

THE SRI LANKAN TAMIL DIASPORA AND THE PEACE PROCESS IN SRI LANKA

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The international Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora was produced by the escalation of violence and counter violence in Sri Lanka. About 90% of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora originated from the Jaffna peninsula where political and military developments during the past two decades have politicized and radicalized the population. The Tamil Diaspora is a growing togetherness of people living in many lands and across distant seas, many thousands as refugees and asylum seekers.

The Tamil Diaspora is a highly influential community, and it plays a major role in their host countries and Sri Lanka. The role of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in war and peace in Sri Lanka is critical for the future of Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka and abroad. This is because the Tamil Diaspora forms both the economic backbone of the Tamil resident in Sri Lanka and also contributed at least 60 % to the LTTE procurement budget. Tamil Diaspora support to the LTTE cannot be defeated militarily; the only option is to present a reasonable solution to the Tamil aspiration to the Diaspora and the LTTE. At the same time the majority of the Tamil Diaspora do not want a peaceful settlement of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Because many of them are studying in colleges or universities and some are already employed and settled down and they have bought properties or are doing business and leading comfortable lives. If there is peace in Sri Lanka, they will be compelled to leave the respective host countries. Therefore, they are not keen on having peace in Sri Lanka. However a fraction of them want peace because their friends and relatives are still in Sri Lanka.

If the Sri Lankan government is really interested in peace it should convince the Diaspora that the war is no longer necessary to win the aspirations of Tamils. It should come out with a reasonable proposal to share power in Sri Lanka between various ethnic groups. Therefore, it is evident that the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora can play a decisive role in bringing peace or escalating the war in Sri Lanka.

There is very little published material available on the subject. For example (I) Peter Schalk has published an article on "Some Reflections on the Situation of Exiled Lankan Tamils in Europe" (II) R. Cheran has published a booklet on "The Sixth Genre Memory, History and Tamil Diaspora Imagination" (III) Rohan Gunaratna also published articles on "Impact of the Mobilized Tamil Diaspora on the Protracted Conflict in Sri Lanka" and (IV) V. Suriyanarayanan and V. Sudarsan have published a book on "Between Fear and Hope: Sri Lankan Refugees in Tamil Nadu". The above three books give some valuable information about the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora.