

Waradas, Thiyagaraja, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo  
Dinidu Karunanayake, Policy, Research and Implementation Unit, Presidential Secretariat

*Paper: Equity*

## **Cinema as a tool of reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka**

In the wake of the end of the conflict between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the country is confronted with the challenge of cultivating reconciliation between the Sinhala and Tamil communities which were hitherto separated and denied a chance for unison. The Government has acknowledged that reconciliation is effective when it occurs through economic and social mechanisms rather than political intervention.

In creating a space where communities in conflict can come together in a common dialogue that is essential for post-war reconciliation, the role of cinema is of significant relevance. As a most effective audio-visual form of art, cinema has been utilized in reconciliation endeavours in many post-war environments around the world. However, as examined in this paper, the mainstream Sri Lankan cinema does not seem to play its much expected social role of reconciliation in the current post-war milieu. In considering the films produced following the end of the war in May 2010, both commercial and classical cinema seem to fail to bring the Sinhala and Tamil communities to a common platform. Instead, majority of the films show a tendency to romanticize the war, and its trauma and agony. Conversely, stories seem to be narrated from the point of view of the Sinhala Buddhist community characterized by an overwhelming notion of nationalism, while much of the duress experienced by Tamils is sidelined. It is crucial to examine why and how mainstream Sri Lankan cinema is so reluctant to play a prominent role in post-war reconciliation.

This paper focuses on the four films: *Ira Handa Yata* by Bennet Rathnayake, *Sinhawalokanaya* by Suneth Malinga Lokuhewa, *Mahindagamanaya* by Sanath Abeysekara, and *Gamani* by Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekara. This paper intends to examine the reasons behind the films' failure to contribute to reconciliation attempts in a post-war environment. It will also illustrate the potential of Sri Lanka cinema to act as a powerful tool of reconciliation, and show how it should redefine its stance and transform itself, moving away from Sinhala Buddhist nationalism.