

**Fictive Kinship and the Survival of a New Way of Life among Sinhalese
IDPs in Sri Lanka**
*(A social anthropological study of displaced people due to civil war in
Sri Lanka)*

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ABSTRACT: *Sri Lanka's 26-year-long protracted civil war triggered a variety of social and economic issues in the Sri Lankan context. As a consequence, people who were residing in the North and Eastern provinces were largely displaced and it directly resulted in a huge amount of internal and external migrations. However, displacement has changed relationship patterns among Sinhala communities as well as some relationships, such as fictive kinship, have an effect on how Sinhala people survive new lifestyles. This study is concerned with the post-war survival of the new way of life for the war-affected Sinhalese IDPs and how fictional relationships have affected that. The objectives of this study were to identify reasons which Sinhalese IDPs tend toward fictive kinship, to explore the impact of fictive kinship on the survival of a new lifestyle for Sinhalese IDPs, and to identify trends related to the fictive kinship of Sinhalese IDPs. The research method was the case study and data was obtained through in-depth interviews. The research area was Galkandegama village at Rambawa Divisional Secretariat in Anuradhapura district in Sri Lanka and the research sample was purposely selected by pre-observations among displaced families. The findings show that the reduction of blood relationships, although there are blood relatives, they were unable to assist them due to various financial difficulties are the primary factors influencing Sinhala people to trend toward fictive kinship. Therefore, fictive kinship has positive effects on Sinhala people who were resettled. Fictive kinship had positive effects on the resettled Sinhala community in that it helped them meet their basic needs and obtain new homes and permanent residences and to have psychological support in adoption to the new lifestyle as well. The new trend of this is the expansion of these fictive relationships among resettled people into blood relationships through marriage.*

Keywords: Fictive Kinship, Resettlement, Sinhala community, Blood relationship

1. INTRODUCTION

The displacement that occurs for a variety of reasons is a major social issue. At the end of 2020, 82.4 million people in the world were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflicts, violence, violation of human rights, and incidents that drastically disrupt public order. One in every 95 people on earth has fled from their home as a result of conflict or persecution (<https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends>). In this situation, there had been an increase in refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs), who lack access to basic requirements as well as other needs including employment, education, and health care. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), displaced people due to conflicts, generalized violence, or human rights violations in the world were approximately 27.1 million by the end of 2009. Around 800,000 individuals have migrated from the

approximately 1,116,000 people who were displaced by the conflict in Sri Lanka, which started in 1983. (National Peace Council 2003). The protracted conflict between the Sri Lankan army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which had an impact on the population's way of life, was the primary reason for the displacement. Both parties have been purposefully targeting people as part of their war plans throughout the process. Displacement results in subsistence living and social and economic problems (Jayamule, 2006: 65). International organizations emphasize that displaced people should be cared for in a humanitarian way (Suryanarayan 1996: 219, UNHCR 2000: 08). (Suryanarayan 1996: 219, UNHCR 2000: 08). War is a serious catastrophe and In every way, it has an impact on people. Economic, political, social, and cultural distress are all brought on by it. Due to the war tragedy, the population suffers tremendous disasters. Government usually intervenes in this situation in a number of different ways. The assistance for the displaced is instead being provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other groups, like religious institutions. However, it appears that simply delivering relief will not be enough to address all of the problems facing displaced people. One way to help the displaced individuals integrate into the host society is to provide them with such aid. Another factor that aids the survival of those who have been displaced is social capital. Kinship is an important topic of the discussion about social relationships. There is a considerable influence of sectors such as social, economic, political and cultural etc. to buildup social relationships without kinship. This study might be understood as paying attention to the idea of social capital during the reintegration of war refugees in Sri Lanka. This study examines fictive kinship as social capital and the resettlement of Sinhalese IDPs in Sri Lanka.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted as qualitative research in the village of Galkandegama, Rambawa Divisional Secretariat, Anuradhapura district, Sri Lanka. In 1985, Sinhalese residents of Warikuttiuruwa village were completely displaced when the war broke out. They were consequently initially relocated to a Sinhalese refugee camp in the Bodhidakshinarama temple in the Vavuniya district. Later, some Sinhalese people moved to Galkandegama village due to their historical ties with the community in that village. The methodology was qualitative research methodology and data was mainly collected through case studies. Both the primary and secondary data were included in this study. Most of the second-hand information was gathered from the Divisional Secretariat in Vavuniya, recorded notes from the chief incumbent in the Vavuniya temple, and IDP project reports of Sri Lanka. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with Sinhalese IDPs who resettled in Galkandegama village.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study is utterly based on qualitative data and the data obtained from villages who relocated due to civil war were assisted to significant outcomes. The 2 summarized cases are mentioned as follows. (The names in those cases are fictitious)

Case 1

Weera, a 76-year-old native of Galkandegama, was born there. He never went to school and works as a farmer. His wife, who had five children, passed away while she was just a young woman. He also lost a daughter who was not yet married. The other kids departed the house after getting married. With parental involvement, Weera married a woman from his village at the age of 17. He moved into his wife's house after they were married. Following the LTTE terrorist attack in 1985, residents of Warikutturuva village temporarily relocated to Vayuniya temple. Later, they visited Galakandegama village in need of assistance. They stayed in relative homes for the first few days. They had no permanent place to build up a new home. These Warikutturuva village homeless families were given a number of parcels of land. For the purpose of merit, these lands were provided free of charge. Received the land for free and without any kinship ties. Another person who acquired land in this way was Siridara. Later, he constructed a mud home on the property, and they frequently paid respects at Weera's home. The children of Weera prepared tea and served them cooked manioc and sweet potatoes. The youngsters assisted them in their labor. Later, Weera and his family and Siridara's family developed a stronger bond. Siridara made sure to offer Weera's home a little portion of their crop. They spent some evenings in Weera's home where they conversed. Together, they went to Sri Maha Bodhiya. They remained close both through difficult times and when working together. As the land was granted for permanent habitation in the village, they displayed familiarity. For the defenseless displaced people, it has actually marked the beginning of pleasure. Later, Weera's eldest son married a daughter of Sethuva's family. Some people were hesitant to marry orphaned families. It was due to their lack of anything. However, the marriage's foundation is its closeness to these families.

This case study reveals that the displaced people are helped by those who have no any inter personal relationships. Due to the war disaster, the displaced people came to Galkandegama village because they belong to the same ethnicity and caste. Those displaced people got lands for permanent settlement by *Weera* who had many lands in that village. Ownership of many lands is the reason to offer plots of lands. According to the study some families those who came to Galkandegama village after being displaced by war disaster had no kin relations or economical ability. At the beginning, the ability to clear the government forests land and growing crops increase the land assets of a person. There were government forest lands within the limits of the village. Its ownership took place on consumption (Codrington 1938: 06)

This case study mainly reveals that the charitable tendency was paramount. *Dhana* (giving something) is a basic teaching of Buddhist philosophy. Especially philanthropy is important in the response of people who are faced by a social disaster like war. This situation helps to re-establish the mental breakdown of these poor and helpless people for some extent. Identity of caste is the priority when giving plots of land for settlement of the displaced people. It is clear that the people from Galkandegama village represent the *Nakathi* caste. Similarities in caste and occupation were mainly

focused when donating lands for the displaced people from Warikutturuva village. Traditional services of people from *Nakathi* caste are playing drums, dancing, studying horoscope etc (Silva 1997: 53). It is important that these displaced poor, helpless people are from same caste when donating lands by *Weera*. Therefore, social value for caste has been highlighted. It is necessary to be kin or similar in ethnicity other than caste when helping poor people. In past there were few family members in a village and they were from the same caste or same kin (Knox 1911). Therefore, the subdued caste was active due to the arrival of people who were displaced by war disaster to Galkandegama village. As a fact of this, inter relationships were increased among people who were belonging to the same caste.

Through plots of land donation, inter relationship and intimacy among two families (displaced and non-displaced) were build up which has never existed previously. Before the civil war, marriages among Warikutturuva and Galkandegama villages were common. In the past women from Galkandegama village were married with men from Warikutturuva village and settled there. But after being displaced by war disaster, Galkandegama men got married to Warikutturuva women and settled in Galkandegama village. As per example, in the case study it reveals that the son of *Weera* got married to the daughter of displaced *Sethuva's* family. Therefore, now Galkandegama provides men for marriage rather than providing women. Life of *Weera* was secured by donating plots of lands for the displaced helpless people. This resettlement process paved way for new kin relations in Galkandegama. After the end of the civil war new settlers were permanently settled in the village. *Weera* got help from these families and secured his life in his difficult time. This situation was confirmed by kin relationship. Earlier non kin became kin in later period of time. Because of this inter personal relationships and inter actions became more prototype and active. Similarly, the next case study is not of a displaced family. But they helped to provide protection for a displaced family who has arrived from Warikutturuva village to Galkandegama village with the influence of war disaster. The land was given free by early settler in Galkandegama village for their settlement. The relevant families did not have much land. But they have decided to give two plots of land for displaced two families due to some reasons. Early settlers of this family; the elder son is addicted to alcohol and younger son is mentally handicapped. There was no proper income to the family. They needed help from others because of these family crises. Addiction to alcohol, lack of education, handicapped, ignorance, deaths, divorce, and abundance are reasons for to collapse of the family (Sutherland 1960: 101).

Structurally, existing some rigidities within the families cause various crises. The government has not paid attention to help these families nor any welfare programs. Family is a married couple or another group of folk who cooperated economically and in the upbringing of children and all or most of whom share a common dwelling (Gough, 1993). However early families offered plots of land for the displaced people by war disaster. This has built-up new human relationships between early settlers and new settlers. It was not a kin relationship. However, this relationship fulfilled most of the functions which were done by kin. This situation not only gave solutions for the displaced family but also for non-displaced families. The following case study will reveal that information.

Case 2

Pina was born in the village of Galkandegama and is, as far as he could recall, 76 years old. He hasn't ever gone to school. drumming was passed on from the father as a profession. He engaged in farming because his salary from his other profession was insufficient for him. In accordance with the wishes of their parents, he married a woman from the Galenbindunuwawe village. The family has four kids. He received his father's inheritance. As a result, additional family members moved to various provinces around the nation. Within a 2-acre parcel of land, kurakkan, undu, sesame, and cowpeas were grown. These plants received no fertilization. More harvest was produced as a result of the transfer of agricultural fields. Due to a lack of land, this strategy is now ineffective. Due to the entrance of war refugees, there was a lack of land. Orphans with relatives have successfully seized public forest properties through competition. Therefore, it was prohibited to clear government-owned land. With the money he makes from wage work, the son who resides at home buys alcohol. He doesn't give the home's poverty or the resident who is disabled any thought. Together, Pina's wife, divorced daughter, and adopted child work as wage laborers or farm crops to make a living. The majority of the time, the orphan family members visit this family to assist them. In those times, Kawwa, an orphan who came here, was given a parcel of land without receiving any payment. Since then, those family members have assisted them by taking care of the mentally ill patient, delivering him medicine, and offering protection and food. Pina has his own economic problems. But he was not able to ask for money from these orphan people looking at their poor faces. Therefore, he thought of giving things with kind heart with the hope that it will return as a blessing one day. Pina's family members helped to buildup Kawwa's house. This has strengthened the intimacy between the two families. They came to help the eldest daughter's wedding. Later they tried to prevent the divorce of this daughter. Orphaned people made up documents to prove their ownership to their lands. These documents were essential to get aids from the government. Land ownership was given to Kawwa as his request. Later wild sticks were buildup at land borders. It is good for land protection. It is a relief that these people came to settle in this land. Now this family gets security from this new family. They helped at the wedding of Pina's second daughter as much as possible. Kawwa did his best to minimize the problem of dowry at the wedding. Later her husband died by poisoning. Kawwa helped with the funeral. He always advised the drunken own son. Later, the divorced daughter's adopted child got married and she also settled there. Second daughter whose husband died kept visiting frequently. Wife gives her full effort to survive the drunken son and sick child. Orphan Kawwa is visiting home and making conversations frequently. It is a relief to the mind. In the early days, Pina did many witchcrafts to heal the mentally ill son. Later he was admitted to Anuradhapura hospital at the request of Kawwa. Then Kawwa came to help when he got eloped from the hospital. Welfare Assistant Allowance is given by the government for a living. It is difficult live with that. Work cannot be done because of age. Children of Kawwa who got separated and settled after marriage come to visit him. Two children from that family is in military service. When they are visiting they bring food and essential medicine for the patient. After the victory of war Kawwa and his wife returned and settled at Warikutturuva village. This was a major loss for him. He lost someone that he could share his feelings. One

of Kawwa's divorced daughters stayed at this home with her two children. They visited this family frequently. Her children looked after the patient whenever they can. It is a relief for the patient too. All these support is received because the piece of land was given. It is a reason for happiness. Even now they receive more help. This help cannot be burrowed from money. He has not thought that his family may suffer like this at the last days. This helplessness occurred due to the loss of his children's support. At the end, the children from orphan family have stayed close to evade their loneliness. They have stayed with them and looked after them. He ends his story by saying that it is a relief for him.

According to this case study the non-displaced family and displaced family buildup a friendly relationship based on sympathy for each other. Being displaced by war disaster make them to be poorer because they had no place to settle permanently. This family had limited kin relationships. This situation made him to buildup new human relationships. When people came to Galkandegama village for safety after being displaced by war disaster it was important that they had kin relationships, similarities in caste and ethnicity. In this case, though kin relationship was not rigid the similarity in caste and ethnicity among the displaced family and non-displaced family were prevailed. This situation has aroused the sympathy for person.

On the other hand, *Kawwa* who was displaced from Warikutturuwa village and came for safety to Galkandegama village. It has made him to tell his difficulties as he had similarities as mentioned above. For instance, displaced *Kawwa* told that he is not getting protection from his wife's sister as expected, to *Pina*. Therefore human relationships with each other help to release their mental pressure. It was initiated by donating a plot of land for the displaced family to live. This relationship has made them to tell problems they are facing to each other.

According to this case study there was no close relationship among the displaced and non-displaced family members earlier. But the non displaced and displaced family helped each other according to a frame of kin relationship. For instance, family members of *Pina* were helped, not only providing a land to settle for the displaced family but also to build up a new house. On the other hand, family members of displaced *Kawwa* help to get treatments for *Pina*'s mentally ill son and at weddings of his daughters. Thus, these helps were done more enthusiastically for each other. It is common that these types of helps are done by kins. But in this case study there was no such a-kin relationship to help each other. This was build up because of intimacy for each other. This is another representation of helping each other as a social capital.

Friendship and mutual trust secure the life of *Pina* as well as the displaced family. This friendship initiated to get help from this displaced family which is not gained from kinship or villagers. Earlier the information from *Weera* revealed that land donation is in the aspiration of secular aims. There is no such ambition in this case on donating lands by *Pina*. The friendship and trust were buildup by donating a plot of land with the expectation to have humanitarian help in return. Therefore the idea of taking money for the relevant land was excluded. The trust that was developed with the displaced family was useful to secure the future of non-displaced family. Therefore, *Pina* helped the displaced people in the hope of secular aspiration. It is important that

displaced *Kawwa* helped in some situations like at divorce of *Pina*'s daughter and sudden deaths of relations. These situations can be taken place in any family. Kinships or relationships are useful in such situations. In these situations, kinship bonds are not firm enough to get help for problems. Therefore, *Kawwa* who came after being displaced from Warikutturuawa village performed many duties which have to be done by kinship. This situation of lending help happened because *Pina* gave a land for free. The help which was lent in the first place transforms to an opportunity to receive different types of help.

Therefore, fictive kinship is recognized as there is no real kinship but there are situations that have relationship like kinship (Pieris 1984). At the beginning the displaced people came and settled in Galkandegama village through non kin relationship. These people get help from original settlers because they are similar in ethnicity and under the influence of Buddhist philosophy. The nationality was considered, when someone lends help to another person. Sinhalese who became displaced from Warikutturuwa village by war disaster and when settling at Galkandegama village the sense of ethnicity was heightened. As well as thoughts about Buddhism have been re-established. For instance, *Weera* who is an original settler at Galkandegama village donated a plot of land to settle for *Sethuva* who was displaced from Warrikuttruwa village because of the same ethnicity and the influence of religion.

But after the war displaced families returned to their original village to settle, the heads there of the displaced family lead to resettlement. They were left from Galkandegama village and permanently settled at Warikutturuwa original village. Families of the married children of them stayed at Galkandegama. The reason for is that the marriages have taken place with original settlers of the village and new kinships had been buildup. For instance, the daughter of displaced *Sethuva* got married to the son of original settler *Weera*. In this situation, newly married families have been secured with these type of marriages. But previous members of the displaced family have considered, Warikutturuwa village which they lived before is more secure. Caste and ethnicity was the basics when the displaced people rehabilitate. Caste and ethnicity were considered when non kinship people helped to poor person. For instance, *Weera* and *Pina* who gave help, supported *Kawwa* and *Sethuva* who got help because they are similar in caste and ethnicity. Thus, social capital has developed through caste and ethnicity in inter personal relationships which are not kinship when displaced family start new settlement.

4. Conclusion

Even though it did not happen through kinship, the resettlement process generates new kinship. These displaced people's condition of not having support makes them even more powerless. As a result, those who belonged to the same caste and ethnicity helped the displaced people establish their new settlements. When more support was required, new kinship ties were formed between the displaced individuals who received assistance and those who provided it. In the absence of kinship, the kinship model has continued to operate. Both those who gave and those

who received assistance made contributions without taking the financial goal into account. They supported one another as much as they could. These two groups of people were related to one another in a way that was similar to that of kinship. This makes the kinship model apparent. According to the case studies, the original settlers who helped and the displaced people who received help had a close relationship with each others' families. (For instance at weddings, sudden deaths, and at sickness) this mutual relationship is close to kinship to some extent (fictive kinship) at the beginning. Kinship has buildup through marriages as a result of developing this. Additionally, when supporting people, ethnicity and caste were prioritized before relatives. Due to the non-kinship nature of this relationship, it helps the displaced people. Caste and ethnicity play a significant role in establishing new interpersonal bonds. The development of marriage kinship among them has confirmed this scenario.

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