

The Role of Youth in Post War Reconciliation

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Abstract— With the elimination of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) in 2009 number of debates made an effort to understand the role of youth in post war reconciliation. Reconciliation represents the process of healing wounds, repairing and transforming a conflict in to peace that drives beyond an ad hoc settlement. Further it recognises potential opportunities to explore and upgrade post conflict developments. As Sri Lanka moves towards reconciliation, it is important to integrate young Ex- LTTE combatants who have been victimized by the thirty years along war in to our society. It involves creating a national identity and sense of belonging for all, regardless of their ethnicity or religions. On the other hand, during the war the youth in the northern and the eastern provinces suffered from fear of terrorism. Due to this inculcation of fear which was carried out by the LTTE they faced issues such as deprivation of their rights to education and employment. Therefore it is essential for the governmental bodies to be concerned and include youth in to the reconciliation process. In this regard the National Youth Policy of Sri Lanka (NYPSL) currently provides an opportunity to explore youth issues in a holistic manner. The NYPSL develops the full potential of youth to enable their active participation in national development. Within that context it is very clear that the government must pay more attention to youth in the reconciliation process.

The main objectives of this research paper is to examine the reconciliation of youth through a united and integrated approach. Generally youth are constrained in seeking financial and social independence. Therefore government and community based actors can work together to fulfil those requirements. This study tends to focus on areas including the potentials of both Ex- LTTE combatants and young non-combatants in the northern and eastern provinces. The author follows the qualitative research method using relevant sources such as journals, articles and web sites. Further this paper considers how youth can be empowered to engage in addressing post conflict developments.

Keywords— Reconciliation, Youth, National Youth Policy

I. INTRODUCTION

Reconciliation is a long term process which focuses on non-recurrence of hostilities. John Paul Lederach demonstrated that reconciliation as a process of change and redefinition of relationships. In concrete terms, reconciliation processes always envisions post conflict development as a potential opportunity to explore, understand and changes the deeper patterns and causes that have given rise to violent expressions of conflict. It must be oriented towards youth populations who represent the future of the country. It means the younger generation has the full capability to engage in this long run procedure. Within this context reconciliation should be focussed not only on youth who have experienced violence but also youth who have been directly engaged in warfare (Ex- Combatants). However according to the United Nations (UN) youth are defined as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. But the meaning of the term youth varies according to different societies. In Sri Lanka youth are categorized as those between 15-29 years. (National Youth Policy, 2014).

II. YOUTH AND CONFLICT

Pruitt and Rubin (Social Conflict, Escalation, Stalemate and Settlement, 1986) has quoted that conflict is a perceived divergence of interest or belief where the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously. It depicts that the conflict is a clash of interests. According to this point of view the involvement of youth in conflicts can be higher due to their unfulfilled aspirations including social and economic needs. Therefore, the following triangle (ABC Triangle) can be used as a metaphor to analyse the youth's involvement in conflict.

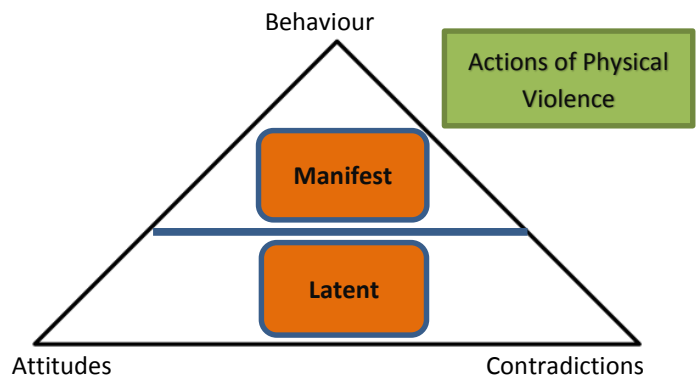


Figure 1
Conflict Triangle
Source: Johan Galtung

As illustrated in the above figure, the latent level of conflicts demonstrate prime causes for a conflict. These causes are commonly not easy to identify before a conflict occurs. Attitudes which come under latent level refers to parties' perception experienced by them in a conflict situation. It includes misperception, enemy construction and feelings such as anger, hate, suspicion. This scenario provides a contextual background for contradictions as well. Contradiction denotes the mismatch between values and social structure and this may encompass issues such as inability to fulfil basic needs, unequal accesses to resources and feelings of frustration. Ultimately these two dimensions lead to a violent behaviour. It is an indicator of the manifest level which covers physical actions of violence. The notable fact is that this violence can be visible in a destructive manner within society. Along with this perception, youth in Sri Lanka were victimized since the starting of the conflict. In that sense, the conflict in Sri Lanka can be identified as a struggle of both parties' attitudes, contradictions and behaviours. It means the first uprising of Tamil youth against the Sinhalese became apparent in the late 1960s due to the restrictive policies of national governments. This was an outcome of the politicization of ethnic differences by the national governments. For instance Prime Minister Bandaranaike introduced a bill to make Sinhala as the official language in 1956. Further, the educational standardization policy in 1972 allowed Sinhalese students to enter science and medical schools with lower scores than the Tamil students. Due to these administrative policies the Tamil youth were marginalized. Therefore Tamil extremists were able to mobilize youth against Sinhalese. Moreover, the colonization process carried out in the country after the independence has made an impact for the youth uprisings. Under the settlement policies Tamils were resettled in the dry zones. Those dry zones were not appropriated for agriculture which was the major income of Tamil youth at that time period. Therefore Tamil youth believed that they did not receive a fair share of the land from the settlement projects. (Don Embuldeniya, 2013). Further, the Presidential Commission on Youth which was appointed in 1990 found that the mismatch between education and employment were the primary reasons for these youth insurrections. As a result of these policies, the LTTE which is a ruthless terrorist organization, was able to brainwash the Tamil youth to get their support for the separatist movement in the late 1970s. While Tamil youth were gathered around LTTE, youth in the south began riots against the LTTE in 1983. This was commonly known as the Black July riots. The Black July riots commenced as a response to a deadly ambush on 23 July 1983 by the LTTE that killed 13 Sri Lanka Army soldiers.

During these uprisings and riots youth from both parties become vulnerable.

III. RECONCILIATION MODEL FOR SRI LANKA

After the military victory in 2009 the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) formulated the NYPSL policies to enhance the potential of youth in the country including Northern and Eastern provinces. National Youth Policy is a primary organizing principle guided by a core set of humanizing ethics and values that can be passed from one generation to another. It develops the promises of youth to enable their participation in national development. Within this context it is essential to implement reconciliation along with the NYPSL. This process should be focused on not only non-combatants but also on ex-combatants who are representatives of the younger population.

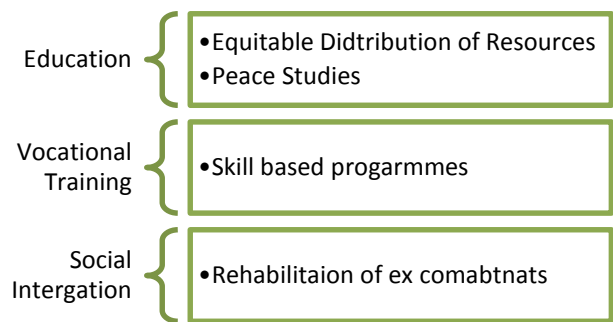


Figure 2
Reconciliation Model
Source: By Author

As the author has demonstrated in the above figure education is a major requirement for the reconciliation process which addresses equitable development. The government has currently formulated a 10 year plan (2012-2021) for Trilingual Sri Lanka which refers the usage of three main languages, Sinhala, Tamil and English in schools and universities for educational purposes. From this point of view the government has the responsibility to recruit more teachers and provide reading material which are written in all three languages. Most of the times even though students are learn in these languages they are not able to find reading material in those particular languages. It can be overcome by providing reading material to libraries in schools and universities. This reflects the equal distribution of resources among students. In addition promoting peace studies in multicultural post war context is a current necessity of the country. It involves strengthening human rights and respect for each other's dignity. Kruglanski and Gelfand believed that dignity is a significant aspect of the reconciliation

process where the victims developed genuine friendship. It helps students improve mutual understanding among students who represent different ethnicities. In that sense the teachers have the responsibility to develop their interpersonal relations along with conflict resolution skills. Besides building harmony centres in schools will also help promote solidity among students belonging to different ethnicities and religions. Such approaches deal with the crucial issues of structural inequality and differential power relation in society. (McCarthy, 1991). This process should encompass the reconstruction of school buildings and recruitment of teachers.

During the war time youth in the Northern and Eastern provinces were not able to engage in economic activities as per their own interests. Because of these situations they were frustrated and unable to earn an income to fulfil their needs. Younger combatants who were recruited forcefully by the LTTE too faced the same problem. Furthermore there was a lack of employment opportunities in conflict zones. Hence it is indispensable to improve the inherent skills of youth which can contribute to advance their livelihoods. To acquire that requirement more vocational training centers should be established in the Northern and Eastern provinces and these centers are highly concentrated to areas such as agriculture, carpentry, motor mechanisms, garment and textiles and beauty culture.

The social integration process epitomizes appreciating and understanding each other's culture and identity. During the war time, youth were differentiated in terms of their ethnic identities. However within this post war context there is a risk of marginalizing ex-combatants in society. Most importantly ex-combatants are the individuals who are having psychological trauma due to their experiences of war. By providing an opportunity for ex-combatants to share their experience with Sinhalese will create a path to build social cohesion between the two conflicting parties. This comes with empathy which refers to the willingness of conflict parties to listen. Though ex-combatants have undergone vocational training, most of the time they are unwelcomed by the villages who lost their loved ones during the war. This social condition often makes it difficult for them to live peacefully. To tackle these social effects the public can hold discussions on the experiences and imminent objectives of ex-combatants. Music, poetry, films or photography can be used as tools to have such dialogues. For instance movies like "Ini Avan" which was directed by Asoka Hadagama is a sound incentive for public discussions. It portrays the story of an unnamed LTTE soldier, who faces challenges of social recognition. These activities develop empathy between Sinhala and Tamil youth. Moreover the 2013 National Youth Survey has found that 54.1% of Sri Lankan youth do not have

close friend that belongs to a different religious or ethnic group. This is an indication of the lack of social integration in the country. Therefore, the above aspects are essential in building social integration which is a major requirement of the reconciliation process.

IV. CONCLUSION

Above facts and figures indicate that the Post war reconciliation process needs to be designed according to the needs of the younger generation. Generally youth are the people who seek opportunities which directs to a productive life. Therefore the reconciliation process should be aligned with the observations of root causes of conflicts which comes under social and economic dimensions. According to this point of view there should be national policies relating to education, employment and social integration. This comprises of the values of non-discrimination and tolerance. Finally as the conclusion it is very clear that the role of youth is a vital factor in post war reconciliation.

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