

government amidst a deepening economic crisis and political morass. Further, with the dissolution of parliament institutional and structural reforms are stalled; even before that, economic reforms were lackadaisical. The planned divestiture of remaining state holding in Sri Lanka Telecom and Shell Gas (Lanka) Ltd this year has not taken place so far, primarily due to unfavourable market conditions.

In sum, both the IMF and the GOSL are unable and unwilling to deliver on their economic forecasts and institutional and structural reforms respectively.

Conclusion

The Sri Lankan economy is poised for a very low economic growth rate this year, perhaps the worst since independence. This will inevitably result in significantly lower public expenditure on social sectors and a marginal decline in defence expenditure compared to last year. What is alarming is that the gap between defence and social expenditures as proportions of public expenditure is expected to widen further. ■

CONFLICT RESOLUTION THEORIES AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO THE ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA

Ranjith Wijesinha

Conflict resolution is a discipline with a developing body of theory and practice. As an academic and professional study, conflict resolution developed largely in the United States and Europe. It was the Cold War and a number of changes within western nation states that led scholars, mainly in social sciences, to search for a science of conflict and its resolution.¹ Today conflict resolution has become a distinct field of study through the setting up of formal centres in academic institutions and the publication of professional journals. The period between 1950s and 1960s is considered as the foundation period of conflict resolution. Further construction and expansion occurred in the period 1970s to 1980s.² Conflict Resolution has a theoretical base and practical skills in resolving actual conflicts. The skills are for the resolution of conflict within an individual, between two individuals, between communities or organisations or conflict at the international level.

Conflict Theories

Theories of the nature and origins of conflict have a long history and include those of Freud and Marx. There are a number of conflict theories and theorists in conflict resolution. Two scholars who have been prolific contributors to conflict research are John Burton (international relations) and Johan Galtung (peace research). Both Burton and Galtung as human needs theorists share the view that denial of human needs is the central cause of conflict.³ There are also various scholars in the field of psychology who provide insights to conflict resolution.

Many social scientists have identified the role of human needs in understanding human behaviour. According to Burton human needs are 'universal and primordial, and perhaps genetic'. They are required for the development of the human species and will be

pursued by all means.⁴ Burton identifies nine human needs. These are consistency of response, stimulation, security, recognition, distributive justice, appearance of rationality, meaning, control, and role defence (defence of roles that permits satisfaction of needs).⁵

Galtung identifies four classes of human needs. These are: survival needs, well-being needs, identity needs and freedom needs⁶. Although less precise, Galtung's formulation allows much greater scope for the social dimension of human existence and for variety of forms in which these needs manifest themselves. Galtung, who identifies the structural nature of protracted conflicts, has played a prominent role in identifying the social structures that give rise to protracted conflicts. He explains conflict in the form of a triangle and identifies three elements: the attitudinal aspects (consisting of cognitive and emotive elements), the behavioural aspects and the conflict itself. The construction of Self-Other image with significant differences between images held by different actors is the next important cognitive aspect. The cognitive aspect is reinforced by emotions enhancing Self-love and Other-hatred.⁷

Practical Skills in Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution involves both the study and practice of skills in communication, problem solving, mediation and negotiation. Communication is vitally important as a means for carrying out the fight and to gain new supporters. Communication also lies at the heart of the resolution of conflicts. Inappropriate language very often leads to breakdown of peace talks. For example, during the failed talks between the LTTE and the government in 1995, the LTTE reacted angrily to the language of negotiations,

when the president used the term "concession" to describe lifting of the economic embargo on Jaffna.⁸ However, good communication alone does not necessarily lead to resolution of conflicts.

Problem Solving

John Burton has been the leader of problem-solving process in the international arena. The workshop as envisioned by Burton consists of panel experts in conflict resolution and parties to the conflict representing the various sides and factors. The parties are not themselves officials of the government or the opposing armed group. The workshops are held in secret to avoid outside pressure. The objectives of the process are analytical and not negotiation. In 1985 The Centre for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland (USA) in collaboration with the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (Sri Lanka) sponsored a large forum as well as two smaller more intensive seminars that addressed the Sri Lankan conflict.⁹ Although participants in these workshops were influential members of both communities, they were not able to make an impact on the leadership of the government and the LTTE. "This disjunction and problems of re-entry into the conflict system make successes at the workshops level difficult to transfer in meaningful ways to a political, negotiation process."¹⁰

According to Galtung, conflict resolution requires much more than problem solving. Galtung makes a distinction between direct violence (people are murdered), structural violence (people die through poverty) and cultural violence (whatever that blinds to this or seeks to justify).¹¹ In his view structural violence "is not only evil, it is obstinate and must be fought." The strategy advocated by Galtung is nonviolent revolution.¹² He also identifies peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding as three approaches to peace¹³

Assumptions and Criticism of Conflict Resolution

According to a number of scholars conflict resolution has been of little relevance to protracted ethnic conflicts such as in Sri Lanka.¹⁴ There are unstated assumptions in conflict theory that need to be deconstructed in order to understand why it has not been more useful.¹⁵ Salem, mainly from a non-western perspective, criticises the ideological basis of conflict resolution. And Tdwell and Heys argue that conflict resolution has made no difference to the escalating conflicts and identify conceptual flaws.¹⁶

The macropolitical context (USA & Europe) has been a major influence on the assumptions and values of conflict resolution. Considering the dominant and powerful intellectual, cultural and political traditions of the societies in which conflict theory emerged, could the theory remain acultural and apolitical? In this macropolitical context legitimacy is based on authority embodied in the legal system, bureaucratic administration and centralisation.

Based on democratic and liberal values there is an assumption that all parties share certain values such as equality and recognition of the rule of law. It is an environment where people are considered as self-interested rational beings. And most of the disputes that emerge in these societies can be resolved within the system of law and they are mostly to do with individual rights. Generally the state itself is not a party to the conflict.

The origins of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka have the basis in the formation of an ethnic state. Beginning from 1956 there was the rise of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. The state was controlled by a hegemonic majority and was based on patron-client loyalties. When Sinhala was made the official language, this policy tremendously disadvantaged the minorities. The state was the party to the conflict. Such a state can be described as a "defective state." That is, the state is controlled by a hegemonic majority and bound by patron-client loyalties. The rule of law and democratic principles are weak. Besides the state being a 'defective state' the invention of opposing identities and ideologies based on myths and symbols has formed opposing 'mindsets'.

Changing Approaches of Conflict Theory and Practice to Protracted Conflict as in Sri Lanka

Approaches toward ethnic conflicts and conflict resolution are changing in the international field since the end of the Cold War. The relevance of pacifist and nonviolence objectives and strategies to conflict resolution is being recognised. For example, the ideas of Gandhi are seen as vitally important to the understanding of violent political conflict and alternatives to it. The teaching of Buddha (Dhamma), how the doctrine of middle way and the four noble truths locate the deepest roots of conflict in the perceptions, values and attitudes of the parties are given recognition.

Sri Lanka has much to offer and gain from conflict resolution, practically and theoretically. But the vast literature on conflict in Sri Lanka remains rooted in "realist" political and anthropological approach.¹⁷ It is a task for peace researchers, peace activists in Sri Lanka to identify and make use of the vast literature. Human needs remain the most extensive theoretical approach for understanding protracted conflicts. It is argued that the human needs approach provides a moral and spiritual basis for political action to resolve the conflict in Sri Lanka. But for this approach to be accepted and put into practice there has to be changes in the mindsets of both sides.

Creating a Will

Creating a will to resolve protracted conflicts is perhaps the most difficult problem in the whole study of conflict resolution. The cost of the conflict in terms of death, destruction and economic hardships has not led the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to take actions to resolve the conflict. Instead both

the parties have used the cost to rationalise their positions. For the Sri Lanka government any attempt to create a separate state has to be fought at all costs. For the LTTE the cost of the war in terms of suicide killings, hardships born by the Tamil people are all part of the sacrifice and martyrdom for Eelam.

The responsibility for finding a solution that will satisfy the Tamil demands rests with the Sri Lankan government. But whatever political party is in power there is a failure to adopt a long-term perspective for peace as they focus on clinging on to power at the next general elections. Opposition to devolution comes from the Sinhala nationalist parties who see any form of devolution as a division of the Sinhala majority nation.

An Alternative Approach

Although Western conflict theory and practice remain problematic in application to Sri Lanka, some of the theoretical developments and practices do provide valuable insights for peacebuilding and peacemaking. There are two main obstacles confronting the peace process in Sri Lanka. First, there has been a growing consensus between the two major parties that the solution to the conflict is a power sharing and devolution close to a federal system. But in the absence of a broad consensus within the Sinhala and Tamil communities and a bi-partisanship between the two major parties, the peace proposals do not have credibility. Second, LTTE is a military organisation with narrow political perspective. And it is not clear whether the LTTE could transform into a political organisation and will accept anything less than a separate state.

Since 1983 resources and mindset of the Sri Lanka state has been directed towards war. After so much violence, destruction, mistrust and polarisation between the two communities, can peace be achieved in a short period by negotiations? Sri Lanka needs a comprehensive peace process where peacebuilding commences with healing and reconciliation. "Since wars begin in the minds, it is in the minds of men [and women] that defences of peace must be constructed."¹⁸ The peace process needs to commence by changing attitudes and mindsets using insights from both Buddhism and Hinduism.

However, there are western theoretical insights for the peace process. These are the human needs theory, peacebuilding and peacemaking as defined by Galtung and the insights on conflict transformation developed by John Lederach.¹⁹ This alternative approach includes the civil society and is a long-term approach based on peacebuilding. It adopts a multifaceted and multilevel approach. That is, it involves all sectors of the society, at national, regional and international levels. This approach argues that before negotiations are possible considerable preparations are needed.

The first stage in peacebuilding is establishing an effective southern peace constituency and a bi-partisanship between the two major parties. This will enable to gain the trust and confidence not only of the moderate Tamils but may go a long way in getting the

confidence of the LTTE. In the south it is the civil society that is able to put pressure on the two major parties to establish bi-partisanship.

Given the long history of broken agreements and anti-Tamil riots, it is the Sinhala politicians and the Sinhala people that should take steps to build trust in the Tamil community. For an active peace constituency to evolve there has to be a united peace movement in the south. Considerable effort is needed in changing attitudes and developing inclusive politics. In order for an understanding and acceptance of the non-negotiable human needs that has given rise to the conflict, an education for ethnic reconciliation and human rights are needed.

Once a strong peace constituency emerges with the backing of moderate Tamils, regional and international powers, the LTTE could be brought under considerable pressure to move from violence to politics. The Tamil diaspora in many western societies need to play an important role in establishing peace. To a large extent the Tamil diaspora can assist to move the LTTE from violence to politics and from exclusion to inclusion. The role of the international peace community is crucial in the involvement of the Tamil diaspora in peacebuilding. Because the Tamil diaspora carry bitter memories of anti-Tamil riots that led them to leave Sri Lanka and has no confidence in the Sri Lankan government or the Sinhala community.

Given the history of the protracted conflict in Sri Lanka, lack of political consensus and the mistrust of the Sinhala polity by the LTTE, it will be idealistic to believe that a process exists that will bring peace in a short span of time. The conflict has created mistrust, extreme perceptions and bitter emotions. Therefore the peace process must start with very small but clearly coordinated steps that indicate 'good faith'. A comprehensive peace plan that builds confidence, trust and changes the "mindsets" is a pre-cursor to negotiations.

Notes

¹ Joseph A Scimecca, "Conflict Resolution in the United States: The Emergence of a Profession," in Kevin Avruch, Peter Black & Joseph A Scimecca, (eds.) *Conflict Resolution Cross-Cultural Perspective*, London, Greenwood Press, 1991, pp.20-21.

² See Hugh Miall, Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1988.

³ According to the Human Needs theory, besides biological needs that cannot be compromised humans have psychological needs such as identity, recognition and distributive justice that are nonnegotiable.

⁴ John Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention*, London, Macmillan, 1990, pp36-37.

⁵ Burton, *Deviance, Terrorism and War*, New York, St Martins, 1979, p.79.

⁶ Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence", *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no.3, 1990, p.292.

⁷ Galtung, *Solving Conflicts: A Peace Research Perspective*, Honolulu, University Of Hawai, 1989, p.4.

⁸ J. Uyangoda, "Breakdown of Peace Talks", *Pravada* Vol 4. No.1 May/June 1995, p20.

⁹ Edward E. Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict*, Dartmouth Publishing Company Ltd, 1990, pp.73-81

¹⁰ Kumar Rupesinghe, "Mediation in Internal Conflicts: Lessons from Sri Lanka", in Jacob Becovitch, (ed.) *Resolving International Conflicts*. Colorado, Lynn Rienner Publishers, 1999, p.155.

¹¹ Galtung, "Cultural Violence", *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no.3, 1990, p292.

¹² Galtung, *The True Worlds: A Transnational Perspective*, New York, Free Press, 1980, p.140.

¹³ Peacekeeping (dissociative approach) means a third party as a peacekeeping force separates the warring parties and maintains a ceasefire. Peacekeeping is appropriate when the conflict is horizontal, that is between equals and over goals rather than interests. Peacemaking (conflict resolution approach) means resolving the underlying cause over goals, interest and need by negotiations and mediation. Peacebuilding (the associative approach) is to build over a long term economic and social relationships and

structures, which do not lead to violence and unpeacefulness. Johan Galtung, *Three Approaches to Peace, Essays in Peace Research*, vol.2. Copenhagen, Christine Ejlers, 1976, pp 282-304.

¹⁴ AJan Tidal and Andrew Heys, "The Ashes of Conflict Resolution", *The International Quarterly of World Peace*, Vol.54, 1993.

¹⁵ K.Rupesinghe, *Strategies for Conflict Resolution: The Case of South Asia*, p.164.

¹⁶ Tidwell and Heys, "The Ashes of Conflict Resolution", *The International Quarterly of World Peace*, Vol.54, 1993.

¹⁷ Liz Philipson, *Negotiation Process in Sri Lanka*, Marga Institute 2001.

¹⁸ Preamble to the UNESCO constitution.

¹⁹ According to Lederach, conflict transformation is best understood when contrasted with the traditional linear methods. In this process there is a bias towards the long term. The focus is on relationship building over time and a commitment to constructing and sustaining an infrastructure as opposed to achieving an immediate result. See John Lederach, "Conflict Transformation in Protracted Internal Conflicts: The Case for a Comprehensive Framework", in K.Rupesinghe, (ed.) *Conflict Transformation*, New York, St Martin's press, 1995.

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