Political Dilemma of Muslims in Sri Lanka: State and Society Approach

MM. Fazil[1] and Terence Gomez[2]

[1]Dept. of Social Sciences, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, University Park, Oluvil. fazilmoh@gmail.com
[2]Faculty of Economics & Administration, University of Malaya, Malaysia

Introduction

The paper examines state and society contestation, one of the hotly debated aspects of the post-war Sri Lanka. The major issues under consideration include the majoritarian democracy and response of the society. When the Sri Lankan government declared victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2007 in eastern Sri Lanka and rest of the country in May 2009, this marked the end to one of the world's most protracted and brutal internal armed conflicts. The end of the war generated widespread expectations of a state reconstitution that would enable the country to accept minorities into the state system and embark on a sustainable peace. Recent developments have dampened that optimism, however, rekindling fears that Sri Lanka's tale of missed opportunities may continue. There has been a marked shift back towards nationalist-populist state- centred policies, reflecting the pressures of resurgent nationalism (radical movements), an unprecedented concentration of political power in a small ruling group, and the influence of some powerful vested interests. In this situation Muslim minority have contradicted with the post-war state policy of centralization of state power and negligence of their community in the state system. They remobilised right the way through Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) which is the first successful Muslim political party. SLMC secures representations in all political bodies in the following elections such as provincial, general, presidential and local government under SLMC in the aftermath of the war. Scope of the study is centered upon the SLMC and the majority Sinhalese community. Perspectives are focused within the political climate that prevail from the year 2007 to 2013.

Keywords: *Minority, Muslim, Policies, Society and Social forces*

Purpose of the Study

The paper purposes to explore the constraints of state and society reconstitution in the post-war Sri Lanka. Further, examines to how SLMC contests with State concerning to Muslim community.

Methodology

This study builds on a critical and interpretative approach of post-war state and society contestation in Sri Lanka. It is based on text analysis and qualitative interviews, supplement with observation. The first part of the data collection is based on a literature survey which author reviews all the literature available on the subject. Further, this paper is based on 20 qualitative interviews (08 elites; 04 Muslims and 04 Sinhalese; 04 members from Civil Societies). The observation not conduct through, anthropology style observations, but opted for a more restricted method. Finally, the empirical data analysis used in this study is carried out qualitatively based on text.

Theoretical Literature (Conceptual Tools)

The State: It can be emphasized that Uyangoda's (2010, 2011, 2012 & 2013) works are more insightful with regards to Sri Lankan state and failure of its reform. Feature of the state debate, what prompted the writing of this paper was a reading of Migdal's (2001) work on how states and societies constitute one another. His work is a model which not only offers a way of focusing on the level of social practices but also has the virtue of simplicity. In contrast to conventional theories, Migdal's conception of the modern state tries to capture the dynamics of the state within itself (that is, intra-state, in terms of its multiple parts) and within society (that is, in terms of the drawing and redrawing of social boundaries) as these occur in actual practice.

Social Forces: Governance is a continual process in which a state imposes authority and society responds to that imposition with collaboration, resistance, or something in between. Society does not act as one, of course, but in differentiated groups we call "social forces." In State Power and Social Forces, Joel Migdal (1994:20) defines social forces as "powerful mechanisms for associative behaviour."

In Sri Lanka, the concept of "group" is also commonly used to refer to large segments of society (militant, women, workers, peasants) or classes (middleclass, rural poor) or cast. If organized, even loosely, into social movements with political goals, the groups can also constitute social forces.

Social forces compete with one another "over symbolic and material interests" in their effort to dominate social and political "arenas." The winners are those that can establish coalitions and forge alliances through accommodation and struggle (peaceful or violent) with other forces inside and outside the state. The cohesiveness and resources of a social group and its leadership and the ability to deploy "pervasive and

powerful symbols" are important factors in determining success (Migdal 1994:21).

Our understanding of "social forces" can be sharpened if we contrast it with "minority ethnic parties" (Ameerdeen 2006:1) terms used recently to describe the movements stand voice of the social forces or minorities that have engaged in Sri Lankan state. This new category has gained widespread acceptance, but we find "social forces" to be a more accurate representation of reality (Abinales & Amoroso 2005:9). While "minority ethnic parties" would seem to the apex body of "social forces" in its description as "an arena of friendship, clubs, mosques, temples, churches, religious movements, business associations, unions and other voluntary associations that mediate the vast expanse of social life between the household and the state," it has been further and rather benignly defined as the place where citizens learn habits of free assembly, dialogue and social initiative to bring about that delicate balance of private interests and public concern vital for a vibrant democracy. In case of Sri Lanka these all social forces influencing on minority ethnic parties to act as collective social forces on behalf of their community. For an example SLMC and Tamil National Alliance (TNA) are working in this line.

These social forces maintain alliance and contestation with state owing to the sake of its own community. In Sri Lanka, however such social forces joint with collation government and secure powerful Ministerial posts. Such social forces adjoining or contradict alongside other forces too.

Findings & Discussions

In Sri Lanka, leaders of the state concentrated on consolidating the unitary state power and neutralizing the threat of militant Tamil nationalism and secessionism in the post-war state. Anyhow, there is no any acceptable move to state reformation or reconstitution which can absorb Muslim and Tamil minorities into the state system. In this juncture the failures to build sustainable peace to heal wound and grievances of the minorities during the war. This exclusive process of the minorities deeply developed threats and suspect to Muslim community. Specially, study shows the Muslims are a peaceful ethnic group spared throughout the Island since long period of time. Anyhow, anti Muslim sentiment has been increased among majority ruling class and radical movements since the end of the war. In the face of increasing violence against Muslim businesses, mosques, madrassas, and lives, allegedly by Bodu Bala Sena (BBS)–a radical outfit of the Buddhist political organization or social forces, Jatika Hela Urumaya (JHU), which is, create tense situation and question on the Muslims' fundamental rights. Study indicates there is greatest chances to some state sponsored mechanism behind these anti-Muslim campaigns and activities which have not allow to state and society reconstitution. It gives clear message that mentality of the majority

ruling class and social forces would not allow for any state reformation.

Anyhow, Muslim social forces open eyes and start to remobilise against to anti Muslim activities and gave continuous pressure upon SLMC which is most popular Muslim political party. SLMC has been stared to involve in contestation with present state system on behalf of the Muslim social forces. Muslim community supports to this party in all elections in the recent past. Study indicates SLMC one of the important collation partner to brought former General Sarath Fonseka to the last presidential election who competed with Rajapakas. In addition to that SLMC came as a coalition partner in the Rajapaksa Government since last general election and took ministerial post too. Interestingly, the party act as government partner and at the same time contest with the state when it necessary. SLMC some time kept silent while Muslims face above mention difficulties. Anyhow, party has timely condemned the attack against to Muslims by Radical Budhist social forces. Further, Justice Minister and SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem, has protested strongly against President Mahinda Rajapaksa's controversial move to circumscribe devolution by amending the Constitution. Further, study also proof that state works to make split among representatives of SLMC in parliament and its members in the other political bodies. Even, Muslims have well enough representatives in almost all political bodies but their power devastating by Mjoritarioan democracy or lack of democracy.

Conclusion

The approach of this study has been primarily qualitative by applying state in society (Migdal's theory), in an attempt to examine the post-war state and society contestation from the perspective of Majority ruling class and minority Muslims. Increasing anti-Muslim campaign, question on their fundamental religious right and present regime's centralization of state power have been insist social forces of the Muslims to remobilise under SLMC. Anyhow, SLMC has weakened through Mjoritarian democracy.

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