

Extremist Organization to Mainstream Political Party: Genesis and Growth of JVP in Sri Lanka

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Sinhalese extremism mainly arising out of grievances of Sinhala community became visible with the JVP uprisings of 1971 and 1987-89. It has also focused attention once again on the caste factor in the Sinhalese society. The JVP evoked greater support from some lower and middle caste students/youths in colleges and universities. The explanation for this element of caste identity or caste solidarity in the JVP insurrection does not lie in the persistence of any harsh treatment on the basis of caste or the survival of caste disabilities for that matter, but the endurance of caste identities and the staying power of caste and the lingering memory of problems that some of these castes had to face in the past. It is precisely when have improved or have begun to improve that people demonstrate an unwillingness to put up with any continuing disabilities of even the mildest sort and are likely to react violently to these.

Sinhala extremism in the beginning was just like a normal people awaking programme for their socio-economic rights. Later it turned into a big programme and formed a organization known as Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). It advocated 'mass-base, people's war and people's army' for realizing their goals. The educated youth of socially backward castes and economically poorer sections joined JVP, but its extremist position and violent tactics could not be sustainable for a long-time. N.Shanmugathan, the leader of the party was primarily a trade unionist rather than a revolutionary. These ideological strains within the party had a significant impact on other members as well. Wijeweera arrived at a fateful decision to arm the organization in February 1971. The police had started observing an intensification of preparation for insurrection in early 1971. On 6 March 1971, an ultra-left organization, namely Maoist Youth Front, led by Dharmasekera with some followers, held a demonstration outside the US embassy during which a policeman was killed and insurrection started. It was brought under control with the help of friendly countries like India and UK. However, the JVP again consolidated itself and re-emerged as a strong group during the 1980s. It brought another insurgency in 1987-89. Thereafter, JVP became a mainstream political party.

The paper, therefore, analyses the factors and forces which forced the JVP to give up the violent and extra-constitutional means and join the mainstream democratic politics. It concludes that the JVP passes through several phases before becoming a political party. The analysis of all these phases reveals the nature of Sri Lankan politics.

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