

Trincomalee & perceptions of post-LTTE

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- [Features](#)

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It is all but natural to desire to visit areas of our own country that was once restricted to a dream. With the LTTE war machine now eliminated all that remains are the cowards who have been leading their own people astray from their foreign haunts.

The netting and rendition of LTTE arms dealer too showed the world the prowess of Sri Lanka's intelligence to net in LTTE kingpins. It was in this euphoric mood that the desire to go to Trincomalee by road and experience the changes that materialized into reality.

The roads by far were superior to even the best of roads in Colombo. The checkpoints were many but manned by extremely pleasant armed personnel who were very courteous, a far cry from how they were perceived many years ago. It showed the distance the armed forces have gone to leverage their professionalism and we can view the difference.

A stark difference was however the police – clearly apparent was traffic cops out early morning waiting to create a break in law to make a few bucks and this was very visible right through the journey back to Colombo displaying what a long distance Sri Lanka's police needs to go to win the trust of the common masses.

The route via Anuradhapura and through areas that were once held by LTTE was heart rendering – the remains of water wells with some houses minus doors and windows forced us to imagine what fate would have befallen these people at the hands of LTTE brutality. In some distant areas single houses were seen, children waving at passersby obviously happy to be free.

Trincomalee is a healthy mixture of the three main ethnic communities and it was nice to see Sinhalese knowledgeable in Tamil, Tamils speaking in Sinhala. If there are Tamils who grumble of having to live in majority Sinhala areas what about Sinhalese who live in Tamil majority areas. These arguments hold little logic for what about those who go to western shores to live in countries where English is hardly used with no place for their mother tongue.

Arriving in Trincomalee town, the atmosphere was busy, people going about their daily affairs, armed forces again manning areas keeping close watch of everyone

which did provide the feeling that we were safe. The people were extremely hospitable, whatever ethnicity they belonged to and while questioning the changes that have taken place leading to the end of LTTE terror it was now obvious that the people were slowly realizing how life was without LTTE presence.

Many were doing well – business was picking up, infrastructure development was well in place with bridges, roads, buildings all coming up. It was natural to think that the people would be all praise for the Government who took it upon itself to give the armed forces the go ahead to crush the LTTE terror yet unfortunately this was where the reality check arose. While the people whatever their levels in society were happy to pick up their lives, start afresh or rebuild their lost incomes....they were hesitant to actually praise the Government and it took more than a few sentences to drive home to them that wasn't it this Government that finally gave to the people some hope without LTTE domination. To actually say any words of praise these people were in fact hesitant.

The seriousness of this hesitation to acknowledge or praise the Govt and armed forces for putting to an end a 30 year menace is important and becomes key to understanding the voter turnout and ultimate voter casting in the Northern municipal elections. It merits the Government to ask itself if and where they have gone wrong & why people are still unwilling to at least give them credit for eliminating a force that we believed was denying Tamil people as well as the other ethnic communities peace of life! Is it that the Tamil people in general hate the Governments in power or are the Tamil people not being forthright in their real thoughts.

Should we assume that these people actually did not mind LTTE domination – if so, it then leads us not to categorize them as LTTE but to wonder why they would like to live amidst terror, to have their children turned into child soldiers & to monthly donate to kill, when they could roam freely as they were now doing as well as engaging themselves economically as well?

At the heart of understanding Sri Lanka's situation is the need for us to be aware of exactly what the Tamils honestly want. This question however deciphers further into segments for we cannot disengage the fact that there are plenty of differences among Tamils predominant of which is the caste factor. These differences however though the western world and the gender equality proponents may regard as unfair may be regarded differently by the very sufferers who may rather opt to follow generations of "injustices" accepting them as their due. So while they may be agreeable to suffering these injustices having

accepted that they pass from generation to generation do they feel it uncouth to live in harmony amongst the Sinhalese preferring to be mesmerized by a false notion that they will be given a carved out territory to live in and with the new situation still feel they should nurture that desire despite the elimination of the LTTE.

The fairness of this notion again leads us to wonder why only a few are ready to accept that they presently live very much as equal citizens, owning property, opening businesses and acquiring key portfolios in both public and private sectors. With this reality it is sometimes unacceptable why they are hesitant to acknowledge that despite our general opinion of Governments as corrupt this particular one deserves praise at least for eliminating LTTE terror.

A sound survey tabulating the real thoughts of the people – Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Burghers, from different age groups, work classes etc is opportune to ascertain exactly how people think and some key questions need to be asked to enable people to honestly answer.

This will put to rest most of the false concepts and theories that are randomly promoted as causes for the problems that prevail. With the census that is to be held it is good to put together a set of key questions that could be asked simultaneously to gauge what the common masses think. Of course these questions must be intelligently compiled and uncomplicated & certainly minus the errors that arose in the A/L & O/L examination. The survey may unearth plenty of surprises to which Sri Lanka must be prepared to provide answers.

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