

The Role of Education in enhancing the Sri Lankan Government's Peace-building and Reconciliation strategies

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Introduction

The Sri Lankan government armed forces crushed ferocious and brutally ruthless Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009 by ending militarily nearly three decades long civil war and insurgency in the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. The impact of a variety of significant development and rehabilitation schemes introduced and implemented by the Sri Lankan government and the armed forces to rebuild the economy, update the infrastructure of the troubled former war zones and rehabilitate lives of the ordinary people that were victimized and exploited by insurgents over decades are not yet fully visible to local or international observers. In the last four years, on the basis of anecdotes of war crimes committed during the last phase of the civil war, grievances of some activist members of

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the Tamil minority have dominated the local and international media and political platforms. This paper aims to identify and examine: (a) some of the challenges that the Sri Lankan government's post-war reconciliation activities confront today; and (b) current debates on the inefficiency of the existing education curriculum and intellectual leadership of Sri Lankan higher education establishments in the post-war reconciliation and recovery.

As witnessed by two previous resolutions (2012 and 2013) on Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva¹ and the two documentaries of Tamil grievances and alleged war crimes investigated by the Channel 4,² accusations of human right violations during the last phase of civil war have overshadowed and denied due recognition of some achievements of the Sri Lankan government's rehabilitation works. Accusations of violation of human rights during the last phase of the war and incidents of violation of religious freedom have been hotly debated in the international forums and media in the last few years.

The issue of human rights violations in the post-war Sri Lanka dominated and overshadowed the commonwealth heads of state conference held in Sri Lanka in November 2013.³ All of these problematic political issues and controversial points of view are related in significant ways to the nearly three decades' long civil war that paralyzed Sri Lanka's economy, destroying moral fabric of this primarily Buddhist society.

As in any other post-conflict society that seeks effective reconciliation and rehabilitation of war victims, there are many questions to be investigated in assessing Sri Lanka's post-

1. "US Confirms Third Resolution on Sri Lanka," *Colombo Page*, 28 January 2014, http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14A/Jan28_1390924375CH.php

2. "Sri Lanka's Killing Fields," Channel 4, 14 June 2011, <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/sri-lankas-killing-fields/4od#3534106>; "Sri Lanka's Killing Fields: War Crimes Unpunished," Channel 4, 14 March 2012, <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/sri-lankas-killing-fields/4od>

3. "Commonwealth Summit Opens in Sri Lanka Amid Rights Row," BBC News Asia, 15 November 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24951296>

war recovery: What are the key challenges that Sri Lanka as a developing nation confronts in the post-war reconciliation? How can the post-conflict recovery and reconciliation in the former war zones be made more effective, accountable and transparent so that Sri Lanka receives international community's recognition? What processes need to be implemented in the education system and methods of governance to speed up the post-conflict recovery and reconciliation? What roles can the nation's higher education institutions play in making reconciliation more effective and successful? This paper argues that in difficult and demanding circumstances the Sri Lankan government has taken some crucial steps in rethinking and assessing security issues in the former war zones, introducing fresh economic development plans, encouraging nation's higher education institutions to get involved in facilitating the reconciliation process, magnanimously rehabilitating arrested former terrorists and encouraging institutes of higher learning to take a leading role in reshaping the thinking and activities of the future generations. Local and international communities have not yet fully acknowledged and assessed the impact of these post-war recovery programs. This is partly due to the fact that their exact shape, form and impact still need to be defined and eventually their significance will become fully visible in the years to come.

The Relevance of the United Nations and Millennium Development Goals for Post-conflict Buddhist Societies

In the last decade, the United Nations as the leading international humanitarian organization has taken an active role in peacebuilding in several African countries. The United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) was established in 2006. As an inter-government advisory body, it supports peacebuilding efforts in countries emerging from conflicts.

This organization is an important addition to enhance the capacity of the international community in implementing the peace agenda of the United Nations. The PBC has already been involved in several peacebuilding initiatives in societies such as Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Central African Republic where there are issues in emerging out of the conflict.

The role that the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission envisages to play in post-conflict recovery societies is unique. It aims to: (1) bring together several groups who are involved in peacebuilding such as international donors, international financial institutions, national governments and troop contributing countries for peacemaking; (2) It marshals available resources for peacebuilding; and (3) It advises on and proposes integrated strategies for post-conflict recovery. When appropriate, it highlights visible gaps that may threaten and undermine peacebuilding initiatives.

The United Nations involvement in post-conflict reconciliation in Buddhist societies can be relevant and useful. It can provide resources as well as share experiences learnt from other post-conflict societies in the world. As an independent observer and supporter of peace, the UN can be very effective in facilitating the reconciliation process.

In the peacebuilding, reconciliation can be seen as a process. It is a process that involves dealing with extremely traumatized human subjects, their destroyed institutions and lifestyles in the former war zones. It is a continuing process in which those affected in the war are integrated gradually into the wider society as peaceful and productive citizens. Reconciliation thus can be seen as a process without an end in the foreseeable future.

Reconciliation cannot be a one-time event that quickly produces a tangible result in quantifiable terms. Reconciliation can have a beginning point in historical terms. But its success cannot be determined for sure until a successful peacebuilding is implemented and as a result a harmonious society is established. Thus, by any means, reconciliation cannot be seen as a quick fix, generating results overnight.

It is widely held that successful reconciliation begins and takes roots only when two important cultural and human virtues—forgiveness and compassion—are actively present. Buddhist societies also can embrace these virtues without any difficulty.

In any post-war society, undoubtedly political leadership as well as religious, civil and community leadership play a pivotal role in

making reconciliation happen.

Ethnically and religiously pluralist societies like Sri Lanka in which Buddhism and Buddhist institutions still play crucial roles in keeping peace and harmony can act in significant ways in influencing the thinking of the ordinary people in reshaping the post-conflict situations and guiding the implementation of state policies for the advancement of mutual relations among diverse ethnic and religious communities. Buddhism along with Buddhist institutions can be very effective agent of change in the post-conflict recovery by introducing and implementing healthy attitudes and lifestyles for post-conflict societies to emerge from wounds of war.

The processes that can be initiated by religious leadership of Buddhist institutions for reconciliation can be validated and supported by international organizations such as the UN for effective implementation in actual situations.

The Sri Lankan Government's Rehabilitation Success under International Pressure and Scrutiny

From the time of military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009, for over a period of four years now, the Sri Lankan government has come under serious local and international accusations of lack of efficiency and will for genuine reconciliation. Serious criticisms made in public by overseas leaders such as David Cameron, the British Prime Minister, who visited Jaffna on the occasion of the Commonwealth Conference in November 2013, cited the lack of a magnanimous attitude and approach towards the Tamil plight in the Sri Lankan political leadership. Visible absence of proactive rehabilitation works in the former war zones of the north and east have been noted in several reports. The tabling of Sri Lanka's human rights violations at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on a few occasions is noteworthy here.

During my three visits to Jaffna in the post-war period, I have noted significant gradual changes in people's lives. There are some visible improvements in the security situation with a dwindling presence of security forces on roads and the public areas. As it was the case in the time of military defeat of the LTTE in 2009, now there is no visible

military presence in major streets and highways leading to Jaffna. In the cities as well as in rural areas there are significant development activities taking place. When one travels along the A9 to Jaffna, one can observe ordinary citizens, farmers in particular, at work in their fields throughout the day. Once in the summer of 2010, when I was returning from Jaffna on a late evening, I noticed a young Tamil woman riding a bicycle alone in the deserted highway of A9 in darker hours. These scattered scenes and glimpses about the daily life of the most average Tamils in the northern areas give an image of safe and secure post-war environment in the northern peninsular.

During the time of the Commonwealth Summit in Sri Lanka in 2013, when the media interviewed the Sri Lankan Tamil cricketer Muttiah Muralitharan on the British Prime Minister's intervention on human rights, he commented:

Mr Cameron was underestimating the improvements already made... My opinion is, there were problems in the last 30 years in those areas. Nobody could move there. In wartime I went with the UN, I saw the place, how it was. Now I regularly go and I see the place and it is about a 1,000% improvement in facilities. Cricket is the main game to narrow the bridge between the people. But facilities-wise, schools are built, roads are built. Businesses are started. So many things have happened. It is improving. Thanks to the Sri Lankan army, they are putting a lot of effort there... In the north there are only one million people. They are getting more attention than the south at the moment. Asked about Mr Cameron's stance, Muralitharan said: He must have been misled by other people. People speak without going and seeing the things there. I go on and off. I see with my eyes there is improvement. I can't say the Prime Minister is wrong or not. He's from England, he hasn't seen the site, he hasn't gone and visited these places — yesterday only. But other than that, the political side... basically what we want is food, shelter, education, happiness in the family.⁴

4. "Cameron Shrugs Off Murali Comments," *London Evening Standard*, 17 November 2013, <http://www.standard.co.uk/panewsfeeds/cameron-shrugs-off-murali-comments-8943564.html>

A recent think-tank publication has noted a great sense of cooperation among various agencies in the reconciliation efforts in Sri Lanka:

The Sri Lankan case is a good example of how the private sector, community organizations, international organizations, NGOs and the government came together to rehabilitate and resettle former fighters and reconcile the hearts of the affected people. There is almost no likelihood of any of the 11,500 rehabilitated Tamil Tigers going back to violence. They saw what the conflict was and they experienced it personally.⁵

Compared to some other post-war societies, the process of reconciliation in Sri Lanka may be slower. But there are some significant tangible accomplishments as demonstrated by current economic indicators.

The economic development process in the north and eastern regions of the country, which were severely affected by the guerilla warfare orchestrated by the LTTE with gruesome devastations for nearly three decades, is taking place at a fast pace compared to the rest of Sri Lanka. It has been estimated that the economy of Jaffna region is growing at a high rate of 22% as opposed to the relatively high growth of 7% in the rest of Sri Lanka.⁶ This is a remarkable growth rate compared to the lagging economic growth indicators of European countries (for example, the UK)⁷ that are just emerging from serious economic recession resulted by the collapse of the housing market in 2007.⁸

5. Asanga Abeygoonasekera and Rohan Gunaratna, "Reconciliation after Terrorism: The Sri Lankan Experience," 30 August 2012.

6. Ibid.

7. After 2007 recession, for the first time the UK recorded an economic growth rate of 1.9% in 2013. Angela Monaghan, "UK Economy Grew 1.9% in 2013 – The Fastest Growth since 2007," *The Guardian*, 28 January 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/jan/28/uk-economy-2013-fastest-growth-fourth-quarter-gdp>

8. For an analysis of Buddhist perspectives on economic crisis, see Mahinda Deegalle, "A Buddhist Guide in Tackling the Challenges of Economic Crises," *Buddhist Approach to Economic Crisis* (Bangkok: The United Nations Day of Vesak Conference, 2009), pp. 38-48.

In quantifiable terms some tangible achievements in the reconciliation process in Sri Lanka are the following. Within a period of two and half years, with the support of local businesses and international agencies, the Sri Lankan government has been able to resettle 265,000 civilians who were displaced in the final stage of the battle between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE. According to the Ministry of Resettlement in Sri Lanka by 31 December 2013, a total of 72,987 families and 257,038 persons of the IDPs in the Eastern Province and 151,819 families and 501,691 persons of the IDPs in the Northern Province have been resettled. Still 7,094 families and 23,568 persons of the protracted IDPs from three districts (Jaffna, Killinochchi and Trincomalee) need resettlement.⁹ However, those who got displaced as a result of the conflict that ended in May 2009, a total of 297,000 persons, have now been fully resettled.

One of the significant achievements of the post-war reconciliation in Sri Lanka was the way former combatants were rehabilitated and integrated to the wider society by the state authorities. The Commissioner General of Rehabilitation assessed rehabilitation success by commenting: "Sri Lanka's success in rehabilitating former terrorists would make it the best model for other countries which face similar conflicts."¹⁰ Very early on in the reconciliation process, the reconciliation activities extended even to those who were associated directly with the military operations of the LTTE. It is recorded that over 11,600 insurgents and / or terrorists were arrested or surrendered themselves to the government authorities by the end of the civil war. The rehabilitation of the ex-LTTE cadres was an important step taken up carefully and as a matter of urgency. It is recorded that 11,500 arrested persons have already been rehabilitated successfully.¹¹ Rather than using a retributive justice method, in which arrested militants

9. <http://www.resettlementmin.gov.lk/idps-statistics>

10. Shanika Sriyananda, "Sri Lanka's success story on rehabilitation," *Sunday Observer*, 2 June 2012, p. <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2012/06/03/fea01.asp>

11. Rohan Gunaratna, "Reconciliation through Education," *National Conference on the Role of Education in Reconciliation*, Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute for International Relations and Strategic Studies, Colombo, 13 March 2012, p. 14.

were persecuted, the state authorities adopted a method of restorative justice, in which the accused were rehabilitated and released without any formal punishment. This rehabilitation method enabled former combatants to become more naturally integrated into the wider society. While the largest proportion of suspects has been reintegrated into the wider society, as of 3 June 2012, there were only 698 ex-LTTE cadres to be rehabilitated.¹² Among the arrested suspects there were children of under the age of 18 years. According to the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development, by 3 September 2012, 595 former LTTE child soldiers had been rehabilitated under a UNICEF-assisted program.¹³ The child soldiers had regular learning and rehabilitation sessions at Colombo Hindu College.¹⁴ They were given the opportunity and assistance to return to school to pursue their studies. Some of them had taken the GCE Advanced Level Examination and qualified to gain university admission.

With the help of local and international NGOs the Sri Lankan government has made a significant progress in facilitating the peacebuilding process. One notable change in the former war zones is the improvements made in developing the infrastructure. Repairs to an extensive network of roads and improvements in public transport system including the railway lines have taken place. The Yal Devi¹⁵ ('Lyre Goddess,' a modern name for the Jaffna [*yalpanam*, 'lyre poet']) Mail Train Service from Colombo to Jaffna, suspended over twenty years ago when terrorists destroyed the rail track, was due to be resumed by March 2014.¹⁶ An impressive coach service from Colombo to Jaffna is in

12. Shanika Sriyananda, "Sri Lanka's success story on rehabilitation," *Sunday Observer*, 2 June 2012, p. <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2012/06/03/fea01.asp>

13. "Nearly 600 LTTE Child Soldiers Rehabilitated within a Year," http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20120309_02

14. See the BBC documentary by Stephen Sackur on "BBC HardTalk Sri Lanka 7-9: Rehabilitation of Former LTTE Child Soldiers," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuW9c0ufiHY>

15. Carl Muller, "Isn't It Time to Change Her Name?" *The Nation*, <http://www.nation.lk/2009/04/19/eye1.html> is an interesting reflective article on the origins of the Jaffna mail train's name.

16. Irangika Range, "Yal Devi Train Service to Jaffna from Next March," *Daily News*, 7 September 2013; <http://www.dailynews.lk/local/yal-devi-train->

operation daily. These new developments in the transport system and road networks have made traveling much easier to the former troubled areas of Jaffna, Trincomalee and Batticaloa.

The Role of Higher Education in Facilitating Reconciliation and National Identity Formation in the Post-war Sri Lanka

Most importantly, education has an important role in the reshaping of human thinking and preparing people for the acceptance of peace and harmony. In any post-war society, intellectuals should take the leading role in the reconciliation process. It is their intellectual obligation to serve the nation to make reconciliation process a success to emerge out of the ashes of war.

The establishment of the University College in 1921 marked the beginning of university education in Sri Lanka, which enabled taking external examinations of the University of London.¹⁷ When the University of Ceylon was established in 1942 by amalgamating the University College and the Medical College in Colombo, it became the first Sri Lankan university that had degree granting powers. Over seven decades, the state-run university sector has expanded both in terms of number of institutions and student recruitment. The curriculum also has expanded but there is a wider critique that some areas of higher education have made only a few changes thus limiting their capacity to produce an effective labor force for the nation. Today there are nineteen universities under the University Grants Commission and Ministry of Higher Education in addition to 17 research institutes and three campuses.¹⁸ The higher education in national universities in Sri Lanka, which is free of charge, still remains under the state's control and patronage. These state-run universities make significant intellectual contribution to the nation

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17. Gamini Samaranayake, "The Role of State Universities in the Knowledge Hub in Sri Lanka," *The Island*, 30 April 2013 (Convocation address at the Eastern university of Sri Lanka on the 20th of April 2013). http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=77951

18. <http://www.ugc.ac.lk/en/universities-and-institutes/universities.html>

in the development process.

There are issues and limits with regard to the expansion of national universities to meet the nation's needs. Currently, national universities educate 75,000 students annually. The notable factor is only 3% of those who go to school have the privilege of entering the state-run universities for higher education.¹⁹ In 2010, 54,000 students applied for 22,000 placements at the national universities. Those who fail to gain admission to national universities have to seek alternative routes to continue higher education. The University Grant Commission has estimated that approximately 4,000-6,000 Sri Lankan students have sought higher education in the UK alone. Approximately 8,000-10,000 students leave Sri Lanka for overseas higher education annually.

The present challenge for the Sri Lankan government is to increase access to higher education while improving the quality of education provision. With the aim of expanding higher education, the government has begun to authorize the setting up of private universities in Sri Lanka. Only within the last decade, a few private higher education institutions have come into operation to prepare students for higher education.

The University Grants Commission (UGC), the apex body of the University System in Sri Lanka established in 1978, has realized the timely necessity of implementing changes to the university curriculum in order to contribute efficiently to the reconciliation process. In the early summer of 2013, I was invited with the Deputy Vice-chancellor's team of the University of Peradeniya to attend the University Grants Commission's *National Conference on the Role of Higher Education in Reconciliation* (13-14 June 2013)²⁰ hosted jointly

19. Ranjith Senaratne, "Building a Rainbow Nation through Peace Building and Reconciliation: The Role of Universities," *National Conference on the Role of Higher Education in Reconciliation* (13-14 June 2013) (Colombo: University Grants Commission, 2013), pp. 23-24.

20. <http://www.ugc.ac.lk/en/about-us/vicechairman/1191-national-conference-conducted-by-the-ugc-jointly-with-university-of-jaffna-on-the-role-of-higher-education-in-reconciliation-on-13-a-14-june-2013-at-green-grass-hotel-jaffna.html>

with the University of Jaffna at Jaffna.²¹ For this national conference on higher education, the University Grants Commission had gathered a distinguished group of academics including vice-chancellors of the national universities. The key issue to be discussed was what universities and academics in the institutions of higher learning could do to contribute effectively to the reconciliation process. The discussion sought to find meaningful ways of addressing urgent demands of the post-war society in the former war zones.

In general, the higher education sector in Sri Lanka has gradually realized the importance of mobilizing resources of the universities and research institutes to promote peace, harmony and reconciliation.

By hosting the national conference in Jaffna, the UGC has initiated an academic conversation to assess how Sri Lankan universities could contribute efficiently towards reconciliation. It has recognized cultural, religious and ethnic differences in the Sri Lankan society in order to generate a better understanding of each other for creating a common national identity.

The conference highlighted that there was a strong and widespread criticism of the Sri Lankan higher education system, which had completely neglected to contribute to the process of generating peace and harmony in the country. The speakers in the conference highlighted the urgent need that higher education institutions need to contribute directly to the sustenance of peace and stability in the post-war society. These discussions pointed out an urgent need to develop a higher education curriculum that fits the nation's development and reconciliation process in order to create a healthy context for efficient post-war society recovery. The chair of the University Grants Commission urged "the involvement of academia" in the reconciliation process as an "urgent necessity."²² The vice-chair of the UGC asserted the importance of "making universities a

21. <http://www.pdn.ac.lk/uop/main/news/main/2013/jafna.pdf>

22. Kshanika Hirimburegama, "Message from the Chairperson, University Grants Commission," *National Conference on the Role of Higher Education in Reconciliation* (13-14 June 2013) (Colombo: University Grants Commission, 2013), p. 1.

strategic partner and an effective catalyst in promoting the process of peace building and reconciliation.”²³

After the UGC’s initiative, as a follow-up event the University of Peradeniya organized a round-table discussion on the “Role of Academics and Universities in Facilitating Reconciliation in Sri Lanka” on 26 July 2013.²⁴ Directing, facilitating, accelerating and implementing healthy policies in the post-war society lie in the intellectual community of higher education institutions. They have the potential and skills to become the most efficient vehicle of change at times of trouble and disharmony among diverse ethnic and religious communities.

Predicaments of the post-war Sri Lankan society have been rather alarming. Even after the military defeat of the LTTE, the nation has shown signs of disintegration and polarization along ethnic and religious lines. As Sri Lanka’s post-colonial history illustrated signs of growing mistrust among ethnic and religious groups with rising religious extremism are combined today the persecutions of some of her citizens on political and ideological grounds. Increasing violence in the civil society has become a significant problem for the establishment of peace and harmony in the nation.

Creating an effective social context for national reconciliation has begun with initiatives to establish harmony centers in various parts of the country.²⁵ By establishing harmony centers in the twenty-five districts all ethnic and religious communities are expected to get involved in the reconciliation process.

Educating young generations has become one of the key objectives

23. Ranjith Senaratne, “Building a Rainbow Nation through Peace Building and Reconciliation: The Role of Universities,” *National Conference on the Role of Higher Education in Reconciliation* (13-14 June 2013) (Colombo: University Grants Commission, 2013), p. 24.

24. “Message of Reconciliation Should Not be Limited to Academic Elite,” *Asian Tribune*, 27 July 2013, <http://www.asiantribune.com/node/63212>

25. Leel Pathirana, “Sri Lanka: National reconciliation through Harmony Centres,” *Asian Tribune*, 16 July 2013, <http://www.asiantribune.com/node/63134>.

of the harmony centers. Harmony clubs in schools are to be established to make the youth more aware of their moral obligations and responsibilities while adjusting themselves well to the difficult realities of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic ethos²⁶ and realities of the post-colonial and post-war nation by dispelling from their minds any mistrust and animosity towards fellow communities.

The state's inability to provide a broader education that transcends specific ethnic and religious identities has been an important problem for the post-colonial Sri Lankan society. The necessity of cultivating a broader national identity through education has surfaced more prominently in today's national conferences on reconciliation:

Today, the most challenging issue for Sri Lanka is to restructure its education system to produce Sri Lankans, and not Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims.²⁷

This trans-local national identity formation beyond the existing specific ethnic and religious identities for effective reconciliation of post-war communities remains the most formidable task of educators, peacemakers and higher education establishments.

The Post-war Reconciliation Vision of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation (LLRC)

The post-war rehabilitation has asserted an urgent necessity to articulate "a common and shared vision" for the entire country. Creating an "interdependent, just, equitable, open and diverse society"²⁸ with a common vision with a "shared future"²⁹ is essential to secure peace and harmony in the post-war Sri Lanka.

The Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. *The Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation*, p. 367; <http://slembassyusa.org/downloads/LLRC-REPORT.pdf>

29. Ibid., p. 23.

Reconciliation (LLRC)³⁰ stated the general consensus of those who appeared before the Commission:

Many who appeared before the Commission emphasized that what had been achieved by the Security Forces [in May 2009] should be invested in a political process that will usher in an era of sustainable peace and security for the nation and lasting amity, friendship and harmony within and between communities.³¹

A “shared vision” for the future of all citizens becomes the most important idea articulated and emphasized throughout the recommendations. This objective of creating a shared vision is directly related with the education system and the formation of mind setting of the youth for a better future.

In recent national conferences on reconciliation, including the eight sessions³² held at the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies (LKIIRSS), education system has been singled out as an important contributing factor to the reconciliation process. As a nation when Sri Lanka emerges out of the conflict, it has to introduce ways of dealing with issues of the past. In order to form one Sri Lankan identity for all citizens,

30. *The Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation* (LLRC) was completed in November 2011. The complete report is available at <http://slembassyusa.org/downloads/LLRC-REPORT.pdf>; the credibility of this report has been questioned by the UK claiming that it “does not meet international standards.” “Sri Lanka’s Domestic Mechanism for Reconciliation and Accountability Does Not Meet International Standards – UK,” *Colombo Page*, 29 January 2014, http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14A/Jan29_1390954050CH.php

31. *The Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation*, p. 290.

32. Beginning from the *Inaugural National Conference on Reconciliation: The Way for Post-conflict Sri Lanka* (24 November 2011), the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies (LKIIRSS) has hosted national conferences on the role of the (i) Business Community (24/01/2012), (ii) Education (13/03/2012), (iii) Information and Communications Technology (18/9/2012), (iv) Media (June 2012), (v) Youth (2/1/2013), (vi) Diaspora, Arts and Culture (16 May 2013), (vii) Women (23/7/2012) and (viii) Religion.

troubling issues dealing with historical collective memory need to be handled in a cautious manner in the education system in the formative years of schooling.

Education can play an important role in supporting growth of a positive national identity. Schools are places where values and ethical life-styles are taught at a very early age. Children are given ample opportunities to interact with each other as peers and learn by experience to cultivate empathy and tolerance towards differences and diversity. By learning to develop a moderate and healthy life-style with human concerns towards each other's needs, children can acquire skills and competences to lead a successful life in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. The cultivation of these life-styles early on in one's life can enable that person to participate in the reconciliation process more positively and naturally both as teachers and students.

The commission report highlights the importance of two important insights acquired from those who appeared before the commission. After experiencing nearly three decades of civil war and terrorism, it records that "people of all communities now yearn for lasting peace, security, amity and harmony." They assert, "we must do all we can to ensure" that Sri Lanka should never fall back to the blood shedding again to resolve political and ethnic conflicts.³³ At this moment of the post-war period, they see "an opportunity to forge" a consensus to address issues of governance "in a manner" that promotes "reconciliation, amity and cooperation among all communities". They see the importance of providing "political solutions to the grievances of minorities" while at the same time ensuring and safeguarding "the legitimate rights of all citizens".³⁴

The LLRC report has also highlighted some problems that might arise in the reconciliation process. While "acknowledging the losses and suffering [in the conflict] of the past," it is important to provide "mechanisms for recompense". It is equally important to "address issues of lack of trust, prejudice, and intolerance" in

33. *The Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation*, p. 368.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 368.

different communities. All these processes can enable to “create an environment” in which “each citizen becomes an active participant in society and develop a sense of belonging” as a Sri Lankan.³⁵

The LLRC recommendations on education asserted that lessons from the “past incidents” are learnt in schools but we must never repeat them again. Recommendations for education included the introduction of an island wide comprehensive “human rights education programs” that reach to “school children, youth, members of the Security Forces, and the Police”.³⁶ It also recommended promoting trilingual education as an efficient method in creating “a sense of belonging” among all “citizens irrespective of race, religion or social status”. It maintained that a trilingual education might enable “children from very young days to get to know and understand each other”. The domination of “just one language” was conceived as not achieving the aims of reconciliation by healing the nation for long lasting peace and harmony.³⁷ Another suggestion was the State sponsorship of an “integrated education” which “enables schools to work in Sinhala and Tamil under one roof”³⁸ so that polarization of communities can be minimized. The Commission recommended that the Government should have a “pro-active policy to encourage mixed schools serving children from different ethnic and religious backgrounds”.³⁹ To boost mutual understanding and “appreciation of the rich cultural diversity of different communities” in the minds of school children and youth “every encouragement be given to create greater interaction among students, through mechanisms such as twinning of schools from the different provinces” “student exchange programs and formation of Reconciliation Clubs in schools”.⁴⁰ In terms of higher education, it recommended taking steps to “ensure public universities have ethnically mixed student populations with

35. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 309.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 309-310.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

a choice of courses offered in all three languages”.⁴¹

The commission maintained that the “removal of the feeling of discrimination is a prerequisite for reconciliation between the Sinhalese and Tamils in a united Sri Lanka”.⁴² Another suggestion highlighted the vital importance of “peace education in promoting unity and reconciliation” in Sri Lanka.⁴³

Conclusion

This paper has examined and highlighted the role of education in making a significant impact on the post-war recovery and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. All forms of education in Sri Lanka—primary, secondary and tertiary—need to be reformed for achieving millennium goals for development and speeding up the reconciliation process in the post-war Sri Lanka. It has noted with a focus on recent Sri Lankan research initiatives that during the three decades of civil war the higher education institutions in Sri Lanka have hardly contributed to the process of peacebuilding in the ethnically fragmented nation. It has highlighted the important role that academics and higher education institutions can play in helping to build the nation and secure peace and harmony to ensure stability. Though expectations are high for bringing in normalcy, Sri Lanka is still struggling to build peace in the midst of international accusations of war crimes and violations of human rights by government associated groups as well as by the former LTTE members. Among many issues of peacebuilding and reconciliation, safeguarding the rights of ethnic and religious minorities remains the primary one that has drawn international attention.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 381.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 382.