

ABSTRACT

The dispute between Sinhala and Tamil has deep-rooted and long – standing origins, and the present crisis can only be understood in that sense. With the wars of Elara and Dutugamunu, the invasions of the Tamil Chola kings, and the divide and rule policies of the colonists up to Independence and the subsequent demand for greater autonomy by the Tamil leaders, culminating in the war for a separate country called Eelam

To rectify the perceived imbalance and to provide equal opportunity to all the races based on their ethnic ratio, successive Sinhalese- majority governments, since independence passed various pieces of legislation in the national parliament. However, the Tamils, already disgruntled as a result of having lost the positions and privileges they enjoyed under colonial rule, responded to these interventions with anger. Thereafter, for the average politicians, communal politics became the most effective method to win votes. Violence by sections of the ruling majority against a weak minority provided sufficient fuel for the Tamil political leaders to racially unite their people and campaign on a communal note: in a similar fashion, Sinhalese politicians nursed the sense of historical grievance harboured by the Sinhalese people against the Tamils in an offer to maintain electoral majorities.

This research study attempted to test the hypothesis; “short sighted political decisions taken by politicians have contributed to creation of ethnic disharmony between Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka”. Due to practical reasons, the topic being a relevant and applicable one to almost all types of people in the society, only selected segments i.e., the military, politicians and community leaders were targeted in gathering data. In conducting the research, data were gathered through a questionnaire submitted in all three languages to a sample of military personnel and the police department. Further, the questionnaire was also disseminated among a sample selected from among the members of parliament currently in session. Apart from the data gathered through the questionnaire, a series of interviews were also conducted with a selected number of politicians, selected number of military and police personnel including senior officers and lower ranks as well as with community leaders of Trincomalee, representing different religions.