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**Centre for Conflict Resolution  
Department of Peace Studies**

**Working Paper 12**

**Community Peace Work in Sri Lanka:  
A Critical Appraisal**

**Dileepa Witharana**

**October 2002**



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### **About the author:**

**Dilepa Witharana** has been working as a community peaceworker in Sri Lanka. His graduate and post-graduate education is in the field of electrical engineering.

## ABBREVIATIONS

CBO	Community Based Organisation
CSN	Community Survival Needs
CSOA	Civil Society Organisation's Activism
HP	Humanist Practice
ICRD	International Conflict Resolution Discourse
ICRP	International Conflict Resolution Practice
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Revolutionary Front)
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MDDR	Movement for the Defence of Democratic Rights
MIRJE	Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equity
MONLAR	Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reforms
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NMAT	National Movement Against Terrorism
NVCR	Non Violent Conflict Resolution
PA	People's Alliance
RP	Religious Practice
SCF	Save the Children Fund
UNP	United National Party

# **1. Introduction**

This paper looks at community peace work in Sri Lanka, and represents work in its early stages. It provides a view of peace work from the perception of a Sri Lankan community peace activist. The popular practice of treating community peace work as an apolitical exercise will be challenged. An overview of the meta-narratives of the Sri Lankan conflict will be provided, since these inform the broader analytic context which needs to be understood for successful community peace work to be undertaken. Community peace building practice, which draws from knowledge of the international conflict resolution discourse, is treated as just one 'peace' approach among several. Community level work is seen as one contribution to the overall peace effort in finding a resolution to the Sri Lankan conflict.

## **1.1 Terminology:**

For the purposes of this paper, the terms 'Sri Lankan conflict', 'community' and 'peace work' are used as defined below.

- Sri Lankan conflict: will be understood to mean the prevailing <sup>1</sup> Sri Lankan conflict, which has an ethnic dimension, and which is focused particularly in the North and East provinces.
- Community: this is a gathering of number of families, within a particular geographical area, which functions as a social unit for a reasonable time span.
- Peace work: is defined as: non-violent initiatives which contribute towards ethnic harmony among, and between, the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities in Sri Lanka, whilst also addressing their social, political, development, economic and other conflict related needs. Activities, from conflict prevention to long-term conflict transformation, are included.

## **1.2 The Need for Reflection on Community Peace Work**

A special discussion on community peace work is pertinent for several reasons.

Firstly, the nature of the relationship among the main three communities (Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims), is a key factor which influences the shape of the political solution at a given moment in time. A deteriorating relationship among communities demands a state structure and policies which ensures a greater self autonomy and security for the minority communities of Tamils and Muslims. Secondly, an agreement reached at the national level is not going to address all the issues related to



the conflict at the community level. Thirdly, whatever the political solution is reached by the leaders of the conflicting parties, it will need community agreement and support for it to be a successful and long lasting one. Fourthly, there are issues in the community, which can be worked out by the community itself, without waiting for the national level actors of the conflict to come to a settlement. In fact community peace work should complement peace efforts at the national level.

My approach to community peace work is built upon two main arguments.

Firstly, there is no single explanatory meta-narrative available which can completely address the issue of the Sri Lankan conflict at the community level and, further more, no explanatory meta-narrative available can be considered either correct or incorrect by itself. All explanatory meta-narratives are considered to be providing at least a few useful guidelines in understanding the complicated nature of the Sri Lankan conflict at the community level.

Secondly, I highlight the need of using generalised categories introduced in meta-narratives of Sri Lankan conflict (e.g. Sinhala-Buddhists, Tamils, Armed Forces, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Buddhist priests, NGO networks for peace, etc.) carefully. Identifying members of generalised categories at community level with the characteristics introduced in meta-narratives can restrict effective peace opportunities and lead to false analysis of the conflict situation. So, peace workers should have an open mind towards, and an awareness of, all the meta-narratives available on the Sri Lankan conflict, and the information on generalised categories introduced in these meta-narratives.

The rest of this paper consists of three main sections.

Section 2 introduces current community peace practices in Sri Lanka, and an overview of the Sri Lankan conflict is also given. The community level understandings about peace are used as a way of introducing some of the meta-narratives on the Sri Lankan conflict.

In Section 3, five main categories of community peace work are identified within the context of the Sri Lankan conflict, each which draws from their own definitions of peace which occur as a result of the different ways these categories understand 'what' the Sri Lankan conflict is about. The design and implementation of community peace activities under each category are based on those definitions. In Section 4 some of the peace opportunities that have been available in the past (and also in the present), and which have not been recognised by the Sri Lankan peace lobby, because of its over-simplistic view of social movements either as 'pro-peace' or as 'anti-peace', are discussed. Finally, tensions and debates relevant to the community peace work in Sri Lanka are discussed.

<sup>1</sup> Although at the time of writing (July 2002) a ceasefire was in operation between the LTTE and the Government, the situation could be described as one of 'no war' and 'no peace'.

In Section 5, I will look at possible ways of improving community peace practice in Sri Lanka under four headings: community peace practices, research, use of analytical tools, and agents of community peace work.

## **2. Community Understandings of Peace and Meta-Narratives**

### **2.1 Conflict Overview**

Sri Lanka is a country with a population of 19.4 million (Central Bank, 2001) of which 74% are Sinhalese, 18.3 % are Tamils (of which 12.7% are Sri Lankan Tamils and the rest (5.5%) are Indian Tamils), and 7.3% are Muslims (DCS, 1986). Sinhala is the language spoken by Sinhalese. Tamils and a majority of Muslims speak Tamil language. Whilst Sinhalese are, in general, unable to speak Tamil, a good percentage of Tamils and Muslims are capable of speaking Sinhala. However English is the main language used at the middle and the decision-making levels of the government and private sectors, in academia, and at the top levels of civil society circles. Outside these 'higher' circles only a small percentage from all three ethnic communities can converse in English. Four main religions are practiced by Sri Lankans: Buddhism (69.3%), Hinduism (15.5%), Islam (7.6%) and Christianity (7.6%) (DCS, 1998). In general, Buddhists are Sinhalese and Hindus are Tamils. The Christian population of Sri Lanka consists of both Sinhalese and Tamils. Islam is the main identity factor for Muslim people, whereas language is the dominant identity factor for Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups.

Geographically, the concentration of the Tamil speaking community is highest in the North and East regions of Sri Lanka. The Northern region is predominantly Sri Lankan Tamil, and in the Eastern region all three communities are present (41.4% Tamils, 32.3% Muslims and 25.8% Sinhalese). Indian Tamil concentration is highest in the Central part of the country. The rest of the country is predominantly Sinhalese. However 28% of Sri Lankan Tamil population, live outside the North-Eastern regions (DCS, 1986).

The main crux of the Sri Lankan conflict is the struggle by the Tamil minority for their rights and political autonomy. These demands were not taken seriously by consecutive Sri Lankan governments since independence from the colonial British in 1948. Attempts to address the demands of the minorities, through proposals to devolve or share political power at the centre, were either rejected at the last minute, due to pressure from the majority Sinhala-Buddhist community, or not implemented properly (IA, 1995; PDSRSL, 2000). The struggle, which had been mainly political involving senior Tamil politicians from the upper social strata playing a major role, took a violent turn in the late 70's and the early 80's. During this time the impetus shifted into the hands of Tamil youth who mostly came from the lower layers of Tamil society (Hoole, 1990). The civil war which has plagued Sri

Lanka has been fought mainly between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the armed forces of the Sri Lankan government in the North-East region, and has been raging for 18 years. During this time the LTTE gradually gained ascendancy over the other groups who represented the Tamil struggle. It is now the most powerful, and the only, Tamil militant group fighting the armed forces of the Sri Lankan government.

The cost of the Sri Lankan war is high. The direct military expenditure on the war by the government and the LTTE amounts to Rs.295 billion. The total cost of damage, including the cost of repair and replacement, is over Rs.137 billion at 1998 prices. The cumulative loss of output in the North and East due to the war is estimated to be of Rs.273 billion in 1998 prices. Estimates put the total number of people killed at between 50,000-60,000 up to 1998. Of these around half are civilians. Displacement from all communities (Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese) numbers about 800,000, out of which around 40,000 families are housed in basic welfare centres. The number of people who have left the country because of the war is thought to be around 250,000. The whole country, or parts of it, were under a state of emergency from 1984 till in mid-2001. Many political leaders and prominent party members have been assassinated, and abuses of human rights and the loss of civic freedoms, particularly in the North-East, are expected to continue (NPC, 2001).

## **2.2 How Sri Lankans Talk About Peace.**

Peace is a word which carries multiple meanings within the context of the complex conflict in Sri Lanka. Different actors either give direct meanings to peace or, by proposing a solution to the current problem, indirectly create meanings. These meanings are either constructed by outside actors such as the international humanitarian community, political movements in Sri Lanka (e.g. Sri Lankan government, the LTTE, and other Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim political parties), by civil society activists (e.g. NGOs and CBOs), the media, or by the community itself. Acceptance of a certain constructed meaning by a member of the community depends mainly on that person's perceptions and past experiences on conflict. Some of the comments we have heard in various parts of the country are given below <sup>2</sup>:

Tamils talking about the **war situation**:

- *“please allow us to live in peace”* (addressing the parties waging war)
- *“when there are no more check points, round-ups, bomb blasts, checking on national identity cards, detentions, torturing, then there is peace”*
- *“peace comes when we can move and live freely, without fear”*

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<sup>2</sup> There are two main sources of information: (a) what the author has heard, mainly during the last two and a half years, in various community and civil society forums all over the country (except the North) on the subject of Sri Lankan conflict, and (b) the author's experience of what is said and discussed in public by opinion makers of the Sri Lankan conflict over a period of twenty years in the media.

**Sinhala perceptions about LTTE terrorism:**

- “*we need a genuine war to achieve stable peace*” (blaming the government for not being energetic enough in the war effort)
- “*eradication of terrorism is the only way to peace*”
- “*tell the Tigers (LTTE) to stop the war, then we will have peace*”
- “*tell Tamils to stop the war, then we will have peace*”

**Tamil perceptions about the liberation struggle:**

- “*how can we forget what they (the Sinhala army) have done to us and talk about peace, we have lost everything*”
- “*we are prisoners in our own land*” (a Tamil in the GoSL controlled territory in the East)
- “*we want to go back, only there we feel recognised and respected*” (from a Tamil who has come from the East to Colombo)
- “*peace is possible only after the occupying Sinhala army is chased away*”
- “*tell the government to stop the war, then we will have peace*”
- “*tell Sinhala people to stop the war, then we will have peace*”
- “*Sinhala government will never bring peace, they cheat us all the time*”
- “*there will be peace when we get Eelam*”

**About democracy in Tamil society:**

- “*Tamil people are trapped in between the Sinhala army and ‘them’*” (referring to LTTE)
- “*we don’t want to talk politics, even these walls are having ears*” (a Tamil in the LTTE dominant territory)
- “*there is no Tamil community any more, only LTTE*”
- “----- “ (just silence on the subject of LTTE)
- “*Tamil struggle to win rights is over long ago. Now we are moving towards self destruction*” (a Tamil intellectual)

**About state formation:**

- “*politicians created this problem, they have to solve this*” (referring to politicians of both communities)
- “*this war cannot be won by anyone, a political solution is the only way out*”
- “*till we address the historical grievances of Tamil people, a true peace cannot be achieved*”
- “*start thinking as Sri Lankans*” (instead as Sinhalese and Tamils)
- “*what we need is a state structure where Sinhalese and Tamils co-exist with strong feelings towards their ethnicities*”
- “*on the day all are treated equally, we have peace*”

- *“the day Sinhalese and Tamils live happily together, that is the day of peace”*

About **international involvement:**

- *“earning dollars and pounds by selling peace”*
- *“peace is a NGO business”*
- *“kanna rasveem -(meetings for eating and pooshana sathi- nutrition weeks” (referring to shorter and longer versions of conflict resolution workshops conducted by foreign funded NGOs).*
- *“peace lobby is the Southern front of LTTE” (a Sinhalese perception of foreign funded NGOs engaged in conflict/peace related activities).*
- *“peace devalues the freedom fight of the Tamil nation”*
- *“peace talks are an international conspiracy to erase Sinhala nationalism and nation”*

About **class conflict:**

- *“ethnic peace is just an illusion, economic disparities should be addressed for a real peace”*

About **inner peace:**

- *“violence is a part of human nature, a peaceful society is an unrealistic dream”*
- *“peace cannot be achieved by changing the outside environment. Peace is possible through internal enlightenment”*

This wide range of meanings, both positive and negative, represents the community reality. It is possible to find sections of people within the community who give the word ‘peace’, one or more of the above mentioned meanings. Not only sections of the community, but also individuals can give contradictory meanings to peace while using the word. A person who says *“till we address the historical grievances of Tamil people, we can’t achieve peace”*, may say at the next moment, *“peace is a business”*. This happens as a result of having two different interpretations - the person’s own understanding of peace at the first instant, and the person’s understanding about NGO driven peace work at the second instant - for a single signifier (the word ‘peace’).

## **2.3 Placing Community Meanings of Peace in the Context of Meta-Narratives of Sri**

### **Lankan conflict:**

**2.3.1** In section 2.2 we noted that the **war situation** was talked about as being a main feature of the Sri Lankan conflict, and hence a ‘no-war’ situation is understood as peace. This we believe is the understanding of the majority of Sri Lankans irrespective of ethnicity or class. There are at least two main reasons for such a view towards peace.

(a) Years of suffering and of having to lead lives with the continuous fear of harassment, arrest, and getting killed at any moment, has made the war the main and a separate issue to be dealt with. This

happens in contrast to the initial position of using war just as a mean of achieving more noble objectives.

(b) Some sections of the Sri Lankan community experience the Sri Lankan conflict only through the 'effects' of war since they have no 'direct' knowledge of it. A situation without a war, for them, is practically the condition for peace.

**2.3.2** Understanding of the Sri Lankan conflict as a problem of terrorism generates the type of comments seen under the sub heading **terrorism** in section 2.2. This is the stand taken by those advocating a Sinhalese nationalistic ideology who also incorporate the concept that the problems of Tamil people are in general similar to those of ordinary Sinhala people. The Sri Lankan state, it is argued, is a state of elites in which the welfare and the development of majority non-elite elements of all three communities have been neglected since independence. Recognition of problems faced by Tamils (as special to Tamils and due to oppression by Sinhalese) is viewed as a creation by opportunistic Tamil-elite politicians, in the same way that problems faced by ordinary Sinhalese are mostly caused by Sinhalese-elite politicians. It is argued, by using historical references, that Tamil chauvinism has been constructed within the Tamil society. So the present war waged by the LTTE is considered as an act of terrorism promoted by this Tamil chauvinism, and peace can be achieved by getting rid of terrorism (Rupesinghe, 1993<sup>3</sup>; De Silva, 1997; Gunaratne, 1998; NJC, 1998; Akkarawatta, 1999).

**2.3.3** Consideration of the Sri Lankan conflict as a **liberation struggle** of the Tamil nation led by LTTE, is another meta-narrative in which some of the community comments can be placed. This a stand promoted by Tamil nationalistic ideology. It shows from history how the Sinhala-Buddhist state backed by the Sinhala-Buddhist community: broke promises and cheated Tamils; did not accept Tamils as a nation and as equals; marginalized Tamils in the spheres of politics, education, agriculture, industry, and government service; unleashed violence by grossly violating human rights, and; used force to crush the unarmed political struggles of Tamil people. The present conflict is seen as a liberation struggle against Sinhala-Buddhist aggression, and violence is seen as the best language understood by Sinhalese. It is believed that as a nation with a traditional homeland in the North-East of Sri Lanka, the Tamil community has a right to struggle for self determination and separation. Tamil Eelam, the state of Tamil people, is seen as the 'state of peace'. The longevity of the LTTE with a military and political history of 25 years, its ability to conduct consistent and sustained armed struggle, and ability to organise popular masses for political action, are considered as evidence of mass support and hence supports the LTTE claim to be the true movement of Tamil liberation

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<sup>3</sup> See the sections on 'Sinhala Nationalism' and 'Tamil Nationalism' in: Rupesinghe, K et al, *Ethnic Conflict and Human Rights in Sri Lanka: An Annotated Bibliography Volume 2: 1989-1992*. Hans Zell Publishers, 1993, for an annotated bibliography of some of the contributions published (including local press) on the theme during 1989-1992.

(Ponnambalam, 1983; Rupesinghe, 1993; Thirunavukkarasu, 1995; Emmanuel, 1997; EOS, 2001<sup>4</sup>; LTTE, 2001a; LTTE, 2001b; LTTE, 2001c).

**2.3.4** Comments or reactions given under the sub-heading **democracy in Tamil society** in section 2.2 belong to yet another meta-narrative on the Sri Lankan conflict. While justifying the struggle of the Tamil community for minority rights, political power sharing in governing structures, and freedom from oppression from the majority community, this meta-narrative questions the claim of recognising the current struggle led by LTTE as a liberation struggle of Tamil people. According to this narrative, establishment of democracy within Tamil society is considered as an equally important condition for peace when compared to the objective of winning rights for Tamils under the leadership of LTTE. The LTTE's practice of removing other political activities and ideologies from the Tamil community, that do not fit into the LTTE agenda, by assassination and intimidation of individuals, is questioned (as a part of questioning all types of terrors both external and internal to the Tamil community) under this meta-narrative (see UTHR(J)<sup>5</sup> publications<sup>6</sup>; Somasundaram, 1998)

**2.3.5 Failure of state formation** is another meta-narrative on the Sri Lankan conflict. Here failure of State formation after independence, where all ethnic communities could live together and could feel included, is identified as a key element in the Sri Lankan conflict. This is a narrative widely accepted by peace loving academia, and the intellectual circles of both Sinhala and Tamil communities. Failure of state formation is identified in three different dimensions (a) not having a structure allowing political power sharing between ethnic groups, (b) failure in some areas of the public policy, and, (c) Sinhala-Buddhist identity of the state. By accepting the fact that there is an ethnic dimension, some who follow this meta-narrative refer to the Sri Lankan conflict as the 'ethnic conflict'. There can be two schools of thought seen in those who accept the narrative of failure of state formation. One school identifies as failure the inability to build a Sri Lankan identity as the state identity by gradually dissolving the ethnic identities of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. The other school proposes, as the main condition for peace, a state structure, where Sinhalese, Tamils and

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<sup>4</sup> See for a list of publications under the theme, Sri Lankan conflict as a LTTE led Tamil liberation struggle.

<sup>5</sup> *Information Bulletin No.24 of UTHR(J)*, University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), released on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2000, under the title '*The Ordeal of Civilians in Thenmaratchy*', provides the following introduction. "University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) was formed in 1988 at the University of Jaffna, as part of the national organisation University Teachers for Human Rights. Its public activities as a constituent part of university life came to a standstill following the murder of Dr. Rajini Thiranagama, a key founding member, on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1989. During the course of 1990 the others who identified openly with the UTHR(J) were forced to leave Jaffna. It continues to function as an organisation upholding the founding spirit of the UTHR(J) with its original aims: To challenge the external and internal terror engulfing the Tamil community as a whole through making the perpetrators accountable, and to create space for humanising the social and political spheres relating to the life of our community. The UTHR(J) is not at present functioning in the University of Jaffna in the manner it did in its early life for reasons well understood.

<sup>6</sup> Reports, Special Reports, and Information Bulletins published by UTHR(J) from 1989 to date

Muslims can co-exist while each ethnicity maintains their own strong ethnic identities (MPD, 1997; Bastian, 1999; Somasundram, 1999).

**2.3.6** Comments under the sub heading **international involvement** in section 2.2 belong to a meta-narrative which places the Sri Lankan conflict within an agenda of imperialist world power politics. Powerful international involvements for example by the United States, Europe and India on the one hand fuel the Sri Lankan conflict by selling arms and by giving military training to both sides at certain times, is not seen as genuine support either for the Tamil liberation struggle or for the government's drive to defeat separatism. On the other hand, activities to de-escalate or resolve the Sri Lankan conflict by the same international powers such as by pressurising parties involved with the war to maintain a good human rights record, by banning the LTTE internationally, by promoting and becoming involved with third party mediation, and through funding NGOs to do peace work, are not understood as genuine efforts towards peace in Sri Lanka, but as a part of the 'imperialist agenda'. Such contradictions by international powers are presented as an argument in favour of this view. This is a meta-narrative, accepted mainly by the nationalist ideologies of both Sinhala and Tamil communities, and the left thinking circles that can be heard in many public debates on the issue of Sri Lankan conflict and peace. To be independent from the imperialist influence is seen as a necessary condition for peace (Gunaratna, 1994; Dixit, 1998; PBJVP, 2000; Ranawaka, 2001).

**2.3.7** A socialist meta-narrative of interpreting the Sri Lankan conflict mainly as a **class conflict** proposes the roots of Sri Lankan conflict to be economic. 'Real' peace is expected to be achieved only by addressing the economic roots of the conflict. Interpretation of problems and difficulties faced by the Tamil community in many spheres of social life (e.g. education, industry, agriculture, government and private sector job opportunities) under the present state structure, as just being faced by the Tamils, and as a creation of Sinhalese community, is seen as a misinterpretation of class reality. Difficulties particularly faced by the Tamil community under special conditions of war are, however, not challenged by this narrative. The state is identified as an apparatus of the capitalist class and mere adjustments to the state structure are not expected to bring peace to the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim proletariat. Political power devolution on the basis of ethnicity, under the current dynamics of the Sri Lankan conflict, is not seen as a way towards peace, but as a step further in aggravating the conflict (Wijeweera, 1986; JVP, 2000; JVP, 2001).

**2.3.8** Comments listed under the sub-heading **inner peace** in section 2.2 belong to another meta-narrative on conflict and peace. The Sri Lankan conflict according to this narrative can be considered as another reflection of human conflict. A worldview of considering an existence of a meaningful external reality without the involvement of human mind is taken as a misperception. No activity possesses a meaning or characteristics on its own, till the human mind gets involved and creates them. Working on individual human minds is hence seen as the way to a meaningful peace rather than



treating the Sri Lankan conflict as a separate phenomenon having its own existence outside the human mind and then trying to discover solutions (see Kalupahana, 1999 for a discussion on the theme of inner peace).

### **3. Community Peace Practices**

Each meta-narrative discussed above provides a conceptual framework to understand the nature of the Sri Lankan conflict, and by doing that creates awareness for conflict resolution. Using the definition of peace work proposed at the beginning of this paper, not all the initiatives suggested by every meta-narrative can be put into the category of peace work. In addition to that some of the possible conflict resolution activities, which could come under the category of peace work, are not practiced at the community level (see section 4.1).

Five categories of non-governmental peace practices can be identified in Sri Lankan communities. There are differences in how these categories understand and view peace, their approaches towards peace, who does the practice, and with whom. Some of them do not have explicit and overt objectives for peace building, but end up with a peace component. The categorization introduced in this paper is explicitly based on actual peace practice experienced in Sri Lanka. The five categories are,

- International Conflict Resolution Practice (ICRP).
- Civil Society Organisations Activism (CSOA).
- Religious Practices (RP).
- Community Survival Needs (CSN).
- Humanist Practice (HP).

Organisations involved with community peace work in Sri Lanka can be considered to base their work on either one of, or a combination of, the five of the community peace practices identified above. Usually though, the work of an organisation is often seen to revolve around one particular practice more than the others. This is the criterion according to which, examples of organisations are given under each practice, below.

#### **3.1 International Conflict Resolution Practice**

This practice draws from the 'International Conflict Transformation' discourse, and has been gaining popularity as the systematic approach for conflict resolution. Within this approach conflict is broadly defined, and the Sri Lankan conflict is treated just as a single case within the spectrum of the whole range of conflicts throughout the world. The focus is not so much on the final shape of the resolution,

but on the process of reaching the resolution. Non-Violent Conflict Resolution (NVCR) is the term widely used in the Sri Lankan context to identify this practice.

### *Conflict Resolution Workshops*

In this section I will discuss the practice of International Conflict Resolution Practice (ICRP) at community level in Sri Lanka. The main activities associated with ICRP are workshops, ideally with an equal number of participants from the Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim communities, and with a gender balance. The workshop is identified as a place for participants from the communities to sit together to identify and analyse problems, and find non-violent solutions. Activities that are found commonly in a workshop can be grouped under two main streams<sup>7</sup>. Under the first stream comes the introduction and practice of NVCR tools and skills which are expected to give guidelines and capabilities in analysing conflict, planning strategy, and action for peace. Analytic tools commonly promoted in workshops are: timelines; stages of conflict; conflict mapping; ABC (Galtung) triangle; pyramid (Lederach); onion, and; the conflict tree (see: Fisher et al, 2000). Non-violent communication, trust-building, networking, listening, fundraising, mediation and negotiation are the most popularly addressed NVCR skills. The second stream consists of activities done with the objective of challenging the 'conflict promoting' attitudes of participants. Activities to address the issue of 'differences', to deal with myths and stereotypes, and to challenge the perception that working for peace is 'someone else's responsibility' come within this stream.

It is my experience that skills introduced draw mainly from international manuals of NVCR and are yet to develop sensitivity to the local cultures. For example exercises done under 'trust-building' or 'non-violent communication' are not based on an in-depth study on various techniques of trust-building and methods of effective communication embedded within local cultures. The analytic tools are taught within the 'boundaries' of ICRP as gaining useful 'knowledge', but are not usually related to an in-depth understanding on the Sri Lankan conflict. The general tendency is to gloss over the issue of the Sri Lankan conflict (because it is viewed as too sensitive to discuss). Workshop activities usually concentrate more on the general and broader theme of conflict rather than focusing on the Sri Lankan conflict. How far the theme of the Sri Lankan conflict is discussed depends mainly on four factors.

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<sup>7</sup> Sources include agenda's of NVCR workshops conducted by: (i) Quaker Peace and Service Sri Lanka from February 1998 to June 2000 (including the workshop modules of 'Let Peace Begin With Me' and 'Let Change Begin With Me'); (ii) THIRUPTHIYA (a specialised peace NGO) from October 1999 to October 2000 (including the first stage of Applied Peacebuilding programme); (iii) AHIMSA (a specialised peace NGO) held in Negombo (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> March), Matara (18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> June), and Colombo (25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> June) in 1999, Moratuwa (first session of Training of trainers workshop) in 2001; (iv) YMCA in Welimada (10<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> February 2001); (v) OXFAM in Habarana with partner organisations (26<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> March 2000).

- (i) The facilitator/trainer's knowledge about the complexity of the Sri Lankan conflict, and of particular community realities of the Sri Lankan conflict;
- (ii) Level of confidence of the facilitator over handling the issue in a constructive manner;
- (iii) Level of willingness of facilitator to see her/his fixed views being challenged while playing the role of a facilitator, and;
- (iv) Level of willingness of sponsoring organisations to discuss the peace aspect of the Sri Lankan conflict seriously. Such discussions can threaten the military agenda's of both the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE, which in return can threaten the existence of sponsoring organisations themselves.

One characteristic of the activity 'workshop' in the Sri Lankan context is, rather than it becoming a means, it becomes the end itself. Conducting a certain 'number' of NVCR workshops per year is a common activity for many community NGO and CBO plans. It is a common request received by specialised peace NGOs, 'to conduct a workshop', often without clearly specifying why the workshop is needed.

Workshops are held at places varying from five star hotels to community halls, depending on who organises them. ICRP is mainly practiced by INGOs and some LNGOs who have specialised in the field of peace work. These LNGOs often have good contacts with the international conflict resolution institutes and experts. Major workshops are conducted purely by, or with the guidance of, international trainers, whilst local trainers may be used as co-facilitators. Major training of facilitators is done either in training institutes abroad (often in Europe or in North America) or at locally conducted training programmes under the guidance of international experts.

ICRP and knowledge currently being advocated has only recently been introduced to Sri Lanka, and has yet to find its roots in 'Sri Lankan' practice. Whilst outside experts play a leading role in helping to establish a forum for NVCR practice, at the same time this slows down the process of ICRP getting translated into local cultural, social, and site specific conditions. The international element in current NVCR practice also makes competency in English a necessary qualification for a Sri Lankan to be a staff member of an INGO or a specialised local NGO. This is the reason for the majority of local staff of both INGOs and LNGOs to be from town based and middle class backgrounds.

Apart from the main activity of conducting NVCR workshops, organising or facilitating exposure programmes for different ethnic communities to know and experience each other's perceptions and stories also come under the ICRP banner. Mixed community programmes to achieve common needs is another community peace activity specially practiced by the development focused international NGOs. Infrastructure development, women empowerment, and children's rights are some of the common themes for mixed community programmes. International development and humanitarian

NGOs which operate in Sri Lanka (such as OXFAM, CARE, and SCF) and local NGOs specialising in peace (such as Ahimsa) have based their community peace work on ICRP.

### **3.2 Civil Society Organisation's Activism (CSOA)**

In the context of this paper civil society organisations are recognised as local NGOs which came into existence during the late 1970s and who, whilst working for various issues of social reform, saw the need to find a political solution as fundamental to the Sri Lankan conflict. Some of the political activists from the 1971 JVP insurgency, radical tendencies within the Christian church, and liberal minded groups concerned about democracy and human rights, have been leading these organisations (Bastian, 1999). CSOA is identified as the activism promoted by these groups, which in general are Colombo-based and supported by networks of community based organizations and community contacts. By accepting that a historical injustice has been done towards the minorities of this country, CSOA is based on finding a political solution by addressing those injustices through structural reforms of State. The ideological differences of these organisations in explaining the complexity of the Sri Lankan conflict and long-term visions for peace are overshadowed by their common short term approach of campaigning for constitutional reforms of the State. Their focus is on the type of the power sharing structure needed for a solution, rather than the process of achieving the broader state of peace <sup>8</sup>. In contrast to the ICRP, there is no common agreement within CSOA to use 'non-violence' as the only acceptable approach for winning rights of the oppressed. Some left thinking sections of CSOA which take an anti-war stand within the context of the present dynamics of the Sri Lankan conflict, do not reject using the medium of violence in a 'true' liberation struggle, and do not ideologically hesitate to support an armed conflict for the 'true' liberation of oppressed.

Practices of CSOA of community peace show common features <sup>9</sup>. Awareness programmes are conducted in the nature of exhibitions of posters and paintings, and leaflets are distributed highlighting the urgency of ending the war and the need for a political solution to the conflict. Lectures, with question and answer sessions, are given to small gatherings and are used as the main mode of raising awareness. Public addresses are held on important occasions commemorating special events (e.g. human rights day) at open spaces in town or village centres. Both lectures and public addresses are delivered by guest speakers, who are normally either leading civil society intellectuals

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<sup>8</sup> However the focus of the CSOA campaign has changed at the time of writing (July 2002) as a result of priorities of the Government-LTTE led peace initiative being changed. With the possibility of the LTTE and the Government commencing negotiations in Thailand, the focus currently is on the campaign to build public opinion in the South to support and defend the MoU signed between the two parties and the respective peace process which would include an interim administration structure to be run by the LTTE in the North and the East of Sri Lanka.

<sup>9</sup> Sources of information: (i) discussions held with some of the CBOs and other community groups linked to the CSOA in Eastern, Southern and Central provinces, and; (ii) discussions held with the field activists of MIRJE, MONLAR and MDDR (see footnotes 10, 11 and 12).

linked to CSOA, or leaders and field workers of those Colombo-based civil society organizations. Examples of themes covered in community awareness programmes are:

- (i) History and chronology of the Sri Lankan conflict. This could involve, for example, exploring the Sinhala communities contribution to perpetuating the conflict followed by a discussion on reactions from the Tamil community;
- (ii) Possible frameworks of state structure for a political solution (including an analysis of the various structures worked out in the past);
- (iii) Identifying similarities of the Sri Lankan conflict with other conflict experiences around the world;
- (iv) Answering questions raised by the Sinhala chauvinist camp;
- (v) Describing the cost of the war;
- (vi) Human rights.

The underlying theme of community awareness programmes is the necessity for a political solution to the conflict. Apart from awareness programmes as explained above, public demonstrations (in the form of marches and rallies) are held in Colombo and in other major cities, denouncing chauvinist actions by sections of the Sinhala community, and calling for political accommodation to the conflict. Organising goodwill visits from Sinhala to Tamil communities (especially to the areas under LTTE control) is another activity of CSOA. In such visits Sinhala community leaders are expected to take the message to the Tamil community that there are sections of Sinhalese who do understand the problems of Tamils, who support the Tamil struggle for minority rights and self-determination, and who take an anti-war stand. They argue that the government is the main party responsible for stopping the war.

CSOA too has got its own network of community based organizations. Work is done mainly within the Sinhala community outside the Northern and Eastern provinces with the aim of raising community awareness and mobilising people to act as pressure groups in bringing peace with justice to the Tamil people. Activists of CSOA are in general young people who have moved within left thinking circles for some time and whose qualifications to be involved with CSOA come mainly from life experiences rather than 'formal' training and education.

The Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equity (MIRJE) <sup>10</sup>, Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reforms (MONLAR) <sup>11</sup>, Movement for the Defence of Democratic Rights (MDDR) <sup>12</sup>,

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<sup>10</sup> Deterioration of human right situation in the country after the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1979 paved the way to the formation of MIRJE, the Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equity. Constitutional reforms, fundamental rights, and human rights were the main issues addressed in MIRJE's media, education, awareness and campaign programmes. By the latter part of 2001 MIRJE has stopped functioning.

and the Community Education Centre <sup>13</sup> are examples of organisations which can be considered to base their community peace work on CSOA.

### **3.3 Religious Practices (RP)**

Experience of community peace work that comes under the category of religious practices draws mostly from two of the religions practiced in Sri Lanka - Theravada Buddhism and Christianity. The theological focus of both is on inner peace. Enlightenment and salvation of an individual, which can be interpreted as the state of inner peace, is emphasised as opposed to the enlightenment and salvation of 'community'. However according to the doctrines of both religions, achieving external peace (e.g. working for the benefit of others by improving ethnic harmony among the various communities) is also an important activity. Working for inner peace and working for external peace can be interpreted as activities which complement each other and in fact are two outcomes of a single spiritual journey. There are two ways that RP contribute towards community peace as defined in this paper:

- (i) People in communities who focus more on 'inner peace' through religious practice, contribute to the promotion of ethnic harmony.
- (ii) Community members who focus more on 'external peace' as a result of the understanding and strong belief of religious doctrines are often dedicated peace workers who are prepared to take high risks, an important requirement within the context of a culture of violence. What these members of the community exactly do under the theme 'peace' is dependent on their interpretations of what Buddhism or Christianity says about peace.

Living a peaceful life as preached by the respective religions, and by setting an example to others is considered as fundamental. Not having contradictory values in one's professional and private lives (an aspect which is not always questioned in both ICRP and CSOA) is considered an important element in RP for community peace. Reading and re-reading of religious texts is seen as key in achieving two main objectives of RP. The first objective is to ensure commitment and

<sup>11</sup> MONLAR was formed in 1990 to work for national land and agricultural reforms in particular, and for an appropriate development policy in general. This is seen as an important aspect in the process of rebuilding the rural economy, destruction of which is considered by MONLAR as the main cause for the two militant insurgencies (JVP) in the South. Raising a consensus among the Sinhala community to stop the war, devolve political power, accept self-govern rights of Tamils is considered as the framework for peace.

<sup>12</sup> MDDR's roots can be traced back to the campaign of safeguarding the rights of strikers who lost their jobs in the 1980 July national strike. The organisation later expanded its scope to become a movement in promoting democracy and human rights at a national level. "A suitable constitution for the country" and "peace against war" can be conceptualised as the themes of MDDR's peace programme.

<sup>13</sup> Community Education Centre (CEC) was formed in 1975 with the aim of initiating a discussion on topics of social importance amongst the general public, which were in general limited to the elite circles in Colombo. Whilst the main focus is on youth and women's programmes, the CEC is continuously involved with awareness programmes and campaigns for a political solution to the Sri Lankan conflict.

encouragement to be involved in difficult peace practices which may involve high risk. The final decision to go ahead with a difficult peace activity is seen as being based on teachings of the religion, rather than being based on a rational analysis of the external environment conditions. The second objective, in the case of Buddhism, is to promote the religion as a philosophy which does not accept violence or war in any context. This is contrary to the popular Sinhala-Buddhist notion of ‘fighting terrorism to safeguard Buddhism’. In the case of Christianity, God’s message for love and peace is restated. Themes generally quoted from religious texts are on leading ‘correct’ lives’, and being peaceful and non-violent, and loving all living beings. Peace practices of the Inter Religious Peace Foundation and Alliance of Religions for National Harmony provide examples for reading and re-reading of religious texts<sup>14</sup>. Peace meditation in the Theravada Buddhist tradition, and prayer in Christian tradition are two methods used to promote this peaceful path - ‘let all beings be well and happy’ is a popular theme for peace meditation in Sri Lanka.

However the community peace initiatives of RP are undertaken mainly by clergy and lay people on an individual basis, without much backing of the respective religious institutions. Such individuals normally have local community bases with people who respect and follow them. SARVODAYA, a movement which started in 1958 and has spread to over 8600 villages, and which bases its general activity and community peace programme on a spiritual philosophy, is an organisational example of peacework based on RP (SSM, 1995; Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1998; Ariyaratna, 1991; 2000).

### **3.4 Community Survival Needs (CSN)**

The objective of this work is not specially about bringing peace to the community, but the use of peaceful means as an effective way of getting basic community needs met. These are initiatives predominantly by the members of the community, itself. No significant role can be played by the dominant peace practices ICRP and CSOA. However peace practices RP (3.3) and Humanistic Practice (see 3.5) may play a role as integral parts of community culture.

This community practice can be of two types: either mixed community programmes to achieve common basic survival needs of the community or, a programme done by a single ethnic group addressing similar needs. Peace is not really the main reason driving two or three communities to work together. Invitation for another community to join in a project happens as a result of the realisation that a particular need cannot be fulfilled by violent means, and without the support of the other party. The possible geographical areas for this work are in tense conflict zones where ethnic communities live side by side or are mixed, while sharing common survival needs irrespective of

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<sup>14</sup> Both ‘Inter Religious Peace Foundation’ and ‘Alliance of Religions for National Harmony’ are mainly gatherings of the religious leaders of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, working for peace through the promotion of peace objectives in each religion and inter religious harmony.

ethnicity. Sinhala and Tamil border villages in Southern, Eastern, North-Central and North-Western provinces are examples of geographical areas where communities live side by side, sometimes with a no-mans land between them. The eastern province and some districts of Colombo, Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Matale and Kandy can be taken as the areas where Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities live in mixed communities, and are in a constant state of tension. Community survival needs, which cannot be met by violent means and have a better chance of being met through peaceful means, become the themes of single community programmes. Ensuring safety and security, and rebuilding and achieving sustainability to economies affected by war are common themes for both single ethnic and multi-ethnic programmes based on CSN. Declaration of a 'no-war zone' as a joint community effort and asking the armed groups to respect the boundaries of the zone is another example of this. Practice of CSN is different to the joint mixed community programmes found in ICRP in two ways. Firstly CSN practice is mainly planned and driven by the community itself. Secondly, CSN practice can involve high risk due to the fact that it concentrates on work which poses challenges to both military and ideological fronts of the war because of its potential to build strong links among divided ethnic communities, within a relatively short period of time. A joint paddy cultivation programme led from October 1999 to May 2000 by a farmer committee consisting Sinhala and Tamil farmers in the Ampara-Batticaloa border in the East of Sri Lanka is an excellent example for CSN.

### **3.5 Humanist Practice (HP)**

Human suffering is taken here as the main theme. Humanist practice is basically a practice against war and against physical violence. 'After all we are human beings, so why kill each other?' is the basis of this practice. All the other identities are considered to be secondary to the primacy of common human identity, and other 'secondary' identities are not considered worthwhile fighting for.

Promoting the peace message both on a mass scale and at an individual level is the main activity. The human feelings of all the parties involved, directly or indirectly, on the issue of human suffering caused by the war are addressed non-violently. HP of community peace work crosses the boundary of Sinhala or Tamil nationalism (which just talks about the suffering of one's own community), by addressing human pain and suffering of the 'other' side. Activities include art, television dramas, stage plays, feature films, songs, poems, and paintings which are used as peace promoting work. Instead of giving an analysis of the Sri Lankan conflict and addressing issues of injustices, touching visuals are created to show how things could be different if Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims join hands with each other to share resources.

At a more immediate level, there are groups of artistes who travel around towns and villages with their peace message, conducting musical shows or painting exhibitions. These performers are more active and assertive compared with the methods used above. The strong anti-war messages, delivered



to communities, are not always welcomed by some and the activities of these dedicated performers can place them in some danger. “SAADHU JANA RAAVA” (Voice of Good People) <sup>15</sup> is an example of a musical group, which belongs to this category of HP (see: Kurumbhapitiya and Sunil Shantha, 1997). Apart from these groups of travelling artists, individuals can also be found in many other places who engage with peace work, and who have a humanist approach.

#### **4. Constituencies for Pro-peace and Anti-peace** <sup>16</sup>

Some analysts differentiate between pro-peace and anti-peace constituencies. However there is a danger in adopting such an analysis, especially by a peace lobby, in a complex protracted political and social conflict like the one in Sri Lanka.

- Firstly, what is meant by pro- or anti- peace depends on the definition of peace as well as on the context of the conflict addressed. For example, some of the left thinking political parties and groups who campaign for a political solution to the Sri Lankan conflict, and who are considered to be ‘pro-peace’, do not necessarily accept non-violence as an effective means of conflict resolution. They don’t see any problem in using violence for a just cause.
- Secondly, the dynamic and complicated nature of social and political movements involved with the Sri Lankan conflict does not leave spaces to identify them as simply pro-peace or anti-peace. Evaluation of the pro- or anti-peace nature of a political movement, demands attention to at least three main aspects:
  - i) what leadership says and does in public at a given moment;
  - ii) long term vision of the leadership;
  - iii) the categories of people who rally around the political group.

None of these aspects are static and change over the process of evolution of the political group. The images the Peoples Alliance<sup>17</sup> (PA) and the United National Party<sup>18</sup> (UNP) had at the peace platform during the 1994 general elections as ‘pro-peace’ and ‘anti-peace’ political movements respectively, have since changed significantly. If we just go by the first aspect of what leadership says in public in the recent times, conflicting images are presented by both PA and UNP when it comes to peace.

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<sup>15</sup> The first stage of SAADHU JANA RAAVA is considered in this analysis. During the first stage approximately 500 musical shows were held island wide since beginning in September 1995.

<sup>16</sup> Contents of the introductory part of this section and the sections 4.1 and 4.2 are based on the political environment in Sri Lanka during mid 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Ruling alliance of parties during 1994-2001.

While PA President Kumaranatunga, in general, represents the softer pro-peace image of the government, her Prime Minister Wickramanayaka is presented as a person taking a tough stand on 'LTTE terrorism'. The UNP leadership has given contradictory messages in public debates over proposed constitutional reforms. The UNP, while insisting on maintaining the unitary nature of the Sri Lankan state (this stand does not leave space for any considerable devolution of political power, and is generally recognised as an 'anti-peace' sign), has also highlighted the need for a dialogue with LTTE as primary step towards a political solution (this is generally recognised as a 'pro-peace' sign) and is currently actively pursuing this approach (at July 2002)

- Thirdly, identification of constituencies as pro- or anti-peace discourages the recognition of unhealthy or progressive elements within those constituencies. From a point of view of peace work (as defined at the beginning of this paper), this identification has created in the current peace lobby in Sri Lanka a situation where all the issues addressed by the 'anti-peace' groups (for example: euro-centric cultural expansionism erasing other cultures from the surface of the world), and any criticism made against the peace lobby (for example: consideration of NGO-led peace work having other motives than that of achieving peace in this country), are on the one hand not studied well and on the other hand not given serious consideration as they come from the 'enemy'.

#### **4.1 Peace Potentials Unidentified by the Current Practice**

The general understanding of the Sri Lankan peace lobby of pro-peace and anti-peace alignments is given by the following examples from the South.

##### *Pro-peace:*

- international NGOs operating in Sri Lanka
- local civil society NGOs
- CBO networks supported by international and civil society NGOs
- Christian church and organisations attached to the church

##### *Anti-peace:*

- Sinhala Urumaya <sup>19</sup>
- National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT) <sup>20</sup>
- Sinhala Veera Vidhahana <sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The main opposition party during 1994-2001.

<sup>19</sup> Sinhala Urumaya is the most active Sinhala nationalist party among the groups and parties in the South which focus their campaigns on a Sinhala-Buddhist Sri Lanka.. Sinhala Urumaya has one MP in the Parliament (August 2001).

<sup>20</sup> NMAT is an action group particularly involved with campaigns in support of the rights of Sinhala-Buddhist ideology while adopting a hostile approach towards minority communities in Sri Lanka. Formation of Sinhala Urumaya has provided activists of NMAT a political space, and hence at present there are less activities to be seen under the banner NMAT.

- Buddhist clergy
- Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) <sup>22</sup>

Some of the pro-peace ideological potentials of the above mentioned ‘anti-peace’ constituencies are discussed below. Expansion of the boundaries of current discussion by the Sri Lankan peace lobby to cover such pro-peace ideological potentials, as yet un-addressed, can effectively reduce the political space available for anti-peace action by the above-mentioned groups.

Jathika Chinthanaya and Haritha Samaajawaadaya are two main ideologies (as introduced below in section 4.1.1) which have strong influences on:

- (a) political activists who give leadership to Sinhala Urumaya and NMAT and were involved with activities of Sinhala Veeravidhahana, and;
- (b) the influential sections which rally around the Sinhala nationalist cause. Section 4.1.2 is devoted to a discussion on Buddhism.

#### **4.1.1 Jathika Chinthanaya (National Thinking) and Haritha Samaajawaadhaya (Green Socialism):**

The mid-80s in Sri Lanka saw the beginning of a new wave of discussion. By breaking out of the boundary of elite-English speaking circles, this discussion attracted native language speaking youth (especially the Sinhala speaking), who were in search of an ideal after traditional Marxism lost its attractiveness among them, as the alternative to the capitalist development model. The thrust of this discussion can be considered as ‘human relativism’, where the role culture plays in generating knowledge (including hard sciences), constructing meaning, and providing a direction to social development, is considered decisive. This wide spread discussion initiated in Universities (as a political activity) and spread across Sinhala speaking political circles and young activists in local civil society NGOs to the community, basically identified the contemporary dominant world view as inherently euro-centric and questioned the appropriateness of it as the main analytic system in explaining the reality. Local press played a role in initiating this discussion at the community level. This discussion led to the formation of two main trends. One moved in search of national sources as the alternative ideal (and is called *Jathika Chinthanaya*), and the other one gave a Sri Lankan reading to the green ideology that had already been introduced by that time to Sri Lanka (called *Haritha Samaajawaadhaya*). Interpretations of the philosophies of quantum physics and environmental

<sup>21</sup> Sinhala Veera Vidhahana is an organisation with a fundamental focus to protect and promote ‘Sinhala business’ in the face of the perceived threat caused by the expansion of non-Sinhala business. Sinhala Veera Vidhahana gave leadership in the past to several campaigns in support of Sinhala nationalism.

<sup>22</sup> JVP is a Marxist party. After giving leadership to militant insurgencies in the early 70s and again in the late 80s, JVP has now become a significant political force in the Parliament with ten MPs (August 2001).

sciences, and the latest trends in the fields of philosophy of science, provide a new boost to the discourse of Jathika Chinthanaya and Haritha Samaajawaadaya in the Sri Lankan context <sup>23</sup>.

These interpretations and trends:

- Firstly, removed the certainty factor of the contemporary dominant knowledge system in understanding reality;
- Secondly, questioned the appropriateness of particular knowledge systems against the need of survival of human species in this world;
- Thirdly, the possibility of the existence of different and equally valid paradigms of knowledge systems was recognised. This concept of paradigm brought culture into a prominent position by challenging the universality of the euro-centric knowledge system and the human development model proposed by it.

### **Jathika Chinthanaya**

The fundamentals of the Jathika Chinthanaya discourse is sometimes misunderstood as an exercise in search of Sinhala national thinking, while categorising Tamil nationalism as the ‘other’. On the contrary, the basics of Jathika Chinthanaya ideology defend the right of existence of every ‘national thinking’ in the face of expansionism of the dominant ‘thinking system’ or the worldview. Within the Sri Lankan context the discourse of Jathika Chinthanaya goes a step further to identify worldviews, which provides ideological frameworks for a sustainable world.

Early literature of Jathika Chinthanaya discussion shows this approach by identifying expansionism of the euro-centric worldview as the main challenge of Jathika Chinthanaya, and considers the worldviews of Buddhist, Chinese and Hindu traditions as the worldviews for a future sustainable world (De Silva, 1992). This is an approach, which could provide a common ground for both Sinhala and Tamil nationalist forces to work together. Such an approach, initiated at least by a section of the Sinhala nationalist forces, has the potential of influencing the dynamics of the Sri Lankan conflict in a direction towards peace.

### **Haritha Samaajawaadhaya**

Haritha Samaajawaadaya conceptualises the roots of the current Sri Lankan crisis in the streams of environment, economy, culture and politics, fundamentally as a crisis of development. By identifying this development ideology and practice as based on the dominant euro-centric worldview, Haritha

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<sup>23</sup> This extra sensitivity to the developments in science happened as a result of most theoreticians of both Jathika Chinthana and Haritha Samaajawaada movements coming from natural science and engineering backgrounds.

Samaajawaadaya proposes a sustainable development model based on socialist values as the solution to the Sri Lankan crisis.

- (a) diversity of cultures and nations;
- (b) self determination rights of every collective ‘national consciousness’ while respecting the laws of nature, and;
- (c) the recognition of war and the weapons industry as a repressive element of capitalism. An anti-war stand is considered as a fundamental of Haritha Samaajawaadaya (Ranawaka, 1993, 1997).

The publication *Sihala Abiyogaya* (The Challenge for Sinhalese) by the theoretical leadership of Sihala Urumaya, can be considered as a document providing ideological guidance to the future Sinhala nationalist cause, and it shows that the influences of Jathika Chinthanaya and Haritha Samaajawaadaya (as interpreted above) still exist within young activists of Sinhala nationalism and hence the existence of a pro-peace potential (Ranawaka, 2001).

#### **4.1.2 Buddhism**

It is common practice to identify the anti-peace role of a section of the Buddhist Sangha as the position of Buddhism with regard to the Sri Lankan conflict. But there are community peace opportunities provided by Buddhism, and these can be identified under three broad categories – Theravada Buddhist Philosophy, Popular Buddhist Readings, Community Values.

##### **4.1.2.1 Theravada Buddhist Philosophy**

Theravadic Buddhist understanding of peace (*santa*) makes it a central issue to be addressed. Peace is considered as more of an issue to be attained by individual human beings than something to be achieved by changing the external environment. By going beyond common definitions of peace, Theravada Buddhism refers to internal peace as ‘the appeasement of all dispositions’. The entire Theravadic Buddhist philosophical teaching can be positioned around this central theme of internal peace or ‘being peaceful’<sup>24</sup> and is considered to be focused in the direction of ‘appeasement of all

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24 Kalupahana (1999) quotes Gotama the Buddha from *Purabheda-sutta* (‘Before the Disintegration’), for his explanation on a ‘peaceful one’. “With craving gone away even before the disintegration (of the body), not rooted in the past extremity and not be reckoned in the middle (present), for him there is nothing idealised (for the future). Without anger, not trembling, not boasting, without remorse, speaking in moderation, not arrogant, he indeed is the sage restrained in speech. Without anchoring in the future, he does not grieve over the past. Seeing detachment in regard to sense-contacts, he is not led into (dogmatic) views. (He is) withdrawn, not deceitful, not covetous, not avaricious, not impudent, not prone to disgust and not given to slander. Without desire for pleasant things, and not given to arrogance, gentle and possessing originality, he is not impassioned or dispassionate. It is not because of love of gain that he trains himself (in the precepts), nor is he angry at the lack of gain. He is not perplexed by craving nor is he greedy of flavor(s), (being) considerate, he is always mindful. He does not think of (himself) as equal in the world, as being distinguished, or as inferior. Ostentations are not for him. For whom there is no involvement; knowing a phenomenon, he is uninvolved. For whom there is no craving for becoming (bhava) or other-becoming (vibhava). Him I call the appeased one, who is not looking for pleasures of sense. In him, no ties are evident and he has crossed over entanglements. For him, there are no sons or cattle; a field, a property is not evident.

dispositions'. From the perspective of community peace work, promotion of active practice of Buddha's teachings by the Buddhist clergy and laypersons can contribute in changing their approach towards the Sri Lankan conflict and the negative image of a Sinhala-Buddhist within the Tamil community. This change in approach and image can further contribute to change the current dynamics of the Sri Lankan conflict. Apart from that, the Buddhist discourse provides various tools for conflict transformation that can be used in isolation from practicing Buddhism .

#### **4.1.2.2 Popular Buddhist readings**

As a living practice, Buddhism (as understood by community) and the Buddhist institution has undergone changes during its life span of thousands of years. Community Buddhist practice constantly draws from other practices, and what is highlighted as the best Buddhist practice at a given moment of time depends on the priorities of the influential sections of the Sri Lankan Buddhist community (this can be called the 'politics of Buddhist practice'). So it is no surprise to see some of the community Buddhist practices entirely contradicting the concept of 'appeasement of dispositions'.

Three mediums can be identified through which the message of Buddha is regularly passed to the community:

1. Preaching by Buddhist monks - in temples, in the houses of lay people, or through electronic media);
2. Sunday *daham paasal* - classes conducted in Buddhist temples on Sundays to teach Buddhist doctrine);
3. School text books on Buddhism - Buddhism is a compulsory subject for Buddhist students.

Selected sections of Buddhist texts are often referred to in the above mentioned mediums. What is being selected, and what kind of interpretation is being given to it, is dependent on the priest who is responsible for preaching. This is a place where politics of Buddhist practice can come into play. However there are several Buddhist texts which carry material directly advocating various aspects of peace and non-violence, such as the. *Dhammapada*, *Majjhima-nikaaya*, *Digha-nikaaya*, *Sutta-nipata*, *Jataka text*, and the *Theragatha*. What these texts carry comes under the normally accepted definitions of peace and non-violence, and not necessarily under the definitions given in section 4.1.2.1 (Rahula, 1974; Kalupahana, 1999).

Either the acquired or the rejected is not found in him. That by which the common people, the recluses and brahmins might speak of him, that is not idealised by him. Therefore, he is not agitated in debates. With greed gone, without avarice, a sage does not speak of himself (as being) among the superiors, or equals, or inferiors. Being without figment, he does not reach up to figment. For whom, there is nothing called one's own (sakam); by not having (such a thing), he does not grieve. And he does not enter into (theories about) phenomena. *He indeed is called a peaceful one (santha)*"

#### 4.1.2.3 *Community Values.*

From birth to death the temple plays an important part in the life of a Sinhalese Buddhist, and it is still used as a main meeting place for community gatherings. Both good and bad times are shared with the temple by way of giving alms to Buddhist monks and requesting them to chant *pirith* (Buddhist stanzas). As a leader in the community, the involvement of the Buddhist priest is expected at important occasions. Asking the Buddhist priest's advice in resolving family and community conflicts is still common in many villages and towns where the Buddhist temple remains an integral part of the community. Full moon days, which are considered as religious days for Buddhists, and the Sinhala-Tamil new year in April provides an opportunity for the community to meet each other. Hence Buddhist institutions provide an access to the Sinhala community in general.

As a result of this connectedness between Buddhist institution and community life, community values can be seen to be derived from interpreting concepts of Buddhism. *Pin* (good deeds) and *pau* (bad deeds) are two such deep rooted concepts which sometimes influence the control of violent action. By doing *pin* or *pau* one can expect good or bad rewards in this life as well as in future births. Promising to observe the Five Precepts (*pan-sil*), is part of the day-to-day life of a Sinhala Buddhist. The First Precept is 'not to destroy life'<sup>25</sup>. Observation of *pin* and *pau*, as well as the First Precept of not destroying life, creates spaces for peace.

#### 4.2 **Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP- People's Revolutionary Front).**

The JVP has been identified as an anti-peace constituency (a) because of its stand against the proposed constitution by the government (which is considered by some as the most detailed devolution of power offered by the Sinhala community so far)<sup>26</sup>, and (b) because it opposes the international mediation by Norway as a third party in finding a solution to the Sri Lankan conflict. The recent JVP publication *Apa Gatha Yuthu Maga (The Path for Us)* identifies present international involvements encouraging a settlement through the establishment of a 'looser' state structure for the country, as a part of a two-fold agenda of world imperialism. A temporary settlement for the Sri Lankan conflict (a) is seen as serving the economic agenda of imperialism, and (b) a loose state structure which can be destabilised at any moment, serves the political agenda. The Sri Lankan government and the LTTE are seen as agents of world imperialism.

<sup>25</sup> However the effect of this on a Buddhist is weakened as a result of the way the promise is made. Firstly, the promise is made in Pali language as a tradition and the real meaning of it is hence not well understood. Secondly, the Pali term for 'not destroying lives' is often translated into Sinhala as 'not killing animals', and hence killing human beings can be felt as excluded.

<sup>26</sup> See: Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. *The Constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka: A Bill to Repeal and Replace the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka*. August, 2000.

The class problem between rich and poor is considered by the JVP as the main problem in Sri Lanka, which should be addressed jointly by Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim proletariat. Proposed constitutional reforms by the present government are considered as mere power sharing arrangements among those few elites holding power at the top layers of the social pyramid in Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities, and not as addressing the real problems of the majority Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. Equal rights to all members of all communities by establishing democracy and mending sick relations among them, is presented as the correct move forward (Wijeweera, 1986; JVP, 2000; PBJVP, 2000; JVP, 2001). When the above analysis on the Sri Lankan conflict is combined with the anti-racist stand the JVP takes in public<sup>27</sup>, it is difficult merely to identify them as an anti-peace constituency.

### **4.3 Tensions, Contradictions and Debates**

Different meanings given to peace at the political opinion building level are reflected at the community level as well. Both the people living in the communities, and activists/peace workers working in the communities for peace, operate without getting these contradictions fully resolved, and the tensions generated by these contradictions totally released. There are tensions even within the different community peace practices. Some of the tensions and contradictions which are particularly important within the context of current community peace work are discussed below.

#### **4.3.1 Politics of Peace Work**

Critics of peace work question the politics of opting for peace as the number one priority at the cost of other factors which are considered to be important to both Tamil and Sinhala communities. As the bulk of community peace work being practiced (as recognised in section 3) is directly or indirectly supported by foreign funding institutions, the criticism is extended to question the motives of foreign funders and the role played by the world powers, especially the North American and the European Union countries, in formulating the funding agenda for the whole world. It is argued that the issue being promoted at a given time, whether it is the sovereignty of Sri Lanka, or the freedom struggle of the Tamil nation, or the peaceful political solution, is dependent on the current political and economic interests and the future strategic plan of the afore mentioned world powers. This criticism comes from both Sinhala and Tamil nationalistic ideologies. Members of the Sri Lankan peace lobby are considered to be agents working for an agenda of imperialism, without being aware of the fact

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<sup>27</sup> JVP literature as well as public statements condemns racism of both Sinhala and Tamil communities. During the time of high friction among sections of Sinhala and Muslim communities at the end of April and beginning of May, 2001, JVP launched a poster campaign with the slogan, "We human beings". This was done as a response to the Sinhala Urumaya campaign under the title, "We Sinhalese". However some analysts consider the anti-racist stand of JVP more as a reaction to 'Sihala Urumaya' politics than an inherent part of its political programme. Less contribution by JVP up-to-now in an actual anti-racist campaign addressing all communities (other than just making statements) is one reason behind this criticism. Not taking constructive steps yet, to identify serious problems faced by Tamils as stated in 'Apa Gatha Yuthu Maga' and not paying immediate attention to them, is another reason.



that they are being used as agents. Deconstruction of issues limited to nationalism (national needs, values, and traditions of both Sinhala and Tamil communities), especially under the practice of International Conflict Resolution, is taken as an example. This analysed by some as the imperialist need to dissolve other civilisations. The criticism is especially directed toward community peace work, since community peace work, by definition, devalues the national interests of the communities. Promotion of community harmony is seen, by these critics, as a way of weakening national struggles.

But, the counter argument questions the basis of looking at the world in such simplistic terms without recognising different, contradictory, and diverse social forces in operation within world politics. According to this narrative, the availability of funds for peace work in a particular region of the world at a given moment, does not necessarily mean that peace work is part of an imperialist agenda. This narrative has more faith in the power of concerned citizens all over the world, and solidarity among them on issues like peace. It is also argued by the peace lobby that the need for peace should not be assessed just by looking at the interests of imperialists and therefore always opposing it. To assess the need, peace should be evaluated within the context of the national agenda. The enormous cost the country has already paid in terms of human lives, money, living standards, democracy, and development because of the war is considered to justify the need of peace as the number one priority.

#### ***4.3.2 Politics and Peace.***

There is an important debate in judging the role of politics in community peace work. Both the International Conflict Resolution Practice (ICRP) and the Civil Society Organisation's Activism (CSOA) approaches are seen as defending their own initiatives.

ICRP is criticised for promoting a peace work culture which is not sensitive to the complicated, socio-political problem of the Sri Lankan conflict. This insensitivity, it is argued, results in addressing the Sri Lankan conflict from the surface level without being able to recognise the root causes which are inherently political. Furthermore, the stand of neutrality generally being maintained by ICRP in between conflicting parties is said to be acting as a barrier in resolving the conflict, where addressing injustices is a key issue. Invention of the peace work called 'community peace building' is considered as a way of finding excuses to avoid the political questions of the Sri Lankan conflict. This is done by categorising society into layers and leaving political issues to be handled at the national level by the politicians.

CSOA challenged in several ways by peace workers of ICRP. The CSOA's approach of going to communities and teaching people what the Sri Lankan conflict is about and the means of resolving it, is considered as a project of intellectual elites. These elites stay at the top layers of Sri Lankan civil society and have lost contact with the community long ago. Instead of 'telling' people what is the best to be done, getting community people together to identify from their own perspectives how they

recognise factors of the Sri Lankan conflict and what they think the solutions are, it is argued, a better approach for community peace work. People in their own communities are considered the best group to find solutions to their own problems caused. It is further argued by the critics of CSOA that its focus on justice for minority Tamils has left the insecurities and grievances of Sinhala community forgotten.

#### **4.3.3 NGOs and CBOs as the Agents of Community Peace Work.**

Community peace work carried out by ICRP and CSOA is almost entirely dependent on NGOs and CBOs<sup>28</sup> within the community. NGOs and CBOs, in the Sri Lankan context, are identified as non-governmental organisations which have emerged mainly during the last two decades, as a result of availability of foreign funds, for issues identified by the world civil society project. It is argued by critics of the civil society project that unlike in Europe and in America, where the formation of civil society has occurred as the result of a long rights struggles (and hence has its roots in the society), in Sri Lanka NGOs and CBOs which work under the banner of civil society, have just been ‘parachuted’ onto Sri Lankan soil.

Criticism of NGOs and CBOs as agents of community peace work come from both the inside and the outside of community peace work circles. It is argued that thousands of NGOs and CBOs that can be found in society plan peace work, not according to the real peace needs of the community, but to attract funds by just fulfilling the criterion set by donors and funders. Instead of going for difficult and needed risky peace work, no such activities are usually undertaken. Further, the nature of connections of NGOs and CBOs with the community is questioned. It is argued that rather than being representatives of the community, most of these organisations have created a special social niche for themselves which is occupied by their staff and small groups of ‘confidants’ who rally around. This special niche is often considered to function in isolation from the community, with merely an upward accountability towards funders. Further, some point out that this special niche is threatening the very survival of existing social fabric, which is not visible from a first glance but is deeply integrated with the community. The threat comes in terms of resources NGOs and CBOs possess, which discourages the community developing their own peace practices. Unequal distribution of resources is said to be an issue even among NGOs and CBOs whose practices are based on ICRP and CSOA. ICRP is said to be utilising large amounts of resources, threatening the existence of CSOA networks. This dependency culture relying on outside resources, it is argued, ‘disempowers’ people instead of empowering them.

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<sup>28</sup> CBOs are smaller versions of NGOs, who restrict work to a particular community.

On the other hand a section of the NGO and CBO community (especially the leadership) does not accept the theory mentioned above, and claim their work is bringing changes in the community towards a peaceful environment. Not getting involved and confronting the more political issues on peace is seen as a tactical approach. It is argued that community peace work within a culture of high resistance and violence needs careful planning and execution, without a direct confrontation with anti-peace elements. Sustaining a space for a long-term peace work is seen as the priority rather than aiming for short term (high risk) successes.

#### **4.3.4 *Role of Ethnicity in Peace.***

There are disagreements within the peace lobby about the role of ethnicity as a key factor both in the causes and solutions for the Sri Lankan conflict. Some argue in favour of maintaining a space for strong feelings towards Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim ethnicities. 'Unity, yet diversity' is the theme of this argument. Finding structures as a country and as a community for all ethnic communities to live together, with strong identity feelings of Sinhaleanness, Tamilness and Muslimness, is seen as a fundamental element of any resolution. This argument arises as a result of the understanding of ethnicity as an important element of an individual's identity, and the treatment of ethnicity as an organic part of the culture. It is said that ethnicity, which is a result of a social evolutionary process, has to be accepted and respected.

The counter argument senses a danger in this approach. Feelings of ethnicity, as the main identity factor, are considered strongly established as a result the current conflict in Sri Lanka (this is the contrary argument of ethnic identities creating conflict). Feelings of ethnic difference, it is argued, were comparatively weak during non-war and less-conflict periods. Hence strong feelings of Sinhaleanness, Tamil-, or Muslim-ness as the dominant identity factor are considered to be temporary phenomena. It is argued that state and community structures designed having ethnicity as the basis can first make this temporary phenomena a permanent one by reinforcing differences, and second, create a space for further conflicts in between those structures based on ethnic identity.

#### **4.4 Summary.**

We can draw two conclusions from section 4.

Firstly, it is not correct to analyse and categorise a conflict like the Sri Lankan conflict, by just using information provided by a single meta-narrative. Narratives are built using carefully selected information from a complicated reality. The reality of the Sri Lankan conflict is complex enough to provide information even for contradictory narratives written on the same subject.

Secondly, the use of generalised categories as guidelines in understanding the conflict becomes problematic.

Where can these two conclusions lead us, is an important question to be answered. Can the first conclusion undermine the fight by the Tamil minority against injustices? Can it undermine the need for studying the socio-political background of the Sri Lankan conflict, before attempting any peace work? Does the problematic nature of using generalised categories (e.g. PA, Buddhist Sangha, Tamils, JVP, pro-peace constituencies, and so on), undermine the need of studying the social and political evolution of generalised categories as elements of meta-narratives?

In addressing these questions, this paper takes the following position. Rather than proposing to undermine a single narrative on the Sri Lankan conflict, the first conclusion leads us to consider all narratives seriously, in planning and implementing peace work while addressing the root causes of the conflict. This, hence, demands from community peace workers a comprehensive knowledge on each narrative. Knowledge on generalised categories, too, with all their limitations, provides a context to the Sri Lankan conflict as well as acting as a useful tool in having a general understanding of community politics of community members.

## 5. Conclusions

It is my view that there is:

- a space for community peace work within the larger picture of peace in Sri Lanka, and;
- a need to improve the community peace practices related to the Sri Lankan conflict.

Improvements are possible without a revolutionary change in approach towards community peace practice. This goes against the view of some in the Sri Lankan community peace workers who think that the only effort which is going to produce meaningful results is something along the lines of a ‘Gandhian’ mass movement for peace. Mentioned below are some suggestions, which draw from earlier discussions, to improve current community peace work looking especially from the angle of International Conflict Resolution Practice (ICRP) in Sri Lanka.

### 5.1 Community Peace Work.

All the community peace practices discussed in section 3 highlight important elements which can contribute to the success of community peace work. They can be identified symbolically as follows within the Sri Lankan context.

- **Techniques (ICRP):** awareness of locally available techniques as well as techniques from ICRP, to transform conflict.

- **Context** (CSOA): a comprehensive knowledge of the multi-version context of the Sri Lankan conflict.
- **Belief** (RP): belief in the peace work with which one is involved.
- **Real Needs** (CSN): peace work should be targeted in achieving urgent real needs of the community.
- **Dedication** (HP): dedication to peace work means not getting discouraged in the face of difficult challenges, and to be prepared to take 'risks'

No single element alone can produce results. Instead a combination of all the elements is needed to make an optimum impact. This can be done by adopting the following approaches:

(a) Instead of focusing on just one element (e.g. skills and techniques in current ICRP, political context of the Sri Lankan conflict in CSOA, etc.), training programmes for peace workers should be designed in such a way to address all the five elements identified above.

(b) Criterion of selection to the post of 'peace worker' has to be improved according to the new needs.

## 5.2 Research

Research, under themes 'peace', 'conflict transformation', and 'community peace building' (from which the Sri Lankan ICRP develops), is undertaken at the moment mainly at international research centres. There is a need for research under same themes at local level based on field experience which can complement the research done at international level, because of two main reasons.

(a) The Sri Lankan conflict possesses both characteristics common to other conflicts, as well as characteristics unique to itself. This uniqueness:

- comes as a result of conflict as being a phenomena which can hardly be separated from the context (political, cultural, social, etc.) within which it generates, and;
- can cause research done at local level either to 'fine tune' the current international conflict resolution discourse or to make fresh contributions.

(b) International conflict resolution discourse (ICRD) can be placed within a certain paradigm which has its own view of conflict and tries resolutions based on it. As a country influenced by several grand philosophical traditions, there is a possibility of the existence different paradigms, which may view the phenomenon 'conflict' as identified in ICRD, from a different perspective and provide ways out based on these (e.g.. Buddhist perspective on the phenomenon 'conflict').

More contributions are required at local level by Sri Lankans in addressing this particular research need. Deciding about the ethics of research, the criteria for identifying areas needing further research, are essential aspects of this exercise which should be based on ‘real’ issues in the field.

### **5.3 Use of analytical tools.**

**5.3.1** At the community level suspicion about foreign involvement in peace work acts as an obstacle to many peace initiatives. This happens as a result of the ‘peace lobby’, who are often funded by foreign donors, not being transparent enough when it comes to the accountability of their funds. Such transparency should include public access to:

- links on the international funding line, and;
- information about the international consultative and decision making elements of the NGO.

This approach can help the community understand and have a realistic view on the foreign involvement in the peace lobby, and in fact can challenge some of the stereotypes that creates suspicion.

**5.3.2** Analytical tools often require the use of generalised categories in the process of analysis. While accepting the fact that information on generalised categories is useful, it is advisable to use more focused (but maybe still generalised at a lower level) categories when work is done with community groups. Instead of just using ‘Sinhalese’, ‘Tamils’, ‘Buddhist monks’ or ‘Tamil militants’ the use of focused categories like ‘Sinhalese in a border village’, ‘Tamils in LTTE controlled areas’, ‘*Jathika Sangha Sabhawa*’ (National Bikku Forum), or LTTE, respectively, can provide useful information in having a better understanding of the situation. At village level, it is often not possible and practical to define generalised categories, irrespective of how focused the category is. This leaves no other option than treating village members on an individual basis in conflict analysis.

### **5.4 Agents of community peace work:**

Funding criteria, as a mechanism for promoting community peace, should be widened to supporting a broader agenda of peace potentials, rather than just restricting funding to NGO and CBO activities which have the label ‘peace work’ attached. So donors or funders interested in promoting peace in Sri Lanka have to be clear about their own understandings of peace, and a fairly deep knowledge about social movements in Sri Lankan society, so that they can recognise these peace potentials. The range of such potentials is indicated in the definition given for ‘peace work’ at the beginning of this paper.

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