds of 20,000 or more to its meetings in this rural area at a time when population of Colombo district (excluding the municipality of Colombo) was little over 600,000.”⁴³ Organisations like Social Reform Association, Social Service League, YMCA and YMBA are some of the well known organisations that operated at the city level. Political changes in the mid fifties that actually saw the rise of Sinhala Nationalism to be the main state ideology are traditionally associated with five social groups - Buddhist monks, Traditional Ayurvedic Physicians, Sinhala school teachers, workers and peasants. Although one might question this interpretation in its nuances, these social groups did play a role and each of them has a number of organisations which represent their interests.

The 1992-93 Fergusons directory⁴⁴, from which one can get some indication of the density of the civil society sphere in Sri Lanka, lists 613 organisations under the category of approved charities. The organisations in the section entitled ‘Institutions’ includes those that can be categorised as religious organisations; organisations linked to economic activities such as agriculture, industry and trade; organisations linked to professions; social welfare organisations; trade unions; vocational training institutes; research institutes and many other organisations linked to some specific activities. This directory seems to cover a section of those organisations that are legally constituted and therefore having some form of registration under a law. Which means many organisations, for example those that operate at village level, who are not registered in some form do not come into this directory (in Sri Lanka one does not need any legal recognition or registration for an organisation to function. Even to get outside funding through a bank it is enough to have a properly approved constitution). But it helps us to get some idea about the variety of organisations that constitute civil society in Sri Lanka.

It is into this milieu of civil society activism that foreign aid enters and gives a new meaning to some sections of this civil society activism as promoters of various goals in development, human rights, environment, etc. Thus the intervention of foreign aid constructs a new discourse about NGOs from a section of the civil society. The turning point of this development was somewhere in the mid seventies. In fact this very word, NGO, emerged into prominence with the expansion of donor activities in the country from this time.

As any other organisation in civil society, these NGOs that have been strengthened with foreign aid have very different histories, varying social bases, represent various ideologies and interests and are linked to various other actors in society, including the state. They represent a variety of socio-political forces in society. Their historical role is determined by what they do and do not do in the context of various developments in society. Very often organisations identified by the single term NGOs are found in opposing camps in dealing with critical issues in a country. Thus they cannot be treated as some sort of a politically neutral means of achieving various objectives. This could be politically very dangerous, because this ignores the need to have better tools to understand the broader historical role played by these organisations, although we are bent on promoting them. This

⁴³de Silva, K.M., *A History of Sri Lanka*, op. cit

⁴⁴Ferguson’s *Sri Lankan Directory 1992-93*, 125th edition (published since 1859), Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited

danger multiplies severalfold when the instrumentalist perspectives dominate when working in societies where armed conflicts prevail.

If we accept this notion of NGOs as products of the historical processes of our societies we need to begin an analysis of NGOs in the same manner that we have analysed any other organisation in society, without confining ourselves narrowly to the objective of promoting them or confining our discussions merely to inquiries about whether they have achieved the objectives for which they were set up and funded. If we do the latter, we get trapped within the discourse of those bent on promoting them and do not understand much about what they are actually doing in our societies.⁴⁵ Probably the best place to learn about such a way of looking at NGOs is by looking at how other organisations of civil society have been analysed.

For example, if we look at the body of knowledge that we have about trade unions in Sri Lanka, it tells us a lot about their history, their ideological orientation, their political affiliations, the role that they have played in Sri Lankan history, social processes that helped in their emergence, contradictions that they have faced now and in the past, their external linkages both inside and outside the country, characteristics of their membership, the nature of the relationship between members and leaders, etc.

An example of this type of an analysis about a popular NGO in Sri Lanka is provided by Obeyesekere in his analysis on Sarvodaya. This account is from a publication entitled *Buddhism Transformed - Religious change in Sri Lanka*.⁴⁶ As the title indicates, it looks at some modern transformations in the interpretation and practice of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The starting point of the analysis is Sri Lankan society. Sarvodaya is viewed as part of a series of changes to Sri Lankan Buddhism in the course of modernisation and the emergence of a Sinhala-Buddhist middle class. The authors term this process as the emergence of 'Protestant Buddhism'. Sarvodaya is seen as a modern organisation that attempted to carve out a model of development in keeping with Buddhist doctrine and ethics. It is based on a populist notion of Sri Lankan villages. This notion idealises certain features of village life that is supposed to have existed in the past. The authors show us the origins, substance and contradictions within Sarvodaya in the context of changes taking place in the Sri Lankan society. The most important contribution of this type of analysis is its capacity to place Sarvodaya in the historical transformation of Sri Lankan society. The focus of the discussion is the changes that took place in the Sinhala-Buddhist social formation from the late nineteenth century to the modern period. The role of Sarvodaya in Sri Lankan society is interpreted within this context.

Thus the growth of these organisations called NGOs within developing countries, and the entry of

⁴⁵ For example, one can study an organisation promoting micro credit simply to find out how they have succeeded in promoting and sustaining the supply of micro-credit to so-called beneficiaries. But if we dispense with this language, which is so common in foreign funded projects, and look at the relationship between the credit programme and the society at large, we might find that credit programmes are actually promoting a certain class, strengthen certain caste organisations, are linked to the patronage network of some politicians, etc. The latter type of discussion provides a better understanding of what the credit programme is doing in a society than the former.

⁴⁶Gombrich, R. and Obeyesekere, G., *Buddhism Transformed - Religious Change in Sri Lanka*, Princeton University Press, 1988

international NGOs into these societies, demands a much more historically rooted analysis of these organisations if we are to understand what their role is in these societies. If we are to develop this type of an understanding of the NGO phenomenon it is also extremely difficult to generalise on a global scale. Sweeping generalisations are very common among those who look at NGOs from an instrumentalist perspective. This is not only motivated by the interests of funders who keep on making generalisations about the so called 'Third World', but also perpetuated by consultants who fly around the world without any serious understanding of the histories of developing countries. It is necessary to do away with this form of an analysis and question some of the fundamentals of neoliberalism if we are to understand better what the growth of the NGO phenomenon means for developing countries.

List of Abbreviations

APC	- All Party Conference
DDC	- District Development Council
ENDLF	- Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front
EPDP	- Eelam People's Democratic Party
EPRLF	- Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
EROS	- Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students
IPKF	- Indian Peace Keeping Force
JVP	- Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
LTTE	- Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MEP	- Mahajana Eksath Peramuna
MP	- Member of Parliament
PA	- People's Alliance
PTA	- Prevention of Terrorism Act
PLOTE	- People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
SLFP	- Sri Lanka Freedom Party
TULF	- Tamil United Liberation Front
UNP	- United National Party
YMBA	- Young Men's Buddhist Association
YMCA	- Young Men's Christian Association

Civil Society organisations of the ‘South’ relevant for the discussion in Section 4 of the paper *

Centre for Society and Religion
Centre for Policy Alternatives
Centre for Women’s Research
Ceylon Social Institute
Christian Workers Fellowship
Citizens Committee for National Harmony
Civil Rights Movement
Community Development Centre
Devasarana
Free Media Movement
Gampubuduwa
INFORM
Jana-awabodya Centre
Janodaya
Law and Society Trust
Marga Institute
Movement for Free and fair Elections
Movement for Interracial Justice and Equality
Movement for Defence of Democratic Rights
Mothers and Daughters of Sri Lanka
Muthurajawela United People’s Organisation
National Peace Council
International Centre for Ethnic Studies
Kamkaru Sevana
People’s Forum for Free and fair Elections
Rajarata Sama Sevaya
Samadeepa Samaja Kendraya
Sarvodaya
Sathyodaya
Social Scientists Association
Socio-Economic Development Centre
Socio-Economic Training Institute Kandy (SETIK)
Voice of Women
Wome for Peace
Women and Media Collective
Women’s Development Foundation

* This is certainly a partial list. At present the National Alliance for Peace seems to bring together most of the groups who have joined together to campaign for a political solution to the conflict through negotiations.