

# Political violence in sri lanka



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The recorded history of the world clearly points out the major political changes that occurred in the world are largely due to violence rather than revolutions or any other forms of passive resistance. For example, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) tried to conquer Europe by violence while Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), leader of the Nazi Party and Chancellor of the German Reich killed millions of Jews in aggression with the view to creating an Aryan German state. One of the best substantiations that we witness today is the America's war against terrorism.

It undoubtedly expresses the America's interior thought to extend its political power in the gulf region under the guise of war against terrorism. All these incidents evidently show that the violence has been used as one of the major instruments to gain political power in the history of the world. Therefore the political violence in Sri Lanka should be viewed in terms of historical perspective. It is not strange to say that Prince Vijaya's arrival in Sri Lanka has made the political background of violence.

Because the legend of Vijaya explains how he induced Kuweni to struggle with her own tribe to conquer the island and how he at last expelled her. The battle between the Tamil King Elara (North) and the King Dutugemunu from Ruhunu South, the arrival of foreign invaders in the colonial periods and their aggressive dominance of coastal areas of the country, and almost all the report submitted by the commissioner of elections after each election held in the Independence Sri Lanka vividly bring evidence for some sort of political violence that occurred in Sri Lanka in terms of power thirst.

Political violence and its nature Many different types of definitions have been given by scholars for political violence. Nee Burge describes political violence

as “ any force that is used to harass or harm individual or group of persons with a direct or indirect political motive” whereas Gurr’s (1970) definition lights political violence as “ all collective attacks that take place within a political community against its political regime, or to its actors including competing political groups as well as incumbents-or its politics”.

Therefore in short political violence can be defined as any kind of destructive action that amounts to physical harm or sabotage that confuse, damage or upset an individual or a group or otherwise the existing social order by another politically aggravated individual or a group of persons. Political violence takes many forms such as murder, attempt to murder, political assassination, assault, mischief, threat, intimidation, death threats, hurt, robbery, arson, damage to property, kidnapping.

Beyond all these, punishment transfers, demotions, threat to terminate the services or expulsion from services or making false complaint to the police in order to arrest or punish opposition supporters, etc. , come under the category of some sort of political violence. Political violence is also sometimes used by state power legally or illegally so as to suppress the protests or processions against the state action. Thus the political violence seems to be in different forms in its nature and shape.

Why political violence is created? Theories that explain political violence discuss three major areas known as biology, psychology and sociology. All these theories focus on aggression which deals with physical or verbal behaviour of person intended to harm another person. The psycho-analytic theory of Sigmund Freud (1930) and Innate drive theory of Lorenz (1966)

those which come under biological theory discuss human “ aggressive and fighting instincts” towards another human beings.

Psychological theory of John Dollard dealing with the link between “ frustration and aggression” and the social learning theory explaining the intended motives of human behaviour towards antagonism and the “ reinforcement” of learned behaviour emphasized by Albert Bandura (1963) in response to frustration clearly illustrate the aggressive nature of human beings. Further, J. Curve theory introduced by Davis (1962) related to “ revelation”, modernization theory of Samuel P. Huntington or the relative deprivation theory of Ted Robert Gurr also expresses the aggressive nature of human.

Therefore the theories of political violence discuss the aggressive behaviour of human beings towards power. Situation in Sri Lanka Political violence in Sri Lanka can be looked into different angles or categories on the basis of class strugglers, separatists and organized groups in independence Sri Lanka. The suppression of 1953 hartal by government, the aggression employed by government to repress the 1971 and 1988-89 riots led by JVP and the suppression of 1980 general strike launched by Trade Unions give some examples for class struggles that led to political violence derived from power struggle.

Apart from class struggle, the ethnic problem was the other factor that directed escalated political violence. After the 1958 communal riot, there was an extensive clamour for federal state from Tamil speaking community. After 1970, the demand for separate state became strong by the emergence of anti-government armed political movements among Tamil youth. Since

1983 Sri Lanka has been indulged into civil war due to power struggle of both involved in war.

On the other hand there is another distinctive group engaged in political violence in the names of politicians and their supporters. This group is organized for a short term objective. The activities of such groups reach the peak during elections. Even in the first two elections held in 1931 and 1936, it is reported that some people were murdered. Over a thousand pre-election campaigns of violence were recorded in 1970 General Election. The official report says that the post-election violence has been increasing in Sri Lanka after 1977 General Election.

Thus the political violence in Sri Lanka for power struggle can be viewed in different perspective angles after the country gained its independence from foreign invaders. Recent Tend If we make an attentive observation on the current political situations of Sri Lanka, we will be able to understand that there are intensive motives of power struggle that contribute to political violence in recent history of the country as happened in the past. The best example for it is the way our politicians use to change the government or gaining the political power.

Insurrection against the ruling party, toppling of government changing political sides every now and then for mere concessions or discharging sedition against the ruling regime, taking political revenge on opposition supporters, and trying to hug power in non-democratic paths, etc. , are some examples of the latest political violence for power struggle in Sri Lanka. Another fine instance for power struggle is the deep-rooted prevalence of

ethnic crisis or civil war for more than two decades in the country and the utilization of this problem by political parties willing to embrace power.

Each and every party before getting the power says we will solve this problem in a democratic way. But when they come into power, they are so quiet or giving vague statement about peace. Or even if a government is making attempt to solve the conflict in peace negotiation, the opposition of which previously talked about peace resolution in its regime opposes it at present criticizing the ruling party. Therefore we can strongly conclude with the statement that political violence in Sri Lanka is mainly a result of power struggle rather than any other mere causes.