Political Uprising of Tamil Youth in the 1970s: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract

A segment of the Tamil youth population started to engage in aggressive anti-government activities in the Jaffna peninsula beginning from the early 1970s. Various researchers have observed from diverse perspectives the reasons for the emergence of militancy among the Tamil youth. This study will attempt to find the reasons for the Tamil youth's political uprising and whether it was triggered at least in part by the deprivation they suffered in the society. To do that the study will analyze how the deprivations they had to face led to frustration among the Tamil youth. It was this frustration that acted as a strong influence and the motivating factor behind the emergence of the militancy. This is a qualitative research on this topic based on content analysis and the theory of relative deprivation that uses the case study method. Data were collected from text documents and supplemented by conducting interviews. Field surveys were conducted in the three villages of Meesalai, Valvettithurai and Varani of Jaffna peninsula. Altogether 44 individuals were interviewed. Most of them were elderly people who had experiences of the issues of the 1970s in Jaffna peninsula. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with them. This research revealed that both "egoistic" and "fraternalistic" relative deprivation existed among Tamil youth in the 1970s because of the disadvantageous position in which they found

themselves in comparison to the privileged reference group within the same society. Both individual-centered and group-centered relative deprivation existed among the Tamil youth. However, group-centered relative deprivation played the most prominent role. Lower caste Tamil youth had to suffer "double deprivation." Various forms of relative deprivation-based grievances existed among Tamil youth in the 1970s and these compulsions acted strongly to steer them along the militant path.

Keywords: *Caste, Relative deprivation, Sinhala majoritarianism, Tamil youth*

Introduction

During the early post-independence period the leadership of Tamil political groups was comprised of high caste (Vellalah) Tamils, who mostly hailed from Jaffna. They mainly adopted non-violent and democratic methods to fight for Tamil rights[3]. However, beginning from the mid-1970s, a group of Tamil youth of the Jaffna peninsula in Sri Lanka started political agitations in an effort to win certain rights and benefits from the government. Many studies have examined the background and contributory causes that were behind the Sri Lankan Tamil militant movement of the 1970s. For example, some studies by Roberts (2009), Little (1994), Bond (1988) have observed there is a connection between Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and the emergence of the Sri Lankan conflict. Similarly, some scholars have categorized the Sri Lankan conflict as a religion based or language predicated conflict (De Silva, 1988, a, b; Devotta, 2007; Obeysekara, 1984). Some researchers have identified "Tamil nationalism" as a powerful cause that motivated the Tamil youth (Wilson, 1994, 1998, 2000; Gunasingham, 1999). A number of recent studies (for example, Abeyratne, 2002; Perera, 2001; Tambiah, 1986; Shanmugaratnam & Stokke, 2004; Stokke & Ryntveit, 2000) on the Tamil youth insurrection have explored the underlying causes of the violent conflict and suggest that it was due to the presence

[3] *However, even before the 1970s some violent incidents occurred in Jaffna. In the 1950s and 1960s there were violent protests against certain policies of Sri Lankan governments. But those incidents were not significant when compared with the violent activities of the 1970s and 1980s in the peninsula.*

of inequalities that prevented them from accessing political power and economic resources. Another perspective in this regard was that elite politicians were the chief group who created communal problems in this country (Kerney, 1985; Wilson, 1982; Tambiah, 1986; De Silva, 1981). According to this observation, the majority Sinhalese or minority Tamils were not behind this problem. Another popular argument is that the colonial rulers were responsible for creating this situation (Gunasingham, 1999; De Silva, 1972; Bandarage, 2009). Some researchers have pointed out that the Tamil youth came forward to engage in a double revolution (Balasuriya, 2012; Mahindapala, 2016; Silva & Tanges, 2009 (b); Hoole, 2003; Shammugathasan, 2008; Rasanen, 2015; Plaffenberger, 1982). First, they wanted to enjoy the same opportunities as those available to the majority Sinhala community and secondly, they wanted to change the regressive Tamil society by eliminating its pernicious caste system. According to some of the commentators, the most significant factors in the Sri Lankan conflict seemed to be myths and history (Gunasingham, 1999; Dharmadasa, 1988; Kemper, 1988; Rajanayakam, 1990; Spencer, 1990).

Reasons for the emergence of the uprising by Tamil youth in the 1970s cannot be attributed to any single cause. It emerged due to multiple factors that were mostly interlinked. Many of the recent studies have examined these issues from different perspectives. However, it is difficult to find any recent analysis regarding the background conditions of the Sri Lankan Tamil militant movement that has been carried out from the perspective of "Relative deprivation and the resulting frustration." In respect of that, this research expects to determine whether there was any relative deprivation and resulting frustration among the Tamil youth of Jaffna peninsula in the early 1970s and how they influenced the Tamil youth uprising of the time.

Theoretical and Methodological Application

As defined by social theorists and political scientists, relative deprivation theory suggests that people are likely to feel a sense of deprivation if they think they are being denied something considered essential in their society, such as for example money, rights, political voice, status etc. when compared to some reference group or person that is enjoying those benefits. However, it is recognized that a simple feeling of deprivation is not considered significant even if someone is frustrated about something. Frustration based feelings acquire significance only when a person or group compares its own situation with that of another reference group. Walter Runciman listed four necessary conditions if people are to sense a feeling of relative deprivation:

- A person does not have something.
- This person knows other people who have that thing.
- This person also wants to have that thing.
- This person believes they have a reasonable chance of getting the thing. (Runciman, 1966)

Some researchers have argued that relative deprivation mainly existed in two forms, namely as individual-based relative deprivation (IRD) and group-based relative deprivation (GRD) (Osborne et al., 2015). Accordingly, when a person suffers some sort of deprivation relative to other individuals, that kind of deprivation is known as IRD. In contrast, when a person feels his group is deprived relative to other groups that can be identified as GRD. Presence of IRD and GRD can result in four categories of people who experience relative deprivation. They are (i) people who suffer high IRD and high GRD (i.e., 'doubly deprived'), (ii) people who suffer high IRD and low GRD, (iii) people who suffer low IRD and high GRD, (iv) people who suffer low IRD and low GRD (Osborne et al., 2015; Runciman, 1966; Foster & Matheson, 1995).

Runciman drew a distinction between "egoistic" and "fraternalistic" relative deprivation. Egoistic relative deprivation occurs when a comparison is made between an individual's circumstances and that of a reference group. A comparison that is unfavorable to one can result in discontentment and unhappiness. Fraternal relative deprivation occurs when an unfavorable comparison is made between one social group (this may be based on race, language, religion, caste, social class, etc.) and another. Such comparisons can lead to substantial social discontent that could erupt into political protest, riots, and in extreme cases, social revolution.

Ted Gur also makes certain observations about the relationship between deprivation and violence. He expounds in "Why Men Rebel" (2010), that if people feel they are being deprived of something (especially regarding sundry rights like welfare, linguistic, religious, and other benefits) when comparing their position with those around them, it engenders feelings of discontent within them. This also happens when they realize that they have less of that which they believe themselves to be entitled to, so a gap is opened between their aspirations and their achievements. These problems always arise among deprived groups. As pointed out by Gur, 'the tension that develops from the discrepancy between "ought" and the "is" is of collective value contentment', and this disposes men to become violent (Gur, 2010, p. 23). Therefore, relative deprivation and the resultant discontent are identified as potential causes of conflicts within and between organizations. In the case of a country, it can lead to political violence, such as conflicts, rioting, terrorism, civil wars and other instances of malefaction.

This is a qualitative research that is based on the theory of relative deprivation and uses the case study method. In this context, as the first step of the data collection process the researcher was able to gather a large volume of subject related secondary information from various text documents. This process mainly depended on a desk-based review of literature and the perusal of other related documents that were most relevant to the main research area. Through the literature survey, a vast amount of

data contained in documents and news reports published in local and international newspapers and websites about the Sri Lankan conflict was accessed. In addition, other sources that were used for this purpose were books, research papers, monographs, theses, etc. Relevant contemporary documents preserved in the Sri Lankan National Archives were also scrutinized, such as contemporary Hansards, contemporary newspapers and various acts promulgated by successive governments, etc. Following the collection of literature-based text materials, researcher engaged in a field study to assess the validity and authenticity of these findings. A field survey was conducted in the three villages of Meesalai, Valvettithurai and Varani of Jaffna peninsula. Research sample comprised 44 persons, representing 30 males and 14 females. Most of them were elderly people who possessed extensive experiences of the events that occurred in the 1970s in Jaffna peninsula of Sri Lanka. Valvettithurai emerged as the main center of militant activities in the early 1970s. For that reason, 60% of the sample was selected from Valvettithurai. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in all three areas to collect reliable qualitative information. Key informant interviews were conducted with knowledgeable people in the surrounding villages and with officials of government institutions.

Content analysis method was used to analyse the data. As the first step of the data analysis process all the collected data were coded. Secondly, all the data were categorized to suit the main research aim. In order to do that numerous details that were not relevant to the main research aims were omitted. Also, in the case of partial viewpoints and incomplete information that were received, they were checked for reliability. Whenever information seemed incomplete or less reliable, all the information collected from the literature and interviews were cross-checked during the analysis and the reliable information was extracted. In the end it was possible to arrive at certain plausible conclusions by comparing all related details with each other.

Tamil militancy in the Jaffna peninsula

The violent activities that primarily emerged from the beginning of 1970 were mainly centred on two places of different social backgrounds – one in the Jaffna University and the other in Valvettithurai (VVT), a fishing village in the North of the Jaffna peninsula, well-known as a hotspot for smuggling of goods from India (Stokke, 2006). The violence prone youth from the Jaffna University were mostly Science and Mathematics educated unemployed graduates. Most of them were from the Jaffna high caste (Vellalah) families. However, VVT became a hotbed of violent activities in the 1970s long before the Jaffna University. The reason was mainly because VVT was already well established as a popular location for underworld activities. Many of the smugglers were also engaged in gun running and a variety of other illegal trades. Therefore, an unusually high number of military personalities had been stationed there. This scenario created the perfect background to create tension between the military forces and the Tamils. Mostly, the militant youth from VVT had only a basic level of education due to being affected by caste injustices and a bad socio-economic setup. They strongly espoused radicalism and violence. Gradually they became the dominant force in society by exceeding the strength of the Vellalah based radical group from the Jaffna University.

As pointed out earlier, the Sri Lankan Tamil militant movement emerged due to a number of grievances the youth harboured. Among those reasons was the frustration felt by the Tamil youth in Jaffna in the 1970s as a result of relative deprivation, and this can be identified as a powerful factor. Relative deprivation related frustrations influenced the Tamil youth in two different ways. First, the lower caste Tamil youth deeply resented the Vellalah caste hegemony and the resultant injustices their people had endured during the course of the past several hundred years. Even in the 1970s this situation proved highly detrimental to the lower castes. Particularly, the Tamil youth of VVT were badly deprived because of the injustices of the caste system.

Caste System in the Tamil Society

Over thousands of years the depressed caste Tamil people had been subjected to Vellalah hegemony, based on the traditional caste system and its injustices. Ragavan (2009) who was an early Tamil militant leader presented a clear idea regarding contemporary Tamil society. "I think the Jaffna Tamil society is structurally violent because of the caste system. When an upper caste man's honour is questioned, he uses violence to assert his authority." This observation is sufficient to convey an idea of how the lower caste Tamil people had to face discrimination by the dominant upper caste. As pointed out by Silva et al. (2009), the caste system among Sri Lankan Tamils in Jaffna can be seen to be very rigid, with clearly defined patterns of inequality, discrimination, and social rejection (p. 06).

The Jaffna caste system had an inverted pyramidal structure with the Vellalah in the dominant top position (Banks, 1960; Mahroof, 2000; Pfaffenberger, 1982; Siddarthan, 2003). Simon Casie Chetty (1934) identified more than 65 castes among Sri Lankan Tamils. However, most studies by national and international authors (Banks, 1960; David, 1974; Pfaffenberger, 1982; Rasanen, 2015) have estimated a little more than twenty castes in the peninsula. Those castes are listed here according to their population strength in Jaffna. *Vellalah* (land owner, farmer) 50.0%, *Karaiyar* (deep-sea fisherman) 10.0%, *Nalavar* (praedial laborer) 9.0%, *Pallar* (praedial laborer) 9.0%, *Koviar* (domestic servant) 7.0%, *Paraiyar* (drummer) 2.7%, *Thachchar* (carpenter) 2.0%, *Mukkuvar* (lagoon fisher) 2.0%, *Pantaram* (garland maker) 1.0%, *Vannar* (washer) 1.5%, *Ambattar* (barber/ hairdresser) 0.9%, *Brahmin* (temple priest) 0.7%, and *Thattar* (goldsmith) 0.6%, *Cantar* (oil monger) 0.5%, *Kuyavar* (potter) 0.5%, *Kikular (*weaver) 0.5%, Kollar (blacksmith) 0.4%, and *Nattuvar* (musician) 0.2%. Further, Sivathamby (1995) has identified some other castes in addition to above castes. These are, *Saiva kurukkal* (Vellalah who achieved the status of temple priest), *Nattuvar* (temple drummers), *Kaikkular*, *Chettikai*/ *Chiviar* (those who carried palanquin for kings), *Mukkuvar* (fisherman) and *Turumpar* (washers for *paraiyar*). Rasanen (2015) has confirmed that members of

each and every caste mentioned here were to be found in Jaffna society even in 2015.

As pointed out by Sivathamby (2005), Vellalah and Brahmin castes are recognized as high castes (p. 10). However, in practice the Vellalahs were able to dominate society as the ratio of Brahmins was very low. Also, "---these Brahmins were being employed only as temple priests. They were in fact salaried employees of the Vellalah who managed the temples" (Banks, 1960, pp. 66–67). Mahindapala's (n.d) observation regarding the Vellalah's hegemony of Jaffna was, "Jaffna had only one identity, the identity of the Vellalahs. It was a closed society that did not permit anything outside its rigidly conservative identity. The power and the insularity of the Vellalahs, together with the exclusion of any external influences, gave them the upper hand in Jaffna. Having eliminated all rivals there was no one to challenge them so they resisted jealously and fiercely any intervention from any external or internal quarter." Under the hegemony of the Vellalahs Jaffna society continues its feudal rituals and practices. Vellalahs were the traditional landowners in the society. Also, during the colonial period they were able to access the best educational resources, which allowed them to acquire proficiency in the English language and other subjects. That and the close relationship they maintained with the colonial rulers enabled them to enter the important professions and achieve political representation. As Russell noted, "Under British rule, missionaries began setting up schools in Jaffna and the American missionaries were allowed to function *only in Jaffna* along with the British. The Jaffna Tamils, especially Vellalahs took to education in a big way to gain upward mobility" (Russell, 1984, p. 35). In this context they were able to further monopolize the whole of Jaffna society and become wealthy and powerful. Rasanen (2015) explained this as follows, "Vellalahs had a monopoly over land ownership, social leadership, education, the service castes, places of worship and religious rituals, and thus over the entirety of Vellalah-hood" (p. 74).

In the Jaffna caste system, there was a historical categorization known as *Kudimai* and *Adimai*. As pointed out by Rasanen (2015), those who worked as menials for the Vellalah were categorized as *Adimai* (slaves), and those who lived around the Vellalah and provided assistance in the Vellalah's household matters were called *Kudimai* (Rasanen, 2015, p. 82). According to Banks (1960), traditionally the Vellalah people used to think that the Jaffna social system should be centered and focused exclusively on them (Bank, 1960, p. 71). From the mid to late 19th century, they had been living like tribal chieftains in the Jaffna society. The following observation by Hocart sufficiently presents a picture of the Vellalah's nature. "Like a feudal lord with his vassals to serve him on all occasions, these slaves and vassals came from different castes and served him in such capacity whenever the occasion demanded. The vassals were called *kudimai* and the slaves as *adimai*" (Hocart, 1950, p. 07). This system of slavery was abolished by the colonial rulers in 1844. But according to Tambiah (1954), "Although slavery was abolished legally, many of the depressed classes remained as the *de facto* slaves of their masters for economic reasons" (p. 85).

Among the above-mentioned castes, five castes were identified as the *Panchamar* castes. They are *Nalavar*, *Pallar*, *Paraiyar*, *Vannar* (washers) and *Ambattar* (barbers). They were called the depressed castes and during the 1960s and 1970s the Vellalah hegemony over these five castes was immense (Rasanen, 2015, p. 83). Also, except the Vannar (washers) other castes were referred to as "Untouchable." Traditionally, high caste Tamils identified "Untouchables" as unclean. "Untouchables" made up about 18 percent of the Jaffna population as compared to nearly 50 percent for the Vellalah population in the peninsula in the pre-war period (Silva *et al.*, 2009, p. 06). The Panchamar castes were highly discriminated against by the dominant Vellalah caste in matters such as temple entry, education, employment, land ownership, marriages, and ceremonial functions, etc. According to Silva et al. (2009a), Pfaffenberger (1982) and Rasanen (2015), a series of customary prohibitions were applied to the Panchamar caste community by the

Vellalah society. For example, they were not allowed to wear any kind of respectable clothes or jewellery. Particularly, both men and women from the "Untouchable" caste were traditionally forbidden to wear the upper garment (Pfaffenberger, 1982, p. 52). Jane Russell related her experiences thus, "When I first lived and studied in Jaffna in late 1973, there were elderly women who went around the villages, streets and markets with no upper garment over their breasts" (Russell, 2015). Jane Russell further observed, "---where their nudity was demanded by upper caste men and (presumably) by their wives, sisters and daughters, possibly these upper caste women felt relief that they were excused this humiliating custom by the Victorian prudery adopted by the English educated class of which they were part" (Russell, 2015). *Panchamar* castes could not dress in white for any kind of rituals. They were not allowed to wear shoes or use an umbrella when they had to go out. Also, *Panchamar* castes were not allowed to worship in certain temples. They were prevented from even going near the temples. They also could not marry without the permission of the Vellalah. Further, as pointed out by Banks (1960, p. 65), people of the *washermen* caste were not allowed to move around during daylight hours and had to travel only at night. Depressed castes were not allowed to play music at either auspicious or inauspicious functions. They were prohibited from riding bicycles and driving cars, not allowed to sit while travelling in buses, and not allowed to sit on chairs; they were also expected to bury their dead instead of cremating them like other Hindus and were not permitted to draw water from public wells. They were not expected to study or even allowed to enter the tea shops. As observed by Rasanen (2015), "the depressed castes were not permitted to enter the verandah of a high caste home. They were given tea in a discarded tin can, bottle, glass or a cup not used by others. This practice was prevalent even in the year 2018 in some rural Vellalah homes in Jaffna" (p. 86). By this practice, purity of domestic space was preserved, which would otherwise be polluted by inviting the depressed castes inside. The so-called lower caste Tamil people were socially deprived as a result of such prohibitions that had prevailed from a historical era.

Ragavan (2009) has recalled his own experiences in respect of the caste barriers in Tamil society. “I remember entering a barber saloon (barbers belonged to the oppressed castes) when I was small and asking the barber if he will allow Dalits (untouchables) into his saloon. There was a big muscular farmer standing next to me and he slapped me, because he was angry that I should even ask such a question. Eventually, the barber saloon was closed, as the barber was scared of the upper castes. After the saloon was closed, the barber started visiting people’s houses and performed his work. Thus, particularly in the villages the caste system was very strong. With the service castes of that time, there was no question of workers’ rights; whether you were paid or not, you were expected to work.” Therefore, caste injustice was one of the visible realities of life in the Tamil society.

Many elderly people from the depressed castes were interviewed by the researcher and they confirmed that they had to suffer numerous deprivations as a result of the caste injustices they had faced over the years, even as children. An elderly Tamil citizen from VVT described an injustice inflicted on him at that time as a result of the caste system that prevailed in Tamil society.

> *“We are toddy tappers of the Nalavar caste. We did not have an opportunity to live on an equal footing with the Vellalah people in the 1960s and 1970s. When I was eight years old, I suddenly got fever and went to get medicine for it with my mother. As I was not feeling well, I sat down near a Vellalah caste person in the medical center. He became very angry and scolded me and my mother. My mother and I came outside immediately”* Key Informant 1 (12.11.2018).

The experience related above is sufficient to illustrate how the rights of deprived lower caste Tamil people were violated by the high caste groups even as late as in the 1970s. Depressed castes could not wear trousers, shorts, and shoes even when attending school in the 1970s. Also, they had to keep some distance from Vellalah caste students in the schools, including inside the classroom (Drawn from focus group discussions held with lower caste Tamil citizens on 12.11.2018 in Meesalai).

They could not use a bicycle or car. They were badly discriminated against in public affairs even in the 1970s, and prevented access to water resources, laundries, barbershops, cafés, and public transport. They could not enter certain temples as Vellalahs felt that if depressed caste people entered temples, those places would become unclean. Even when depressed caste people were able to enter some temples at the time, strong discrimination existed inside the temple in the presence of Vellalahs. An elderly Tamil citizen of VVT from a lower caste gave the following account of his painful experience in connection with temple entry.

> *"If Vellalahs entered the temple we could not face them directly. My brother who was eight years old at the time, talked to a Vellalah child in the temple. Angered by this, the Vellalah mother thrashed my brother and severely admonished my mother"* Key Informant 2 (13.11.2018).

Therefore, it is clear that the depressed caste Tamils suffered from intergroup discrimination over thousands of years. There were no positive developments that occurred in their livelihoods in the 1970s. So, they continued to live under the worst social restrictions of the traditional caste system.

Majoritarian Sinhala Political Community and Tamil Youth

As pointed out earlier, high caste Tamils occupied high positions in the professional and educational fields even during the colonial period. This enabled them to maintain themselves at a higher social level (Tambiah, 1986; Spencer, 1990; Bandarage, 2009; Hoole et al., 1990). High caste Tamils were able to stay in the forefront, ahead of the Sinhala leaders in the political agitation movement during the colonial period (Wickramasinghe, 1995, p. 25). During those times Tamils were not regarded as a minority community either by others or even by themselves; rather, they were on a par with the majority Sinhalese community (De Silva, 1967, p. 90). As pointed out by Wickramasinghe (1995),

> "This state of affairs placed the Tamils, who formed only 11% of the total population of the country, on an equal footing with the Sinhalese, 43% of whom were Low Country Sinhalese and 24% were Kandyan Sinhalese. The psychological legacy of this was that until the mid-1920s, the Ceylon Tamils saw themselves as the dominant community" (p. 29).

Beginning from the 1930s the British rulers began applying democratic principles to the socio-political setup of Ceylon. During the post-independence period the government continued this policy by further democratizing the socio-political setup. Applying these democratic principles allowed the Sinhalese to establish themselves in a much stronger position in the socio-political and economic fields compared to the Tamils due to their far greater numerical strength. With the erosion of the previous position enjoyed by the Vellalah Tamils, they became frustrated as those positions came to be increasingly filled by the Sinhalese. Moreover, when they compared their position with that of contemporary Sinhalese society, they were worried. Even though the evolution of majority dominance is a natural phenomenon in the socio-economic and political fields under the practice of open competition based on democratic principles, the high caste Tamils were not ready to accept the majority, minority concept. They expected equal parity for both nationalities. In this context they felt they were relatively deprived compared to the Sinhalese (Focus group discussion held with Vellalah caste Tamil citizens of Meesalai on 08.02.2018).

The post-independence social welfare and human development indicators of Sri Lanka were at a higher level compared to the other South Asian countries. However, economic growth was not at a high level when compared with social welfare development. Nevertheless, as a result of the social welfare development the Sri Lankan population increased significantly so that in the 1970s the population of the youth community was extremely high in comparison to the population of older people. Supported by free education and post-independence welfare developments most Sri Lankan youth received a good education and naturally they expected to

secure profitable positions and acquire upward social mobility. But as the economy was tottering at the time, the government was unable to provide employment opportunities for such a vast number of educated youths. Therefore, unemployment, underemployment, poverty and youth unrest were rampant among both Sinhala and Tamil youth. The discontented Sinhalese youth then began to engage in violent actions against the government in 1971.

Frustration was a common issue of the time but the Tamil politicians, high caste Tamil youth and lower caste Tamil youth assumed that they were the only affected parties and that the Sinhalese community was in a better position when compared with their own situation. They also perceived certain policies implemented by successive Sri Lankan governments during the post-independence period as well as in the 1970s as being favourable to the Sinhalese while subjecting the Tamils to deprivations. Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike introduced the Official Language Act, no. 33 of 1956, which made Sinhala the only official language of Ceylon in 1956. Later, in the 1972 constitution, the government re-affirmed Sinhala as the official language, and declared that Buddhism shall have the "foremost place" (The Constitution of Sri Lanka, 1972, pp. 4, 5). However, it should be mentioned here that the constitution has clearly pointed out that protection will be afforded to all religions and to the cultures of all communities in Sri Lanka (The Constitution of Sri Lanka, 1972, p. 12). In addition, the constitution contains a number of clauses aimed at protecting the language rights of the Tamil community (The Constitution of Sri Lanka, 1972, pp. 5-7). Even though the upper caste Tamil leaders did not agree with some of these provisions they expected to enjoy an equal status with the majority community in the national political arena. Tamil leaders claimed these legislative enactments would bring in an era of "apartheid" with the Sinhalese as the "masters and rulers" and Tamils being forced to accept "subject status under them." Therefore, they feared they had become second class citizens of the country under the dominance of the Sinhalese. They felt they were formally deprived due to those implementations. However, in the 1970s, the government had allowed the use of

Tamil language for official activities in Jaffna (HC. Deb, 05.03.1974, vol. 10). In 1974 the parliamentary member for Kayts named Irakthinam irascibly addressed the parliament complaining that he had received a letter on 05.11.1973 written in Sinhala language (without a translation in Tamil language) from the Department of Telecommunications in Colombo. On this occasion, the Minister of Telecommunications named C. Kumarasuriyar tendered his apology regarding the mistake made by officers at the Department of Telecommunications in Colombo (HC. Deb, 05.03.1974, vol. 10). Therefore, it is clear that Tamil political leaders felt strongly about even tiny omissions in implementing the language policy of the country, by claiming that they had been relatively deprived.

The deprivation-based feelings were further heightened among Tamils after the implementation of the Standardization policy in the 1970s. The representation of high caste Tamils in the government professions gradually declined during the post-independence period. But they were able to maintain their high position in the Science discipline-based faculties of the Universities even at the beginning of the 1970s, as a result of their English language ability, which they had acquired because of the high-class educational facilities available in Jaffna. When compared to their population ratio it was significantly high even in the 1970s. When considering the university education of the time it was noticed that towards the beginning of the 1970s, the Sinhalese representation in the Arts faculties of the universities had significantly increased but their representation in the Science faculties was not significant. The government failed though to follow up by providing suitable employment opportunities for the vast number of Arts graduates, who then went on and formed the main group that participated in the 1971 insurrection. But the Science graduates were able to secure good positions even in the 1970s. Eventually, after the uprising was brought under control, the government moved to address this problem. Contemporary Sinhala nationalists also strongly urged the government to implement necessary measures to admit students to the Science faculties according to the ethnic ratio (Panchaseeha, 1970). The government's solution was to introduce

the scheme of Standardization, the purpose of which was to draw up admission quotas to the Science and medical faculties of universities in a manner that would reflect the racial representation of the total population. The Tamil political leaders vehemently opposed this scheme as it had the effect of reducing the number Tamil students while increasing Sinhalese representation in the Universities. However, one researcher pointed out that,

> "The Sri Lankan Tamils, though they constituted just 11.1% of the population, accounted for about 30% of the Science students because the scheme of Standardization ensured that this proportion of places in the University accrued to them" (De Silva, 1978, p. 90).

Nevertheless, Tamils viewed that by means of the 1972 Constitution, language implementations and university admission procedure of the 1970s, the Sinhalese had undermined their previous position. They believed the Sinhalese had usurped the socio-economic welfare benefits they had enjoyed in the past. After a prominent position was given to Buddhism in the 1972 Constitution, the perception of the Tamils was that the Sinhalese had shown disrespect to the Tamils' cultural identity by placing their own religion and culture in a superior position. As pointed out by Jaffna parliamentarian Mr. R. Sampanthan in 1977,

> "Tamil people in this country have a language of their own, a culture of their own, a civilization of their own and a heritage of their own; they too have a right to preserve and protect these…" (HC. Deb, 21.11.1977, p. 832).

As discussed above, throughout the post-independence period the Tamils perceived that they were being deprived significantly when they compared their current position with the previous position they had occupied, and by comparing their current status with that of contemporary Sinhalese society. In this context the feelings of deprivation of the lower caste Tamil youth were the most prominent. Even educational opportunities were restricted to the depressed caste people of Jaffna due to the barriers of the caste system. Some lower caste Tamil youth did

receive educational benefits through post-independence welfare programs but much of their education was based on the vernacular language of Tamil. This put them in an untenable position because after receiving education, they expected to enter the government professions but were restricted from even applying for the posts as the official language was Sinhala. The following comment was made during a key informant interview by a lower caste Tamil man who had participated in militant activities in the 1970s.

> "*My father was a traditional drummer from the Paraiyar caste. Over thousands of years our people had been discriminated against by upper caste Tamils. I was able to go to school in the 1960s. However, we faced discrimination even in the schools by the upper caste students. Despite many challenges I studied up to the Ordinary Level. I hoped to enter one of the white-collar professions as I did not wish to become a tom-tom beater like my father. But I was handicapped by my vernacular based education as it did not empower me to access my dream job. I did not want to be further deprived by the discrimination of Vellalahs. As a young lad I was aggressive and wanted to transform the Jaffna society in a violent manner to build up an equal society. Therefore, I joined the militant organization that emerged in the 1970s in Valvettithurai"* – Key Informant 3 (12.11.2018).

One of the early Tamil militant leaders, Ragavan (2009) mentioned that the Jaffna Tamil middle class family's aim was to educate their children and turn them into a doctor or engineer; this reflected a production line mentality. At least one child, preferably the elder child, should try and become a doctor, an engineer or at least an accountant. But during the post-independence period high caste Tamils were also brushed aside in the professional fields due to the heavy competition from mainstream Sinhalese. In this competition the depressed caste groups naturally did not stand a chance as they were marginalized by both internal and external factors. Therefore, the unemployment problem affected the depressed caste Tamils very badly.

In the mid-1970s, the relative deprivation-based feelings of Tamils regarding the Sinhalese heightened further. Even when the rest of the country suffered an economic downturn at the beginning of the 1970s, Jaffna farmers produced sufficient crops, particularly chilies, onions, rice, and mangoes (Ilangarathna, 1976). Some places like Velanai, Mankumpan and Mandaithivu produced large rice harvests in 1971/1972 (HC. Deb, 21.11.1974., p. 777). But after the introduction of the open economy in 1977 this situation changed drastically. The open economic policies were a mixed blessing. Though they stimulated the economy they also widened the gaps between the rich and the poor. Prices of agricultural produce from Jaffna dropped precipitously due to the open economy-based competition (HC. Deb, 18.11.1977). Therefore, rural poverty spread rapidly in Jaffna. However, poverty was a serious problem even among the Sinhalese in rural areas. Benefits of the open economic policies were enjoyed mostly by the urban community of Sinhalese. However, Tamils viewed that on the whole their community had been relatively deprived due to the bad outcomes of the Open Economy. At one time Mr. A. Amirthalingam, parliamentarian representing Kankesanthurai pointed out,

> "We have been subjected to much pain of mind and the humiliation of being unable to provide for our family's essential nourishment, due to the high cost of living, corruption and monopoly of the State and cooperative societies…" (HC. Deb., 18.11.1977, p. 408).

According to them, most of the factories, companies, development projects and businesses were established in the Sinhalese majority areas under the Open Economy. Therefore, Tamils were relatively deprived in such matters like professional opportunities, ownership of businesses and profits when compared with the Sinhalese (HC. Deb., 18.11.1977., p. 408).

The focus group discussions held in Varani on 23.09.2018 revealed that even during that period the Jaffna Tamil youth did not wish to work beyond the outskirts of Jaffna. Such feelings were now even stronger than in the 1970s. Computer literacy

and English language proficiency were compulsory requirements to join the private sector. Whereas the high caste Tamil youth possessed such knowledge to a certain extent, the knowledge of the lower caste youth was extremely poor. Therefore, the Jaffna Tamil youth felt that they were relatively deprived with respect to the private sector positions created by the Open Economy. Due to the much-vaunted Open Economy, a westernized lifestyle and culture were introduced to the cities. These foreign influences gradually spread among the Sinhalese majority who lived in the urban areas. Consequently, the urban Sinhalese youth acquired a taste for modern technology and the western lifestyle. Looking at all this, the Tamil youth realized they were in a disadvantaged position when compared with the Sinhala youth. Though western influences mostly had an effect only on the urban Sinhalese youth, during field visits the researcher realized that most Tamil youth were under the impression that most of the Sinhala youth were leading westernized lifestyles. They envied the contemporary Sinhalese youth and believed they received more benefits than the Tamil youth who were only facing deprivation.

Findings

Relative deprivation and the resulting frustrations have existed among the Tamil community from the 1970s. When considering the lower caste Tamil youth it could be noticed that even in the 1970s, all the signs that were characteristic of relative deprivation as identified by social theorists and political scientists, were manifested by them. Thus, relative deprivation-based feelings were definitely present among the lower caste Tamil youth. When considering the situation of these youth in the light of Walter Runciman's (1966) observations, it is clear that the lower caste Tamil youth did not have many of the things that the upper caste Tamils had. Thus, they felt they were discriminated against in the socio-economic and political sectors vis-à-vis the upper caste Tamils within the same society. Therefore, it is clear they suffered egoistic relative deprivation after comparing their individual circumstances with those of a reference group.

As discussed earlier, researchers have categorized relative deprivation based feelings in terms of IRD and GRD. In that context it is clear that lower caste people had suffered both IRD and GRD because of the hegemony of upper caste Tamils. Thus, generally the lower caste people realized they were being deprived as a group in the face of Vellalah dominancy. That was the main reason behind the organized anti-caste struggles that took place even in the 1920s. Group sense was more powerful than individual sense when the need to organize effective events arose. Anti-caste struggles were commonly visible in Jaffna society even in the 1950s. Participation of a number of people working as a group with a particular aim, such as organizing events or fighting for rights, will always achieve more effective results than the participation of a large number of people acting separately and individually.

During the post-independence period even the high caste Vellalah leaders and Vellalah youth came to realize they were relatively deprived. The depth of their deprivation-based feelings varied according to the time period. They realized they were deprived to a greater extent during the post-independence period as compared to the status they enjoyed during the pre–independence period. Another thing they felt was that they were relatively deprived after comparing their status with the contemporary Sinhalese political groups. According to the relative deprivation theory, if such comparisons arouse negative feelings among individuals or a particular group, this could give rise to egoistic relative deprivation feelings among them. It will be noticed that Vellalah Tamils too felt compelled to act as a group rather than as individuals. They engaged as a group in agitation movements at the national level during the post-independence period, by demanding equal opportunities with the Sinhalese. Therefore, it is clear that GRD is more significant among Vellalah Tamils than IRD. In the 1970s, they were able to mobilize the depressed caste youth by appealing to their sense of ethnic pride. In this context caste-based frustrations became a secondary issue and the feelings related to ethnicity-based deprivations became more prominent among all layers of Tamil youth. Thus, the Tamil youth as a single group became a united force against the

hegemony of the Sinhalese majority. Such group-based power and strength provided great encouragement to the Tamil community to project their Tamil ethnic identity and agitate against Sinhalese majoritarianism.

Group based deprivations were present among Tamil youth in the 1970s but their feelings regarding that were not the same. During the early period, deprivation-based frustrations were noticeably higher among the depressed caste groups than the upper caste group. This was because they felt they were doubly marginalized, both internally and externally. Their situation appeared to fit into the "double deprivation" category, which is discussed in the relative deprivation theory.

According to the relative deprivation theory, relative deprivation and the resultant discontentment are recognized as potential causes of conflicts within and between organizations. In the case of a country, it can lead to political violence, such as conflicts, rioting, terrorism, civil wars, and other instances of malefaction. It can be clearly observed that fraternalistic deprivations among Tamil youth are felt as the result of a negative perception regarding the circumstances of one's social group compared to another group or groups. As interpreted according to the relative deprivation theory, fraternalistic deprivations compelled the Tamil youth to follow the violent path in the 1970s. Among them were the lower caste Tamils who were in the "double deprivation" category. Therefore, being the most affected group, they aggressively engaged in militant activities in the 1970s and gradually became the dominant Tamil militant movement in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

Conclusions

Feelings of egoistic and fraternalistic relative deprivation existed among Tamil youth of the 1970s as a result of their conviction that they suffered various disadvantages in comparison to the reference group. Though both IRD and GRD existed among Tamil youth in the 1970s GRD was the most prominent. Because they acted as a group, a powerful sense of their common ethnicity had the effect of

forging unity among the Tamils. This power was harnessed positively in organizing militant activities with a unity of purpose. The lower caste Tamils felt really motivated as they had been badly affected by the "double deprivation" due to having suffered at the hands of the upper caste Tamils as well as the Sinhalese majority. The various kinds of deprivation-based feelings of the Tamil youth drove them to react violently against those whom they perceived to be their oppressors. Thus, lower caste Tamil youth were more active in the movement as they belonged to the "double deprivation" category.

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