

Research Article

“We Walk on the Same Corridors of Our University”: Contemporary Reflections of Sinhala--Tamil Relations in Sri Lankan Public Universities

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Inter-ethnic relations amongst students in public higher education institutes (HEIs) in Sri Lanka are weak. This deficit deprives students of experiencing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to be productive citizens the country demands. Considering the violent history both Sinhalese and Tamils share, there is a dearth of minority discourse in Sri Lanka. As a consequence, research that explores inter-ethnic dynamics within public HEIs in the island nation is also minimal. Similarly, being mindful of the fragileness of Sri Lanka's race relations, it is unclear how responsible local authorities should facilitate educational reforms to foster student success. To address this literature gap, the present inquiry conducted a document review to identify contemporary student and instructor perspectives associated with learning in state-run universities. A total of nine newspapers and blog posts by students, journalists, and academics that critically discuss learner experiences in minority-dominant Jaffna University were chosen after a careful evaluation. Using thematic analysis, three key themes were generated. As per the obtained results, inclusiveness and appreciation between Tamils and Sinhalese learners remain a challenge. Moreover, local security forces continue to suppress minority student voices, leadership, and civic engagement. Further, there is a need for governmental interventions to systematically implement DEI policies to improve the quality of learning spheres for students. Overall, this interpretative research lays out key observations associated with race relations in Sri Lankan HEIs.

Keywords: diversity, inclusion, minority groups, interethnic relations, multiculturalism, cultural awareness

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1. BACKGROUND

Sri Lanka is home to Sinhalese and minorities such as Tamils and Muslims. After its independence from the British in 1948, Sri Lanka experienced multiple instances of racial tension [1, 2, 3, 4]. By 1983, Sri Lanka was in a state of civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Thousands lost lives, many fled the country, and Tamils who lived in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka were

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severely affected by the war that continued up to 2009 [3]. Historically, the Sinhalese Kingdoms and South Indian Tamil Kingdoms (i.e., Pandya, Chola, etc.) had land disputes. However, the inter-ethnic conflicts of recent times are an outcome of enacting populist acts by political regimes to secure majority support to win elections. The Sinhalese Only Act No. 33 of 1956 was a starting point of the ethnic tensions in the island nation. This policy made the Sinhala language mandatory for all official work within the country marginalizing Tamil speakers. Similarly, the introduction of the Standardization Act in the 1970s further impacted minority groups and limited their access to higher education [5]. The purpose of both acts was to reduce the representation of Tamils in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Although these policies were amended to a larger extent by successive governments, the damages already rendered were irreversible. The negative outcomes of the implemented majoritarian policies made Tamil youth retaliate against GOSL ultimately paving the path to the civil war between 1983 – 2009. The nature of Sri Lankan politics created a turbulent atmosphere for all Sri Lankans and the resulting inter-ethnic dynamics created social changes of larger magnitude. For instance, state universities slowly became political centers for promoting nationalistic sentiments [6, 2]. As a result, discriminatory practices within educational spheres against Tamils have become common [7, 8]. Although 14 years have elapsed since the war victory, Sinhalese and Tamil students still struggle to interact with each other within HEIs [9, 10]. A nexus of negative social and political factors has also created a noticeable language barrier between Sinhalese and Tamils [11]. This language barrier further limits student interaction within campuses. To make matters worse, university regulators also seem to place minority students primarily in the HEIs of the Northern and Eastern Provinces where Tamil-speaking populations are concentrated (Figure 1). Although some provisions are given for minority students to study in the campuses of Sinhala-dominated areas, many Tamil-speaking students may not consider them due to difficulties in cultural assimilation.

1.1. Universities: The centers for nationalism

Jaffna University (JU) of the Northern Province was once a center for multiculturalism. However, over the last few decades, the university transitioned to a place of Tamil nationalism [6]. In some sense, this is understandable as the rest of the Sri Lankan universities also directly or indirectly started reflecting the nationalistic majoritarian policies of GOSL. As a result, JU was viewed as a place that could be utilized by interested parties for advocating the linguistic and cultural identity of Tamils. The

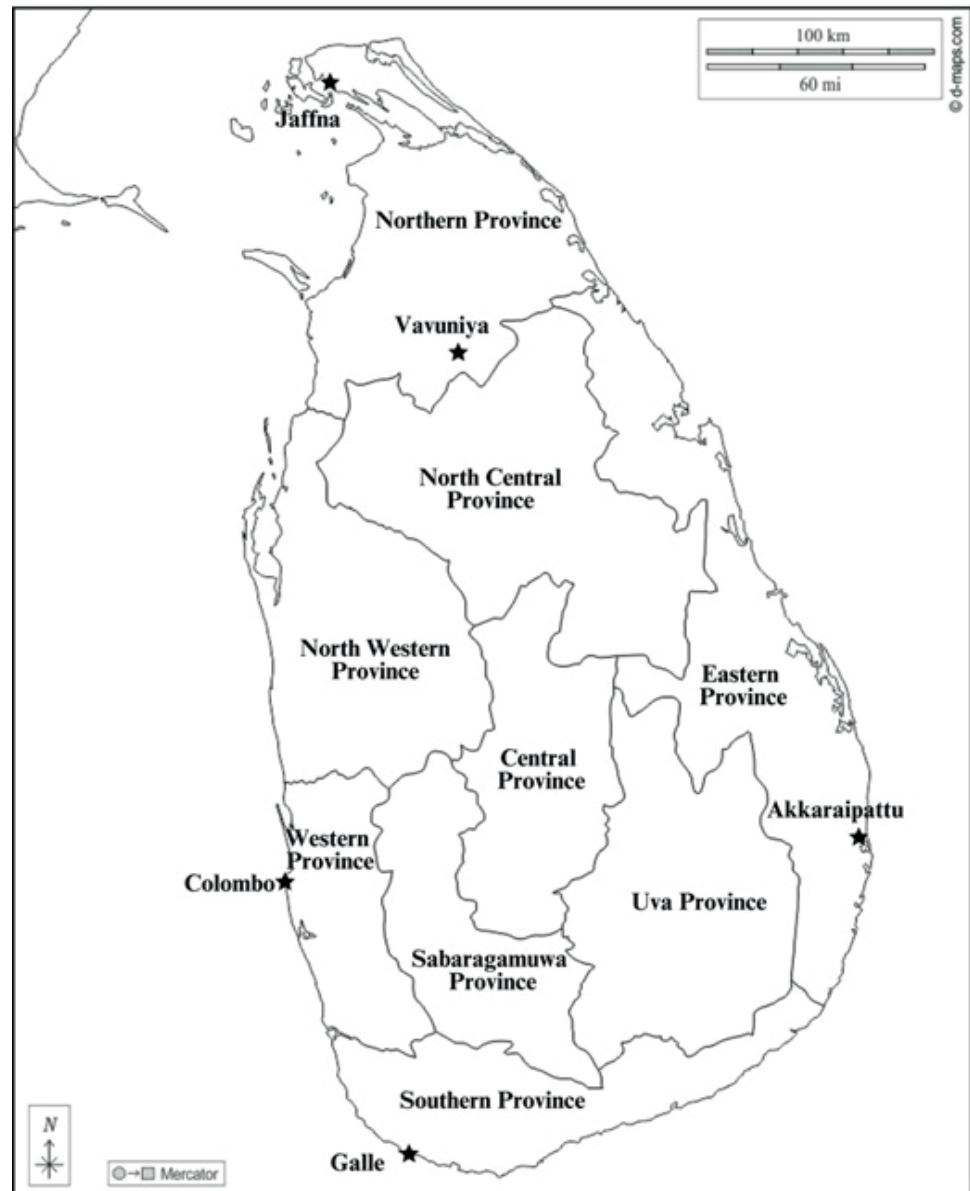


Figure 1: Map of Sri Lanka [12].

student body being largely comprised of Tamil students further enabled this push for safeguarding the said identity. However, overreliance on advocacy for minority rights and increased representation within a single institution may have made the learners of JU deviate from the much-needed diversity to integrate into a common Sri Lankan culture. This is also applicable to other state universities as DEI policies are not adequately addressed within HEIs in Sri Lanka. Due to this deficit of DEI policies within universities, disputes among students are common. A good example to demonstrate this is the JU brawl in the year of 2016. The clash erupted followed by a minor confusion over a simple decision to include a Sinhalese dance item in a

welcome event at the university. Although many prefer to believe minority groups as the sole victims of political jingoism, in the event of the Jaffna brawl, the Sinhalese students were the victims. As some of the journalists report, Sinhalese students have witnessed a multitude of different issues within the JU which ultimately led to the brawl [13]. Although some attempts were executed to improve the relations between the two learner communities, none were successful. The militarization of the Northern Province and coordinated mechanisms to suppress the activism of Tamil students victimize both Sinhalese and Tamil students in the JU negatively impacting the already struggling Sinhalese-Tamil relations further. Ideally, good reconciliation processes should help communities learn methods to sustain harmony for long periods. However, in the context of Sri Lanka, post-war reconciliation efforts are not adequately implemented and are largely disconnected from any acceptable national frameworks [14, 3]. Consequently, the inter-ethnic relations within the university are further challenged as regulators also have minimal focus on student welfare [15].

1.2. Present study

The present study is a qualitative document review to provide a realistic picture of race relations within the JU of Sri Lanka. Although interviewing current students could provide first-hand experiences about the prevailing circumstances of the university environment, a document review is considered ideal for comprehending the methods in which bureaucracies function [16]. Further, analyzing documents is a good method to critique policies. As a result, the findings of this study may directly reflect the validity of the majoritarian policies previous regimes have enacted to secure power. Similarly, this study is of some significance as it portrays the necessity to implement DEI policies within universities to promote inter-ethnic student cohesion to create a better learning experience. The authors of the present study believe that creating opportunities for Tamil and Sinhalese students to interact with each other is a possible mechanism for improving their relations with each other. This would help both communities to assimilate into a common academic culture with enhanced cultural awareness, intercultural competence, and sensitivity towards each other [17, 18].

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The present inquiry is a document review which is a method often considered in policy research [19]. Generally, reviewing existing documents associated with a specific focus

provides context to phenomena of interest. In addition to providing context, document reviews could also help in developing new policy frameworks. In that sense, analyzing existing documents can be used as the sole method in research. In the present study, the authors use the **READ** method suggested by Dalglish, Khalid, and McMahon [19]. This method consists of 4 steps: 'ready the documents' (**R**), extract data (**E**), analyze data (**A**), and distill data (**D**).

First, the authors used a series of keywords such as 'Tamil,' 'Sinhala,' 'Sri Lankan public universities,' 'inter-ethnic relations,' 'Jaffna University' etc. with varying combinations to conduct Boolean searches on the Google search engine. Through this search strategy, initially, 12 public media documents, 1 public university letter, and 8 social media posts were identified. After a careful evaluation, a total of 3 newspaper articles and 6 blog posts were considered for the data extraction and analysis. All chosen documents included first-hand narrations of lived experiences. Moreover, the selected documents are all publicly available communication documents. Data analysis was performed using thematic coding to interpret the experiences of the narrators [20]. Thematic coding is the most suitable data distillation technique in a document review as it provides a clear qualitative framework to explore the socially constructed meanings associated with race relations within a university. Such capacity to decipher meaning helps authors understand the social reality in which every human being lives and being able to decode latent realities is an added advantage for collaborative processes such as policy development. Similar to the benefits document reviews bring, there are some drawbacks as well. For instance, media documents could be biased and may be produced by individuals, activists, journalists, etc. to fit personal political affiliations. As a result, forming inferences impartially is a matter of great analytic skill. The authors of the present study made sure to select documents authored by academics, students, and journalists in which both Sinhalese and Tamils are represented. Further, the selected documents were analyzed reflexively and the generated codes were grouped based on commonality to develop themes. Each theme was then supported with contemporary social media posts of student unions to further depict the authenticity of the findings. In that sense, this study utilized some form of triangulation. All these methods enhanced the procedural rigor of this study as the authors have paid attention to the reliability, validity, authenticity, authors' political leanings, and representativeness of the documents chosen.

3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Key information about each chosen article or post is provided in Table 1. Using the selected documents, a total of 3 key themes were developed. In the proceeding paragraphs, the generated themes are further critiqued and compared against pertinent literature to form a well-balanced understanding of the racial dynamics within the Sri Lankan universities. Each theme is also supported by verbatim extracts of the selected news articles and blog posts.

TABLE 1: The final list of documents chosen for analysis.

Author and Year	Title	Significance
Fernando (2016) [21]	Jaffna University Sinhala-Tamil student conflict was insane (Blog Post)	This blog post provides a university professor's perspective on the brawl at Jaffna University between Sinhalese and Tamil students.
Kanthaiya (2016) [22]	The fundamental reasons behind the Jaffna University brawl (Blog Post)	This blog post provides evidence of factors that contributed to the Jaffna University brawl between Sinhalese and Tamil students.
Kunaratnam (2016) [23]	To my dear Jaffna University friends (Blog Post)	This blog post is a Tamil student's request for all students to embrace and accept each other.
Kurukulasuriya (2016) [13]	Jaffna University Sinhala society exposes series of grievance and anti-Sinhala attacks against them. (Blog Post)	This blog post exposes a series of events that led to the brawl at Jaffna University. This is a post by a local journalist about the difficulties Sinhalese students faced at Jaffna University.
Sri Lanka Brief (2014) [24]	Tamil university students get Sinhala summons for military course (News article)	This news article describes the mandatory military-run leadership program for all state university students.
Thangamayl (2016) [25]	On the killing of Jaffna University students: In search of the right path (Blog post)	This blog post narrates the unjustified execution of two Tamil students from the Northern province due to the negligence of enforcement authorities.
Tamilnet (2019) [26]	SL Police detains Tamil student leaders of Jaffna University after SLA cordon (News article)	This news article describes the nature of security raids at the University of Jaffna and the degree to which student activities are impacted due to such law enforcement intervention.
Tamil Guardian (2021) [27]	Jaffna University students marks LTTE leader Prabhakaran's birthday in secret (News article)	This article gives evidence about secret celebrations of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran's birthday in the Jaffna University despite military crackdowns.
De Silva (2021) [28]	Tense standoff at Jaffna University as govt destroys Mullivaikkal student monument under cover of darkness (Blog post)	This blog post elaborates on the student protests that resulted due to the government's intention to destroy a war memorial in Jaffna University.

3.1. Lack of inclusiveness, sensitivity, and appreciation remains a challenge

Due to the bitter history both Sinhalese and Tamils share student bodies in HEIs still harbor subtle forms of racism [10]. This racism creates division among students and deprives learners of experiencing DEI. Further, to appreciate ethnic differences, develop trust, confidence, and efficacy amongst students, HEIs require more interactional diversity [29]. Although some academics are positive about implementing DEI to create a better learning experience for students, the division between Sinhalese and Tamils is no simple problem to tackle. Considering the delicate nature of Sri Lanka's ethnic relations, contemporary academics try their best to enhance inter-ethnic relations in state-run universities. In a blog post Dr. Laksiri Fernando, a fellow academic elaborates this well.

I was particularly impressed by Prof. S. Srisatkunarajah's message to the new students last year, as the Dean of the Faculty, addressing them as *'My Dear Students'* and emphasizing this humanness. He didn't talk about Tamils or Sinhalese. As he said, *"We are human beings and our thirst for knowledge is innate. In this respect, cultivation of knowledge in basic and applied sciences is fundamental. The Faculty of Science is committed to fulfill your desire and ready to mould you as a competent graduate, excelling in learning and research, and capable of making useful contributions to the development of the nation."*

-Fernando, 2016-

Considering Sri Lanka is a country with a history of recurrent social unrest and a civil war, any attempts at reconciliation to improve inter-ethnic student relations have to follow a systematic approach. When responsible authorities recently increased the number of Sinhalese students at Jaffna University, some of the Tamil students were not ready to embrace the dawn of this new academic culture. A good example of this is the brawl of 2016 at Jaffna University between Sinhala and Tamil students. As per Dr. Laksiri Fernando, students experienced violence and confrontation as a result of loosely made policies. He elaborated:

Cultural rights by nature are sensitive issues. This should not mean that multiculturalism, particularly after a long drawn out war, is a process and all sectors should act with utmost responsibility in this process. What should be condemned forthright of the Jaffna University incident is not the dispute (however humorous!), but the violence and confrontation.

-Fernando, 2016-

Although Dr. Laksiri's statement is indicative of the need for clear policies, implementation of such reforms should occur not just within academic spaces, but at the national level as well. Incoherent policies are often a cause for agitation. For instance, similar to the increasing number of Sinhalese students at Jaffna University, Tamil students should also be encouraged to study in HEIs outside of the North and East. Such practices could help students experience each other's cultures and become sensitive to the needs of each other. A good example to demonstrate a lack of sensitivity towards others is the war memorial removal at Jaffna University. Students have created this memorial to commemorate the fallen rebels. There was substantial controversy associated with this monument as at times it was grounds for career dismissal of some of the senior academics. As De Silva narrates,

Former Head of Law at the Jaffna University, Dr. K. Guruparan expressed concern on Twitter that the previous Vice Chancellor had been sacked for his refusal to remove the monument. Activists viewed the demolition as the government's complete inability to tolerate remembrance and commemoration of the dead by minority Tamils.

-De Silva, 2021-

Establishing a war memorial in itself cannot be considered a negative behavior. Similarly, refusing to remove the said monument does not make a person unfaithful to their nation. However, government officials attempting to destroy this memorial is a direct threat to the already struggling mechanisms of post-war reconciliation to bridge the differences between Sinhalese and Tamils. Since LTTE originated in the Northern Province, most rebels are from the same regions. As a result, a fallen rebel could also be a relative or a family member to most individuals in the Northern community. This understanding is often dismissed by government officials as Sri Lanka's government service is primarily comprised of Sinhalese which is an outcome of advocating dogmatic nationalistic sentiments through policies such as the Sinhalese Only Act and Standardization Act. To make matters worse, whenever government officials interfere in some aspect that deals with minority relations, it automatically is perceived by the Tamils as an act against them by Sinhalese. In some sense, this state of affairs portrays a clear lack of understanding Sinhalese and Tamils have for each other. Undergraduate student Kunarthnam states that such a lack of understanding is not only a Sinhalese and Tamil problem but sometimes Muslim students are also victims of racial violence. Kunarthnam's narrations of Tamil-Muslim affairs and the JU brawl indicate a clear requirement for national policy targeted at improving DEI within universities.

As we reflect on the Tamil-Sinhala relations at the University of Jaffna, we should also ask ourselves if we can easily overlook the deteriorating relations between Tamil

and Muslim students? The oil thrown at the prayer room of the Muslim students at the University has not been cleaned up yet.

-Kunarthnam, 2016-

Those folks did not emerge all of a sudden. Posters sprang up on the walls calling for the construction of Buddhist temple. The Nandi statues were recently demolished. The stone benches where enamored couple spent their leisure hours were destroyed. The fuming volcanoes finally exploded on the 16th of July. There was no sudden reason for the violence that shook us yesterday. It was an explosion triggered many sub-events. The posts that appear these days in the media and the social media sound as though their authors want the students to divide themselves into Tamil and Sinhala groups and kick start a war. They want to scapegoat the students to feed their greed for sensational news and racism. Abhorrent men.

-Kunarthnam, 2016-

Analyzing the elaborations of Fernando, De Silva, and Kunarthnam, all students should be sensitive to the needs of each other. This could be created by encouraging university regulators to implement key DEI strategies within universities to create inter-ethnic cohesion and interaction. A social media post obtained through Jaffna University's Student Union's official Facebook page is also given below to further support the need for everyone to be sensitive towards the needs of each other.



Figure 2: 18th Anniversary Commemoration of Tsunami victims [30].

As per Figure 2, students of JU generally conduct vigils to remember those who have lost their lives for a host of reasons. In this instance, the commemoration was organized to mark the 18th anniversary of the Tsunami victims. Jaffna peninsula was one of the most severely affected regions by the 2004 Tsunami. Activities of this nature are commendable and promote positive attitudes among students. These activities ideally should consider the participation of Sinhalese students as well to further promote inclusive and cohesive practices among other learners.

3.2. Security forces persistently suppress minority students' voices and impede civic involvement

Inculcating feelings of inclusiveness, sensitivity, and appreciation among students is no easy feat. This is especially true when security forces still are employed in the Northern Province [31]. As per the Oakland Institute's report in 2021, 107,000 military personnel are deployed in the Northern Province which is 1 military officer for every 6 individuals. In the district of Mullaithivu alone, security forces have annexed 16,910 acres of land and have an unprecedented number of military camps despite the 14 years that have elapsed after the war victory [31]. In addition to these, settling Sinhalese villagers, constructing new Buddhist temples, etc. are all covert operations to suppress the freedom of minority groups. One could argue that all of these activities are GOSL's strategy to create a multicultural Northern Province; but, none of the stakeholders of the post-war reconciliation mechanisms report such progression. In that case, military presence impacts the civic involvement of students who are disheartened due to the constant double standards they experience despite being citizens of the island nation. These experiences further act as stimulants for some student groups to take part in activism. As many scholars and intellectuals opine, the Sri Lankan university system is heavily politicized [6, 2, 3]. In that sense, the higher presence of security personnel in the vicinity of universities makes problems between student activist groups and the military inevitable. For instance, TamilNet reports a shadow war between security forces and Tamil students with a visible augmentation of the suppression of minority students' civic involvement after the Easter Attack bombings of 2019.

The student union of the Art Faculty convened a press conference at Jaffna Press Club clarifying the situation to the press. The student leaders said the SLA and the Police were engaged in a shadow war against the Tamil student community for a long-time and is using the current situation to clamp down on them.

-TamilNet, 2019-

The latest terror attacks carried out by the Islamic militants have paved the way for the SL military to militarize the schools in the North once again, the officials complained.

-TamilNet, 2019-

This expression of 'shadow war' is not clear as the intentions of everyone who claims a shadow war are not supported with clear evidence. Further, this could also be students stating their displeasure over the presence of the military in the greater learning community. Similarly, acts like war memorial removal could further contribute students to presenting similar thinking. However, these are not recent problems, but outcomes of already existing macro societal problems of national interest. Even if you keep the ethnicity factor aside, many universities still report violence between homogenous student groups. One good example is the recent fight that took place inside the Peradeniya University canteen where students who support hazing were beating non-supporters [32]. There are also reported cases of students targeting academics violently. One such example is the recent attack on the former vice chancellor and his son of Peradeniya University [33]. On top of the violence, student unions do protest marches to show displeasure at certain policies of the GOSL. In those instances, security forces do get involved. In that sense, security forces do get involved in universities at varying levels due to the nature of student activism.

In the presence of large-scale activism and security forces crackdowns, it is clear that state-run universities fall short of providing a safe space for ordinary learners who aspire to learn and grow. However, considering North Province a territory recovering steadily from a civil war, the mentioned problems of security personnel involvement may occur more frequently in the day-to-day activities of the students. Moreover, JU is a hub for Tamil nationalism and some intellectuals claim that politics and universities are entangled in Sri Lanka [6, 2]. The existence of turbulent politics and ethnocentric approaches to governance may have contributed to possible ideological disputes between student activists and security personnel. However, there is no conclusive reason to elaborate on the perception of a so-called 'shadow war.' To provide some support to the reasoning of the student groups, a report by Haviland in 2012 also claims that impeding students from commemorating dead rebels of the civil war is a clear suppression of minority voices and a demonstration of a symbolic distaste for Tamils. Even if the dead rebels stood for a group that was banned from the GOSL, the overwhelming majority of the cadres were from the Northern Province, thus, making it essential for Tamil students to commemorate fallen rebels [34]. Accordingly, one could reason army personnel being mostly Sinhalese is the reason for the suppression of student activism, if the commemoration of rebels and standing for one's own rights is what students imply as

activism. Although a commemoration is justified, conducting such activity by students in a highly politicized university also sends a political message. In that sense, security forces trying to stop it could also be justified. However, if a commemoration ceremony is going on, an interruption does more harm to national harmony than benefits it could bring as such work often attracts unnecessary spotlight to student groups and partisan politicians. However, to form an impartial comprehension of the form of activism the student union of JU carries, some of the recent Facebook posts from JU Student Union's official Facebook page were analyzed.



Figure 3: Celebrating Tiyagi Pon Sivakumaran, the first martyr of Tamil Eelam [35, 36].

A close observation of Figure 3 will reveal that this is no ordinary commemoration. This figure was posted on Facebook by student union members of JU where a celebration was coordinated to remember the 'first martyr of Tamil Eelam' [35]. While students have every right to remember a fellow student, policymakers and university regulators should introspect further to comprehend the message such remembrances would convey to fellow students in the university. In Figure 3, the country map behind the student's photo seems to look like Tamil Eelam and not Sri Lanka. Also, in the post, it is mentioned that

the student sacrificed his life to a Tamil nation (*Tamizhar Desam*). In some sense, it is perplexing to notice that celebrating nationalism that closely resembles separatism and terrorism is allowed within university premises.

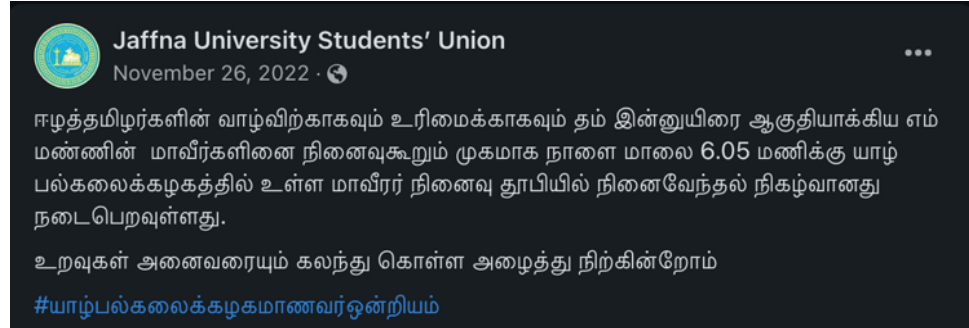


Figure 4: Student union announcement to celebrate 'Maveerar day' [37].

Similarly, the message in *Figure 4* can roughly be translated as follows: 'A memorial event will be held tomorrow evening at 6.05 pm in the memory of the warriors of our soil who sacrificed their lives and rights of *Eelam* Tamils.' This statement is problematic as 'Maveerar' (heroes) is a term associated with the dead rebels of the LTTE. Further, LTTE is a terrorist organization banned in more than 30 countries including India and the United States. As Tamil Guardian reports, some students secretly celebrate the birthday of late LTTE leader *Velupillai Prabhakaran* [27]. In that sense, it is justified for military personnel to keep North Province under their occupation. Further, it is worth mentioning that activism of this nature by promoting antiquated leftist ideologies is not helping with the problems ordinary Tamils of the North experience every day. Similarly, the activities of some student activists may have further harmed the relations between the ordinary Sinhalese and Tamil students at the university. As much as Tamils lost lives, many Sinhalese also lost lives due to the atrocities of LTTE. As a result, not only in the minds of any ordinary Sinhalese citizen but any law-abiding citizen for that matter, commemorating someone who belongs to a terrorist organization may feel like celebrating terrorists. Undoubtedly, the security forces may share the same view. In that case, this shadow war is intentionally sought by the student union groups than it is given to them. However, no one can simply justify all acts of violence and suppression by the above reasoning. Not every person who died in the Northern Province was part of LTTE. As De Silva points out, some were innocent civilians.

The bulldozers arrived under the cover of darkness and reduced the monument to a pile of rubble. The monument was erected by the students in 2019 and reportedly sculpted by a student lost his father when his family was trying to flee the fighting in the Government designated No Fire Zone.

-De Silva, 2021-

Since Sri Lanka's independence from the British, many recurring anti-Tamil policies and pogroms have yielded unfair outcomes in education for minority groups. Further, many students, academics, and civilians have lost lives due to the same hate campaigns. Against the backdrop of such callous bludgeoned history, commemorations of the dead coordinated by student activist groups should also be mindful of the intended messages such events will deliver to the public and security personnel. The message would have translated differently if the commemoration was held for civilians regardless of what they represented. Such accurate representations of intentions would have eventually enhanced Sinhala-Tamil relations within universities as it paints a realistic picture of losses incurred by both groups. In the vicinity of large misunderstandings between the two communities, some politically inspired students secretly promote or celebrate separatism. For instance, celebrating LTTE leaders, and martyrs, are all indicative of unpleasant separatist propaganda. Although students should be given the freedom to express themselves, overt or covert acts of this nature hinder the much-needed inter-ethnic harmony. From the perspective of security forces and ordinary Sinhalese and Tamil students celebrating something of this nature is perceived as an act of terrorism. As a result, military personnel are endowed with the responsibility of mitigating or eliminating such acts within public learning spaces to ensure security and harmony. In such attempts unwanted political involvement may further victimize ethnic and religious minorities.

Students at the University of Jaffna cut a cake to celebrate the 67th birthday of LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran earlier today, in a secret ceremony held on the campus grounds. Whilst in previous years more elaborate celebrations have taken place, amidst a Sri Lankan military crackdown, cakes were cut in secret on Friday.

-Tamil Guardian, 2021-

Considering the reviewed documents, the security forces' presence and the extent to which they are involved in student activities is a pressing issue the university administration should consider addressing immediately. While it is alright to suppress student unions' separatist ideologies, unnecessary suppression of student voices for general concerns must not be encouraged. It must also be noted that there is an inherent difficulty in relying on one-sided stories associated with Sri Lanka's ethnic problems as each narration carries some degree of self-interest. However, the findings of the document review strengthen the authors' understanding of Sri Lankan universities being extremely politicized.

3.3. Unsystematic methods of university administration curb diversity required to sustain positive relations

In some sense deficits in inclusiveness, sensitivity, and appreciation among students for each other are a direct result of defective policies implemented by regulatory bodies. As described in the second theme, Tamil students still fight for their rights. Populists agendas such as the Sinhalese Only Act and Standardization Act have reduced educational equality and equity for Tamil students. While minority students experiencing the repercussions of these contentious policies, drastically increasing the Sinhalese student numbers at the JU is another way of welcoming new problems. As Dr. Laksiri Fernando reasons, some academics and non-academics of JU were not pleased with such initiatives to enhance the diversity of student bodies.

Perhaps it was a third stage that was intended after the end of the war in 2009, by sending Sinhala students back to the University of Jaffna, rather haphazardly and without much planning or creating necessary conducive conditions. On the other hand, there has been much goodwill, as far as I know, from the academic staff, particularly in the Faculty of Science to invite Sinhala students. However, this is apparently not the case in other faculties or among the non-academic staff. In this context, having 60% of Sinhala students in the faculty is undoubtedly overbearing and an invitation to trouble.

-Fernando, 2016-

Also, enhancing the diversity of student bodies is something all state universities should consider to help students learn from each other. It should also be noted that some of the Tamil student groups engage in activism to promote their cultural and linguistic identities. Amidst such activism, university regulators increasing the Sinhalese student enrollments negatively impacts Sinhala-Tamil relations within the universities. Kunarthanam's elaborations imply that the victims of such ethnic tensions inside faculties are both ordinary students regardless of their ethnicity and where they come from. His narration further implies the degree to which responsible authorities must be held accountable for maintaining a Laissez-Faire attitude despite witnessing disharmony within student bodies.

Why have the authorities suddenly raised the number of Sinhala students admitted to the University of Jaffna over the years without realizing that such a sudden increase may pave the way for ethnic tensions at the University? Can any of the authorities explain why except in one or two faculties Tamil-Sinhala student do not even smile at each other even when they walk past one another? Does any of the authorities have a

rational response to it? I do not think the Sinhala students are doing this. The authorities and power centers are responsible for this odiousness.

-Kunarthnam, 2016-

In another incident in June, the Poson lantern that was put up at the entrance of the Science Faculty had also been damaged by an unknown group. The Society also revealed that all university notices were sent to the Sinhala students in Tamil, which they cannot read or understand. Even though for almost six years they have been requesting the authorities to send them the notices in English in case they are unable to draft them in Sinhala, the authorities have claimed that the person who drafts notices does not know English.

-Kurukulasuriya, 2016-

Similar to what Kunarthnam describes, Kurukulasuriya further documents the difficulties Sinhalese students faced at JU. As per the documented evidence by Kurukulasuriya, Sinhalese students have also been subjected to both racial violence and restrictions to practice religion. These examples indicate the need for the implementation of systematic DEI policies within HEIs to improve racial dynamics. Through such policies, students would start to appreciate and make each other welcome. For instance, at one point the regulators implemented a leadership training program for university students prior to the start of their first semester. Although the intentions were good, the program was not appropriately designed. The program lacked a proper curriculum and it was delivered by military personnel [24]. As per the analyzed documents of this review, it is clear that the academic well-being of students is negatively impacted due to some involvement of the military in higher education. Amidst the existence of such problems, conducting a leadership program by the military sending summons to Tamil students in Sinhala is either a lack of awareness or pure disregard by authorities towards post-war reconciliation.

4. CONCLUSION

Sinhalese and Tamil students at JU walk in the same corridors, but they never share smiles with each other. As per the generated results, lack of inclusiveness, appreciation, and sensitivity to each other are key reasons for tainted ethnic dynamics in the university. Militarization in the North Province and the bad policies of the regulators further exacerbate this problem. Most contemporary literature on the issues of Sri Lankan Tamils displays the Tamil community as victims. The majority of researchers document the degree to which nationalist populist majoritarian ideas have harmed the

Tamil community [1, 4, 3]. While every research portrays the past issues accurately, many have omitted how certain factions (i.e., student union groups) of minority community holds a stake in some of the recent problems, especially within Sri Lankan HEIs. As per the analyzed documents, a few problems have resulted due to student union groups engaging in unnecessary politics while studying in universities. While students have every right to engage in activism and speak on behalf of the greater society they represent, advocating separatism does not assist them in any way in securing rights. Even after 14 years since the war victory, if the only method to bring more representation to the Tamil community is by protests and student activism, Sri Lanka will never be able to truly become a pluralist society. For instance, most social media posts on JU's official student union group are dedicated to '*Eelaththamizhar*' (Eelam Tamils). This priority to one specific group within a public university itself does more harm to students than any benefits it would bring. As Cunningham and Ladd explain, students must learn civil war of Sri Lanka as part of school curricula to understand the mistakes of both sides [38]. Such understanding will help students set aside differences and adopt a mindset to be a Sri Lankan first rather than becoming Sinhalese, Tamil, or Muslim. Further, the lack of a clear plan to mitigate ethnic tensions in the universities may pose significant risks to the longevity of HEIs in Sri Lanka. To overcome such risks, Perera, Rahmat, Khatibi, and Azam recommend that HEIs follow international standards implemented in the developed world [39]. Firstly, universities should implement DEI policies to help improve relations between all student groups despite their ethnicities. Further, diversity must be reflected in student recruitment processes and university administration (i.e., decision-making bodies should have multi-ethnic representatives). Additionally, regulators could try to enhance the interactional diversity of students by providing opportunities for learners to engage with fellow colleagues in other local and international universities. Such exposure will help students develop alternative perspectives which is important in developing sensitivity towards other groups. Similarly, universities could provide training on inclusion and diversity for students as a mandatory component of university education. As Russell describes, universities can be used as centers to promote ethnic cohesion [6]. This will create a student group that will share the comfort of each other as they share the same corridors every day to attend classes.

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Ethics Policy

This study is based on already published documents and the ethical clearance for this study was obtained from Management and Science University (MSU). The data that supports the findings of this study are publicly available for viewing. Relevant references and hyperlinks are provided by the authors under the references for readers to confirm the authenticity of the findings generated. The authors hold no responsibility if the hyperlinked references are removed or moved to different websites by respective owners.

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