



**TO STUDY HOW IMPORTANT, IT IS THE  
COMMEMORATION OF DISAPPEARED  
ONES ON 27<sup>TH</sup> OF OCTOBER**

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## **Acknowledgement**

Right To Life Human Rights Centre - Mr Brito Fernando, Mr Philip Dissanayake, Mr.Wasantha Ranil, Mr.Prasanga Fernando, Mr.Erantha Shreenath, Ms.Shreenika Nilashini, Mr.Mahesh Channa,Ms. Nadeeshani Malinga, Ms.Sandani Chathurika and Mr.Amila Chandrasiri.

The people who gave their time for the interviews -The politicians, Human Rights defenders, Lawyers, and the families of the victims.

Ms.Alma Fernando and Ms.Anuradha Gunarathna who helped in translating,

Ms.Priyadarshani Premarathna and Mr.Buddhika Wijayawichrama, Ms.Fioni Munasinghe and Ms.Shashika Prasadi who helped in giving information and kind support for this research,

All the others who helped in various ways.

## **Introduction**

Sri Lanka became infamous in the world as a country where people disappear mysteriously during the decade of 1970. That disappearing culture works against the opposing groups and the people who tend to question the existing situation in the political field of Sri Lanka. This was seriously happened during the period of 1987-1989. On October 27<sup>th</sup> in 1989, H.M. Ranjith, a leader in the trade zone, and M. Lionel, the legal instructor of Ranjith, were killed in the Raddoluwa junction in Seeduwa. On October 27<sup>th</sup> in 1991, a group of 17 members started to commemorate these two people. Since on that day, commemorating the disappeared at this place was started and continued for 22 years. In 2000 a monument was built at this place and this particular place was named as the common place for memorizing the disappeared. This commemoration is organized in order to keep this tragedy in the hearts of the general public, make them aware of the reasons for this tragedy and take steps to prevent such mishaps in the future. It should be identified here that the experiment was done by considering the fact that whether this commemoration has any effect on disappearing people, whether this commemoration is worthwhile to the society, whether it should be continued in the future and to raise awareness on the weaknesses of it and the sectors that should be changed in this commemoration.

## Chapter one - Introduction

Sri Lanka has been obtained its Dominion Freedom from Great Britain in 1948 and began to work as a Democratic State. The first Prime Minister was Mr.D.S. Senanayake from United National Party and he could govern the country by retaining relationships with the countries of the world in a Capitalist viewpoint. In 1956, Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was able to govern the country in a neutral way between capitalist and left political views and the country was ruled by the government having the priority of Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

Then after the decease of Mr S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, Mrs. Sirimawo Bandaranaike came to power. Meanwhile, we could identify that UNP and SLFP has gained power from time to time and ruled the country until today through the confederation with the other parties.

From the ancient times, in Sri Lanka, various conflicts and confusions have been occurred every now and then under various situations. These conflicts were caused by several issues such as, gaining independence, gaining State Power, escaping from the prevailing harmful condition and gaining rights and ownership of the land based on the nation.

The 1971 Rebellion against the existed Sri Lankan government was the first unsuccessful armed young rebel. Against the existed government of Mrs.Sirimawo Bandaranaike, an armed group of young people began the rebellion on 5<sup>th</sup> of May in 1971 through the JVP and it lasted till the end of June in 1971. These armed young rebels were able to conquer some towns and villages in Sri Lanka and the government could totally alleviate the rebellion through the Army and the Police.

Young people between 16-25 years old with the leadership of Rohana Wijeweera joined this rebellion. It seems that they have done this rebellion in order to deny the unjustifiable social – economical and political system and to create a society with equal rights. Nearly 5 000 people lost their lives in this rebellion and nearly 20 000 people were imprisoned. Also, a lot of noble young people lost their lives and Mrs. Bandaranaike appointed a committee preceding the then Chief Justice in order to go through this case. It was known as ‘The Committee of Young Frustration’. This committee was appointed to search for the reasons for this calamity, but it too met the same fate as the other Commissions faced the Sri Lankan history.

Although the 1971 Rebellion in South was unsuccessful and defeated, in 1980s the youths in the Northern area started to battle for gaining the rights and the ownership of the motherland with weapons in hand. It seems that the rebellion of the JVP acted as a spur for these youths. Again in 1987 a group of youths called “Patriotic Liberation Organization” joined JVP and they started to battle against the political system of the existed UNP and the prevailing situation of the country.

The protests were organized due to the various reasons, such as the implementation of Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, Provincial Councils and the act of Provincial Council that came from the Amendments to the 13<sup>th</sup> Constitution, the Indian prevalence, to get freedom from the

harassing situation that resulted from the caste difference, state of being jobless, inadequate money for survival, closing the Universities, selling Degrees and suppressing the University students, incapability of dissolving the Parliament due to the President's continuous existence in his post and the incapability of changing the political system due to the fact that only rich people are having the chance to do the politics, to take freedom from the economical harassments that the resulted from the economic principles of new colonialism, the government actions of suppressing JVP and impeding the political activities of JVP and hoping that a new government system with peaceful equality will come under JVP.

Under this situation, JVP took the necessary steps to make its way by using its armed forces and started to assault, murder and destroy lives and property with a strong protest against the UNP, its members, government officials, the President and the Prime Minister. They destroy the government institutions, equipments, private property, lives of the general public those who were against JVP's system, creating Harthals, closed the shops, made havoc in the lives of the general public and killed a lot of civilians.

The government too took the steps to massacre the youths very brutally. It is said that nearly 30 000 to 60 000 lives have been lost. Especially, the government-blessed Army and the armed groups known as 'Pra', 'Black Cats' took the youths forcefully and massacred them.

The most catastrophic event is the massacre of the youths in Sri Lanka which was a situation that never occurred in the Sri Lankan history before. In past, there were battles to gain the State power, protect the power in one's area and save the country by chasing the emperors away from the country. In those situations, civilians were gunshot and killed instead of stabbing them. Although a strong grudge existed between the two parties, people were rarely harassed brutally.

But during the rebellion of the JVP in 1987- 1989, the existed government took brutal actions in order to suppress this rebellion. Without stopping by killing the youths after making them imprisoned, the youths were crudely harassed and victimized to electricity, parts of their bodies were damaged and specially head and body were dismembered, the body parts were exhibited in public places, people were tied onto light posts, bridges and various other places and burnt by petrol and they were burnt by throwing tyres on them. It can be identified that such a brutal and inhuman slaughtering culture was built by the government. Also the government tried to repress the rebellion by threatening the general public by exhibiting the corpses in public places.

Also many people were kidnapped and disappeared. This was a thing which never happened in the Sri Lankan history before. The tragedy in this case is that all youths were killed without keeping any evidence to recognize them or their whereabouts. Most of the young men who were taken to interrogate were brutally slaughtered or totally disappeared without any evidence. Moreover the parents or the relatives of those disappeared ones were unable to know the miserable fate of their young sons. Due to the fact that making someone disappear is not mentioned as a violation of fundamental human rights in the 1978 Second Republic constitution, it was a problematic to get a justice from a legal action.

“In 1978 the UN General Assembly discussed for the first time against making people disappear forcefully and they took steps to implement a compromise from the UN’s Statement in 1992 to protect people from enforced disappearances. Then in 2006 it is ratified as a resolution with the contribution of the countries in the world.”

(UN’resolution against the involuntary and enforced disappearances. Asain Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances)

But as a country which belongs to the United Nation, Sri Lanka has not signed the Un’s resolution against the involuntary and enforced disappearance and the other statements and compromises regarding it. It is very pathetic to notice that making people disappear is not mentioned as a violation of human rights in the Sri Lankan constitution. Due to this, these people could not gain a legal relief or justice from the national or international law.

Suppressing the youth rebellion brutally caused the defeat of the existed Government from the election and the President who came to power after this, appointed a President Commission for the young disappeared ones in 1998 and it was consisted of trio officers. According to the final report of this investigative Commission, it was realized that these mishaps should not be happened in future and some kind of relief should be given to the families of those victims. But any of those approvals was not succeeded until today. Still in Sri Lanka people are disappears. It is symbolically transformed to white-van from tyre –pyres. Those who are against the current political situation and those who are condemn the politicians were victimized for this enforced disappearing. The society has not identified the people who are responsible for this. Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa who played a major role in this problem in 1987-1989 is the current president in Sri Lanka. Many incidents were reported about the disappeared ones during the war time in North-Eastern areas and then under the government of this current President too. Although four years have gone since the war has stopped, it can be identified that the government was impossible to give the right information about the disappeared youths and what actually did happen to them. Also justice was not done to disappeared ones according to the approvals of Lesson Learnt and Reconciliation Commission and the government keep its mouth shut. Moreover, Sri Lanka has become infamous amidst the International State of human rights.

According to this, it seems that Sri Lanka has gained a place of culture where people are disappearing. Due to the fact that it is not considered as a violation of fundamental human rights, it can be identified that though many incidents of disappearing happenings had occurred, it does not own the honour and rights which belongs to a right. This was widely spread during the period of 1987-1989 and the commemoration held by the committee of the Families of Disappeared to memorize the disappeared was somewhat affected. This was the only memorial that is held during the past 22 years for the commemoration of the disappeared in Sri Lanka from 1991 and its monument was built in Raddoluwa junction in Seeduwa. D.M.Ranjith who worked in the Free Trade Zone and M.Lionel who was his legal instructor were killed in Raddoluwa Junction and from the slippers of Ranjith it was identified that they were the ones who were killed and burnt. During a plenty of disappearing and when people were afraid of speaking about it, Mr.Brito Fernando who was a member of ‘Kalapaye Api’, Jayanthi

Dandeniya who was the girl friend of Ranjith and nearly 17 other people started to commemorate them on October 27<sup>th</sup> in 1991 at this same place and they lighted candles and offered flowers in order to commemorate the dead. The act which was started amidst a plenty of impediment, was spread to build a monument for the disappeared in 2000. This is the only monument for the disappeared in Sri Lanka and this is the only commemoration that held for the disappeared in October 27<sup>th</sup>. The National Defence and the Urban Development Ministry took steps to destroy the “Ahinsakayange Aramaya” which was built at the entrance of Parliament for the commemoration of the 38 disappeared school students at Suriyakanda. In a such condition the monument which was built in the Raddoluwa junction in Seeduwa and the October 27<sup>th</sup> function have been the only commemoration for the memory of disappeared ones. That is why this commemoration which is held to the remembrance of the disappeared has become a national ceremony. Although the steps were taken by the governments in other countries to build monuments and to held commemorations in such situations, it seems that there is no such a situation in Sri Lanka. Under such condition it seems that it is a present day need to study how important it is to commemorate the disappeared ones in a country where there are many disappearing incidents occurring. After the war that existed three decades in the country, people hold different notions on disappearing civilians. Rayappu Joseph- the bishop in Mannar has stated that nearly 1 476 667 civilians were disappeared during the late part of the war. The GA of Jaffna has stated that nearly 78 000 civilians were disappeared after they came under the Army control. Reports were presented to the UN stating that about 57 people were disappeared. According to this, it seems that about 50 000 people were disappeared at the end of war. The relatives, friends of those disappeared people still with hopes of their loved ones. During these two years, the parents in North and Eastern province too joined this commemoration and it was the reason that this function has become a national function. Therefore, it can be mentioned that it is a current need to study how important it is to held the commemoration of the disappeared ones and how it will effect the society to hold a commemoration for the disappeared ones in the field of human rights.

## **Purposes of the study**

To identify how important it is the commemoration of the disappeared ones on October 27<sup>th</sup>.

To seek if there is any effect from this function against disappearing.

To examine the effect of this commemoration against disappearing.

To identify the sectors that should be changed in this commemoration.

To identify the duty of socializing this commemoration.

## **The Field Of the Study**

The study field of this study was the monument on behalf of the disappeared and the October 27<sup>th</sup> commemoration held in Raddoluwa Junction, Seeduwa. During the period of 1987-1989, youths were disappeared from nearly all the districts in Sri Lanka and about 700 photos of those disappeared have been posted on the 'Tear Wall' of this monument. Many victims from different areas of the country come to this place especially people from Colombo, Gampaha, Kaluthara, Kandy, Galle, Matara and Mannar. This commemoration was held for 22 years continuously and during the last two years the families of the disappeared in North and East too joined this commemoration. Therefore, the main study field of this study is this annual commemoration and the monument which was built on behalf of the disappeared.

## **Sample**

The sample of this study was the participants who joined the commemoration which was held in Raddoluwa junction, Seeduwa. A selected group of 50 people from the districts of Colombo, Gampaha, Kaluthara, Kandy, Galle, Matara and Mannar belonged to this sample and they were selected under four different sections.

01. Family members of the disappeared.
02. Clergies, Officers of the NGOs and Politicians who act against the disappearing process and violations of human rights.
03. Human rights defenders.
04. The Officers of the Human Rights Centre known as "Right to Life" who organize this commemoration.

Each of these people has participated to this commemoration more than two times and some people from this sample have participated to this commemoration continuously. Also people who had participated to this commemoration before but did not attend it later too were selected because it too is relevant for the purpose of this research.

Moreover, this sample is consisted of various status such as clergies, family members of those who disappeared, politicians, officers of the NGOs, human rights defenders, journalists, officers of the Human Rights Centre of 'Right to life' and the well wishes of this function. from this research, it was discovered from the participants, the structure of this ceremony, the importance of it, the effect of it to the society and the sectors that should be changed.

## **Collecting Data**

In this study, data was collected in qualitative way and quantitative way. Special attention was given to the qualitative data and data was collected by using the following methods.

### **Collecting Primary Data**

- Questionnaire

Quantitative Data was collected from the questionnaire.

- Interviews

Semi Structured Interviews were used to collect Qualitative Data. By using the Semi Structured Interview system, information was collected about this commemoration, its importance, the changes, its social effects and the general idea about this programme. These Questionnaires and the interviews were given to the members of the disappeared who were being selected to the sample, clergies, lawyers, human rights defenders and other NGO officers who raise their voice against the violation of human rights and the members of the Right To Life Organization.

- Case Studies

In order to confirm the accuracy and the quality of the information that was taken from the interview and the questionnaires, case studies were conducted. Also the case studies were used to identify the different notions of the commemoration which held on October 27<sup>th</sup> and its effect on disappearing from those who did participate to this commemoration and those who did not participate it.

### **Collecting Secondary Data**

The literature stuff that was based on disappearing people and different notions of different personalities were being referred in this situation.

- The publications about disappearing the general public.
- Internet Letters
- Magazines
- Political books that were written on that particular period.

## **Analyzing of data**

This experiment was consisted of both qualitative and quantitative data. But special attention was given to qualitative data. The received data was analyzed in detail.

## **Problems and Limitations of the research**

The major problem in this research was the difficulty in allocating dates to have interviews with people. Therefore the task of collecting data was unnecessarily delayed due to the fact that the people were heavily busy. There were difficulties of contacting people too.

Also when the parents and the relatives of the disappeared were interrogated in order to get information, most of them tend to cry by remembering the memories of their loved ones. This too was another difficulty.

Moreover, some people were reluctant to speak or to give information and some have forgotten their experience due to the effect of time. Some people held the notion that it was utterly useless to investigate the things that were already erased from their minds. Others held the notion that in order to remind the general public of the tragic things that happened in our history, such experiments and research should be conducted.

In the process of collecting the necessary information, some limitations too occurred. Specially the relatives of the disappeared ones probed that whether they receive any financial aids through this. Most of the people tend to express their private miseries on to this idea.

The notion of some people was this commemoration should be done without considering the disappearing that happened in Northern and Eastern provinces. Because these disappearing were occurred in 1987-1989 and it is a commemoration of the patriots and the others are terrorists. They gave information by keeping this idea in them. Another group of people told that it is unnecessary to hold these commemorations continuously in the present.

Although amidst the above problems and limitations the study was completed successfully by avoiding problematic situations.

## **Chapter Two - Disappearances in the world and building monuments.**

In the conflicting eras of the world's history, fundamental human rights were violated in a large scale. Internal conflicts as well as external conflicts were resulted in killings, imprisonments, exiling, mass killings, and disappearances.

Among the above mentioned fundamental human rights violations, disappearance has taken a very pathetic place in the entire human history. In the case of disappearance not only the disappeared but also his or her family, relations, and friends have become victims. They have even lost the right to know even the disappeared is dead or alive. People can bury, if the person is dead and also people can do alms giving in the remembrance of the dead person and can built a memorial in the place of the burial. But there is no such a place to a disappeared. Without knowing disappeared person's death, family cannot do the rites and rituals for that person.

Due to the above reasons memorials are built in the public places in the remembrance of the disappeared in the history of the world. After the disappearance, monuments are built in the remembrance of the disappeared as the date of death and the death place are not known by the people. The reason behind building monuments and celebrating the day of disappearance is to commemorate the pathetic past of the disappeared and to avoid those in the future. The countries those who have faced the disappearances have come up with the idea of building monuments for the above objective which is to avoid the disappearances in the future, and have started to organize ceremonies for them along with that. These ceremonies have become national shoka dates, ceremonial dates and special dates sponsored by the governments of those countries.

Russia, German, Argentina, Chile, South Korea, El Salvador, Iraq, and Sri Lanka are recognized as the countries that have faced disappearances most and the countries that have organized ceremonies for the disappeared and have built monuments.

The Military junta that was prevailing since 1976 in Argentina was resulted in disappearing more than 50 000 people in the country. This was called Dirty War and the people who go against it and those who held socialist and welfare views were disappeared. During this era most of the youths rebelled against this military rule and their destiny was either the death or they were disappeared. They were disappeared in a way that is very mysterious and the mothers, who suffered from that, came to a place called Plaza De Mayo with their children's pictures to display and they were silent for a minute to commemorate the disappeared in order to tell the world the destiny they had to face due to the rule of Military junta. In 1980 Argentina became a republican state and the mothers who suffered from the pain of their children's disappearance were given justice and International law of disappearance were established in the country and monuments were built to commemorate the disappeared.

In 1973 a military ruler called Augusto Pinochet came to the power in Chile who was against socialism. To the people, who were against his dictatorship, were either died or disappeared. He was born out of republicanism, and more than 30 000 people were tortured and more than 3000 people were disappeared during his rule. Due to the rebellions that were going on against the dictator, Chile became a republican state and violation of human rights and disappearances

came to a minimum. Hopes of the young those who beard the socialism were fulfilled and they are commemorated until the present.

Kwangju Uprising in South Korea can be mentioned as one of the world's pathetic situations of human rights violation and also one of the greatest defeats of the world. About one million people were gathered to Siyol on 18<sup>th</sup> May in 1980 against the military rule of South Korea. Their objective was to defeat the dictatorship and make South Korea a republic. During the rebellion that held to defeat the Kwangju area, people who lived in that area went against the Kwangju army and also about 160 young people became the leaders of the rebellion. Military army of Kwangju killed most of the young and some were disappeared by the army. People believed when they go against this dictatorship one day they can fulfill their dream of having a socialist republic. In present day context South Korea has become one of the greatest countries of republicanism and they have built the monument of Kwangju in order to commemorate the disappeared and 18<sup>th</sup> May has become the day of celebrating the young who devoted their lives for t5he country. Further May 18<sup>th</sup> has become a public holiday and Koreans get together to celebrate human rights and the people who created a republic without thinking their own lives.

Likewise rebellions were held to protect human rights in the history of the world and people those devoted their lives in protecting human rights are commemorated in the present day as well. And those days have become public holiday in the countries to make remember the importance of protecting human rights and to make strong the people to stand against human rights violation of their own and their neighbors.

### **Chapter Three - Commemoration and the monuments of the disappeared in Sri Lanka.**

In 1971 and during the period of 1987-1989 youth rebelled and they were highly controlled by making them disappeared. More than 1971, 1987-1989 youth were suppressed and they were killed. Not only torturing the youth but also they were killed and disappeared. The most pathetic situation was that there was no one to take the responsibility of killing them and making them disappeared and there was no one to accuse as well. In other countries of the world public go against the system and rebelled. There was a system in those countries that went beyond the political parties and regarded human rights as the main concern. Those countries politics, political parties, responsibilities, reorganization, punishing the wrong doers, building monuments, and went for a government that will protect and take responsible of their actions which was different from Sri Lanka.

Even after a chaotic situation in Sri Lanka though the political party did change but their principles did not. The prevailing situation was used as a weapon to come to the power and did not pay any attention to the violation that took place. No punishment was given to the wrong doers and no solutions were provided for that. Not only that but also no monument was created and no day was held to commemorate the people who became the victims until today. In present day as well we can see people being victimized due to disappearances as a result of the political system in Sri Lanka.

In 1980s youth in Periyamulla who was with the New Socialist party published a magazine called “Kalapaye Api” that published the creations of the trade zone youths. During this era lots of young people who worked in trade zone were disappeared despite the fact that they were members of the rebels that were going on at that time and the organization “Kalapaye Api” fight for the rights of those who were disappeared. H. M. Ranjith who was a leader of the labour party and his lawyer M. Lionel who fought for the rights of the youth in trade zone were kidnapped and killed at the Raddoluwa junction. Jayanthi Dandeniya, the girlfriend of Ranjith who was killed by burning together with Mr. Brito Fernando who was an activist in New Socialist party began to work actively to protect the human rights of the trade zone youth and to gain justice for those who disappeared in Gampaha district.

In 27<sup>th</sup> October 1991 a group of 17 people gathered to Raddoluwa junction in Seeduwa with the idea of ending the violations of ruthless kidnappings and killings as it is a responsibility of all human beings, to commemorate the disappeared according to the religious activities. In 27<sup>th</sup> October 1992 the commemoration was held for the second time in the same place and about 1000 people including politicians, priests, family members of the disappeared, organizations and human rights activists came for the ceremony. They were acted as “Mahajana Vinishaya Sabhawa” within the organization of “Kalapaye Api” and commemorated the disappeared according to five requests.

With this beginning of the memorial function, it began to continue the commemoration of the disappeared annually by being together as “the familial group of the disappeared”. For about 60 000 Sri Lankan who were disappeared, without a date of death, place of death, and even

burial, are commemorated annually in the ceremony of “the 27<sup>th</sup> October disappeared Commemoration”

The foundation for the monument of the disappeared was placed in 10<sup>th</sup> December 1999 in Raddoluwa junction in Seeduwa. For that “Asian Human Rights Commission” in Hongkong and “18<sup>th</sup> May Commemoration committee” in Kwangju city lent their hands. The monument was built by the artist Chandraguptha Thenuwara and it was made public in 04<sup>th</sup> of February 2000 with a collection of the disappeared photographs. About 700 disappeared persons’ photographs are displayed on that crying wall.

The wall with the photographs of the disappeared is the only monument built in remembrance of the disappeared. “Innocent’s Aramaya” which was built to commemorate the disappearance of the students of Ambilipitiya that was sponsored by the government was torn down with the government consent.

We have to stand for justice in an era where leaders who were trying to and who are trying to press down the memories of the disappeared, and still making people disappeared who fight against injustices of the power and keep on commemorating the disappeared persons is my personal belief. In a country where there’s no public commemoration for disappearances, this commemoration was held as a national celebration together with Sinhalese and Tamils for the 22<sup>nd</sup> time. Trough “Right to Life” organization which is a human rights centre, this commemoration is held in order to make remember the people of something like this happened in the history of Sri Lanka and we should closed the doors for these kinds of pathetic situations in the future, and to say we should establish International law for disappearances within Sri Lanka to prevent something like this in the future.

## **Chapter Four - Analysis**

Here the attention is paid towards the analysis of information taken from the family members of disappeared people in 1987-1989 who participate in the October 27<sup>th</sup> commemoration, the family members who participated first and later gave up their participation, members of the other non-governmental organizations, politicians, people who work in relation to Human Rights, people who have participated in this ceremony continuously, committee of disappeared peoples' families and people who work in relation to Human Rights defenders in Right To Life organization.

The information taken from the fifty people is analyzed in general here and it is consisted of two parts. First the importance and the influence of celebrating the disappeared people on October 27<sup>th</sup> is taken into consideration. Secondly, the fact of, whether this ceremony should be continued or not and the reasons for this will be considered. Here another noteworthy fact is that the details taken from the interviews will be discussed, considering the bias and non bias ideas for these two parts separately.

### **The people who participate in the commemoration of disappeared people in October 27<sup>th</sup>.**

We can see a lot of women from the families of the victims have joined this ceremony. They are the mother, the wife and the sister. There are some families with both mother and father. Also husbands participate due to the bad health condition of wife while in some families sister or brother participate since the parents are so old. However women participation is higher in the families of the victim. According to the information taken from interviews, it's clear that due to the pain of losing their child, husband and brother participate in this ceremony.

Among the people who participate in this ceremony, most of the males can be identified as other non governmental organizations, members of political parties and people who work in relation to Human Rights. They participate in this ceremony due to several reasons such as, being an employee of this organization, being an employee of an organization which has been connected with Right to Life Human Rights Organization that organizes this ceremony, being a politician and acting as a person who works in relation to Human Rights.

Women are higher, among the family members of the victims who have abstained the participation. There are several reasons for this. They think that it is useless to participate in this ceremony continuously since nothing can be done and they can do the religious rituals on their own including alms giving and also the bad health condition. The common alms giving of this ceremony is a main reason for the continuous participation of the family members of the victims for the commemoration.

Also a person who has avoided the participation said that due to some conflicts of political party members' participation who have involved in the disappearances in 1987-1989, he doesn't participate in this ceremony. A politician as well as a minister of present government who has contributed a lot to this commemoration in 1990s said that these commemorations for

disappeared people are not suitable for the present and there was not any disappearance in Sri Lanka recently.

### **The nature of disappeared people.**

When the family members of the victims were questioned about their disappeared people, they said that these disappeared young people were very innocent and didn't have any affair with JVP. Due to family problems, political problems, mistakes and wrong details these young males have been disappeared.

Further among these young people there were students who were schooling, young people who were doing jobs and also unemployed young males. Most of them were from ordinary families and specially there were doing government jobs or were engaging in self employments. Many people mentioned that those were guiltless. Some people criticized the behavior of JVP at that time.

When they were asked about their disappeared people, everyone said that the prevailed time period was very unpleasant for them and a lot of innocent lives lost without any use.

### **How people were joined this the commemoration**

Most of the people who participated in this ceremony have got information about the ceremony through Mrs. Jayanthi Diddeniya who worked in relation to these things in Gampaha district. Through the awareness of the committee of disappeared people and through the letters which were sent but them, these people have known about the ceremony and joined it.

Besides the family members of the victims, some other people have participated for the ceremony due to some reasons. Being employees in Human Rights Organization which organizes this ceremony, paying attention to work joining with that organization and getting details about this ceremony can be identified as those reasons. Through these reasons people have participated for the ceremony at first and after that they have given their participation continuously.

### **How the commemoration is connected to the present condition.**

Most of the parents participate in this ceremony alone at present. One reason for this condition is the lack of second generation in this ceremony. They didn't like to join the other children of the family for the ceremony due to the bad condition of the country at that time. They haven't tried to make the other children participate for the ceremony, because they believed that by participating the ceremony they will have to face life threats.

“ We didn’t motivate the mothers to bring their other children here, because if the disappearance of one child bring problems for the other children, the situation could be worst. If there’s no second generation from their families, whoever will continue the ceremony.”

(Mr. Brito Fernando- Interviews)

A person who has lost his brother gave opposite ideas for the above mentioned sentences and he said that he continuously participate in the commemoration. He says,

“I join this ceremony with my children, because they should know what happened at past. If it’s not so, the generation will not know what happened during last two decades in this country.”

(Mr. Rathnayake- Interviews)

The politician,Mr. Wickramabahu Karunartathne who raises his voice for rights for a long time,and works in his political life regarding those things, also who has contributed to the establishment of Parents- Children Committee of disappeared people gives his opinions in this way.

“My opinion is, mothers for their children, wives for their husbands, children for their fathers should raise their voices. If it’s not so, there’s no one to talk about those people. These things may not continue when people don’t raise voices for the justice in breaking rights.

(Mr.Wickramabahu Karunarathne- Interviews)

Accordingly, though this commemoration was held in the memory of disappeared during 1987-1989, it was discovered that not only the family members of the victims but others those who are interested in this also should join this and necessary steps should be taken to socialize this with the help of human rights defenders.

### **Comment on disappearing in 1987-1989 and disappearing in North-East during the war time.**

Most of the family members of the disappeared held the notion that the tragedy that happened during 1987-1989 was due to raising the voice of youths for patriotism. They insisted that the steps that were taken by the youths were wrong and the innocent youths who were not joined JVP political views too had to pay from their lives.

“My son is Victor Lenin Marasinghe. He was an Air force soldier. At this time he was taking medicine for illness. But he was taken away by the government to interrogate by stating that my son had taught the JVP cadres to shoot. He was the only son of mine. I lost him forever.”

(Mrs.Aani Theresa-Interview)

Most of the family members of the disappeared insisted that the children who were taken away never came again and after sometime they stopped searching them after realizing that their attempts for search were utterly useless. Most of the family members never know when or where their loved ones paid from their lives. Knowing the facts about the deaths is very rare.

“Both Ranjith and Lionel were killed and burnt in October 27<sup>th</sup> in 1989 at Raddoluwa junction in Seeduwa. We identified those two with the help of a slipper of Ranjith.”

(Mrs. Jayanthi Dandeniya-Interview)

The rulers of the country wanted to destroy the life of Ranjith who spoke on behalf of the problems of the laborers in the trade zone and it seems that it was on this background that he and his legal instructor, Lionel, were brutally killed. The family members of the victims held the notion that the disappeared were the ones who tend to criticize the existed ruling system and they were taken away and killed by suspecting them or in order to take revenge from them.

When probing the family members of the disappeared in Northern area about the disappearing that happened in Southern area, their response was that they are unaware of detailed information about that situation. They were unable to get more details due to less media facilities and the prevailing war in North.

When probing the family members of the disappeared in 1987-1989 about the disappearing that happened in North and East, what they said was,

“Our children are too innocent. My son disappeared when he was returning from school. People disappeared in North because of terrorism. Tamils can go to Tamilnadu, if they want. But this is our country. We cannot take these two situations as equal.”

(Mrs. Sheela Gannoruwa-Interview)

“Whether it is in North or South, our children did disappear. For every mother the child is a child but not a terrorist. The children went on this path due to the fault of the society.”

(Mrs. P. Yasohami- Interview )

The human rights defenders’ and politicians’ views of the disappeared in 1987-1989 are,

“UNP ruled the country during the period of 1987-1989. The innocent youths were killed from repressing actions of the existed government. We gave shelter to many youths in our own home and protected them.

But in North there was a different type of disappearing. No one can put blame on the government about the disappearing situation in North.”

(Minister Prasanna Ranathunga-  
Interview)

“The rulers are totally responsible for the disappearing that happened in 1987-1989 and North and South. These things happened in the history because of the weaknesses of the ruling system and the ruling principles. Also the things got worse and make people disappear in North and East still today because the government did not take steps to give a solution for the 1987-1989 tragedy and the government tends to continue its dominating power forever. Moreover, still no solution was given to these problems.”

(Mr. Wikramabahu Karunaratna-  
Interview)

Mr. Prasanna Ranathunga came to power from Sri Lanka Freedom Party and earlier he was a person who gave the necessary help for this commemoration with his father. In the period of 1987-1989 the UNP governed the country. The protests and walks against the disappearing made the party lose its power. Then the Sri Lanka Freedom Party came into power by using the disappearing and Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksha who played a major role in protesting against the pervading disappearing is the current President in the country. During the period of his ruling, many people disappeared in North and East. But it is very pathetic to see that Minister Prasanna Ranathunga is trying to rationalize that. It depicts the crooked political system and the non existence of policies in the country.

Accordingly, some people in South are trying to rationalize the disappearing that happened in North. By stating that terrorism is the cause for this, they try to escape from their responsibilities. The guides who run the political system in the country were able to make this as the general social notion among the public.

### **Opinions on commemoration of disappeared.**

People came up with different ideas on annual 27<sup>th</sup> October commemoration of disappeared ceremony. The idea that this ceremony will never make the families, that became the victims of these ruthless disappearances, forget their children and husbands that were disappeared. During the ceremony disappeared will be commemorated, placed flowers in their names and arms giving will be held.

“We don’t know at what time my child got kidnapped and in which place. My child doesn’t have a grave even. It is precious to have this kind of monument for those who faced a destiny like my child’s.”

(Mrs. Ariyawathi Silva – Interview)

Mothers, fathers, wives, and siblings commemorate their children, husbands, and siblings in this ceremonial day without any difference in religions as Buddhist and Catholics. Further, this monument has become a public place for them as they all have faced the same experience.

They did not expect to make any changes in the society neither they believe that they can make any changes today. Because nothing were done in the past either from the commission that was appointed regarding the disappearances or from any political party or from any other way they were not given justice. So people believe that this commemoration will not make any difference in the society in the future as well. Their ambition is to commemorate them and do what they can do for their loved ones.

“There is no grave for my child. I am a catholic mother. On 2<sup>nd</sup> November we celebrate the day of the dead. I believe this is my son’s place.”

(Mrs. Anne Fernando- Interview)

Some believe that this is a discussion that goes beyond a simple commemoration.

“Though this is a commemoration for the disappeared this gives a message to the society that this tells the society that these kinds of pathetic incidents occurred in the past.”

(Mr. Sirithunga Jayasooriya- interview)

According to these, the idea came up that these kinds of incidents happened in the past and we have to stop it happening in the future. Moreover, without letting the memories to fade away and specially without forgetting what happened in the past and instead of being shy about that this makes people remind go against these kinds of violations.

“This monument put forward a question to those who do not know about this dark past and people will ask why this kind of monument was built and what happened in the past to build such a monument just as the ceremony. It can be said that this memorial is organized to raise a voice for justice, and to say that justice should be given to those who became the victims.”

(Mr. Pilip Dissanayake- interview)

“I am a person who have participated this memorial from the beginning. A voice should be raised for the injustices that are happening in the society. Otherwise, what happened today to someone else will happen to me or somebody tomorrow. So as I think this is something that goes beyond just a memorial.”

(Rev. Terrence Fernando- interview)

According to above opinions it is proved that this commemoration goes beyond a simple memorial to various ideas.. Moreover, this memorial can be shown as a commemoration held to raise a voice against social injustices, to commemorate the people who disappeared, to take actions to avoid same kind of pathetic situations in the future, and to line up people against injustices.

The points against this memorial can be pointed out as below.

Parents in North and East told that this is an important celebration and it has the effect of their disappeared children but to the part of offering flowers and arms giving they did not like.

“My elder son was disappeared. He was 16 years old. LTTE took him. Later at the time when the war was ending, we handover him to the army as we were asked to. My child who was sick cannot be found until today. Without knowing what happened to my child I can’t offer flowers for him. I can’t have an arms giving. We are Catholics and in our religion that is done to the dead. My son is not dead. He is alive in somewhere. People in the South can commemorate that because for them it was long time back. This ceremony is good for their commemoration but my wish is to make an influence to the government from this to get any information about my child.”

(Mr. M. Nageswaram- interview)

Even though there is no commemoration for those who disappeared in North and East Rev. Father Jayabalan who is a human rights activist holds the mass asking from God to find out the disappeared for their loved ones we were told in the interview we had with him.

The opinion of those who celebrated and do not celebrate the day of disappeared in the South.

“Today the commemoration day of the disappeared has politicized. Those who killed my brother speak of human rights today. Freely come to the stage. This is contradictory. Though the Sri Lanka Freedom party said that they are against disappearances, they did not take any actions against it. Feel like these have become an event in their agendas.”(Mr. Rathnasiri-interview)

“As an NGO, what should be done is to make an influence in the society without limiting this memorial for a ceremony. Without taking an action for that it is not successful to commemorate.”

(Mrs. Jayanthi Dandeniya- interview)

“We don’t like to commemorate our children along with LTTE people. Our children are not terrorists. So I am commemorating my child in my way and do what I can.”

(Mrs. Sheela Gannoruwa – interview)

“This must be a people’s business. Otherwise, the influence it makes will not be felt by the society.”

(Mr. Prasanga Fernando)

Though there are opinions like that, the main idea about this function is that the memorial should be continued and nationally it is significant because the only memorial and the ceremony for disappeared is this.

Some of the ideas about the influences against abductions were emerged during the memorial ceremony, such that there is a resistance versus abductions. This has to be continuously carried out not only by commemoration, but also diplomacy, preservation of human rights, discussions about abductions. Also, this affirms that abductions are illegal and it spoils basic human rights.

“This will not make any huge influence either on people or the government. But for even once a year it is important to hold a memorial like this as it makes people aware and interest on this issue.”

(Mr. Basil Fernando- interview)

“The concept of monument is very important. People built monuments to remind of what happened past without forgetting it. By seeing those monuments people’s conscience will talk to them. They will be able to understand that this past was a mistake. Even the thought can be influenced by this.”

(Mr. Chandraguptha Thenuwara)

According to this, the memorial is commonly influence the society, law in the country, and protecting human rights.

### **The current situation of this Memorial.**

The ceremony of 27<sup>th</sup> October memorial function for disappeared held in last year for the 22<sup>nd</sup> time. In the past this ceremony was a turning point in Sri Lankan politics.

“In the past the protests against abductions resulted in changing the government. Within the prevailing conflicting situation people were able to raise their voices”

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In the past this memorial was able to change the governments and though each party came to power by saying that they will do justice but it is clear they did not make their promises once they came to the power. Moreover, even though the government of Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa went to Human Rights Commission in Geneva before came into power, the disappearances keep on happening in his period of governing which is really pathetic.

Likewise, parents of those who disappeared during the war time in North and East participate to this memorial celebration today

“This country has lost number of valuable lives, even though they are Sinhalese or Tamils. Therefore, this is very important because all mothers of died ones have gathered in this special moment.”

(Leenas Jayathilake)

“My child was lost. I have seen wives and mothers coming to this place for past few years. It is good to see that mothers and wives from North and East coming to this place. The pain we feel is just the same as theirs. I have felt by the way they talk that they feel the same pain as mine.”

(Mrs. Anne Fernando)

Mrs. S. Velu who lived in Kandy is a mother of a young boy who was abducted during the period of 1987-1989. She has come to this memorial for a long time and she was dead few days ago. We were told that as she was a Tamil, she was labeled as a terrorist by the Sinhalese people. The participation of Veluamma adds the participation of North East members was viewed by her in a terrorism viewpoint. Her view was that this commemoration should be done without the participation of these people.

Unlike in the past, the number of the mothers who attend to this ceremony is gradually decreasing. Deaths, old age, health issues and the decrease of sorrow are some reasons for this.

“My son was lost 20 years ago. He was studying to be a doctor. I cried for so many years. I went to one commemoration. I’m still suffering. But now I never come to the commemoration because it makes my pain great. It is useless to worry about that for the whole life. I have made up my mind now.”

(Mrs. Senanayake-Interview)

However this commemoration directly affects the existing government and the lives of the general public. Through this commemoration one can recognize that making people disappear is a crime whether it happens in North or South.

“The effect of this commemoration should be expand to patriotism or protection of human rights. Also this should be done with a connection with political parties in the viewpoint of principles.”

(Mr.Sudarshana Gunawardhana-Interview)

Accordingly, it seems that the effect of this commemoration is spread widely.

### **The idea of the monument of the disappeared people.**

The monument in the memory of the disappeared was opened in 4<sup>th</sup> February in 2000 and nearly 700 photos of the disappeared were created on the Tear Wall of the monument. Building such monuments will help to give a great message to the world.

“When such incidents happened in the world, people tend to built monument in order to memorize the incidents. From these monuments, not only the people are memorized. By that not only they are commemorated but also the fact that these kinds of crimes happened in the past and also this remind that these crimes shouldn’t repeat in the future.”

(Mr. Chandraguptha Thenuwara)

“Ranjith and Lionel are the only ones who were killed in this place. But this is a common place for all the victims who do not have a place of death and a date of death. This is not a property of the church but a public property.”

(Rev. Father Siril Anthony)

This monument has become important because it was built during a period that nobody built monuments in Sri Lanka for commemoration and also it reminds us of the pathetic past. Especially a monument which was built for commemorating the disappeared has an effect on the future as well.

The actions that were taken by the governments who were from 1987 to 1989, NGOs and civil social activists were not satisfactory but this memorial was important to the society nationally as well as to private lives of the ordinary at a time like mentioned above and it should be admired. Moreover, people believed politicians used these disappearances as a weapon to get the power. It was revealed that those who took part in commemoration continuously are apart from politics and they really concern about human rights.

### **The Idea on the Actions of the Union of Families of Disappeared.**

Organizations on disappeared such as Union of Parents and Children, and Mother's Front came to the society during 1987-1989. With the opening of the monument named Union of Families of Disappeared in year 2000, the function was established in the country mostly in Gampaha, Kandy, Kaluthara, and Gall districts. A lot of activities were held specially to collect information,, to organize meetings on those areas, to make people aware of the memorial, and to make them participate to the ceremony.

“Acting as a group is more influential than being a single person to avoid these kinds of situations in the future. It cannot be done without politics. It's important to have a conditional agreement on disappearances, and we should have an idea about what we will do in another 3 years or 5 years.”

(Mr. Wasantha Ranil)

“To organize this memorial, this Union of Families does a great job. To organize this kind of an event is not an easy task. So I feel that it is very important and influential to organize this kind of a memorial by this union.”

(Mrs. Seetha Gamage)

Furthermore, another idea that came out is that the union is doing with the purpose of money other than a commemoration. The reason behind this perception was that this union has the sole objective of organizing the day of memorial. Another reason is that in this particular union there is no one from the families of the victims.

### **Opinion on whether this memorial should be continued or not.**

This October 27<sup>th</sup> ceremony is important and should be continued to commemorate the disappeared and to avoid those kinds of pathetic situations in the future, and to keep in mind that we have faced this kind of a dark past as well. Also this memorial can be used as a weapon to force people to take necessary actions to avoid these circumstances, to force politicians to make new principles and make law to protect the human rights.

The opinion that NGOs should make people aware of this situation and take necessary legal and constitutional actions for these came up.

Moreover, the view that the parents' contribution is very important emerged as well. And also necessary actions should be taken to engage victimized parents in this memorial.

The idea of those who were against this commemoration was this should be going beyond a memorial and should stay away from the political influence. Further, the opinion was brought out that this is something that happened 26 years back, so what we should do is take actions for the welfare of the families of the victims.

### **Weaknesses in the Commemoration.**

One of the weaknesses is that this is limited to the 27<sup>th</sup> October. An idea came up that we should hold this commemoration for at least a week including events such as cultural events, awareness programs, educational programs, and etc.

Commonly, people bear the belief that this should be a social campaign. This should be transformed to a social campaign including politicians, intellectuals, and professionals.

Over so, the space should be given to the families of the victims to take an active part in this commemoration. In organizing that more importance should be given to them. This is a weakness which is prevailing in today's ceremony.

In addition, without thinking that this commemoration as a mere political or NGO's project people should give more importance to this.

Also politicians should be put away from the principles of this commemoration, so that they cannot intervene and also if the government changes it will make no effect on the principles of the memorial as it is more powerful.

Public should be aware of this memorial and each and every human being should know about this.

Another weakness is that Sinhalese and Tamils are both involved in this memorial but there is no opportunity to share ideas of two ethnic groups.

Besides, guest speeches are not enough for this occasion, organizers should take actions to put forward this into the society.

## **Chapter Five - Conclusion and Suggestions.**

It was emphasized that this 27<sup>th</sup> October Commemoration should be continued in the future as well. Further, it was emphasized that this should be organized with the remembrance of the pathetic incident happened in the past, and we should avoid these in the future.

As suggestions, it came up that we should socialize this commemoration and should expand the area of the ceremony.

Also, a suggestion came into view that this memorial should include intellectuals, politicians, and the public.

Moreover, without being one day celebration, this should be a commemoration that goes beyond a day including cultural programs, awareness campaigns and so on.

Further, memorials should be organized in regional levels in order to make people pay their attention to this matter.

Another suggestion was presented as to build this monument in somewhere that has a peaceful surrounding than the place at present. So that people can experience it freely.

Furthermore, the opportunity must be given to Sinhalese and Tamils to exchange their ideas, and fro discussions, and to have conversations in order to build their mutual understanding, so that their misunderstandings will fade away.

Another suggestion was made to involve second class generation to this memorial. It is important to make them know that abduction is not a fact to be shy.

Moreover, posters, newspaper articles and etc should be published to make the public aware of the 27<sup>th</sup> October Commemoration, with a strong basis.

Further, the intellectuals and politicians those who take part in this memorial should be aware of the fact that this is not an event to get power. State principles, rules and regulations should extend in order to make this memorial stable without changing with the change of the government.

A suggestion came up that people who are responsible for the abductions or disappearances should apologize to the society for their faults.

Furthermore, this campaign should go around the country and should be continued in the future. Also with a more organized way and a future plan, the monument should be preserved and the commemoration should be hold.

## **Conclusion**

The souvenir of disappeared people in Raddoluwa junction, Seeduwa and the October 27<sup>th</sup> ceremony have become the only souvenir and the ceremony to commemorate disappeared people in Sri Lanka. Though it's created by a non- governmental organization and civil social community, it has become an important ceremony at national level.

The youth massacre resulted in more than 60 000 deaths which made a dark spot in Sri Lankan history were occurred in 1987-1989 and it can be identified as a great tragedy also. Here it gives the message that such incidents had been happened, they should be memorized without forgetting and steps should be taken not to occur such disappearances again.

The ideas were presented to continue the ceremony and the souvenir properly, though there were some weaknesses and to collect the facts which have been proposed, by emphasizing the influence of it to our society.

Also there were opinions that this ceremony should be continued without any weaknesses and it should be widen in order to be more than one day ceremony.

Further it was said that about the neccessasity of reforming the legal and social system of the country through a ceremony against disappearances and for that governmental, non-governmental, civil organizations, victims and general public should get together and work according to the principles.