



BOOK REVIEW

A Book Review on ‘*Legacy of Palmyra*’: “The Unnerving Yet Caste-Veiled Dual-Horizontal Inequalities in Northern Sri Lanka”

J.K.J.P. Perera

University of Leeds, United Kingdom

E-mail: jlhv0880@leeds.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

The Sri Lankan civil conflict has majorly been framed as an ethnic struggle, with the LTTE, representing the Tamil minority, leading a separatist war against the Sinhala-majority state to secure their rights. However, in *Legacy of Palmyra* (2023), Balasooriya offers a fresh perspective that goes beyond the ethnic dimensions of the conflict, emphasising the critical role of intra-ethnic factors, particularly the caste system in Northern Jaffna. He argues that lower-caste Tamils faced two layers of discrimination: first, as an ethnic minority oppressed by the Sinhala-majority state, and second, as marginalised lower castes excluded from elite Tamil political power. Through empirical research, Balasooriya shows that many lower-caste Tamils joined the LTTE not only to escape socio-economic deprivations linked to their caste status but also because the LTTE’s ideology transcended caste barriers, providing opportunities previously denied to them. Extending Stewart’s (2011, 2010, 2002, 2001, 2000) theory of horizontal inequalities, Balasooriya introduces the concept of *dual horizontal inequalities*, positioning lower-caste Tamils as victims of these intersecting forms of discrimination in Northern Sri Lanka. This work has significant implications for post-war peacebuilding and reconstruction in Sri Lanka, where caste, often overlooked, remains a pivotal factor. Balasooriya’s findings underscore the need for tailored and sensitive approaches in post-war peacebuilding to address these nuanced dimensions of inequality.

Keywords: Sri Lankan Civil Conflict, Ethnic Conflict, Horizontal Inequalities, Post-War Peacebuilding

INTRODUCTION

Widely regarded as a protracted civil conflict, the war between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which concluded in 2009 with the military defeat of the LTTE, is often characterised as an ethnic struggle (Anandakugan, 2020; Bajoria, 2009; Perera, 1992; Uyangoda, 2007). While this narrative emphasises the tensions between the Tamil minority in the North and the Sinhalese majority-led state, highlighting the inter-ethnic dimensions of the conflict; it has neglected the substantial intra-ethnic dynamics that may have influenced it. Consequently, both during and after the war, literature has primarily framed the conflict through the lens of ethnicity, portraying it as an inter-ethnic struggle where a minority group sought to assert its rights against a dominant majority (Neil, 2017; Wickramasinghe, 2015; Silva, 1999).

This discourse underscores issues related to inter-ethnic political, economic, social, and cultural rights, with particular emphasis on linguistic rights, employment opportunities, and the right to self-determination grounded in cultural identity. However, it falls short of providing a comprehensive overview of the conflict. To understand ethnic conflict holistically, it is crucial to consider both the inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic dimensions. As Casperson (2006) argues, a common shortcoming in the theoretical literature on ethnic conflict is the limited analysis of intra-ethnic competition and rivalry, as well as how those intra-group dynamics impact on inter-group relations and the broader conflict. For a holistic analysis of the Sri Lankan civil conflict, a careful examination of both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic aspects is essential. This represents a significant gap in the literature on the Sri Lankan civil conflict that has long required attention.

Furthermore, the intra-ethnic dimensions are often overlooked or rarely understood by outsiders, as they require nuanced insights achieved only through in-depth anthropological immersion. Consequently, international perspectives on the conflict often seem arbitrarily constructed, lacking the lived experiences and first-hand understanding necessary to fully grasp both the conflict itself and the socio-political dynamics underpinning it. This disconnect highlights the importance of engaging with local narratives and first-hand accounts to develop more informed and effective analyses.

In addressing the existing gap in literature that seeks to conceptualise and analyse the Sri Lankan civil conflict in depth—beyond its oversimplified portrayal as an inter-ethnic struggle—Balasooriya's (2023) *Legacy of Palmyra* offers a critical perspective. This work foregrounds a significant yet frequently overlooked factor: the caste system within the Northern Tamil community. Through anthropological immersion, Balasooriya (2023) adeptly uncovers how intra-ethnic caste dynamics complicate and nuance conventional understandings of the conflict's ethnic dimensions. He effectively lifts the obstinate veil of caste that has long been hidden beneath the broader blanket of ethnicity, a theme that has dominated the conflict narrative. In doing so, he challenges surface-level readings of the war and offers a richer, more layered understanding of its underlying socio-political complexities.

Unveiling the Veil of Caste Hidden Beneath the Blanket of Ethnicity: A Deeper Analysis of the Sri Lankan Conflict

Balasooriya's *Legacy of Palmyra* (2023) is a deep exploration of a previously unexamined aspect of the conflict: beyond the state's majoritarian politics, what other forces drove the country toward war? His answer lies in *Tamil caste politics*—an intersection of sociology and politics that shapes a political sociology of caste as identity politics.

Caste assigns individuals a fixed social rank based on ancestry, marriage, and occupation, dictating rules and restrictions on social interactions and occupational roles (Gwinn et al., 1995 cited in Balasooriya, 2023). Unlike class, which allows for mobility, caste is a hereditary system of rigid social stratification that classifies individuals at birth as either upper or lower caste. While the upper caste benefits from numerous rights and privileges, the lower caste endures systemic discrimination and the denial of these advantages, perpetuating deep social inequalities. According to Balasooriya (2023), in Northern Sri Lanka, a dual framework of inequality and deprivation can be witnessed. Firstly, the Sri Lankan Tamils as a minority ethnic group in comparison to the majority Sinhalese. Secondly, the Caste system-based inequality and deprivation within the Tamil community. This approach, which Balasooriya (2023) introduces as dual horizontal inequalities, offers a critical insight, revealing the complexity of identities and how these intricacies impact conflict dynamics.

In *Legacy of the Palmyra*, Balasooriya (2023) consistently argues that framing the Sri Lankan civil conflict as a textbook example of 'ethnic conflict' oversimplifies its nature, offering only a superficial understanding while neglecting intra-ethnic divisions within the Tamil community, particularly those that formed the LTTE. Throughout the book, he provides a detailed analysis of the conflict's historical trajectory, emphasizing the

caste system within the Tamil community. He brings to light the stark inequalities between upper and lower castes and how these disparities contributed not only to the onset and escalation of the conflict but also to its eventual downfall.

The Caste System in Northern Sri Lanka

The caste system seen in Northern Sri Lanka, as Balasooriya (2024) points out is a traditional social hierarchy that historically divided the Tamil community into distinct groups based on hereditary occupation and social status, influencing social interactions, marriage, and access to resources.

In the book, he provides an in-depth analysis of the Tamil caste classification, explaining how the Vellālar caste occupies the top of the hierarchy due to its historical legacies of land ownership, agriculture, and related commercial activities. Traditionally, the Brahman caste is placed at the top of the hierarchy due to their lifestyle centred on religion, and education. However, due to the political and economic power of the Vellālar caste, in practice, Vellālars hired Brahmin priests to conduct religious activities, and Brahmins in Jaffna were financially dependent on the Vellālars. He also points out that the lower-caste Tamils were often referred to as *non-Tamils*, and elaborates on the structure of the Jaffna caste system, where the lowest stratum, collectively referred to as the *Panchmar* castes, includes the Vannār (washermen), Ampattar (barbers), Pallar (landless laborers), Nalavar (toddy tappers), and Parayar (funeral drummers).

Balasooriya argues that Hindu religious ideology legitimised an inherent right for elite upper-caste Tamils to enjoy a better quality of life, while the lower castes were expected to sacrifice their well-being for the benefit of the upper castes. Balasooriya highlights how the privileged upper caste in northern Sri Lanka imposed customary prohibitions on the lower castes to maintain their socioeconomic dominance. In his book, Balasooriya (2024) provides empirical evidence of the systemic discrimination and inequality faced by the lower caste, which will be explored in greater detail later in this review.

Balasooriya (2024) also examines the Karaiyar, a low caste that resembled an intermediary caste within the Tamil social hierarchy. This intermediary caste experienced the socio-economic struggles typical of lower castes while maintaining ties with both upper and lower castes. Balasooriya (2024) highlights that 98% of the LTTE leaders, including Prabhakaran, the self-declared leader of the LTTE, originated from this caste. This unique position within the caste system enabled the LTTE to strategically leverage the Tamil caste identity as a political tool to mobilise both upper and lower castes to support their military objectives — a feat that the mainstream Tamil political leadership failed to achieve.

Fragmentation of the Tamil Community: A Lose-Lose Paradigm

In a compelling economic analysis of history, Balasooriya (2024) examines how the conflict's ethnic recourse has been constructed. He highlights how the British colonial *divide-and-rule* policies paved the way for a Sinhala-led state post-independence, where majoritarian rule, driven by Sinhala nationalism, adversely impacted the Tamil community. He argues that key historical milestones, such as the *Sinhala Only Act* and *ethnicity-based university admission policies*, not only stripped the Tamil community of their linguistic and cultural rights but also deprived them of vital opportunities in education and employment, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities.

Naturally, under such circumstances, one would expect Tamil political leaders to rise and step in to represent the voices of the Tamil community and make it their political mission to secure the rights of those they represent. However, as Balasooriya (2024) illustrates, while elite Tamil leaders advocated for equal rights between the Sinhalese and Tamils, they failed to mobilise the broader Tamil community. As a result of this failure, most Tamils lost faith in Tamil politicians and the democratic process, creating a vacuum that allowed

radical Tamil groups to emerge, using violence to achieve their demands. Balasooriya argues that caste was the key factor that hindered the elites' ability to unite the community. The upper-caste ideologies of the elite Tamils did not reflect the socio-economic struggles of the lower castes, and the deep social stratification kept the two groups distant from any meaningful association.

Balasooriya further highlights how the Tamil national liberation movement, led predominantly by elite Tamil politicians, marginalised the voices of lower castes and neglected their interests in the struggle against the majority Sinhalese. This internal disunity within the Tamil community, rooted in caste differences, hindered their ability to achieve adequate political agency through the democratic process. He illustrates this point through several compelling examples, which can be found in the book. His examples highlight not only the challenges faced by leaders who sought to bridge the divides within their community but also underscores the broader systemic issues of caste discrimination that hindered the Tamil struggle for political representation.

LTTE Seizing the Opportunity

In the absence of meaningful political representation for the lower-caste Tamil community, radical groups emerged, some adopting militancy as a strategy to secure the rights denied to them—not only as an ethnic minority but also as individuals relegated to the lower tiers of the caste hierarchy. Balasooriya (2023) points out that what the elite Tamil politicians could not achieve was made possible by the LTTE, due to the group's unique approach to caste and identity politics. The LTTE skillfully operated on two parallel narratives: advocating for socio-economic empowerment and rights for the lower castes, while simultaneously promoting Tamil nationalism to appeal to the upper castes. Additionally, the group's ruthless suppression of opposition instilled fear among the upper-caste elites, effectively silencing dissent and ensuring compliance with the LTTE's agenda.

For the low(er) castes, the LTTE was particularly appealing. Balasooriya argues that state-led policies discriminating against Tamils had a limited direct impact on lower-caste Tamils because customary caste practices already restricted their access to decent employment and educational opportunities. For instance, the *Sinhala Only Act* restricted the prospects of the Tamil elite caste's ability to secure state-sector jobs, while the *language-based university admissions policies* reduced their access to higher education. However, these policies had little bearing on lower-caste Tamils, as customary caste practices already restricted their access to decent employment and educational opportunities.

While the Tamil national liberation movement, predominantly led by elite Tamil politicians, systematically marginalised the voices of lower-caste Tamils, the LTTE (at least initially) offered a contrasting vision of a casteless Tamil community, focused on liberating lower-caste individuals from their socio-economic frustrations and discrimination. Balasooriya cites Swamy's (2008) research, which records a significant moment in 1979 when Tamil academics—who were influenced by Marxist and communist ideologies—urged Prabhakaran to establish a socialist Eelam. In response, Prabhakaran remarked, "I don't know all that, but I want all these caste differences to go." This statement underscores the oppressive nature of caste-based socioeconomic and political discrimination, highlighting that the struggles were not solely about ethnicity but also about the systemic injustices faced by lower-caste Tamils within the broader political landscape of Sri Lanka. This vision deeply resonated with lower-caste youth, inspiring many to join the LTTE. Balasooriya's empirical evidence further supports this, illustrating the movement's appeal to those seeking both ethnic and caste-based justice.

LTTE's Strategic Mobilisation of the Lower Castes

As the war escalated, Balasooriya contends that caste-based socioeconomic inequalities within the Tamil community were pivotal in mobilising lower-caste Tamils into conflict. He observes that during the 1990s, it was primarily the upper-caste Tamil individuals, who possessed economic resources, that fled to foreign

countries and southern Sri Lanka. This is confirmed by research, such as those of McDowell (1996, 1999) who reports that during 1983 – 1991 (the initial phase of the conflict) among the Tamil refugees in Switzerland, 62% alone were from the Vellālar caste (upper caste) and 13% belonged to the Karaiyar caste (intermediate caste). In contrast, the economically disadvantaged lower-caste Tamils remained with the LTTE and were subsequently recruited into the armed struggle. During this period, Tamil nationalism evolved into a form of defensive nationalism, aiming to address both caste grievances and the overarching threat posed by the Sinhala-dominated state.

Thus, the vision of a casteless society, which would inherently benefit the lower caste, as envisioned by the LTTE leader, was a foundational goal of the organisation at its inception. This ideal aimed not only to address the immediate grievances of lower-caste Tamils but also to challenge the entrenched caste hierarchies that perpetuated their marginalisation. In Balasooriya's analysis of twelve high-ranking LTTE leaders, he reveals that all were from low or lower castes, with ten identifying as Catholics. This religious affiliation highlighted a departure from Hinduism, which traditionally upholds caste divisions.

Balasooriya presents empirical evidence and extracts from his interviews to illustrate that many lower-caste Tamil youth joined the LTTE in search of liberation from their socioeconomic struggles and caste discrimination, as well as to seek revenge against the upper castes who had undermined their opportunities in life. He also points out that by implementing a *de facto* legal system with a reward structure for contributions and socioeconomic benefits for family members, the LTTE effectively mobilised lower-caste individuals to become suicide bombers and other cadres. The notion of sacrificing one's life for the nation was widely accepted as a greater honour than clinging to petty social status based on caste. The marriage of the LTTE leader to a Vellālar woman, as Balasooriya argues, holds significant implications in the context of caste dynamics. Traditionally, the caste system prohibits lower-caste individuals from marrying into upper-caste families. However, with Prabhakaran's rise to power and widespread acceptance as a formidable leader, his marriage was perceived as a symbolic act aimed at bridging the caste divide within Tamil society. Balasooriya contends that this gesture resonated deeply with lower-caste individuals, boosting their confidence and motivating many to join the LTTE.

Balasooriya highlights the emergence and evolution of the Women's cadre within the LTTE as a significant development in the movement. He notes that women in traditional societies are often the primary managers of their families' socioeconomic struggles, which gives them unique insights into the challenges faced by their communities. Lower-caste women were driven to join the LTTE due to their deep-seated frustrations stemming from socioeconomic inequalities, and the burdens imposed by the caste-based dowry system, which heavily impacted their lives. The LTTE's ban on the dowry practice was a crucial factor in attracting these women. Balasooriya observes that many lower-caste women favoured the LTTE for its strong organisational measures aimed at protecting women in LTTE-controlled areas. Consequently, many women placed greater trust in the LTTE than in any other legitimate state institution, drawn by its commitment to their protection and empowerment.

Another notable observation is how the LTTE recruited a significant number of child soldiers. Balasooriya argues that children were mobilised for the armed struggle by leveraging their unresolved caste-based deprivations, often rooted in basic needs such as access to food, shelter, and education. By framing participation as a path to empowerment and an escape from marginalisation, the LTTE effectively turned these vulnerabilities into a means of sustaining their militant agenda.

Having secured the trust of the lower-caste Tamils through a plethora of means, the LTTE was able to lead lower-caste individuals to sacrifice their lives for the organisation. Balasooriya argues that the majority of LTTE cadres joined not merely to sacrifice their lives for Tamil nationalism but to address their socioeconomic

issues. These arguments support Balasooriya's central argument that the birth and development of the LTTE cannot simply and solely be attributed to ethnic factors, as caste identity played a significant role in shaping the movement.

The LTTE's Dual Narrative on Caste: A Strategy That Victimised Tamils and Undermined Its Own Strength

Initially, the LTTE emerged as a movement advocating for a casteless Tamil community, aiming to dismantle the rigid caste system within Tamil society. However, they soon realised that to gain widespread support from most of the Tamil community, they needed to navigate the caste system strategically. Balasooriya argues that this shift was driven by the recognition that a significant portion of Jaffna Tamils—approximately 50%—belonged to the upper caste, and the Hindu religious ideology underpinning Tamil society made the concept of a casteless community difficult for many to accept. Consequently, the LTTE reframed its approach by emphasising 'ethnic recourse,' attributing Tamil deprivations to the Sinhala-led state's policies.

At a surface level, as Balasooriya highlights, the LTTE maintained its stance against the common enemy—the Sinhala-led state—positioning this struggle as the unifying goal. This strategy fostered a sense of solidarity across the Tamil community, allowing the LTTE to mobilise lower-caste Tamils as menial labourers in the war effort and upper-caste Tamils as sources of financial support. By balancing these dual narratives, the LTTE effectively leveraged caste dynamics to sustain its militant campaign while presenting itself as a unifying force against oppression.

While this strategy facilitated the LTTE's expansion and dominance, it disproportionately burdened the lower castes, who endured the harsh realities and brutalities of the war. Unlike the upper-caste Tamils, who primarily contributed financially or through diasporic activities, the lower-caste Tamils bore the brunt of the conflict on the front lines. Thousands of lower-caste individuals lost their lives, while many others were left physically disabled and psychologically scarred. Balasooriya further argues that, by the war's end, countless lower-caste Tamils were relegated to transitional camps as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), where they continued to face systemic marginalisation despite their immense sacrifices.

Balasooriya contends that the downfall of the LTTE can, in part, be attributed to the politics of caste within the organisation. While the LTTE initially professed a vision of a casteless Tamil society, this aspiration gradually faded from its agenda by the 1990s. Through empirical evidence, Balasooriya illustrates this shift. A pivotal example of how caste politics contributed to the LTTE's collapse is the defection of the Karuna faction in 2004. Balasooriya analyses how Karuna, the LTTE's eastern commander, was marginalised in decision-making despite his skills and capabilities. This marginalisation, according to Balasooriya, was largely due to his caste background—he was a Mukkuwar, a Tamil caste from the east that held lower social status than the Jaffna-based Karaiyars, the dominant caste among the LTTE leadership. Karuna's departure was a significant blow to the LTTE, and his claim that the group did not represent the true interests of eastern Tamils further underscores how internal caste dynamics weakened the organisation and played a key role in its eventual downfall.

Over time, it became evident that the LTTE abandoned its initial aspiration of creating a casteless movement aimed at securing rights for the lower castes. Rather than addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by lower-caste Tamils, the LTTE shifted its focus toward the pursuit of wealth, power, and caste-based considerations in its decision-making processes. This deviation from its founding principles not only alienated and victimised its lower-caste supporters but also undermined its ideological integrity, ultimately contributing to the weakening and eventual downfall of the LTTE.

The Caste System Orchestrating Dual Horizontal Inequalities

Balasooriya's contribution to peace and conflict studies lies in his extension of Stewart's (2000, 2001, 2002, 2010, 2011) theory of *horizontal inequalities*. Stewart's theory focuses on how disparities in wealth, resources, and opportunities among social groups—especially based on ethnicity or region—can lead to social tensions and conflict. Marginalised groups often feel disadvantaged and mobilise to address their grievances. While Stewart's concept has been applied to the Sri Lankan conflict, it has largely centred on ethnic inequalities between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority.

Balasooriya, however, argues that framing the conflict purely in ethnic terms is insufficient. He contends that analysts must also consider caste divisions within ethnic groups. This deeper layer of analysis reveals the influence of caste in shaping the Sri Lankan conflict, with implications for both Sinhala and Tamil communities. For instance, Balasooriya points out that the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurgencies in the 1970s were driven by lower-caste Sinhalese mobilizing against the upper-caste political elite.

Similarly, his analysis of the Tamil conflict highlights how the LTTE sought to create a casteless society for Tamils, empowering lower castes who faced systemic oppression. These individuals experienced *dual-horizontal inequalities*, being marginalised both as lower-caste members within Tamil society and as part of an ethnic minority. This dual inequality concept, which Balasooriya (2023) advances, is crucial for understanding the multi-dimensional nature of social stratification in the conflict.

Balasooriya emphasises that the inequalities in Sri Lanka are not merely between ethnic groups (Sinhalese vs. Tamils) but also within them (upper-caste vs. lower-caste). These dual-horizontal inequalities manifest in four key areas: economic, social, cultural, and political inequalities.

Economic dual-horizontal inequalities among Sri Lankan Tamils, particularly in the north, are deeply embedded in both historical and socio-economic practices that have long marginalised the Tamil community. First, as a minority in relation to the Sinhalese majority, and second, through internal caste-based divisions that sidelined lower-caste Tamils. These inequalities manifest through limited access to land, education, and financial resources, essential drivers of upward mobility. Colonial and post-colonial resource distribution patterns disproportionately favoured upper-caste Tamils, relegating lower-caste groups to traditional labour roles such as toddy-tapping and fishing. This entrenched disparities in income, employment, and professional opportunities, fostering socio-economic isolation and deep-seated grievances within the Tamil community.

Social dual-horizontal inequalities are deeply embedded in both state policies and caste-based discrimination within Tamil society. Post-colonial educational policies disproportionately disadvantaged lower-caste Tamils, who faced dual barriers to education from both the state and upper-caste members of their own community. This lack of educational access perpetuated a cycle of poverty and limited employment opportunities. Beyond education, lower-caste Tamils also faced deprivation in healthcare, sanitation, housing, and social services due to their geographic isolation in resource-poor areas, further marginalising them socially and economically.

Cultural horizontal inequalities were largely driven by policies that marginalised Tamil cultural identity, particularly through state-orchestrated language discrimination. The Sinhala Only Act of 1956, which made Sinhala the official language of Sri Lanka, sidelined the Tamil-speaking minority and limited their access to government employment and education. This language barrier disproportionately affected lower-caste Tamils, who had limited proficiency in Sinhala or English. The cultural marginalisation of the Tamil language, customs, and practices deepened the divide between the Tamil minority and the Sinhalese majority, contributing to broader social, political, and economic inequalities.

Political horizontal inequalities among Sri Lankan Tamils were shaped by both caste and ethnic exclusion. While Tamil politicians held positions in post-independence Sri Lanka, they were predominantly from upper-caste backgrounds, leaving lower-caste Tamils excluded from meaningful political participation. Even within the Federal Party, which represented Tamil interests, no lower-caste Tamil was elected until 1977. The

dominance of upper-caste elites and their reluctance to vote for lower-caste candidates reflected deep-seated political inequalities within the Tamil community. These disparities contributed to broader issues of social and political alienation, further exacerbating conflicts both within the Tamil population and between ethnic groups in Sri Lanka.

Balasooriya's analysis reveals that caste divisions played a critical role in shaping the Sri Lankan conflict. The complexity of social stratification, often overshadowed by the traditional ethnic lens, requires a deeper understanding of how dual-horizontal inequalities between ethnic groups and within castes fueled grievances and contributed to the violent conflict.

On Balasooriya's Positionality

Balasooriya's positionality offers a critical lens that challenges the dominant narrative of Tamil nationalism by unveiling the caste dynamics that often remain obscured. His claim that upper-caste Tamil academics sidestep the issue of caste by framing it as a matter of "class" highlights an intellectual strategy designed to protect their own social status while maintaining the facade of unity within Tamil nationalism. This deliberate avoidance of the caste discourse allows them to deflect attention from the deep-rooted inequalities within the Tamil community and project a more cohesive front in the broader ethnic struggle against the Sinhalese majority. By reframing caste as class, they simultaneously downplay the systemic oppression experienced by lower-caste Tamils and safeguard their position of privilege. This critique exposes how academic narratives can be complicit in perpetuating social hierarchies, even as they appear to advocate for broader forms of justice.

As a Sri Lankan yet not a Tamil, Balasooriya's outsider identity enables him to challenge the sanitised narrative of Tamil unity and offer a nuanced analysis of intra-ethnic conflict. His positionality allows for a more critical interrogation of caste as a fundamental aspect of Tamil society that has been overlooked or conveniently ignored in scholarship focused solely on ethnic nationalism. By bringing caste to the forefront, Balasooriya disrupts the monolithic image of Tamil resistance, revealing the fractures within that are often hidden under the rhetoric of ethnic solidarity. His critique not only exposes the limitations of previous academic work on the Sri Lankan conflict but also emphasises the need for a more intersectional approach that considers both ethnicity and caste. In doing so, he broadens the scope of conflict analysis and underscores the importance of addressing internal hierarchies in understanding social struggles.

CONCLUSION: ENVISAGING THE FUTURE

Balasooriya's contribution offers a transformative perspective on the Sri Lankan civil conflict by shedding light on dimensions often overlooked in traditional analyses. Firstly, his work challenges the conventional understanding of the conflict as purely ethnic, bringing to the forefront the caste system within the Tamil community as a critical and contributing factor. His extension of Stewart's (2000, 2001, 2002, 2010, 2011) theorisation of horizontal inequalities underscores how both ethnic and caste-based inequalities played significant roles in the emergence and escalation of the conflict. By exposing the intersection of caste politics with ethnic politics, Balasooriya expands the conflict analysis, showing that the Sri Lankan war cannot be fully comprehended without examining the internal social hierarchies that influenced the trajectory of the Tamil resistance. In doing so, he moves beyond a surface-level interpretation of ethnic strife, arguing that the conflict also represents a struggle for social and economic power within the Tamil community itself.

Secondly, Balasooriya's findings offer crucial insights for post-conflict peace-building. His argument that the oversimplification of the conflict as purely ethnic overlooks the caste-related grievances highlights a significant gap in current peace-building efforts. He emphasises that without addressing these intra-ethnic complexities—particularly the persistent caste-based disparities—achieving durable peace will remain elusive. This critique of ongoing peace-building processes, such as resettlement efforts hampered by caste-based land ownership issues, illustrates the depth of social inequalities still affecting the Tamil community. By advocating

for a *multi-structure* approach, Balasooriya calls for a more comprehensive analysis that considers both the ethnic and caste dimensions of the conflict, enabling policymakers and peace-builders to tackle the root causes of division more effectively. His work, therefore, serves as a critical guide for those aiming to build not just ethnic harmony but also social cohesion within the Tamil community itself, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and inclusive peace in Sri Lanka.

REFERENCES

- Anandakugan, N. 2020, August 31. *The Sri Lankan Civil War and Its History, Revisited in 2020*. Harvard International Review. <https://hir.harvard.edu/sri-lankan-civil-war/>
- Bajoria, J. 2009, May 18. *The Sri Lankan conflict*. Council on Foreign Relations; Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/sri-lankan-conflict>
- Balasooriya, 2023. *Legacy of Palmyra: The Victims of Dual Horizontal Inequalities in Northern Sri Lanka*. University of Colombo Press.
- Caspersen, N.F. 2006. *Intra-ethnic competition and inter-ethnic conflict: Serb elites in Croatia and Bosnia, 1990-1995* [PhD Thesis]. <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/1907/1/U215438.pdf>
- McDowell, C. 1996. *A Tamil Asylum Diaspora: Sri Lankan Migration, Settlement and Politics in Switzerland*. Berghahn Books.
- McDowell, C. 1999. The Point of No Return: The Politics of the Swiss Tamil Repatriation Agreement, In R. Black & K. Koser (Eds.). *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*, 126-141. Berghahn Books.
- Neil, D. 2017. *Majoritarian Politics in Sri Lanka: The Roots of Pluralism Breakdown*. Global Centre for Pluralism. https://www.pluralism.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Sri_Lanka_Complete_Case.pdf
- Perera, J. 1992. Political Development and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 5(2): 136-148. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/5.2.136>
- Silva. 1999. *Reaping the whirlwind: ethnic conflict, ethnic politics in Sri Lanka*. Penguin Books.
- Stewart, F. 2000. *Crisis Prevention: Tackling Horizontal Inequalities*. In *Oxford Development Studies* 28-3: 245-362.
- Stewart, F. 2001. *Horizontal Inequalities: A Neglected Dimension of Development*, CRISE Working Paper 1, Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford.
- Stewart, F. 2002. *Horizontal Inequalities: A Neglected Dimension of Development*, Working Paper Number 81, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford.
- Stewart, F. 2011. *Horizontal Inequalities as A Cause of Conflict: A Review of CRISE Findings*. World Development Report 2011 (Background Paper).
- Stewart, F. 2010, February 23. *Inequalities and Conflict* [video]. IFPRI Policy Seminar, Washington DC, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1wNwjZqEgM>
- Swamy, M.R.N. 1996. *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas*. Vijitha Yapa.
- Uyangoda, J. 2007. Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka: Changing dynamics. *Scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu*. <https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/items/30accf88-29b1-4fe5-a25e-8a4a7201104b>
- Wickramasinghe, N. 2015. *Sri Lanka in the modern age : a history*. Oxford University Press.