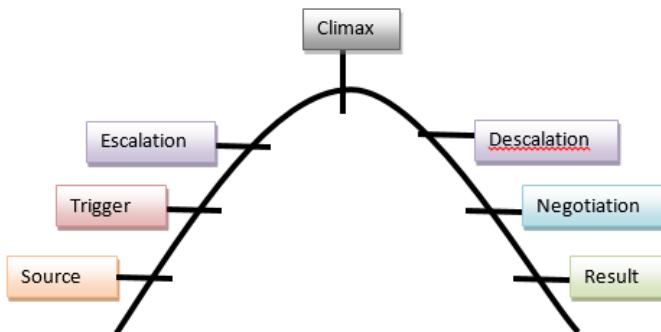


CHAPTER II THE ETHNIC CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN SRI LANKA

This chapter will focus on the history of ethnic conflict between Sinhala and Tamil, as well as the dynamics of the ethnic conflict that has lasted for approximately 25 years. This chapter will also explain how the relationship between the Sinhalese and Tamils themselves since the colonial period of the UK. The strength of each conflicting party, as well as the conflicting tactics employed by Sinhala and Tamils, will also be discussed further in this chapter.

A. Conflict Background

Figure 2 2.1 The Dynamics of Sri Lanka Civil War



Source: (Studies)

The conflict that happened in Sri Lanka is a conflict of racial/ethnics, also called for a civil war. An ethnic conflict is a form of conflict in which there are ethnic dimensions. Conflict tends not to be about ethnic differences themselves but also political, economic, social, cultural, or territorial issues. Ethnic disputes are common in every multicultural society. Intergroup problems arise during periods of substantial political, economic and social change and lead to uncertainty, opportunities for action, and particular interests. Polarization complaints and leadership lead to mobilization, from political action (conventional politics, strikes, demonstrations, and other non-violent means) to acts of violence such as terrorism, armed insurrection, guerrilla activity and civil war. Ethnic conflict is one of the major threats to international peace and security (Reuter, 2008).

Sri Lanka is a country located in the South Asia continent, bordered by the sea with India and also the Maldives. Sri Lanka is a former British colony. The British colonized Sri Lanka from 1796 until 1972. Until 1972, the international world called this country Ceylon. Sri Lanka is a country with a very rich Buddhist heritage, which is where Buddhist writings were first written in this country. The majority of the population is Sinhalese (74.9%), Sri Lankan Tamil (11.2%) and Sri Lanka Moor (9.2%). Sri Lanka has two official languages, namely Sinhalese and Tamil. Buddhism is the official religion of Sri Lanka, about 70.2% of the population of Sri Lanka embraces Buddhism.

According to the World Bank on its Appendix I to the 2003 report on Sri Lanka, the root causes of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka can be identified as follows:

- Ethnic politics and the interpretation of the past;
- Politics of language;
- Politics of education; and
- Other factors, including employment and land.

Demographically, Sri Lankan society is an ethno-religious mosaic and within the ethnic groups, there are clear religious divisions as well. To a certain extent, ethnicity and religion also have a regional basis, which is a significant reason why the Tamil militancy has a strong geographical dimension, which extended to the demand of a separate independent state later (Bank, 2008).

The Tamil Hindus dominate in the Northern Province and maintain a significant presence in the Eastern Province. The Eastern Province is a mixed ethnic area where Tamil, Muslim, and Sinhalese are

found in considerable numbers. Indian Tamils -the descendants of labours brought from South India by the British in the 19th century to work in tea and coffee plantations- were concentrated in parts of the Central Provinces, Uwa, and Sabaragamuwa. While Sinhalese Buddhism dominates in all parts of the country except the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Muslims have a significant concentration in the Eastern Province but are generally scattered throughout the country (Bank, 2008).

Christians maintain a significant presence in the coastal areas as a result of the presence of European colonial presence that has been present for more than 500 years and Christianization which resulted in the significant population in these areas. The Christians also can be found in all parts of the country in small numbers. The Malays are mostly

concentrated in and around the cities of Colombo and the West Province (Bank, 2008).

Due to the diversity that Sri Lanka has in terms of religion, ethnicity, and language, the country has also escaped the emergence of conflict. Sri Lanka is experiencing a prolonged ethnic conflict that has been running for more than 25 years. The two ethnicities involved in the conflict are ethnic majority Sinhalese and also minority Tamils. In the beginning, the root causes of Sri Lankan ethnic conflict was 'ethnic politics' which is later generated a social jealousy of the Sinhalese. The British colonial period lasted from 1796 to 1972. At that time, the British applied the policy of *Divide et Impera*³, by providing

³ *Divide et impera* or often also called political divisions is a combination of political, military and economic strategies aimed at gaining and sustaining power by breaking large groups into smaller groups that are more easily conquered. In other contexts, dividing politics also means preventing small groups from uniting larger and more powerful groups (Rahardjo, 2012).

various strategic positions in central and local government to the Sinhalese and Tamils. Tamils people in general were famous for their tenacity, loyalty, as well as their intellectuals who are superior to the Sinhalese. Therefore, although the Tamils were a minority, during the British occupation, the Tamils dominated the bureaucracy.

The power-sharing inequality arising from the British government's power-sharing generated social jealousy for the majority of the Sinhalese. The seeds of hatred began to appear in the hearts of the Sinhalese. Until after the British liberated Ceylon in 1948, the British exerted all power to the Sinhalese government, which was then based in Colombo and changed its name to Sri Lanka.

After its independence became the country's Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, the position became reversed. The majority of the

bureaucratic ranks are held by the Sinhalese. Until then, retaliation for the inequality of power-sharing acquired by the Sinhalese in the colonial era was on the rise. Sinhala accused Tamil of making a profit during the British occupation. This revenge then encourages ethnic discrimination. The Tamils have no right to vote after independence.

Discrimination against Tamils began to emerge when the Ceylon government in 1948 and 1949 issued the "*Ceylon Citizenship Act*⁴" policy which was a form of discrimination for Tamil ethnic minorities and made them barely gain citizenship rights. Parliament endorses Tamils as non-citizens. They should attach evidence to explain their origins. Only 25% of requests for Tamil citizenship are passed, so the majority of them cannot vote in the election

⁴ A controversial law that passed by Ceylon parliament that did not grant citizenship into Indian Tamils who were 11% of population. The purpose was to provide means of obtaining citizenship, and it determined that anyone wishing to obtain citizenship had to [prove](#) that their [father](#) was born in Ceylon.

(Zwier, 1998). Around more than 70,000 Tamils are made stateless. Over the next three decades, more than 300,000 Tamils were deported back to India.

Then, in 1956, the *Sinhala Only Act* policy was initiated by Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. Sinhala Only Act is an act passed by the government of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) making Sinhalese the official language of the country. The act was the first step taken by the new government of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike to realize one of the main campaign promises that had brought about his landslide victory in the 1956 general election (Britannica). This legislation forced Tamils to withdraw from the bureaucracy because they were not fluent in Sinhala, and prevented Tamils from working as civil servants and other public services.

Starts with the policy of the *Ceylon Citizenship Act*, the minority Tamils began to feel

excluded and discriminated against. The forms of discrimination include; lack of access to public services in their own language, education, and lack of public facilities located in northern and eastern Sri Lanka; the fact that the police agents in the north of the country did not speak Tamil, so that people continue to live in fear due to the big military presence. In 1972, under an emergency, the government established an ethnic constitution as it had been designed by the British. But the drafting of the constitution completely ignores the Tamils, gives more protection to Buddhism, and ignores Hindu, Islamic and Catholic groups (DeVotta, 2017).

The discriminations that the Tamils have perceived as a minority have pushed the Tamils to establish an independent state, a secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam. In the 1950s, the TULF was established, supporting the militant armed struggle.

The TULF is a political party in Sri Lanka which was dedicated on May 4, 1972, by S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, G. G. Ponnambalam, and Savumiamoorthy Thondaman. The goal of TULF is fighting for the rights of Tamils people. In the election period, TULF became the main opposition of Junius Richard Jayawardene as a representative of the UNP Party. This is because when Junius Richard Jayawardene elected, he did not realize the sweet promises given during the campaign. All of his sweet promises have been abandoned.

After that in 1976, there was a militant organization called Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The LTTE is a guerrilla organization that seeks to establish an independent Tamil state, Eelam, in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. It based in northeastern Sri Lanka and was established in 1976 by Velupillai Prabhakaran as the successor to an

organization he had formed earlier in the 1970s. The LTTE grew to become one of the world's most sophisticated and tightly organized insurgent groups. During the 1970s the organization carried out a number of guerrilla attacks (Britannica, Tamil Tigers).

By the establishment of the LTTE, Tamils plan to avenge the hurt they suffer from the discriminations directed against them. The use of violence by the Tamils was directed to government officials, as well as several acts of rioting and murder. The peak occurred in July 1983, when the LTTE committed suicide attacks against the armed forces based in the north. A total of 13 Sri Lankan soldiers were killed after the revenge took place across Sri Lanka. Between 400 and 3,000 Tamils were killed. More than 70,000 people have been killed since 1983 and the population declined as they fled back to India, Britain, Canada, the United States, Australia,

Malaysia, and so on. There were also massacres at Kent and Farms in 1984. Then the Anuradhapura Massacre of 1985 in which 146 civilians were killed, and 23 Tamils killed in Kumudini attack. The LTTE joins other organizations sympathetic to the LTTE and Tamil struggle.

The peace talks with the LTTE that had been held in Thimphu in 1985 failed and the armed struggle continued. In 1986 there were more massacres everywhere. Between May and June 1987, Sri Lankan troops launched Operation Vadamarachchi⁵ to release Jaffna from LTTE control. The military commits a conventional war. As a result, LTTE leaders Prabhakaran and Sea Tiger Soosai fled from Valvettithurai. The leader of this military operation

⁵ Operation Vadamarachchi was a military attack carried out by the Sri Lankan military in May and June 1987 to reclaim the Vadamarachchi region on the Jaffna peninsula of the LTTE (Tamil Tigers). This is the first conventional wartime engagement on the land of Sri Lanka after the end of British colonial rule.

was Lieutenant Colonel Vipul Boteju, Lieutenant Colonel Sarath Jayawardene, Colonel Vijaya Wimalaratne, Brigadier, Denzil Kobbekaduwa, and Maj Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

In July 1987, a truck suicide attack was carried out by *Captain Miller* from Black Tigers⁶. The attack was aimed at military camps and a total of 40 soldiers were killed. In 1993, another Tamil suicide bomber kills Sri Lanka's president, Ranasinghe Premadasa, after failed peace efforts. After that more than 170 suicide attacks were committed. The suicide attack became a trademark for the LTTE.

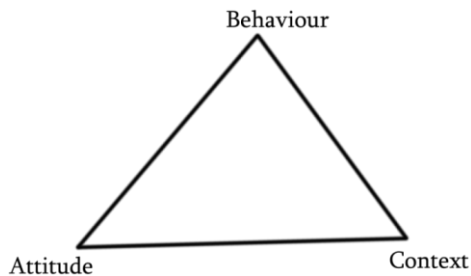
⁶ Black Tigers was a subordinate (wing) from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a rebel Tamil Sri Lankan separatist organization. They were specifically selected and trained by LTTE cadres whose missions include suicide attacks on military and political targets, among them Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa and former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. From their formation in 1987 to the defeat of the Tamil Tigers in 2009, over 330 Black Tigers made suicide attacks on land and sea, mostly in Sri Lanka (Athas, 2007).

The killings and massacres that took place have led to anti-Tamils for most Sri Lankans as well as the SLG. The chaos that happened, became the beginning of a conflict called the "First Eelam War". Since then, massacres and killings have occurred everywhere, and there have been about 70,000 victims since the First Eelam War took place in 1983, among them, were ethnic Tamils, Sinhalese, and Muslims.

B. The Actors' Power, Interest, and their Relations

To analyze the Tamils/LTTE and Sinhalese relations, the writer uses the ABC Triangle (Attitude, Behavior, and Context). This ABC Triangle has the function to understand the relations between actors/conflicting parties that can be seen below:

Figure 3 2.2 The ABC Triangle



Source: (Understanding and Working with Conflict, Conflict Analysis Tools, 2013)

Explanation:

1. Attitude

Sinhalese → The relations between Sinhalese and Tamils are not in a harmony since the time of British colonial occupation. Both of them are feeling discriminated against each other. It was because of the policy that has been applied since the British colonial occupation. At that time, the British applied the divide et impera policy. Divide et impera policy is also called political divisions; a combination of political, military and economic strategies aimed at gaining and

sustaining power by breaking large groups into smaller groups that are more easily conquered. In other contexts, dividing politics also means preventing small groups from uniting larger and more powerful groups (Rahardjo, 2012). It was creating a power-sharing between Sinhalese and Tamils within its administration. British provided various strategic positions in central and local government to the Sinhalese and Tamils. Tamils were famous for their tenacity, loyalty, as well as their intellect which is superior to Sinhalese so that during the British occupation, the Tamils dominated the bureaucracy. This policy is creating power-sharing inequality for the Sinhalese.

As an ethnic majority, the Sinhalese has a fear of losing power because they did not dominate the bureaucracy and central government administration. Thus, after the emergence of Tamils militant groups,

such as LTTE and the Black Tigers, and the attacks, bombing, and also the murder that has been done by Tamils militant groups, the Sinhalese considered Tamils militant group as a group of terrorist.

Tamils → After Ceylon (the old Sri Lanka) independence from the British, the Sinhalese took revenge and make a turning point to dominate the bureaucracy and run the administration. The jealousy that Sinhalese felt during the British occupation, generated animosity towards Tamils. The impacts of that were discrimination of the rights of Tamils people as the citizens of Sri Lanka. The relations between Sinhalese and Tamils were getting worse, following the emergence of Tamil militant groups, like LTTE and the Black Tigers. The establishment of Tamils militant groups led to the protests, riots, suicide bombings, denial of human rights, and chaos. However, the chaos, riots, and also denial of human

rights also did by the Sinhalese, not only Tamils. Both of the conflicting parties are taking a responsibility for those actions that generated from their bad relations.

2. Behavior

Sinhalese → Since the independence of Ceylon (the old Sri Lanka) from British, the jealousy of inequality power-sharing during the British occupation still imprint in the heart of Sinhalese. That is why, the turning point of Sinhalese being the majority that drives Sri Lankan administration, has been misused by creating the policies that harming Tamils. Thus, the rise of Tamils militant groups, such as; LTTE, and Black Tigers, make the SLG and the Sinhalese feel insecure.

Thus, the government of Sri Lanka which basically comes from Sinhalese ethnic, create some policies that tend to prioritize the Sinhalese rather than Tamils. It can be seen through the policy that has been

made by them, such as; the Sinhala Only Act policy was initiated by Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in 1956. Sinhala Only Act is an act passed by the government of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) making Sinhalese the official language of the country. This legislation forced Tamils to withdraw from the bureaucracy because they were not fluent in Sinhala, and prevented Tamils from working as civil servants and other public services.

Tamils → The discriminations that the Tamils have perceived as a minority have pushed the Tamils to establish an independent state, a secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam. In the 1950s, the TULF was established, supporting the militant armed struggle. After that in 1976, there was a militant organization called LTTE. The LTTE is a guerrilla organization that seeks to establish an independent Tamil state, Eelam, in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. It based in

northeastern Sri Lanka and was established in 1976 by Velupillai Prabhakaran as the successor to an organization he had formed earlier in the 1970s. The LTTE grew to become one of the world's most sophisticated and tightly organized insurgent groups. During the 1970s the organization carried out a number of guerrilla attacks (Britannica, Tamil Tigers).

In 1983, several violence actions did by the LTTE, such as; murder, and also suicide bombings have been recorded by mass media. They carried out suicide attacks against the armed forces based in the north. A total of 13 Sri Lankan soldiers were killed and it is triggering riots in which 2,500 Tamils died (Bajoria, 2009). There were riots that occurred in the capital city of Colombo. Hundreds of people died, wounded, and thousands of people fled. The chaos was the beginning of a conflict called the "First Eelam War". Since 1983, an estimated 70,000 people have

died from the conflict - the majority ethnic Tamil, Sinhalese, and Muslim (Maharanie, 2014).

3. Context

Sinhalese → The power-sharing inequality arising from the British government's power-sharing generated social jealousy for the majority of the Sinhalese. The seeds of hatred began to appear in the hearts of the Sinhalese. Until after the British liberated Ceylon in 1948, the British exerted all power to the Sinhalese government, which was then based in Colombo and changed its name to Sri Lanka.

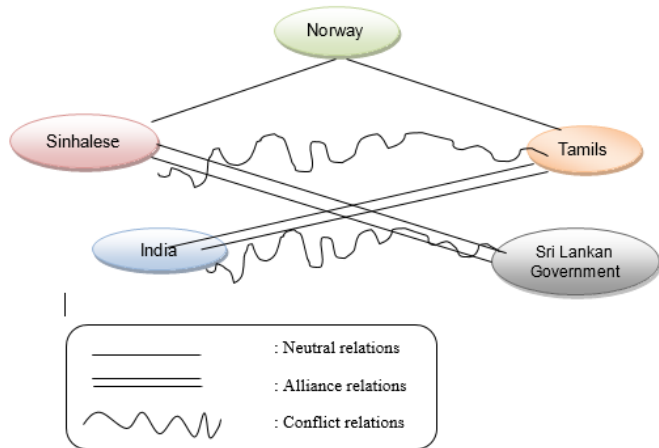
Tamils → The policies that have been applied by the SLG, which is; the Ceylon Citizenship Act and the Sinhala Only Bill policy, generated a hatred in the heart of Tamils people. Starts with those policies, it gives a hard time for the Tamils for looking a job and getting their rights as citizens. The minority Tamils

began to feel excluded and discriminated against. The forms of discrimination include; lack of access to public services in their own language, education, and lack of public facilities located in northern and eastern Sri Lanka; the fact that the police agents in the north of the country did not speak Tamil, so that people continue to live in fear due to the big military presence. In 1972, under an emergency, the government established an ethnic constitution as it had been designed by the British. But the drafting of the constitution completely ignores the Tamils, gives more protection to Buddhism, and ignores Hindu, Islamic and Catholic groups (DeVotta, 2017).

During the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, there is involvement from several actors outside the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils. They are India, Norway, and also the SLG itself. To understand more about the relations between the conflicting

parties with Norway, India, and the SLG, we can see the picture below:

Figure 4 2.2 The Relations between the Conflicting Parties



Source: (Studies)

According to the scheme above, it can be seen that the relations between Tamils and India are alliance relations. The intervention of India is based on the ethnic similarity that they had, which is Tamils.

Tamils is an ethnic that lies in the south of India. The relation between ethnic Tamils in India and Tamils in the north of Sri Lanka is very close, even though, India won't help the Tamils in Sri Lanka because they avoid the probability of expansion of the conflict becomes conflict inter-state. After the emergence of Tamils militant groups, such as the LTTE and the Black Tigers, it generates the threat for India. The LTTE's goal of a sovereign Tamil Eelam comprising all the Tamil inhabited areas (of Sri Lanka and India) posed a threat to India's territorial integrity. The LTTE and other Tamils militant groups also developed strong relationships with political parties in South India. Since then, India was intervening the ethnic conflict by providing armaments, training, and donating towards Tamils groups in Sri Lanka. Tamils in India is strongly supporting Tamils militant groups in Sri Lanka.

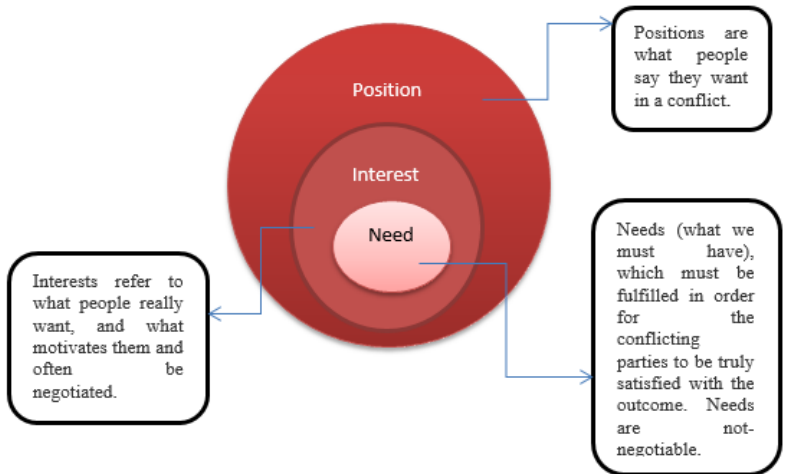
While the relations between the SLG and the Sinhalese is quite close since the independence of Sri Lanka. As we know that the bureaucracy of the governance mostly consists of Sinhalese people. Thus, the intervention of the SLG is benefiting the Sinhalese. It can be seen in the scheme that they are on the Sinhalese side. The relations between the SLG and India is in conflict since India intervene and support the Tamils militant groups.

And in the end, there is Norway as a third party also who intervene the conflict in Sri Lanka. Norway is a neutral side, which is they do not support either Tamils or Sinhalese. Norway came as a mediator for both the conflicting parties (the Sinhalese and Tamils). Norway aims to end the ethnic conflict between them. Thus, its intervention can be seen as a mediator which is later resulting in a ceasefire

agreement that has been accepted by both Sinhalese and Tamils.

The conflicting actor's power can be analyzed and understood by using the Onion Analogy.

Figure 5 2.4 The Onion Analogy



Source : (Understanding and Working with Conflict, Conflict Analysis Tools, 2013)

Take a look at the historical background of the conflict, at the time of the British occupation, Tamils dominated the bureaucracy ranks of the British mandate. The Tamils were well-known for their intellectual over the Sinhalese, that is why the *divide*

et impera policy at that time put Tamils to run the central government. However, the Sinhalese is a majority ethnic in Sri Lanka by percentage of 74.9%. They feel the injustice of that *divide et impera* policy. Thus, after the independence of Ceylon became Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese have:

- a. Interests → To take avengement toward Tamils for what they have been experienced under the time of British occupation by making a turning point and dominate the bureaucracy, thus create some policies that damage the Tamils; such as Sinhala Only Act and Ceylon Citizenship Act.
- b. Position → Discriminate the Tamils, racist towards Tamils even though they are in the same nation.
- c. Need → Getting back their rights as the majority in Sri Lanka through dominating the bureaucracy.

While according to the Tamils:

- a. Interest → To take a revenge on the Sinhalese for the discriminations they have committed against the Tamils and also the hurt they have suffered because of that.
- b. Position → Establish several Tamils militant groups, such as; the LTTE, Black Tigers, thus do several acts of rioting and murder, protests against the government using violence, and also suicide attacks.
- c. Need → To regain their citizenship rights as a whole without any form of discrimination again, through the establishment of an independent state of Tamils Eelam.

Recognizing the conflict that caused by the social jealousy generated from imbalance power-sharing that has been existed since the time of British occupation, both Sinhalese and Tamils remained to

have power-oriented style, which would use the power by any means to win the conflict, e.g. the struggle for the rights of living of Tamils people by protesting and using a violence means. By this means, the actors' style and tactic conflict are closely related to the *Competition* style.

Both conflicting actors have this conflict style, in which one's own needs are advocated over the needs of others. It relies on an aggressive style of communication, low regard for future relationships, and the exercise of coercive power. Those using a competitive style tend to seek control over a discussion, in both substance and ground rules. They fear that loss of such control will result in solutions that fail to meet their needs. Competing for that tends to result in responses that increase the level of threat. Both Sinhalese and Tamils that using this competition style has caused the struggle will be long and hard and

the result is likely to be ugly, the ethnic conflict may
remain lasts.