

## **A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE SRI LANKAN TAMIL MILITARY GROUPS IN THE EMERGING AGES AND IT'S SOCIO-POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL OUT LINE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

When considering the Sri Lankan Tamil violence activities, the period of 1970s is considered predominant. Because until the beginning of the 1970s, the leadership of the Tamil community was conducted by the elite class Tamil leaders. They never wished to go their leadership for the massive campaigns or terrorist activities against the Sri Lankan government in public. Mainly they used non –violent activities (Gandhian method) to show their opposition. But during the beginning of the 1970s, Tamil youths lost faith in the ability of elite class Tamil leaders. They thought that elite class Tamil leaders would not be able to provide leadership for the Tamil community since they were incapable of acquiring any significant opportunities from the Sinhala government, for the Tamils even during the 1970`s. Therefore since beginning of the 1970`s Tamil politics gradually adopted the violent path. Concurrently a number of Tamil radical organizations emerged within the Jaffna peninsula. They engaged in violent activities to release pressure for their society. This tendency emerged in the 1970`s and in the 1980`s those youth successfully established their power in the Tamil society. This paper will brief analyze the socio, political and ideological features of the Tamil militant group in its early stages. Similarly at the end it will be shown how the LTTE became the dominant power in the Tamil society. This observation, mainly depends on the existing related literature regarding this topic.

**KEYWORDS:** Violence, Tamil, Militants, Guerrilla

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Emerge of Tamil Militant Groups**

As a result of long term frustration and socio political and economic discriminations, violent youth organizations emerged within the Jaffna peninsula. According to Narayan Swamy (1996), those violent Tamil groups were identified as "boys," by the cotemporary Tamil community. Tamil New Tigers (TNT) was identified as precursor violent group which formed by radical Tamil youths in the Tamil society. V.Prabhakaran, Pathmanadan and Chettithambalasingham were the most significant radical Tamil leaders in 1970s. According to Rohan Gunarathna, TNT was the first Tamil group who have indulged in fierce violence. (Gunarathna, 1983, p.14) Any how when the beginning ages, elite class Tamil leaders also gave intensive supports to violent behaviors of Tamil youth. (Hoole, 1990). They accepted Tamil separatist movement was as a holy-war against the oppressive and alien Sinhala state. (Bandarage, 2009, p.69) After then, number of Tamil radical groups were emerged in the Tamil society. In the beginning of 1980s more than 30 criminal groups were appeared in the Northern province of Sri Lanka (Gunarathna, 1987, p.27). Even though most of the groups fail to actively engage in significant violent behaviors as their lack of membership. But following Tamil radical groups held prominent levels within the Tamil society towards the beginning of the 1980s. They were Eelam Revolutionary organization of student (EROS) led by V. Balakumar, Eelam Revolutionary People's Liberation Front (EPRLF), led by K. Padmanabha, Tamil Eelam Liberation

Organization (TELO) led by Sri Sabaratnam until he was killed by the LTTE assassins in May 1986, People Liberation Organization for Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), headed by Uma Maheswaran and the most remarkable pioneer group which was Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) led by V. Prabhakaran.. (Swamy 1996). Most probably other tiny youth groups would be concurred by above one of strong groups.

### **Diversity of Tamil Military Groups**

All of the above groups similarly accepted separated homeland for the Tamils known as the Tamil Eelam (state) including the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. Even though these groups differed significantly in terms of strategies, ideologies and social background. When compared to the Sinhala youth participation of JVP riots in 1971, Sinhala rural nature becomes very clear. But Tamil organizations were compromised Tamil youth of both urban and rural sectors. Another reason is that the Tamil youth who participated in the Tamil military movement, consisted of various social backgrounds. Since the mid-1970s, various militant Tamil groups, recruited their members mainly among students. Further Samaranayaka mentioned, a sizeable proportion appeared to come from an affluent middle-class background and a fairly large number are from families of higher socio-economic status. The majority of the rank and file, however, belong to the lower middle class or its economic equivalent (Samaranayaka, 1990, p237). When comparing the social background of prominent Tamil militants leaders, their diverse background is most significant. According to Bandarage, (2009, p. 68), one of prominent leaders Kuttimani was a smuggler but leader of TELO, T. Maheshwaran a graduate of the University of London. Further Samaranayaka has explained about the background of Prabhakaran as follows, 'Prabhakaran was born in 1956 to a middle-class family from Velvetithurai, which is a fishing village in Northern Jaffna notorious for smuggling goods from Southern India. He apparently dropped out of school after grade five, and by the age of sixteen was involved in guerrilla activities. He began operating undercover when he was 19-years old' (Samaranayaka, 1990, p 226).

Caste diversity is another significant factor, of the Tamil military movement. For example a significant number of Mukkuvar (fisherman) and Koviyaar (domestic servants) caste members were represented in the LTTE. Mukkuvar, Koviyaar and Karaiyaars caste were found in the TELO. Large number of Vellala group were represented in PLOT. The majority members of Vellala and Mukkuvar were contained in EPRLF. When analyzing the caste heritage of top class Tamil military leaders, this caste diversity is most remarkable. For instance, leader of EROS was from Karaiyaar caste and Uma Maheshwaran who was leader of PLOT came from Vellala caste. V. Prabhakaran leader of LTTE came from Karaiyaar caste and EPRLF leader was from either Vellala or Karaiyaar. Some recent analyses have pointed out that, caste system based socio-economic issues also as one of the root causes of the conflict in the Northern Tamil community --- '(Balasuriya, 2012, p 86). According to them, the low caste Tamils were severely discriminated by Vellala elite class Tamils during the long period (Balasuriya, 2012). Therefore they mentioned that the uprising of Tamil youth took place as a result of long term discrimination in the inter-community. But it is important to note down here that a significant number of Vellala caste youth also had participated in the Tamil military movement at the initial stage.

Political ideology of Tamil youth militancy has been mixed with Tamil nationalism and Marxism. Mainly their idea of nationalism derived from various concepts. Such as Tamil motherland concept, glorious history of Tamils etc. This ideological framework was designed to explain and justify their targets. According to popular Sri Lankan Leftist leader S. Shamuganatan.' it is true that, for pragmatic reasons they first resorted to the armed struggle and thereafter went in search of an ideology that would justify such action. Naturally they found it in Marxism-Leninism. There is nothing wrong in this except that most of the Tamil militant groups did not seem to have studied Marxism-Leninism sufficiently' (Vaitheespara,

2007). Even though most of the time Tamil militants leaders have significantly expressed their Leftist approach. For example prominent LTTE leader A.S. Balasingham has explained their ideas as follows. 'The political objective of our movement to advance the national struggle along with the class struggler rather our fundamental objective is national emancipation and socialist transition of our social formation. (Balasingham, 1983, p 42). Similarly most of the publications issued by Tamil radical groups, have been clearly indicated their Leftist influences. Further some recent analyses have been observed about relationship of between JVP insurrection and Tamil military movement. (Bandarage, 2009, pp66-67, Samaranyaka 1990.) According to Samaranyaka (1990), and Ivan (2009), Tamil military youth and JVP youth had shared Leftist ideas among each other, when they were in Welikada Jail in the beginning ages.

Every Tamil military group was influenced by Leftist ideas, certain ideological differences also appeared among Tamil military groups. As pointed out Samaranyaka (1990), 'The differences in ideology between the groups is mainly attributed to their different interpretations of Marxism. The E. P. R. L. F. advocated an orthodox Marxist-Leninist approach irrespective of any embellishments. The P. L. O. T. adhered to a socialist revolution of the workers and peasants based on a strong Marxist line. The E. R. O. S. on the contrary advocated an even firmer Marxist view of the struggle. According to Sabarathnam (T.E.L.O) they don't consider about socialism or any other concept till achieve Tamil Eelam. After achieve separate Tamil kingdom they hope to apply socialism. The leader of the L. T. T. E.. V. Prabahakaran, explained that socialism and Tamil Eelam formed the nucleus of the L. T. T. E. ideology (Samaranyaka, 1990, p288).

Though most of the Tamil military groups endured Marxism, seemed to play only a minor role in their activities and indoctrination. As mentioned previously their main purpose was to achieve independent Tamil Eelam. To fulfill this target they used violent method rather than ideological approach. According to Prabahakaran they were mainly dependent on practical action rather than ideology. Violence is their primary method which is used to achieve their last target (Prabahakaran, 1986, p13). Their early targets included policemen, soldiers, and a number of Tamil politicians who were seen as collaborators with the Sinhalese dominated government. The attacks were sporadic, relying largely on hit-and-run tactics.

There were certain ideological differences among Tamil guerrilla groups, they all similarly accepted violent activities to achieve their final goal. But some sporadic differences appeared regarding war strategies and tactics. For instance LTTE adopted, tactics which were introduced by Mao- Sethun and Cheguvara, naming that of confusing the enemy and attacking unexpectedly and destroying one's target (Dagmar, 1986 p71). Further the final goal of LTTE was, to achieve national liberation and socialist revolution. But before entering this final goal they were supposed to engage in a people's war. But this concept was only an idea, which was subjected to give moral support for participated Tamil guerrilla. Practically they did not engage in people war. But according to the PLOT, war strategies should depend on particular time and situation. There for policies should not be exact or stable, it would be changeable. They introduced mass - base mobilization for Sri Lanka (Dagmar, 1986, p74). Similarly EROS did not totally accept LTTE's hit and run tactics. According to them it is only effective when movement is in beginning age. But when movement was gradually developed policies should be more advance. Therefore they identified economical sensitive areas as military target places. Through this method they expected to long term effective results. They supposed ambushes, landmines, bombing as tools of war. Similarly TELO also pointed out that warriors can initially use hit and run tactics, but if they can engage in open confrontation that basic method should be skip out. They impressed strategy of protracted war of national liberation. EPRLF mainly influenced by Leninism and also accepted mass mobilization depending on the lower class in the Tamil

area. They also identified hit and run method as only more strategy. (Frontline, March –April p 65)

As mentioned previously the emerging of the Tamil military movement, elite class Tamil leaders gave remarkable encouragement for the Tamil youth. Vellala elite class was the main predominant group in the Tamil politics up to the 1970`s. Even though after ten years later, when 1980`s, this situation had been changed clearly. Tamil guerrilla movement had established their power in the Tamil society. Number of elite leaders were murdered by guerrilla groups, complaining that elite leaders had engaged with agreements with the Sinhala government. Under this situation most of the elite leaders migrated overseas. This situation created a positive environment for the guerrilla group for successfully establishing their power. In 1986, the entire membership of Tamil military movement more than 10,000 (Samaranayaka, 1990, p 234). Even in the initial stages some Tamil guerrilla leaders had successfully developed foreign connections. According to Swamy (1996), some of the guerrilla members had taken foreign military training from India, Lebanon, and Palestine etc. Similarly weapons, equipment and funds were also provided by those countries to develop Sri Lankan military movement even in 1970s. Involvements of India, were most particular regarding this issue. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi acknowledged in 1983 that the Research and Analysis Wing (R. A. W.), India's foreign, Intelligence agency, had established contacts with a number of Tamil Guerrilla groups (Samaranayaka, 1990, p 248).

### **Dominance Power of LTTE**

As mentioned above when beginning of 1980s guerrilla military tendency was most remarkable factor in the Tamil society. They had come forward to fulfill similar final goal which was separate independent Tamil state. Even though as mentioned previously entire guerrilla movement was not disclosed similar features. There were number of sociopolitical and ideological differences and variables among each other. According to this there were no massive positive opportunities to establish long term strong unity or connection amongst various Tamil guerrilla group. They had been engaging in a power competition with each other, to establish their power on Tamil community. Lately prominent leftist leader Sanmugathan, pointed out this situation as followers, 'from the beginning, the militant groups committed serious tactical errors. In the first place they were not united. Five major groups sprang up and constantly collided with each other. Because of this disunity, the Indian secret service (RAW) was able to influence them and use one group against the other and thus weaken the whole group (Vaitheespara, 2007). Even in the infancy stages, the LTTE was able to gather majority number of Tamil youth around their group. Their position was more prominent even 1970`s among other military groups. As mentioned previously they were the main group who were accepted action oriented method rather than ideological perspectives. This method was given most effective results for their development. After the 1983 communal violence, they found a positive environment to develop the most effective propaganda movement among Tamil community. They used this situation, to create adverse ideas among Tamils over majority Sinhalese. Under this propaganda movement number of Tamil youth connected with the LTTE, expecting separate Tamil kingdom. Lately Anton Balasingham analyzed this situation as follows, 'July 83' marked a turning point in the history of our struggle. There was a massive racial violence, as you know, in which hundreds of Tamil people were massacred. This gave a new momentum to the struggle. It led hundreds and thousands of young men to join the liberation organizations (Ilankai Tamil Sangam, 16.12.2006) As a result of more human power LTTE was able to develop their financial level by using, smuggling, robbery, collecting tax from people etc. Further their practical efficiency they were able to develop contacts with Indian RAW (Research Analyses Win) which was the agency of the Indian government that dealt with external intelligence, was entrusted with the task of advancing secret Indian foreign policy (Bandarage, 2009, p 113). Through this connection they could obtain much of political and

economic benefits rather than other Tamil guerrilla group. During the 1980's the LTTE was able to establish their dominance within the Tamil society. Because the L. T. T. E. began to eliminate any groups which posed a threat to their supremacy. For example Between April and May 1986, nearly 150 members of T. E. L. O. including its , Sri Sabarathnam, were killed by the L. T. T. E. (Samaranayaka, 1990, 229) .Similarly another significant group which was PLOT successfully skipped out from Tamil politics by LTTE. During the initial ages U.Maheshwaran was a leader of the PLOT, was closely associated with Prabahkaran. Even though when U. Maheshwaran became a barrier towards the power of the LTTE. Prabahkaran took immediate action to kill him. More to point the LTTE killed 70-80 carders of EPRLF in 1986.(Bandarage,2009,p 129).Having killed and also sent hundreds of its rivals underground, the LTTE began to claim that it was the "sole representative of the Tamil community"(Hooly ,2001,p 340). Anton Balasingham has provided the following explanation to say that why they destroyed other military group." It's a struggle for supremacy. They want to destroy us politically and, to our shock, we found, uncovered, some documents from an EPRLF comrade, that there was a plan, a plot was worked out, in which they were planning to launch a sudden, unexpected attack on the Tigers. And all the details of the plan we have got. So what happened was...we had no other alternative but to take immediate action." (Ilankai Tamil Sangam, 16.12.2006) Through observing following another statement of Anton Balasingham it will clearly identify their situation and ,purposes. ""So, as a consequence, the Tigers have emerged as the sole politico-military organization in Tamil Eelam. And all the other tiny groups, like EROS [Eelam Revolutionary Organization Struggle], are falling in line with us. EROS doesn't want to have any conflict with the Tigers. They are more mature politically, and militarily very wise. (Chuckles) Now, they have accepted our leadership and (uproarious laugh) we have built up a very cordial relation." ( Ilankai Tamil Sangam,16.12.2006) Say, for example, there are four or five groups, each imposing various taxes, getting money. Somebody will come and ask you for money and you give money to the Tigers, and then EPRLF will come and demand money, then the other organizations will demand – then you will get frustrated. What the people here want is a single movement, committed to the struggle. That is the general opinion among the Tamils."(Ilankai Tamil Sangam, 16.12.2006)

But even the LTTE has mentioned, that Tamil people totally accept their power and because they are the main representative of Tamil people, some analyses has pointed out different viewpoints. (Stokke, & Ryntveit ,2000) According to them, the LTTE had maintain a dictatorship over the Tamil community. They collected carders and taxes through unfair forcible activities. Similarly during the 1980s there were no other alternative selections for the Tamil people rather than LTTE. Above researchers pointed out following statement of one of Tamil person which they have observed."-----there is threat all the time and because there is no political solution or anything, they feel that if the LTTE is also gone we don't have anything at all. If you are there is Jaffna, unless you are very politically conscious, you don't want to think about alternatives, because there are no alternatives. You have seen in the front of your eyes what happened to so many alternative movements (Stokke, & Ryntveit, 2000, p 296)

## **CONCLUSIONS**

According to the above explanation it is able to identify that the Sri Lankan Tamil youth started violent activities when 1970s.They stabilized variety of military organizations and also followed different strategies and theories. But it is important to note down here, there were no strong unity even emerge ages of Tamil military movement. There were big competitions between each other to establish their power among Tamil community. When the 1980s LTTE movement was able to successfully establish their supreme power among Tamil community. They suppressed other Tamil military groups

and expand their supreme power over the Tamil community around Northern and Eastern provinces. They strongly emphasized that they were the main representatives of the Sri Lankan Tamil community. Even though it is important to engage in further observations through different angles to establish the final conclusions regarding such issues.

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