

**INSTITUTIONAL AND STRUCTURAL OBSTACLES TO
PEACE IN SRI LANKA-
A CASE FOR A PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT FOR PEACE**

by
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Institutional and Structural Obstacles to Peace in Sri Lanka. A Case for a
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Abstract

It is the goal of this thesis to argue that peace in Sri Lanka cannot be achieved under the existing political order. The 47 year history of post-colonial Sri Lanka and her attempts at resolving the ethnic conflict illustrate those structural and institutional obstacles which are inherent to all ethnically divided societies.

The thesis begins with a critical survey of various theories of ethnicity and ethnic identity. Particular attention is given to the underlying perception of ethnicity. The argument here proposes the need for rethinking ethnicity as a positive phenomenon.

In order to demonstrate that peace-lasting peace-is a near impossibility in Sri Lanka, it is necessary to review the socio-economic and political history of Sri Lanka and its impact on the ethnic conflict. Here, attempts have been made to demonstrate how ethnic politics evolved from the politics of accommodation and bargaining, to the politics of militancy and terrorism.

The structural and institutional obstacles to peace in Sri Lanka is given an in-depth examination. Particular attention is given to the examination of institutionalized communalism and violence in the polity and the need for unlearning negative ethnicity.

The thesis concludes that peace can only be possible through a people's movement that will encourage alternative space for people's participation in the peace process.

Dedication

To Rajini Thiranagama and the others who were sacrificed
at the altar of peace, in the name of freedom.

"I saw the tears of the oppressed
and they have no comforter; power
was on the side of their oppressors.
And I declared that the dead,
who had already died, are happier than
the living, who are still alive."

(The Book of Ecclesiastes 4:1 & 2)

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Approval | ii |
| Abstract | iii |
| Dedication | iv |
| Quotation | v |
| Acknowledgements | vi |
| Table of Contents | vii |
| List of Tables..... | ix |
| | |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| | |
| 2. Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict and Conflict Resolution : Towards and Applicable Model | 10 |
| 2.1 Ethnicity | 11 |
| 2.1a. Tracing the Roots | 12 |
| 2.1b. Ethnicity: In Search of a Useful Approach | 15 |
| 2.1c. Ethnicity and Some Overlapping Concepts | 21 |
| 2.2 Ethnicity: A Source of Conflict or a Source of Strength | 26 |
| 2.3 Ethnic Conflict Resolution: In Search of an Applicable Model | 31 |
| 2.4 Ethnic Conflict Resolution: Some Models For Consideration | 35 |
| | |
| 3. Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict: A Brief Survey | 39 |
| 3.1 Socio-Economic Structure of Sri Lanka: The Colonial Legacy | 40 |
| 3.1a. Colonial Economy at a Glance | 41 |
| 3.1b. Social Structure at the Time of Independence: A Summary | 44 |
| 3.1c. Post-Colonial Socio-Economic Structure: A Survey | 46 |
| 3.2 Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka..... | 57 |
| 3.2a. Roots of Ethnic Conflict in the Colonial Era | 58 |
| 3.2b. Ethnic Conflict: The Parliamentary Phase | 63 |
| 3.2c. Ethnic Conflict: The Presidential Phase | 71 |
| 3.2d. Ethnic Conflict: The Militant Phase | 74 |
| | |
| 4. Structural and Institutionalized Obstacles to Peace in Sri Lanka | 78 |
| 4.1 Structural Sources of Ethnic Conflict | 83 |
| 4.1a. Homogenisation and Its Effects on Sri Lankan Polity | 84 |
| 4.1b. Ethnic Majoritarianism | 88 |
| 4.2 Institutionalized Sources of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka | 91 |
| 4.2a. Communalism and De-Secularism | 91 |
| 4.2b. Institutionalization of Communalism by the State and the Sinhalese Society | 92 |
| 4.2c. The Rise of Tamil Nationalism and its Movement towards Secessionism | 97 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 4.3 Institutionalization of Violence | 103 |
| Conclusion: Towards an Applicable Model- A Case for a People's Movement for Peace. | 106 |
| Bibliography | 112 |

List of Tables

| | | |
|---------|--|----|
| Table 1 | Economic Growth Rate(in percentage)..... | 55 |
| Table 2 | Ethnic Representation in Sri Lanka..... | 57 |
| Table 3 | Religious Representation in Sri Lanka..... | 58 |

Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of my thesis is to demonstrate that peace cannot be achieved in Sri Lanka under the existing political order. The thesis further attempts to argue that lasting and just peace can only be achieved through a people's movement for peace. The study of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and the attempts at achieving peace provides yet another example of the structural and institutionalized obstacles faced by all ethnically divided societies around the world.

Sri Lanka provides a rather fascinating case study of ethnic identity, ethnic assertiveness and ethno-nationalist manifestations. As a Sri Lankan, I find the political history and development of Sri Lanka challenging, for it not only presents the ideal situation to examine how and why ethnic assertiveness develops and assumes different proportions, it also challenges one's notions of democracy and the practice of democracy in society. As a Tamil, I have witnessed the decay of a society that now has little hope of ever being at peace. Peace, in this situation, means more than the absence of war. It has to involve ethnic reconciliation, acknowledgment of past injustices, recognition of the need for a political solution, and finally, the creation of an environment that is conducive to human development. The peace process has to involve the society as a whole. Furthermore, the process has to come from the people through dialogues, demonstrations and political participation. This was the stand taken by a small group of Sri Lankans at the Conference for the Promotion of Peace held in Toronto, Canada, in April, 1993. As a participant, I was greatly challenged by Prof. N. Shanmugaratnam's (Agroeconomist, University of Oslo, Norway) presentation on "Obstacles to Peace in Sri Lanka". In his presentation he argued that the obstacles to peace are deeply entrenched in the political system and the society, and that any solution that does not address these deep rooted 'ills' will not be adequate. As a result

of this challenge I have attempted to explore the obstacles to peace in terms of structural and institutionalized sources. This thesis reflects this exploration.

At this point it is necessary to define and explain what I mean by structural and institutionalized sources of ethnic conflict. The structural sources constitute those political processes and political 'institutions' which have become entrenched in the Constitutions and in Sri Lankan society. The structural sources of ethnic conflict, in the Sri Lankan case, are homogenization and majoritarianism. Homogenization, a process started by the British in their quest to 'democratize' Sri Lanka, took the form of the establishment of a unitary state, a parliamentary system of government, universal franchise, a party system and a constitutional process of government. Majoritarianism is interpreted as ethnic majority by those in power. The institutionalized sources, on the other hand, refer to those negative 'processes' that have become the norms in the society. These include communalism, which is defined as negative processes that transform the politics of a multi-ethnic society into a hotbed of competing identities which rely, for their 'ideological' consolidation, on targeting the 'other' as the 'enemy' (Rajni Kothari, 1988)¹, de-secularism - meaning the dismantling of the secular state, and finally, violence, which includes both state and militant terrorism.

In order to understand and eventually demonstrate that the obstacles to peace in Sri Lanka come from her socio-economic and political structures and institutions, one needs to study the ethnic conflict, its roots, its entrenchment in the Sri Lankan polity, and the various attempts taken by successive governments to manage the conflict, if not resolve it. For this purpose, I have chosen to provide a brief survey of the socio-economic and political development of the country. I have also provided a brief

¹ I have used the same definition elsewhere in my thesis.

analytical survey of the colonial structure, for it is important to situate the study in its proper moorings.

This thesis also attempts to demonstrate that ethnicity and ethnic mobilization can be positive forces in a society where other forms of political participation and mobilization are not available. When traditional forms of political participation - such as voting in elections- fail to provide the necessary space for political representation for the society as a whole, alternative forums for participation develop. This has become very evident in most of the less-industrialized countries where new social movements are fulfilling the needs that are not met by traditional political representative forms. The ethnic movements of Sri Lanka are a case in point. In this sense, ethnicity, ethnic consciousness and ethnic identity have become mobilizational forces. Chapter Two attempts to posit ethnicity as a positive force and as a source of strength for the marginalized people. This can be better understood by analyzing the 'place' ethnicity has in the traditional paradigms of participation and development.

In general, it was fashionable for 'modernization' theorists to consider ethnicity as de-stabilizing and potentially a disruptive force. They argued that the 'primordial' tendencies of ethnic consciousness whereby ethnic identities are believed to be formed, work against the 'progress' of a 'civilization'. It was further argued that ethnicity itself is anti-modern and anti-development. Hence it was not uncommon for the early literature on the so-called less-developed countries to cite ethnicity as a cause for underdevelopment. The conventional Marxist paradigm believed that under industrialization and modernization 'parochial' allegiances such as ethnic identity and ethnic consciousness would eventually 'wither away'. Furthermore, the belief in 'linear' progress, where development would be attained through 'stages',² led to the assumption that ethnic identity and ethnic consciousness would be subsumed by such a

² A.F.K. Organski's The Stages of Political Development (1965) is a case in point.

process. It was further argued that political homogenization is the way to achieve this end. Chapter Two attempts to challenge this mode of thinking.

What is ethnicity? Defining ethnicity is a difficult task. Attempts to describe ethnicity either as a 'phenomenon', a 'concept', an 'issue' or as a subject, have not been very successful, for ethnicity is a nebulous 'concept'. Little consensus exists as to what constitutes ethnicity. This is further complicated by using it as a synonym for ethnic identity, ethnic consciousness, and ethnic assertiveness. Furthermore, ethnicity is also used -interchangeably- with race, minority and nationality. Ethnicity or ethnic identity can be both a 'psychological construct' and a 'behavioral phenomenon'. Since ethnic identity involves a 'subjective self-consciousness' of who you are and a claim to status and recognition which results in elite competition (Paul Brass, 1991, 16), defining ethnicity in such terms helps me to explain, a) how ethnic consciousness developed in the Tamil and Sinhala communities and b) why it has assumed the present 'ethno-nationalist' proportions.

Ethnicity, at a general level, is expressed as, to quote Rajni Kothari (1990), "assertion of cultures, communal upsurges, revival of religions, voices and movements of marginalized peoples, regions and nationalities" (191).³ Ethnicity is a dynamic concept which assumes different 'boundaries' in different situations. Ethnicity, in its original form, is seen and mostly accepted as a normal manifestation of diversity and differences. When these normal manifestations are 'politicized' -a process which may facilitate ethnicity to become a latent force to assume militant proportions such as communalism and racism, assertion of ethnic identities become negative forces. These negative forces include communal riots, armed struggle and ethnic cleansing.

³ I have used this same quote elsewhere in my thesis [Chapter 4]. I find Kothari's 'explanation' of manifestations of ethnicity very useful in my discussion of Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, for it includes a broad spectrum of 'expressions' as ethnic manifestations.

Is ethnicity a source of conflict in the society or can it become a source of strength?⁴ As discussed earlier, ethnicity, according to conventional thinking, is held as a 'disruptive' force, which not only becomes an obstacle to 'modernization', but also threatens the survival of a 'nation-state'. Furthermore, the 'primordial' nature of ethnicity, the 'modernists and developmentalists' predicted, would lead more to conflict than provide a basis for 'strength'.

If one could argue that the sources of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict lie in such thinking, then one could also posit the idea that the persistence of ethnic conflict results from the same. Yet, the 'attempts' taken by various 'actors' to either solve the conflict or to suggest ways for solving it did not reflect such thinking. The attempts to resolve the conflict were neither holistic nor participatory. They did not include the people, the Sinhalese, the Tamils, the Moors, or the Indian Tamils, rather the Pacts and Peace-Accord focused on those in power. Furthermore, the solutions did not consider the structural and institutionalized sources of ethnicity that have become the obstacles to peace in Sri Lanka.

As in all such cases, the question of the origin of the ethnic conflict has led to much confusion. On the one hand, there are those who hold that enmity between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils has existed for the past 2,000 years. Others argue that the ethnic conflict originated in the 1970s when the MEP [People's United Front] government sought to subdue the Tamils by cutting down their ratio of university admissions.⁵ Yet another group argues that the conflict is a result of the 'divide and rule' policy of the colonial masters- the British. One can also look for the roots of the conflict in the emerging ethnic consciousness of both Sinhala and Tamil groups in the 19th century. A brief survey of the various theories about the Sri Lankan

⁴ The phrases 'source of strength' and 'source of conflict' are derived from the title of Milton Yinger's book, Ethnicity : source of strength? source of conflict?, 1994.

⁵ The government introduced a quota system in 1973 under which admissions were given on the basis of region and ethnicity, instead of merit.

conflict shows that there is no consensus regarding the roots of the conflict. For the purposes of this thesis, I consider the introduction of self government as the starting point.⁶

From independence(1948) until 1983, the history of Sri Lanka had also been a history of endless political wrangling, negotiations and bargaining. It is also a history of no compromise and institutional and structural obstacles, which eventually became embedded in Sri Lankan political society. Since 1983, the politics of Sri Lanka has taken a path of militancy, violence and terrorism(both state and militant), which seems irreversible. The politics of accommodation and bargaining has been replaced by demands for a separate state and armed conflict.

As a Tamil hailing from Jaffna, which is considered the birth place of Tamil nationalism, militancy and separatism, I believe that peace in Sri Lanka can become a reality only when it involves the people. Having lived the better part of my life amidst conditions of war, I have become convinced that the traditional forms of conflict resolution will not be appropriate in the Sri Lankan case.

As a Tamil, I have witnessed the gradual decay of a society⁷ that has chosen war over peace. War has not only become the means to an end, it has also incorporated elements of 'heroism', pride in one's identity, and Tamil rituals that encourage war. Hence, the cyanide capsules on the necks of LTTE cadre are symbolic of their pledge to 'fight unto death' and of their resolution to die rather than be captured by the enemy. In this way, suicide has become a form of heroism. The numerous 'monuments' erected to honor the dead soldiers and the observance of a 'National

⁶ Various scholars have given different interpretations about the origin of Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. Serena Tennakoon(1987), Sri Lanka's Ethnic Problem(1984), Kumari Jayawardena(1990), Satchi Ponnambalam(1983), Radhika Coomaraswamy(1987) and Stanley J. Tambiah(1986) provide some of these interpretations.

⁷ Here and in later discussions, when making observations, I have chosen to refer to Tamil society as a whole. It is my position that the Tamil people as a whole are collectively responsible for the growth of 'narrow-nationalism' and political exclusivism in the society. 'Narrow-nationalism' here is used to describe the militants' politics of ethnic cleansing in the early 1990s.

Heroes Day' are some of the ways that are used to socialize Tamils in the North to accept 'war' as a way of life.

My experience as a teacher at the University of Jaffna made me realize how communalism, narrow-nationalism and violence has become deeply entrenched in the polity. Furthermore, my involvement with the University Teachers for Human Rights, convinced me that peace is possible only when conditions of war are either eliminated or dismantled. In my attempts to collect first hand reports on human rights violations - committed by both Sri Lankan security forces and the militants- I came to understand why ethnic affiliations and kinship take precedence over human lives and generally accepted human values. In addition to that, the Tamils' acceptance of death as a punitive action for seemingly 'insignificant' crimes⁸ and the justification of such punishments revealed how ingrained violence has become in everyday practice.

In the South, the Sinhalese people's frequent resort to communal riots as 'pay-backs' for Sinhalese soldiers who were casualties in the war in the North and East, and the security forces' indiscriminate arrests and killing of Tamil civilians in the South, show us that 'hatred' and communalism have become deadly forces in the country. In such a situation, traditional forms of resolution are not adequate to resolve the conflict. Furthermore, the Sinhalese people's seemingly 'adamant' beliefs that Sri Lanka is for the Sinhalese and attempts at devolution of power or separation of the country is also an attempt at 'eradicating' the Sinhalese as a nation reveals that mere structural solutions will not work. An example could be seen in the rejection of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord⁹ and the political turmoil that resulted in the death and/or

⁸Killings of 'undesirable elements' - a category that included 'pick-pockets', thieves, and human rights activists- started to increase in the mid-1980s. The bodies of those killed were left in the market squares and main traffic intersections, usually with a 'description' of their 'misdeeds', for the public to see. Most of these killings came to be accepted by the public as necessary in the fight for freedom.

⁹The infamous Indo-Lanka Peace Accord of 1987 is an excellent illustration of 'imposed' peace. The Indian Government, mainly through sheer intimidation, tried to impose a solution to the conflict. This Accord was met with resistance from both Sinhalese and Tamils. The Janata Vimukthi Peramuna[People's Liberation Front], a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movement, was one of the most bitter opponents of the Accord.

disappearance of approximately 65,000 civilians in the South. This type of 'collective psyche' needs to unlearn ethnic hatred and chauvinism. This unlearning process cannot be brought through structural solutions.

In such a situation it is futile to argue that peace can be 'imposed'. The four traditional conflict resolution models discussed in Chapter 2 cannot be adequately applied to the Sri Lankan case. These resolution models - partition, ethnic democracy, consociational democracy and liberal democracy - by the very nature of their assumptions, are limited in their scope and therefore inapplicable to the Sri Lankan situation. Peace has to involve the people as a whole. It can be achieved only through a people's movement for peace, where discourses on the obstacles and sources of the conflict can be carried out in a participatory manner. Furthermore, the attainment of peace has to involve a process in which people, regardless of ethnicity, class or religion, could participate.

This thesis attempts to provide an interpretation of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. This interpretation is, by no means, devoid of any biases. My position and experience as a Tamil has influenced my analysis. Furthermore, this thesis does not claim to provide the answer for all the other questions - the future of the Muslims, the fate of the people of Indian origin, the 'how's' of de-institutionalization, and the economic future of the country are some of these questions that still need to be explored.

My discussion of the ethnic conflict and the alternative I have proposed as a resolution model is not conclusive. In my discussion of ethnic identities, I have not discussed what constitutes the Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim identity. Such a discussion will have to be done on an inter-disciplinary basis, which would incorporate a discourse on the Aryan, Dravidian identities. Furthermore, I have also tried to stay away from the usual 'who came first' and 'who started the conflict' type of questions, which more often than not, has led to more confusions than clarity.

The thesis begins with a general overview of theories of ethnicity, ethnic conflict and conflict resolution models. Is ethnicity a source of strength to the society or a source of conflict? When considering resolution to ethnic conflicts, should the resolution models consider ethnicity as a negative force? Or should they consider ethnicity as a positive force that could facilitate greater mobilization and participation of the society?

Chapter 2

Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Some Resolution Models for Consideration

In this thesis, the author wishes to demonstrate that peace in Sri Lanka cannot be 'attained' under the existing political structures and institutions. An examination of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and the continuous attempts taken towards 'achieving' peace reveals to us that peace will remain an utopia as long as the premises for the 'promotion' of peace remain unchanged. The thesis further attempts to argue that peace, which means more than the mere absence of war, can only be made a reality through a people's movement.

The theoretical basis for my argument comes from two fronts. On the one hand, the lack of acceptance of ethnicity as a positive phenomenon in social science has resulted in inapplicable resolution models for ethnic conflict. The second 'front' of my argument comes from the body of new social movement theory, which focuses chiefly on people and their efforts at achievement -be it peace, development or resistance to development. For this purpose, I have undertaken a survey of some of the literature on ethnicity, and its overlapping concepts, and a sample of resolution models in this chapter. The underlying argument for this survey posits ethnicity as a positive phenomenon and as a source of strength for the people.

Setting the Theoretical Stage

The term "ethnic" is one of the vaguest known to sociology. We use it here merely to designate a state of fact, going in no sense into the question of explaining the fact(Vilfredo Pareto, 1963,1837) .*

* As cited by Michael Hechter, 1974, 1151.

The study of ethnicity and ethnic conflict has been one of the most fascinating and challenging subjects in social science. Attempts have been made, time and again, to ground the examination of ethnicity in a theoretical framework. Sociologists and political scientists have tried to explain ethnicity and ethnic conflicts and suggest various alternatives as solutions to ethnic conflicts. An analytical survey of the literature on ethnicity shows that the concept, phenomenon or issue of ethnicity cannot be grounded in one theoretical framework. Michael Hechter aptly sums up this 'frustration' when he states that "in the first place, there is no standard definition of ethnicity, let alone much agreement on its explanation"(Michael Hechter, 1974,1151). However, for ethnic conflict and conflict resolution, attempts to explain and prescribe models and solutions have been more fruitful. The objective of this chapter is to critically analyze the validity and adequacy of the dominant conflict resolution models proposed by conflict resolution theorists. This is fulfilled by:(a) a critical analysis of the theories of ethnicity and, (b) an analysis of the various models of ethnic conflict resolution and their basic assumptions.

2.1 Ethnicity

Ethnicity has been considered as a concept, a phenomenon and/or an issue by various social scientists. It was assumed by many to be a "middle class pathology" and described as "group identity"(Dov Ronen, 1986, 2). Some other scholars described ethnicity as "a type of cultural segmentation that may also intersect class and territorial segmentation"(Robert J. Thompson and Joseph R. Rudolph Jr., 1986, 32). The purpose of this section is three-fold: 1) to provide a brief background of how the concept of ethnicity has developed in the field of social science, 2) to understand the main approaches adopted in the study of ethnicity and, 3) to provide some definitions of ethnicity and contrast it with other overlapping concepts. To achieve this end,

section 2.1(a) deals with tracing the roots, section 2.1(b) discusses the possibility of finding a useful approach and section 2.3(c) deals with various overlapping concepts.

2.1a. Tracing the Roots

Ethnicity, as a concept and phenomenon, has enjoyed a sudden resurgence in social science literature since the late 1960s, and early 1970s. According to Thompson and Ronen(1986), this resurgence was the result of a reaction to the emergence of ethnic movements and ethnic nationalism in the industrialized world (5). Hence, Walker Connor(1967 and 1972) in his seminal articles, focused on ethno-nationalism in the industrialized Western hemisphere, and Milton J. Esman's Ethnic Conflict in the Western World (1975) was entirely devoted to the examination of "the reinvigoration of communal and ethnic solidarities and their emergence in recent years as important political movements in the industrialized and affluent societies of Western Europe and Canada"(11). Cynthia Enloe's Ethnic Conflict and Political Development (1973), though it attempts to deviate from this trend, nevertheless devotes major sections to the examination of the Western rather than the non-Western experience. While one agrees that ethnicity was not a new term, nor was the phenomenon new to academia, the terms used to describe ethnicity prior to 1960s were different.¹⁰

The sources for the re-emergence of 'ethnicity' in the 1960s more or less determined and defined the nature and terms of future academic work in this field. During this period, the political climate-international as well as domestic-of the Western world was very much influenced by East-West relations. The new racial

¹⁰It can be argued that considerable confusion existed in the field of social science with regards to labels. Issues of group identity and cultural and religious diversity were regarded as issues of nationalism, not as issues of ethnicity(I shall discuss both concepts- nationalism and ethnicity- later on in this chapter). This is very evident in Karl Deutsch's Nationalism and Social Communication : An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality(1953) and Charles Tilly's The Formation of National States in Western Europe (1975).

assertiveness of Afro-Americans, resurgent ethnic assertions of the Scots and Welsh in Britain, Croats and Macedonians in the former Yugoslavia, Quebecois in Canada and Basques and Catalans in Spain increased dramatically during the 1960s. The intensity of these ethnic assertions, the scope of their demands, and the base of their popular support was enough to 'annoy' governments and established political parties. The governments were forced to rethink certain assumptions about national integration, state growth and economic growth. As Esman notes, "rapid economic growth, the spread of state-provided welfare services and expanded educational opportunities have undermined the ideologies of class conflict and of religious authority that for three generations oriented much of the political organization and activity in industrialized countries"(Esman, 1975, 11-12). He goes on to say that this loss has been reinforced by "erosion of the once powerful ideologies of liberal individualism and state associated nationalism, which together illegitimized ethnic particularism and relegated it to the status of backwardness and subversiveness"(12).

An overview of the literature on ethnicity in the 1960s shows that the common tendency at that time was to view ethnicity as a destabilizing, potentially revolutionary force that threatened to disintegrate nation states or at least to disrupt their smooth functioning. Walker Connor(1972),in his seminal article "Nation Building or Nation Destroying?" argues that "...the leading theoreticians of "nation-building" have tended to slight, if not totally ignore, the problems associated with ethnic diversity"(319). He goes on to provide a representative sample of ten scholarly works of the literature on intergration theory where ethnicity was not even mentioned in a "...section, chapter, or major subheading...."(319). It is interesting to note that Connor's sample includes all the major literature on state and nation-building.¹¹ Connor continues his criticism of

¹¹Walker Connor's representative sample of literature is:

1]Gabriel Almond and James S. Coleman, The Politics of Developing Areas(Princeton,1960);2]Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach(Boston,1966);3]Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture (Boston,1963);

this literature and reiterates, "the slighting of ethnicity is further evidenced by the indices" of the volumes(320). He goes on to show that, "six of the ten show not a single passing reference to ethnic groups, ethnicity, or minorities"(320).

The 1960s saw the beginning of a new era in the study of ethnic politics, where ethnicity was no longer regarded as a term for a "folkloric or "primordial" phenomenon, the manifestations of local tribal feelings", but as a term applied to a potent political force (Thompson and Ronen, 4). Furthermore, it was asserted that ethnicity was a "disruptive form of national awakening"(4), which supposedly hindered the process of national integration and consolidation.¹² In discussions of national integration, *mobilization*, *political party formation* and *nationalities* became central terms. An obvious result of such 'simple' theorizing was the assumption that ethnicity is a rival to the concept of nation, which was considered the legitimate entity. This is very evident in Anthony Smith's Theories Of Nationalism (1983) where he argues that,

...the core nationalist *doctrine* is constructed from a few far reaching propositions: 1. Humanity is naturally divided into nations;... 3. The source of all political power is the nation, the whole collectivity; 4. For freedom and self-realization, men must identify with a nation;... 6. Loyalty to the nation overrides other loyalties; 7. The primary condition of global freedom and harmony is the strengthening of the nation-state (20-21).

Hence, the nation becomes the legitimate entity, to which ethnic loyalties and identities must defer. Ethnicity, ethnic groups, ethnic loyalties etc., are considered as

4]David Apter, The Politics of Modernization(Chicago,1965);5] Willard A. Beving and George O. Totten, eds., Developing Nations: Quest for a Model (New York,1970);6] Karl W. Deutsch and William Foltz, eds., Nation Building (New York, 1966);7]Jason Finkle and Richard Cable, eds., Political Development and Social Change (New York, 1966);8]Philip E. Jacob and James V. Toscano, eds., The Integration of Political Communities(Philadelphia,1964); 9]Lucien Pye, ed., Communications and Political Development (Princeton, 1963); and 10]Lucien Pye, Aspects of Political Development (Boston,1966).

¹²According to bulk of the literature on the process of nation-building and national integration, such a process inevitably meant 'modernization'.

competitors to the nation-state. Such an analysis leads to the inevitable conclusion that ethnicity emerges only as a result of the failure of national integration.

Both Marxism and liberalism tended to view ethnicity as disruptive and destabilizing. Crawford Young in The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism affirms that, "both camps shared the secular faith in the idea of progress" (Crawford Young, 1993, 3). Can the analysis of ethnicity be carried out on an ideological basis? Since some dominant elements of Marxism and liberalism -such as the notions of progress and linear stages of development- lead them to consider ethnic assertiveness as a potentially disruptive force, an ideologically based analysis becomes limited in its scope. Rather, the analysis should address the conditions under which ethnicity is considered a source of conflict, i.e. whether ethnic assertiveness becomes the basis for conflicts within the society, or a source of strength, where the same assertiveness could lead to greater mobilization of the people and result in meaningful participation of the people in the political process of a given society. The following section attempts to define and explain ethnicity.

2.1b.Ethnicity: In Search Of A Useful Approach

Before one goes into the discussion the question posits, one needs to define and draw the boundaries of what ethnicity is and what it is not. The boundaries of things which are of interest to different people are often drawn in different ways. Theoretical perspectives, ideologies, and the data being examined all affect the process of definition. This is especially true in the social sciences, where the subject to be studied is not as palpable or cut and dried as one would like it to be.

Defining ethnicity has been one of the biggest challenges faced by social scientists. In an effort to draw the 'lines' of ethnicity, attempts have been made to

associate it with nationalism, primordialism and/or tribalism. Then, how and where shall we draw the line, defining 'here's ethnicity'?

Ethnicity has been 'equated' to and has been used as a synonym for ethnic groups or ethnic nationalism. This is evident in Thompson and Ronen's Ethnicity, Politics and Development (1986), where Ronen, in his attempts to differentiate ethnicity from nation, uses "ethnicity, ethnic groups, ethnic loyalties, ethnic regions and/or ethnic nationalisms....." as if the terms mean one and the same thing⁽⁴⁾.¹³

In the discussion of ethnicity, two approaches have gained validity over the years. The essence of ethnicity, its origins, underlying properties, and function in human affairs has been the focus of discussion for both the *primordialist and instrumentalist / structuralist / circumstantialist* theories of ethnicity.¹⁴ Primordialists hold that ethnicity as a collective identity is so deeply rooted in historical experience that it should properly be treated as a given in human relations. Within the primordialist camp, a few argue that ethnicity is at root a biological phenomenon, an expression of the powerful drive to extend genetic endowments into future generations.¹⁵ Others

¹³There are atleast two instances(pages 4 and 7) where Ronen uses ethnicity as a synonym for ethnic groups etc. One such instance can be seen from the following quotation: "Ethnicity, ethnic groups, ethnic loyalties, ethnic regions, and/or ethnic nationalisms compete, as it were, with a full-scale, recognized actor in the international scene; ethnicity, in whatever form, competes with an entity, the nation-state, which conceptually is an integral part of modernity"(Thompson and Ronen, 1986, 4).

¹⁴In their attempts to explain ethnicity and its persistence, various social scientists have used different approaches. These approaches can be generally categorized into two: primordialism and instrumentalism. The instrumentalist approach is also described as *structuralist, circumstantialist, situational, and mobilizationist*. For a concise account of these two approaches see James McKay's "An exploratory synthesis of primordial and mobilizationist approaches to ethnic phenomena", Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 5, No. 4, Oct. 1982, pp. 395-420.

¹⁵A main advocate of this socio-biological approach is Pierre Van den Berghe. See The Ethnic Phenomenon (New York, 1981) for a detailed discussion. In order to prove that the primordialist theory of ethnicity lacks conviction without the sociobiological approach, Van den Berghe argued, "that the conventional primordialist position on ethnicity was vulnerable on two scores: 1.It generally stopped at asserting the fundamental nature of ethnic sentiment without suggesting any explanation of why that should be the case....What kind of mysterious and suspicious force was this "voice of blood" that moved people to tribalism, racism and ethnic intolerance? 2.If ethnicity was primordial, then was it not also ineluctable and immutable? Yet, patently, ethnic sentiments waxed and waned according to circumstances. How is all this circumstantial fluidity reconcilable with the primordialist position?"(pp. 17-18).

contend that as individuals are born and socialized into an ethnic community, they imbibe from their earliest experiences the unique identity, collective memories, language, and customs of their people.¹⁶ Hence, individuals learn "the critical distinction between us, the insiders, and them, the outsiders -who are at best different, at worst (and often) hostile"(Esman, 1994, 10).¹⁷ Implied in this perspective is the notion that ethnic ties are ends in themselves, as an intimate part of identity. In this sense, ethnic ties are persistent and resistant to the homogenization process predicted by convergence and modernization theories (Saad Z. Nagi, 1992, 308).

Instrumentalists, on the other hand, allege that ethnicity is a behavioral phenomenon and that ethnic group solidarity is a result of certain social circumstances, both internal and external. Furthermore, instrumentalists argue that ethnicity is not a historical given at all.¹⁸ They argue that ethnicity is a highly adaptive and malleable phenomenon. The nature of ethnicity is such that it can adapt to situations and can expand or contract given enough political space. In effect, according to instrumentalists, ethnicity is a dynamic phenomenon, "...not a fixed and immutable element of social and political relationships"(Esman, 1994, 11). Furthermore, some instrumentalists argue that ethnicity is primarily a practical resource that individuals and groups deploy opportunistically to promote their more basic needs. These basic needs vary from security needs to economic ones(11). Some instrumentalists, especially the rational choice theorists[those who argue that individuals always seek to maximize profit and hence make decisions based on reason and not on 'emotions'] contend that these ethnic groups may even discard ethnic affiliations when alternatives

¹⁶See Milton J. Esman, Ethnic Politics,(Ithaca, 1994), and Richard H. Thompson, Theories of Ethnicity, (New York, 1989) for a critical appraisal of primordialist approach. Esman provides a critical survey of the literature, while Thompson provides a critical analysis of some of the major works [Edward Shils, Clifford Geertz and Pierre Van den Berghe to cite a few] on ethnicity.

¹⁷ Researchers who have used the primordial approach include, for example, Isaacs (1974), Connor (1967 and 1972) and Smith (1983).

¹⁸Some advocates of the instrumentalist approach are: Joseph Rothschild(1981), Cynthia H. Enloe (1973), Crawford Young(1993), Paul R. Brass(1985) and Michael Banton(1986).

affiliations promise a better bargain.¹⁹ This approach helps to explain the fluctuations in intensity of the ethnic phenomenon.

The instrumentalist perspective played an important part in restoring ethnicity to the social science agenda. As Young argues, the "paradigmatic preoccupation with nationalism" in Less Industrialized World(Third World) studies, and the exclusion of ethnicity from such studies, had relegated ethnicity to the role of an "artifact of traditionality and backwardness, an inanimate 'obstacle' to national integration"(Young, 1993, 22). According to Young(1993) and Esman(1994), instrumentalists suggested how recognition could be accorded to ethnicity in a way that made it compatible with influential paradigms. Hence, as Young claims, "structural-functionalists could add communal groups as one additional entry to the roster of "input" groupings on their organic charts of 'political systems'"(22). As for the Marxists, the stress upon material factors in instrumental activation of cultural solidarity offered an analytical bridge to class theory. Furthermore, the Marxists contended that material and class values would prevail over ethnic ties. Thus, according to instrumentalists, ethnicity is an ideology that elites construct and deconstruct for opportunistic reasons or a set of myths calculated to mobilize mass support for the economic goals of ambitious minorities(Esman 1994, Richard H. Thompson, 1989, Young, 1993, and Thompson and Ronen, 1986).

Are these two approaches mutually exclusive? If ethnic attachments are primordial, they cannot be circumstantial, and if they are circumstantial, they cannot be primordial. Taken individually, do the approaches sufficiently explain ethnicity? The primordialist approach a) does not sufficiently explain variations in rates of conflict experienced by the same populations (Susan Olzak, 1992) and, b) does not

¹⁹Of the rational choice theorists, Michael Banton's analysis presents the most clear explanations. See Michael Banton's "Ethnic Bargaining" in Ethnicity, Politics and Development, eds., Thompson and Ronen, (1986).

account for ethnic identity shifts (when members cross over boundaries). The instrumentalist approach does not account for the content of ethnicity. It is appropriate to sum up the criticisms of these two approaches with George M. Scott, Jr., (1990) and Jack David Eller and Reed M. Coughlan (1993)'s summation. George M. Scott, Jr., maintains that without primordialism "we would have people acting.....without passion, in a wholly sober, rational manner" (pp. 166-167) and Eller and Reed, in their study of the "Poverty of Primordialism" argue that the term itself "is unsociological, unanalytical and vacuous" and they go on to suggest "dropping it from the sociological lexicon" (183).

These two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Attempts have been made to combine both. James McKay, in his discussion of primordialism and mobilizationalism, suggested a model [called a matrix model] which combined both approaches. He concluded that " whereas scholars have tended to view these two perspectives as mutually exclusive aspects of ethnic phenomena, I have argued that they are interrelated ethnic manifestations which combine in varying degrees depending on the situation" (413). Nevertheless, this model deals mainly with empirical studies describing ethnic phenomena and does not adequately explain persisting ethnic phenomena. As Scott (1990) argues, McKay's model, instead of actually attempting to link the primordial and circumstantial approaches causally to explain how they influence one another, only highlights which particular combination of the two manifestations exists in any given empirical situation of ethnic solidarity (149). To quote McKay's own words, "this matrix model does not explain *why* ethnic collectivities emerge, persist or disappear; it only describes *what* combinations of interests they exhibit" (James McKay, 1982, 408).

Another attempt was made by Spicer(1971).²⁰ He proposed an oppositional approach to study persisting ethnicity. Spicer argues that all cases of persistent ethnic identity can be explained by the opposition they faced. To quote Spicer,

the greater the opposition-economic, political, social, religious or some combination thereof-perceived by an ethnic group, the greater the degree to which its historical sense of distinctiveness will be aroused, and hence the greater its solidarity or the more intense its movement towards redress (As cited by Scott, 1990, 152).

Though Spicer's analysis provides a partial insight into the ethnic consciousness, it is inadequate in certain ways. His analysis attempts to explain persistent ethnic consciousness and does not explain intermittent ethnic consciousness.

Both models discussed above show us the difficulty of explaining the ethnic phenomenon fully. Ethnic politics becomes meaningful only in a relational framework. The internal 'we' must be distinguished from the external 'they'. Esman(1994) argues that when "...no relevant others exist, the need for solidarity disappears and society fragments on the basis of internal differences"(13). The 'common enemy' syndrome becomes the mobilizing and uniting force of an ethnic community. "Ethnicity.." is thus "...shaped by environment, by the threats, oppositions and opportunities it affords"(13). Hence, one could argue that the real behaviour of ethnic communities cannot be explained using only the 'primordial givens' and 'instrumental opportunism'. This is typified in the Sri Lankan case. As will be discussed in the succeeding chapters, Sri Lankan politics is the result of political and ethnic bargaining and accommodation. The internal 'us' against the external 'them' phenomenon developed as a result of the failure of the accommodative and bargaining politics carried out by the elite. When that type of politics failed, the elite, on both sides, resolved to politicize ethnicity. This is not to deny the fact that the Sri Lankan polity was already fragmented along ethnic lines. However, the resurgence

²⁰In what follows I am using George M.Scott, Jr.'s evaluation of Spicer's oppositional approach.

of ethnicity in the post-colonial era exemplifies both the instrumentalist and primordialist theories of ethnicity. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

The next section briefly provides some definitions of ethnicity and some selected overlapping concepts.

2.1c. Ethnicity and Some Overlapping Concepts

"Ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity.." thus Paul R. Brass argues in his attempts to define ethnicity and continues, "...which has been defined by De Vos as consisting of the 'subjective, symbolic or emblematic use' by a 'group of people....of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups'.." (Paul R. Brass, 1991, 19). Brass argues that "ethnicity or ethnic identity also involves, in addition to subjective self consciousness, a claim to status and recognition....". He goes on to explain that this identity is formed by a "process created in the dynamics of elite competition within the boundaries determined by political and economic realities"(16). Later he sums up the argument by stating, "ethnicity is to ethnic category what class consciousness is to class"(19).

Milton J. Yinger, another instrumentalist, seems to take a broader view. According to Yinger, ethnicity is usually conceptualized as a common origin or culture resulting from shared activities and identity based on some mixture of language, religion, race and/or ancestry (Yinger, 1994, pp. 3-4). Yinger's definition is limited in that it does not differentiate between 'common origin' and 'culture' and fails to clarify what can be categorized as shared activities.

Cynthia Enloe's definition and explanation of the concept attempts to provide a slightly different perspective. She states that "ethnicity has both a communal and personal dimension" (Cynthia H. Enloe, 1973, 15). She goes on to explain that "it

refers to a peculiar bond among persons that causes them to consider themselves a group distinguishable from others"(15). According to Enloe, "the content of the bond is shared culture"(15). Hence ethnicity becomes synonymous with culture. Michael Hechter successfully sums up this perspective when he tries to trace the roots of ethnic change and ethnicity (Michael Hechter, 1974, 1151-3).He maintains that, "every society has observable customs, styles of life, and institutions-in short, a distinctive set of cultural forms- through which meanings are ascribed, goals are enumerated, and social life is regulated"(1152). Furthermore, he continues "the totality of these cultural forms is often considered to make up the "ethnicity" of a particular group" and that "in this conception, ethnicity becomes indistinguishable from culture" [emphasis added](1152).

Yet, one needs to be careful not to confuse culture with ethnicity. Such theorizing would eventually deny ethnicity the political 'clout' it needs to become institutionalized, with clear separating boundaries and a strong ideology. In this regard, I tend to agree with Hechter's proposition: "let culture refer to a set of observable behaviors which occur independent of a group's relationship to the means of production and exchange", and "....let ethnicity refer to the sentiments which bind individuals into solidarity groups on some cultural basis"(1152). Thus, in this regard, ethnicity 'alludes' to the quality of relations existing between individuals who share certain cultural behaviours.

Hence, it is clear that marking the boundaries of ethnicity is a rather complicated and convoluted process. For the purposes of my thesis, I will define ethnicity in terms of ethnic identity. Defining ethnicity in terms of ethnic identity will help to combine both primordialist and instrumentalist approaches. Ethnic identity is both a psychological construct and a behavioral phenomenon. As Esman points out, "ethnic identity is the set of meanings that individuals impute to their membership in an ethnic community, including those attributes that bind them to that collectivity and that

distinguish it from others in their relevant environment"(Esman, 1994, 27). It is also a 'psychological construct' that can evoke powerful emotional responses and convey strong elements of continuity. Yet, as Esman points out, "its properties can shift to accommodate changing threats and opportunities"(27). Since ethnic identity involves 'subjective self-consciousness' and a claim to status and recognition and, according to Brass, the process of creating identities involves elite competition(Brass, 1991, 16), this interpretation becomes an appropriate tool for my analysis.

At this point, it is necessary to explain some of the overlapping concepts of ethnicity. As I have pointed out elsewhere, ethnicity is considered as a synonym for nationalism, race, minority and/or ethnic group.

Anthony D. Smith argues that over the last twenty years, there has been a "...growing convergence of two fields, which had been formerly treated as separate: the study of ethnicity and ethnic community, and the analysis of national identity and nationalism"(Smith, 1992, 1). Furthermore, he continues that ethnicity and ethnic community had been "largely the preserve of anthropologists and social psychologists, and had focused on small communities, often in Third World areas"(1), whereas nationalism "had been the province of historians, for whom the ideology (and ethics) of nationalism was paramount"(1).

The need to combine ethnicity and nationalism in theory became more urgent in recent years, especially after the resurgence of 'ethnic nationalism' in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe. Coupled with this is the attention given to the impact of the state on ethnicity and ethnic group formation.

What is nationalism? Nationalism is one of the most powerful forces in the modern world. As an ideology and movement, nationalism exerted a strong influence in the American and French Revolutions. It was considered as a "doctrine of popular freedom and sovereignty"(John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, 1994, 4). The central themes of nationalism were *autonomy, unity and identity*. It is also argued that,

almost all the nationalist movements in the former colonies started with the intellectual elite and had subsequently fanned out to include the professional classes, and the broader society. Hence one could say that nationalism is an 'inter-class' and populist movement.

Milton J. Esman provides a simple, yet workable definition of nationalism. According to him, "*nationalism* is the ideology that proclaims the distinctiveness of a particular people and their right to self-rule in their homeland"(Esman, 1994, 28). He goes on to argue that "as an expression of ethnic solidarity, nationalism tends to glorify a people's history, accomplishments, and aspirations; to preach the obligation of loyalty to the community, its institutions and symbols; and to warn against external threats"(28).

The second overlapping concept in the discussion of ethnicity is race. Is racial identity different from ethnic identity? If so, how? Some scholars see racial and ethnic lines as critically different from each other. Some others believe that we should dispense with the term *race* entirely, arguing that it has too many negative connotations to be of any scientific value. The major difference between race and ethnicity, is that race is defined along biological lines whereas ethnicity incorporates identity and culture. Yet, as Yinger(1994) warns us, race as a strictly biological concept has no value in the theory of ethnicity(18). Nevertheless, race has, in many cases, along with language, religion, and ancestral homeland, helped to mark the boundaries of an ethnic group(20). The racial homogeneity within an ethnic group can range from nearly complete to slight(20). Hence, as Yinger concludes, "whatever the degree of homogeneity, the race factor helps to define an ethnic boundary only if it is correlated with ancestral culture or with lingual or religious differences"(20).

A third overlapping concept in the discussion of ethnic group is minority. The United Nations Subcommission on Prevention and Protection of Minorities defines minority groups as "those non dominant groups in a population that possess and wish

to preserve stable ethnic, religious or linguistic traditions or characteristics markedly different from those of the rest of the population"(As quoted by Yinger, 1994, 21).

This is extended by Louis Wirth's definition where he states:

We may define a minority as a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from others in the society in which they live for differential treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination (As cited by Yinger, 1994, 21).

Much of the literature on ethnicity is focused on the study of discrimination(Yinger, 1994 and Esman, 1994). This discrimination, can be either real or perceived, and can range from the absence of full cultural freedom to the absence of basic human rights. Although a discussion of minorities usually includes ethnic elements, one cannot substitute minority for ethnic group. Generally, in all societies, the ethnic groups are ranked - either as a majority or a minority- according to their numerical strengths. Because of the ranked ethnic orders, the majority or dominant group in a multi-ethnic state invariably represents an ethnic group. Thus, the Sinhalese, as a social group, are both dominant and ethnic in nature, and the Tamil ethnic group is a minority. On the other hand, until recently, the Whites or Afrikaners in South Africa dominated the State, even though they were a minority in the country. At this point one needs to be reminded of the fact that "a minority may mobilize or invent the rudiments of ethnicity to oppose discrimination"(Yinger, 1994, 22). Thus, minority status can lead to ethnicity as well as the other way around.

The next section deals with the question of whether ethnicity should be regarded as a source of conflict or a source of strength.

2.2 Ethnicity: A Source Of Conflict Or A Source Of Strength?

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the majority of literature on ethnicity considered it a 'destabilizing and disruptive' force. Political scientists considered ethnicity a nation destroyer and the nemesis of the nation-state. The anthropologists focused on the 'primordial' nature of ethnicity and tried to explain the resurgence of ethno-nationalism and collective mobilization of native peoples in the former colonial countries as a product of primitive ascriptions. Ethnicity was also considered a source of anarchic violence.

The liberal theory of progress, dominant in the West for nearly three centuries, regards the individual as the main unit of social value and predicts that progress will inevitably result in the break down of 'artificial barriers' which are based on parochial, ascriptive allegiances. Hence, in the emergent society, freed from ascriptive constraints, people would participate and compete as self-determining individuals valued and rewarded according to their individual contributions to the society (Esman, 1994). Thus, it was argued, 'progress' [later identified as modernization or development] would even the playing field for all, regardless of race, creed and/or ethnicity. In such a society, ethnicity would remain only as 'nostalgic vestiges' of an earlier and less 'enlightened' period of history. Furthermore, classical liberals argued that in this 'modernized' society, new and 'rational' allegiances—such as professional associations, political parties, interest groups, labor unions etc.—would supplant ethnic groups and other status groups based on 'parochial' allegiances (11-12). Hence it was maintained that, "...in the wake of economic development and nation-building, ascriptive loyalties would lose their social function and gradually wither away" (12).²¹

²¹Most of the early advocates of classical liberalism believed that ethnicity will lose force to progress or development. This was the standard point of departure in most of the early literature on ethnicity. Some examples are: Talcott Parsons, "Some Theoretical Considerations on the Nature and Trends of Change of Ethnicity," in Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, eds., Ethnicity: Theory and Experience

As for the opposite camp-the 'official' Marxist position anticipated the inevitable triumph of socialism over all 'parochial' allegiances(Esman, 1994). The eventual demise of ethnicity in the face of working class solidarity was accepted as a given. It was argued that the triumph of socialism would eliminate economic exploitation, which is considered the principal cause of antagonistic social conflict. It was also believed that the advance of 'proletarian internationalism' would sweep away all other solidarities, parochial or otherwise.²² While one could argue that the policies of the former USSR concerning ethnic consciousness indicate the acceptance of the reality of prevailing ethnic consciousness, they were only temporary in nature. They were put in place only to facilitate the development of socialism.

These views, despite their dominance in social theory, did not go unchallenged. An alternative paradigm has been proposed by the new social movement theorists, who argue that ethnicity is a positive phenomenon. According to them, ethnic movements provide alternative forms of participation to those who are otherwise 'ignored' by main stream politics. This is especially evident when studying the politics of the Less Industrialized World. The failure of the transplanted liberal democratic and/or Marxist political systems has created a 'participation' vacuum in most of the Less Industrialized countries. This vacuum can only be filled by extra-legal institutions which provide alternative channels for participation. New social movement theorists like Gail Omvedt(1993), Ponna Wignarajah(1993), Arturo Escobar(1992) and Rajni Kothari(1990), to name a few, have examined the failure of

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); and Karl Deutsch (1953). Most recent literature on ethnicity disputes this kind of theorizing. See Yinger (1994), Esman (1994), Crawford Young (1993), Richard H. Thompson (1989), Thompson and Ronen (1986), and Cynthia Enloe (1973), for more details.

²²For a very concise account of Marxist view on Ethnicity, see J. Winternitz, Marxism and Nationality, ed. by Benjamin Farrington (Marxism Today Series, No.5),(London, 1946). Walker Connor presents an excellent analysis of the Leninist doctrine of nationalism and ethnicity in his The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Practice(Princeton: Princeton University Press,1984).

such transplanted institutions and have suggested alternative forms of political participation which could increase the political capacity of the people.

Can ethnicity be considered a source of strength? Is it possible for us to celebrate ethnicity as a positive humanistic force that would lead us to greater freedom and more meaningful democracy? There is ample evidence "that strong networks of private associations, based on the ideal of pluralism, do not weaken the cohesion of a democratic society but actually strengthen it. Such networks serve both to relate an individual, through groups that are close and meaningful to him, to the large, complex society, and also to protect him from excessive encroachments on his freedom by that society" (Yinger, 1994, 344). Thus ethnicity and ethnic consciousness, if harnessed properly, could provide an alternative form of cohesion amongst people, where other types of affiliations have failed. However, creating an environment where there is greater political freedom, economic equality, low levels of discrimination and prejudices and finally respect for human rights is essential for ethnicity to thrive positively. Along with this, is the need to move away from homogenizing tendencies. In this respect, ethnic solidarity can be a positive phenomenon.

Ethnicity can also be considered as the ground for reassessing the cultural, economic and political impacts of developmentalism. Rajni Kothari, Indian political scientist and development critic, argues that "instead of formulating macro-level explanations, such as uneven development, to explain the phenomenon of ethnicity, it can be used as a tool to reassess the impact of developmentalism and open up space for accommodating ethnicity as a conceptual tool(emphasis added)"(Rajni Kothari, 1990, 214).

Ethnicity or, more precisely, ethnic movements play a crucial role in bringing the conflicts within the society to light. If all social movements are the inevitable result of developmentalism(Samir Amin et al, 1990, 96-100), they provide the best critiques of development theory as a whole. The resurgence of ethnicity in almost all of the

'developing' states shows us the need to rethink such concepts as modernization and progress. Furthermore, ethnicity can also be used as a tool for a critical analysis of homogenization and majoritarianism [here, the rule of the majority is interpreted as the rule of the ethnic majority].

New social movement theorists like Ponna Wignarajah(1993), who focuses on the emergence of new social movements in South Asia, argue that ethnic movements provide alternative forms of political participation where traditional party politics have failed to function as 'bridges' between the state and the people. This can be better understood by critically analyzing the role of the state in ethnically divided societies.

In Antonio Gramsci's discussion of hegemony (1981) he argued that a state can be dominant at two levels. The first he calls political domination.²³ This is where a state relies on force, violence, coercion and other 'extra-legal' methods to retain control or dominance over society. The second level of state dominance is at the level of civil society. Here the state relies on moral, intellectual, spiritual and emotional manipulation and leadership to exert control over society.

While both levels constitute hegemony, in most of the Less Industrialized World hegemony of the state at the political level seems to be more tenuous while at the civil society level, hegemony is largely absent. Therefore, rather than creating a space for civil society to emerge, the state relies on political domination for its survival (Ihonvbere, 1994, 42-58). This absence of a civil society - that provides the channels for political accommodation, consensus and mobilization - invariably de-legitimizes the ruling group within the state. In such a situation, an emergent civil society can become a forum for political participation and mobilization. Thus, ethnicity or ethnic

²³This argument was cited by Julius O. Ihonvbere in "The 'irrelevant state', ethnicity and the quest for nationhood in Africa", Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol.17, No.1,(1994), 42.

identity, which can foster this civil society²⁴ and lead to greater mobilization and participation, becomes a source of strength where members of different ethnic communities can be empowered to participate in politics.

Thus, one can argue that ethnicity can be a source of strength as well as a source of conflict. It is also clear, from the discussion above, that ethnicity's strengths and weaknesses depend more on the role the state plays in any given society. If the state performs its designated functions of protecting and providing for its citizens and carries out these functions in an egalitarian and impartial manner, then ethnic identities and assertions would become part of the state.²⁵ For example, ethnic identities and assertions have become the basis for the consociational democratic system in Switzerland. In this sense, the democratic system of Switzerland has provided the necessary 'space' for ethnicity to manifest itself in a positive way. If, on the other hand, the state does not perform the necessary functions, or if it performs them in a discriminatory and partial manner, then marginalized groups may become oppositional forces to the state. In such a situation, the civil society which is created through ethnic assertiveness, play a 'surrogate' state role. Sri Lanka has proven to be a good example of this case, where the failure of the state and its machinery in the Northern Province resulted in the creation of an 'alternative' state (from 1990-1995) which, to all appearances, was fairly well-run and administered. Thus, one can conclude that ethnicity and the ethnic phenomenon can play a positive role in a country where the state fails to perform its basic functions, that is, to protect and provide for all the citizens.

²⁴Examples of the emergence of civil society as a forum in which people were mobilized for greater participation can be seen in the struggles of the component units of the former USSR for independence from Russian hegemony.

²⁵This argument closely ties in with the question of legitimacy of the state. Legitimacy, according to Heribert Adam, "manifests itself in a widespread belief that a government exercises rightful power in its given domain" (Heribert Adam in Ethnic Groups and the State, Paul Brass, ed. 1985, 264). See Adam's article on "Legitimacy and the Institutionalization of Ethnicity: Comparing South Africa" (1985) for a more involved discussion.

2.3 Ethnic Conflict Resolution: In Search Of An Applicable Model

"Conflict is neither good nor bad and does not always lead to unquestionable consequences.." states Muhammed Rabi in Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity(1994, 5). Here, conflict is used in its broadest sense and includes both violent and non-violent forms of conflict.

Conflict is a normal product of diversity in beliefs and values-be it cultural, religious and/or ethnic, differences in attitudes and perceptions, or competing socio-economic and political interests among individuals, social classes, ethnic groups and states. Besides, conflict exists at all levels of society and state, and it is the norm rather than the exception. Conflict, rightly managed and expressed, can "uncover hidden deficiencies, redefine existing problems and identify future challenges"(Rabi, 5). When treated as a negative development, conflict has the tendency to disrupt and destroy existing structures and the status quo. Thus an ethnic conflict usually tends to bring out the irrelevancy and/or the incapacity of the existing political system to address the issues at hand. As James Lane concludes, "in many instances, the origins of conflict are in non fulfillment or blockage of fundamental human needs"(cited by Rabi, 5). In this sense, ethnic conflict results from a common perception of the 'non fulfillment' of ethnic interests.

The theory and practice of conflict resolution evolved largely in the context of the Cold War (Kumar Rupesinghe, 1995, 72). The discourse of that period on conflict resolution was predominantly Western and rationalistic. Moreover, the discourse focused more on the interplay of states and state actors in relation to the superpower competition, and placed very little emphasis on the resolution of internal conflicts. Since then, the focus has changed from macro issues to micro ones. Now, other conflicts such as class conflicts, caste conflicts, ethnic and cultural conflicts are given serious attention(Rupesinghe, 1995). Moreover, recent developments in conflict studies have attempted to develop new concepts such as "conflict transformation as

conflict resolution" (Johan Galtung, 1995, 51-65), "positive peace building" (Stephen Ryan, 1995, 223-259) and "third party involvement in conflict resolution" (Rupesinghe, 1995, 84). These are only a few of the plethora of new concepts which have evolved since the end of the Cold War.

The purpose of this section is to critically analyze some of the main ethnic conflict resolution models suggested by various conflict resolution theorists. I have taken the four resolution models suggested by Sammy Smooha and Theodor Hanf (1992) as the basis for my analysis. In order to analyze the various alternatives to the resolution of ethnic conflict, it is imperative to comprehend the different perspectives which define the parameters of the resolution models. Therefore, before I discuss the conflict resolution models, I will briefly discuss some of the perspectives adopted by ethnic conflict analysts.

According to Susan Olzak (1992) at least four theoretical perspectives have influenced the study of ethnic conflict (19). She goes on to argue that while all four perspectives "...share the assumption that modernization processes hold the key to understanding ethnic hostilities, they differ considerably with respect to the processes they emphasize" (19).

Of these four perspectives, two are based on functionalist theories of development, while the other two are based on theories of inequalities-social, economic and political. The first of these four, the *human ecology perspective*, looks at ethnic conflict as a result of biological segregation of immigrant populations in a given society. This perspective holds that "...contemporary theoretical strategies for analyzing ethnic relations originated with ecological theories of competition and conflict" (Olzak, 1992, 15). It also argues that biological differences between groups of people prevent these ethnic groups from totally assimilating themselves with the other ethnic group[s]. This eventually results in residential segregation. Hence, the

conflict. The solution, the ecologists argued, lies in 'residential dispersion'²⁶(Olzak, 19-20). Through residential dispersion, individuals or groups of one ethnic community could move into another ethnic community. This, the human ecologist perspective held, would result in greater assimilation and reduce conflict.

The second one, the *assimilation perspective*, holds that "...cultural differences between groups, especially in language and customs, impede the success and social acceptance of newcomers"(Olzak, 20). According to this perspective, reducing ethnic inequality with respect to income occupation and education etc., would lead to greater assimilation. Thompson(1989) argues that assimilation is a process and that it is carried out in stages. He cites Milton Gordon's (1964) 'cultural assimilation' or acculturation as it is commonly known, as the initial stage(Thompson, 1989, 79). Acculturation, according to Thompson, meant "learning the language, values, and other modes of cultural discourse that predominate in the "host" society..."(79). This means that acculturation is essentially a one-way process that requires the new comers to adopt the dominant culture. This process, more often than not, "results in the disappearance of the native language and culture of the acculturating person"(80). In order to circumvent the effects of acculturation, other processes have been suggested. Bilingualism and multi-culturalism are two of the ways which are adopted by multi-ethnic countries like Canada. These processes are "designed to ease the acculturation process, remove the negative stereotypes impugned to the native culture, and lessen the likelihood of marginality"(80). Even though one can argue that assimilation could reduce ethnic conflict, the effects of assimilation, more often than not, could lead to the elimination of ethnic identity.

A third perspective on ethnic conflict posits the notion that "*internal colonialism and the cultural division of labor*"(Olzak, 21) is yet another basis for ethnic conflict.

²⁶This argument and the subsequent arguments are based on Olzak's analysis of different strategies for analyzing ethnic conflict.

According to this perspective, "...a rich, culturally dominant core region dominates and exploits an ethnically different periphery"(21). Olzak presents Michael Hechter(1975) as a main advocate of this perspective. The key argument is that a combination of uneven industrialization and cultural differences among regions can cause ethnic grievances and result in ethnic conflict. Yet, regional disparities alone cannot account for the spread of ethnic conflicts. This has to be 'joined' by the concept of a cultural division of labor whereby jobs are allocated on the basis of culture and ethnic boundaries.

Finally, Olzak presents a *split labor markets and middleman minorities* perspective to understand the basis of ethnic conflicts. This perspective holds that ethnic conflict is often directed at highly successful ethnic minorities. Olzak points out that usually the 'middlemen', who typically work as traders, money lenders, brokers, rent collectors etc., are the targets of conflict in such cases(22).

How relevant are these perspectives to the various models and strategies suggested for the resolution of ethnic conflicts? This will be addressed in the following section, where a discussion of various conflict resolution models is undertaken.

2.4 Ethnic Conflict Resolution: Some Models For Consideration

The four perspectives on ethnic conflict discussed in the previous section, in various ways, provided the basis for the development of ethnic conflict resolution models. The conflict resolution models proposed by Smootha and Hanf(1992) reveal the correlation between the perspectives and the models. This will be demonstrated in the following discussion.

Within the domain of conflict theory, 'conflict' is normally defined as a situation where different actors are pursuing incompatible goals(Rupesinghe, 1995, 73). In the case of an ethnic conflict, the goals of different ethnic groups are not only different from each other but, as some cases have shown, they are diametrically opposed to each other. While one ethnic group seeks assimilation and acculturation as the goal for the society as a whole, another group seeks disassociation and separation from the state. As a result, the models proposed by resolution theorists, more often than not, are compromises. Such situations require a deeper understanding of the nature of the conflict for the solutions to be effective.

Smootha and Hanf(1992) suggest *partition* as one of the options for managing or resolving the ethnic conflict. They argue that this is "...the most problematic, both in acceptance and feasibility"(31). Partition means the breaking up of an existing state along ethnic and/or territorial lines. This model is influenced by the *human ecology perspective* which posits ethnic conflict as a result of biological differences between groups of people. It further argues that the biological differences between groups of people prevent these ethnic groups from totally assimilating themselves with other ethnic groups. This eventually results in segregation or partition. The examples of Pakistan and Bangladesh demonstrate the feasibility of the human ecology perspective.

The second model discussed by Smootha and Hanf is *ethnic democracy*. Under this model, Smootha and Hanf argued, the dominance of one ethnic group is

institutionalized. This would combine a political democracy with explicit ethnic dominance. According to this model, Smooha and Hanf contend, certain provisions should be made to allow for 1) individual civil rights to everybody, 2) certain collective rights to ethnic minorities and 3) the domination of the state by the majority.²⁷ This model borrows from the *internal colonialism and the cultural division of labor* (Olzak, 1992) perspective which argues that dominance by "...a rich, culturally dominant group.." over an ethnically different periphery would eventually result in a conflict. This domination, if not managed properly, would result in serious ethnic confrontation between the majority and minority. Hence, as Smooha and Hanf argue, ethnic democracy can be suggested as a manageable resolution in such a situation.

The third model put forward by Smooha and Hanf for the resolution of ethnic conflict borrows mainly from the *split labor markets and middlemen minorities* perspective. Smooha and Hanf suggest Arend Lijphart's (1977) consociational democracy²⁸ as a possible resolution model for ethnically and culturally plural societies. This model is based on the premise that cultural differences between groups not only impede social success of individuals (in some cases) but also result in negative targetting of certain highly successful ethnic minorities. In such a situation the resulting conflict has to be managed in a way that will allow the differences to remain positive. Consociational democracy, as suggested by Smooha and Hanf, can provide the answer. The underlying principle of consociationalism is that the deep divisions and disputes between ethnic groups cannot be eliminated and hence should be taken as givens (Smooha and Hanf, 1992, 32). This allows for social success and

²⁷See Sammy Smooha, "Minority Status in an Ethnic Democracy: The Status of the Arab Minority in Israel", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.13, No. 3 (1990), pp. 389-483 for a detailed discussion of ethnic democracy.

²⁸See Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, New Haven, (1977) for a detailed study of consociational democracy.

upward social mobility within the ethnic minorities. In a consociational democratic system, ethnicity is integrated as a structural component in the state's political organization. The political system is run on the basis of power sharing and political accommodation between the ethnic groups, thus managing conflict between majority and minority ethnic groups. Furthermore, political accommodation is carried out on the 'top' level between the elites. The elites decide on issues of conflict and controversy. To add to their strength, the minority ethnic groups are given veto power to protect their interests. Variants of consociational democracy have been adopted by Switzerland and Belgium.

Finally, liberal democracy has been considered as one of the models of conflict resolution. Here, the individual is taken as the cornerstone of the society. Hence, all individuals are granted equal civil and political rights. Furthermore, the privatization or individualizing of ethnic identity is assumed to provide a safeguard against ethnic conflict. The underlying argument here is that when individual rights take precedence over collective rights, the potential for ethnic conflict will invariably diminish (Smootha and Hanf, 1992, 32). While one can argue that liberal democracy as a model for ethnic conflict resolution borrows from both *assimilation* and *split labor markets and middleman minorities* perspectives, the premise of liberal democracy negates this argument. Since liberal democracy as a concept concerns an individual rather than a collectivity, the basis of these perspectives-i.e. group identity/collectivity- fails to apply.

In conclusion one could argue that the basis for these models discussed above, is questionable. The theoretical basis for these models comes mainly from the premise that ethnicity is a negative phenomenon and therefore needs to be dealt with as such. Though one can argue that consociationalism attempts to provide an exception, the fact that the model is suggested as a conflict resolving or managing model, proves otherwise.

Are these models applicable to Sri Lanka? In the case of Sri Lanka, should the resolution models consider ethnicity as a source of conflict or a source of strength? Is there an alternative whereby ethnicity and ethnic identity can be utilized positively for the betterment of all?

Chapter 3

Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict- A Brief Survey

Sri Lanka, previously known as Ceylon, is a small tropical island off the southern tip of India. The island has been the home of two major ethnic groups, the Sinhalese who form the majority, and the Tamils, for centuries. Although the Sinhalese and the Tamils both trace their heritage and culture to India, the physical separation -about 20 sea miles - of the island from the Indian sub-continent has engendered the development of a society which is both distinct and borrowed from Indian cultural traditions. Within Sri Lanka, each of these communities developed its own sense of group identity based on language, religion, ethnic origin, traditional homeland and some cultural attributes. The Sinhalese are generally fair-skinned and believe themselves to be of Aryan origins, while the dark skinned Tamils claim Dravidian origins(Chelvadurai Manogaran, 1987).

Following the capitulation of the island to Colonial powers, the island went through serious socio-economic and political changes. These changes have been indelible and irreversible. The impact these changes have had on the ethnic fabric of society needs to be studied in more detail. This Chapter attempts to survey the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict from colonial rule to the present. Any attempt at describing the ethnic conflict would not be complete without a discussion of its socio-economic context. Therefore, the first section of this Chapter will provide a brief discussion of the socio-economic structure of both colonial Ceylon and independent Sri Lanka.

The bulk of the literature used in this Chapter and Chapter 4 was written by indigenous scholars. Almost all these scholars have adopted a neo-Marxist analysis when examining the socio-economic structure of Sri Lanka. Hence my approach reflects the neo-Marxist critique of a dependent economic structure.

3.1 Socio-Economic Structure of Sri Lanka: The Colonial Legacy

At the time of independence in 1948, Sri Lanka possessed many of the prerequisites assumed necessary for 'progress' and 'development' as an independent nation. Compared to her neighbor India, Sri Lanka possessed 'stability', 'law and order', a highly literate population, a cohesive although heterogeneous society, and a fairly well developed infrastructure. Sri Lanka was described by many of the western scholars as a 'model colony' and a 'model democracy'.²⁹ On the other hand, Sri Lanka also inherited an 'underdeveloped' economic system which was dependent on the Colombo metropolitan center and was dominated by a foreign ruling class. The plantations, historically not endogenous but 'imposed' by the British, remained unintegrated, with no linkage to the traditional agrarian sector. What was needed at the time was to dismantle that system and build an alternative economic structure that could successfully meet the needs and demands of the people. This concept was an anathema to the ruling class, who continued to nurture the existing system. "The result of such policy...", to quote Satchi Ponnambalam³⁰, "...of 'system management' instead of 'system change' over the last 30 years has been to make Sri Lanka today a laggard in development, categorized now among the poorest countries in the Third World and rated as one of the 'Most Seriously Affected' of the less developed countries"(Satchi Ponnambalam, 1981, 1).

²⁹James Manor is one such scholar who continued to describe Sri Lanka as a 'model democracy'. See James Manor, ed., Sri Lanka- In Change and Crisis, 1984, 2.

³⁰Satchi Ponnambalam is one of Sri Lanka's eminent lawyers. In his Dependent Capitalism in Crisis-The Sri Lankan Economy, 1948-1980 he has analyzed a thirty year period to evaluate Sri Lanka's economic structure and 'development'.

3.1a. Colonial Economy At A Glance:

A country that has long remained a colony does not become truly independent merely because it gains political independence. No imperial power restores a colony to its pre-colonial form or reshapes its economy, the body politic or culture to suit the national needs of the colony at the time it is granted independence. Hence, what remains at the time of independence is an economic, political and cultural structure that has been shaped over the years to suit the needs of the colonial power. Therefore, the independent country should make efforts to adapt its economic, political and social structure to suit its own needs. This has to be a conscious decision on the part of the ruling class. Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, but she failed to 'liberate' herself from the colonial socio-political and economic structure she had inherited (Ponnambalam, 1981, Victor Ivan, 1989, and Kumari Jayawardena, 1990).

During the colonial era, the country had developed a classic export-import economy. It was an economy in which what was produced was exported and what imports were needed were paid for from export earnings. The goals of the colonial government were limited to the maintenance of law and order, balancing revenue and expenditure, and generally maintaining the status quo. The colonial rulers, being neither dependent on nor answerable to the people, left most of the economy at a barely sufficient level for the ordinary people to make a meager subsistence level of living. The colonial economy produced what it wanted to export and imported what was necessary to maintain the estate enclave. As Ponnambalam reports, at the time of independence, "...about 95% of export earnings were derived from the three plantation crops, of which tea alone accounted for 60%"(14). This is reiterated by Victor Ivan who states that, "over 40% of the Gross Domestic Product[GDP] came from agriculture with the plantation crops accounting for more than half"(Ivan, 1989,7). On the other hand, imports consisted of food(52%), fuel, fertilizer, textiles etc.(7).

On the home front, the domestic agricultural sector was unorganized and non-capitalist in nature. This sector contained about 85% of the land area and 72% of the population (Ivan, 1989, 3). Although the traditional³¹ sector was quite large, it held only an insignificant place in the cash economy. Of the 72% of the peasant population, only about 30% owned cultivable lands. The rest was mainly owned by the landed gentry. The peasant land-holdings were quite small - usually an acre or less. As H. N. S. Karunatileke (1971) describes, "the type of holding was determined by the general outlook of the peasant who was primarily concerned with self sufficiency rather than commercial gain" (17). What was produced in this sector was self-sufficing. With the introduction of cash crops - those crops that bring foreign revenue into the country - the attention given to this self-sufficing economy was diverted. The colonial rulers in their efforts to maximise profit, 'grabbed' land from the 'traditional' sector. Large parcels of agricultural low-lands were taken over for rubber and coconut plantations. Furthermore, traditional sources of water for paddy cultivation, such as tanks and irrigation schemes, were neglected for a long period of time, resulting in the destruction of these ancient water ways. Those who owned cultivable land were encouraged to produce cash crops instead of producing staples.

The export plantation sector, on the other hand, was sophisticated in the methods and techniques it employed. It was factory-based, profit oriented, centrally managed and hierarchically organized. Roads and railways were constructed to facilitate the production and transfer of the cash crops from the plantations to the port in Colombo (Ponnambalam, 1981, 5-8). The establishment of the plantation economy created a new economy that was vitally dependent on foreign trade, capitalist production where the workers were completely alienated from economy, and a

³¹ Most of the Sri Lankan economists describe the agricultural sector as 'traditional' and the plantation sector as 'modern'. Some examples are Ponnambalam, 1981, Ivan, 1989 and Kumari Jayawardena, 1990.

permanent indentured labor force especially 'imported' from South India to work in the plantations for low wages. "A structure...", Ponnambalam argues, "...which was the anti-thesis of the prevailing self-sufficient rice-growing village economy"(6).

According to Satchi Ponnambalam, Dr. Van den Driesen sums up the state of affairs in the following words:³²:

Bringing with it new modes of economic behavior and a host of concepts foreign to the prevailing economic system, it [meaning coffee] ate quickly into the foundations of the existing structure. Capitalism has arrived and it is with its advent that the Island's modern economic history takes its start. A virile commercial agriculture soon displaced in importance the old pursuits of the people and within the short space of a few years coffee had made itself responsible for almost a third of the Government's income. The stake was large enough to render it the State's most favored child. In the years that followed, the planters' problems came to be regarded as synonymous with those of the country, and in the quest to solve them- an undertaking to which the Government lent its energetic support-much that was new was introduced with startling rapidity.....In the process a new economic structure began slowly to evolve. The factors of production-land, labor and capital-took on a new meaning; roads, railways and ports appeared where there had been none before; political affairs were invested with a novel significance; and class in the modern sense of the term began its slow growth(As cited by Ponnambalam, 1981, 6).

Thus, at the time of independence, the country was left with a dual economic structure. A thriving capitalist export economy on the one hand, and a stagnant, peasant controlled agriculture on the other, co-existed side by side with no linkages between them. It was also an economy based on the exports of primary products-products that could be easily substituted. One could argue that the economic legacy inherited from the colonial government had already paved the way for the kind of 'development' and 'progress' the independent state was supposed to take. Hence, what was required was a restructuring of the economy, which would aim at either

³²Though Dr. Van den Driesen's evaluation is mainly concerned with the introduction of coffee plantations, the principle applies to the other cash crops[tea, rubber and coconut]as well.

eliminating or reducing the imbalance caused by the country's dependence on earnings from primary products(Ivan, 1989).

3.1b. Social Structure At The Time Of Independence - A Summary

At the time of independence the old distinctions of race and caste continued to be fundamental. A system of new class divisions that emerged as a result of the political and economic processes continued to manifest itself alongside the old. This system did not quite fit the traditional three-fold class stratification -bourgeoisie, petit bourgeoisie, and the proletariat- of Western industrial societies. Though Sri Lanka had a working class and a middle class, it did not have a national bourgeoisie³³. Moreover the Sri Lankan middle class sharply bifurcated into an upper middle class and a lower middle class(Ponnambalam, 1981, Ivan, 1989, Kumari Jayawardena, 1990).

The upper middle class was directly under the guidance of the ruling class, and was very small in number and consisted mainly of related families. It chiefly consisted of groups that had benefited from colonialism. This class had two segments, one arising from the plantation economic structure and the other from the colonial administrative system. Those who had lands suitable for plantation economy emerged as 'planters' or plantation owners. They 'identified' themselves with the European planters. This landed gentry made up the 'old monied class' and it was fiercely loyal to the colonial masters(S. Mahmud Ali, 1993).

The other segment of the upper class arose in the service of the colonial administration. They performed as intermediaries[between the colonial government and the local people] in the administrative system and were cynically described as 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' by the people.

³³Here I am using a socio-biological category of class which focuses more on income levels and 'life styles' than on the relationship of these groups to the means of production

This upper middle class was unable to expand as a national industrial bourgeoisie, for they were only involved in the 'non-manufacturing' sectors of production, trading in coffee, tea, rubber and liquor. Mahmud Ali(1993) claims that this group remained "weakly loyal, only seeking mild reforms that would open up greater investment opportunities"(212). Furthermore, this class had nothing in common with the ordinary people of the country and stood as a class apart. In fact, to the people they were strangers. In terms of consciousness, ideologies, interests, dress, consumption patterns and life-styles, they were in every sense British and wanted to remain so. They later assumed the mantle of political power from their colonial masters.

The lower middle class, on the other hand, comprised the middle layers of the salaried employees in the public, mercantile and banking services, as well as teachers, professionals, small land owning farmers, traders, shopkeepers and the like. Unlike the upper middle class, this class did not have any basis for cohesion. This group remained conservative and did not share a class consciousness (Ponnambalam, 1981).

The working class clearly fell into urban, rural and plantation workers, and these three sections stood isolated from one another (Jayawardena, 1990 and Ivan, 1989).³⁴ The urban workers mainly lived in the port of Colombo and worked in road and railway transport and the import/export trade. This segment of the working class proved to be more militant than the other two segments, for, even as early as 1930s the urban workers had organized themselves into trade unions under the aegis of left-wing parties. The rural workers, on the other hand, were comprised mainly of peasants and agricultural workers. The distinction between the peasants and agricultural workers was quite minimal, for they all worked to maintain the self-sufficiency level. The agricultural workers worked on lands leased from the landed gentry and cultivated

³⁴Though the other two classes eventually adapted to the prevailing political and economic situations, the working class continued to remain divided. See Ponnambalam, 1981 and 1983, Ivan, 1989 and Jayawardene, 1990 for more detail.

paddy and other needed food crops. The peasants were small producers eking out a precarious existence in a stagnant agricultural economy. This class still bears the semblance of the old feudalistic system, where the serfs lived and tilled the lands of their social and economic superiors. Though this segment accounted for a sizable portion of the working class, it was totally unorganized. Finally, the plantation workers consist of Indian Tamil immigrants, working on the tea and rubber plantations. According to Ponnambalam, "...they are the largest component of the working class....", and "...are the most under-privileged stratum in Sri Lankan society"(Ponnambalam, 1981, 17). However, this group is well organized in trade unions.

Thus, one could see that the social structure of Sri Lanka at the time of independence was divided and entrenched. The working class continued to remain divided, while the upper middle class 'dabbled' in political accommodation and bargaining. At the time of independence, Sri Lanka, or Ceylon as it was then called, had inherited, a) an upper middle class which was 'united' by a class consciousness, b) a conservative petit-bourgeoisie which had no class consciousness, and finally c) a divided proletariat. The post-colonial socio-economic structure continued to exhibit these characteristics even after political independence was achieved.

3.1c. Post-Colonial Socio-Economic Structure: A Survey

The imposition of an export-import economy and the economic disruption which colonialism caused were not corrected after independence. The local ruling class, long accustomed to foreign life-styles and reliant on imports and imported food to feed the nation, became entrenched in the socio-economic structure. Even people living in the remotest village became intimately connected to the global economy, for they were made to depend on rice from China or Burma, wheat flour from the US, Argentina or

Australia, and sugar from the West Indies or Mauritius. The post-colonial governments failed to make the economy self-reliant in the supply of the basics, and instead spent more than half the total foreign exchange earnings on importing such essentials(Ivan, 1989).

Furthermore, like all other ex-colonial countries, Sri Lanka was expected to 'take' the path of development. At this time, much of the thinking about development relied on the paradigm of modernization.³⁵ In this paradigm, the traditional order was ascriptive, status oriented, non rational, hierarchical, and based on kinship and family; the modern order was achievement oriented, rational and empirical, increasingly based on formal social structures, and organized on merit and equality of opportunity (Gunatilleke et al, 1983). Development was conceived essentially as the transition from the former to the latter. Although national development is not exclusively or even primarily an economic function, economics came to usurp a predominant role in determining the nature and content of development. In this fashion, development was mistakenly equated to economic growth(Ponnambalam, 1981).

With emphasis on economic growth, the task of development was seen as industrialization, modernization and urbanization. What was required was to find the resources to be spent on various sectors of the economy. The objective was to make various sectors, particularly the manufacturing sector, 'grow' -meaning 'increase in production'. The more important questions of production of what, for whom and by whom were not addressed.

³⁵According to Ronald H. Chilcote(1981) the literature on development falls into five categories. The modernization paradigm is only one of them. The others, to cite Chilcote, the political development paradigm as advocated by Gabriel Almond and [later Almond and Powell Jr.], and the stage theory of development, as depicted in A.F.K. Organski's The Stages of Political Development (1965),fall into the first category. The second category focused on concepts of nation building. Karl Deutsch's Nationalism and Social Communication (1953)is an example of such theorizing. A third category, as that of Samuel P. Huntington's Political Order in Changing Societies (1968) focused on notions of change, and order in the political system. And the fourth category includes works critical of ethnocentric theories of development, such as those mentioned above. André Gunder Frank's Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America (1967)is an appropriate example of this category.

Therefore, what was produced were those goods which were most profitable to sell, at home or abroad, but not what was most urgently needed for the direct consumption by the ordinary people. So, enough food was not produced because, it was argued, that there was no effective demand[since the poor cannot afford to buy the food grown locally and only goods demanded by the existing distribution of purchasing power are worth producing]. As a result, while the Sri Lankan economy grew[percentage-wise] and a few industrialists reaped the benefits, the ordinary people continued to suffer. The argument that the benefits of increased production would eventually 'trickle down' to the ordinary people, proved to be a fallacy.³⁶

Since the benefits of growth had not trickled down as expected, attempts were made to 'marry' economic growth to social justice. It was believed that wealth should be redistributed amongst the population. To facilitate this, taxes were levied on certain portions of incomes of those who had already accumulated wealth. In this way, economic development came to be equated with social welfare. Thus, the governments [from independence till 1971] were involved in providing palliative care to the deep-rooted ills of the society (Ivan, 1989).

In such a situation, economic growth and coping with its problems by means of marginal redistribution, e.g. the redistribution of tax revenues, can translate into almost nothing. National development has to be a total process, which would include all segments of the population. It also should place the people at the center. As Gunatilleke et al(1983) argue, the meaning and expectations of development have gone through major changes in the past four decades. From being a 'technoeconomic' phenomenon, development has incorporated social advances and then evolved into a liberating force for the developing states. It was believed by the development

³⁶It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed explanation of what was undertaken in the economic sphere of post-independence Sri Lanka.

theorists, that development should provide the necessary impetus for the developing states to liberate them from their dependency on developed world.³⁷

The United Front Government of 1970-77 attempted to adopt a course of action with a goal of freeing the country altogether from its colonial structure. To achieve this end the UF government enacted laws which to a larger extent,

...ended foreign ownership of estates, of Brokering firms and Agency houses connected with the plantations, limiting the ownership of land, imposing a ceiling on the ownership of houses, abolition of the Constitution which was a legacy of the colonial administration and the adoption of a new Constitution(Ivan, 1989, 17a).

Furthermore, the UF government sought to enact laws towards,

Implementing a policy of export diversification in order to remove the colonial pattern of the export trade, the imposition of import controls on food items towards achieving self-sufficiency in food, and the creation and development of import substitute industries(Ivan, 1989, 17b).

On the social front, the bloody insurrection of Janata Vimukthi Peramuna(the People's Liberation Front, hereafter referred to as JVP)in 1971 brought to light the socio-economic injustices perpetrated by the residual colonial structure. The UF leaders were forced to curb the growing unemployment among the youth. The youth insurgency directed the government towards the correct path, but the government did not have a proper understanding of how to tread that path. In its effort to correct the wrongs of the colonial past, the UF government undertook a task which failed to incorporate the people as a whole. The new social and economic policies effectively pacified one segment of the disgruntled youth. The government's attempt to pacify the

³⁷Lately, the international debate on development has added more dimensions: the need for development to "take place within the harmonious balance between man-made structures and the total ecosystem that makes possible the management of resources on a long-term self sustaining basis" is being recognized as pivotal in development thinking(Gunatilleke et al, 1983, 15).

youth led to certain reforms in higher education. Thornton and Nithyananthan (1984) report that "...the government proceeded further and instituted a deliberate policy of squeezing out Tamils from higher education"(26).

Prior to 1970, admission to universities had been on the basis of open competitive examinations held in English. Tamils had entered the universities in large numbers, especially in the faculties of medicine, science and engineering, competing in the entrance examinations more successfully than the Sinhalese. This competitive merit system was found to be inadequate, and a stringent campaign was mounted by the Sinhala-Buddhist pressure groups for the abandonment of the system. As a result, in 1973 the Ministry of Education effectively established a quota system by lowering the qualifying admission marks for the Sinhalese students. This language-wise standardization, whereby the language of instruction determined who qualified for university and who did not, created so much uproar that the government was forced to modify it. Hence, in 1975, the government introduced a language-wise standardization plus a district quota system. This was later followed by another modification in 1976, when provisions were made for 'backward' districts [districts which had the least number of high schools]. Under this system, 70% of admissions were given on merit basis, and 30% on a district basis, out of which 15% was reserved for 'backward' districts (Sunil Bastian in Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka, 1985). Needless to say these reforms had a serious impact on the Tamil youth. According to Thornton and Nithyananthan (1984), the percentage of Tamils among students entering science courses had fallen from 35% in 1970 to 15% in 1978 (27).

On the employment front, changes were made in the public sector aimed at creating a level playing field. The claim that minority ethnic groups were represented in the higher state services in proportions greater than warranted by their presence in the total population laid the basis for such reforms in the public sector. The government's efforts to rectify the situation took mainly two forms: direct and indirect policy. Direct policies sought to allot public sector employment according to ethnic ratios. Indirect policy involved the enforcement of the Sinhala Only Language Bill(1956) which effectively banned the Tamils from seeking public sector employment. The law required all those who sought public sector employment to have passed the G.C.E Ordinary Level(Grade 10) Sinhala language proficiency exam. Those public servants who did not meet the requirement were either asked to sit for the exam or to resign their jobs.

Sinhalese youth were 'pleased' with the reforms in the education and employment sectors. Tamil youth were not. The reforms carried out by the UF government dealt a heavy blow to the educated Tamil youth who could not gain admission to the state universities nor gain employment in the government services.³⁸ This resulted in Tamil militancy.

Furthermore, the UF government sought to de-secularize the state through the new Constitution(1972). The Soulbury Constitution(1948) that transferred power from the British to the hands of Sri Lankan leaders, had sought to create a secular state. Hence, religion was not given any importance in the Constitution. The new Constitution not

³⁸I will discuss the effect of the Language Bill of 1956 and the Standardization Bill of 1971 on Tamil youth in more detail in succeeding sections.

only declared Sri Lanka to be a Republic but also stated [in the Preamble] that Sri Lanka would give the 'utmost' place to Buddhism and thus ended the 'secular' state. This was also a result of another pacifying effort of the UF government.³⁹

Thus, one could say that although the UF government 'liberated' the country from its colonial past, it also entrenched an 'inner-colonialism' in the socio-economic and political structures and institutions of Sri Lanka. National development became the development of one segment of the population. Development only meant economic development, and even that was carried out in a haphazard way. As Ivan(1989) cynically observes, the government, in its zeal to treat the disease[of poverty and underdevelopment] did not consider the overall well-being of the patient. Hence, at the end of its almost seven year rule, the UF government managed to fight the disease but lost the patient in the course of the treatment.

The eighth general election in 1977 resulted in a landslide victory for the right-wing United National Party[hereafter referred to as UNP]. The UNP took an entirely new path to 'achieve development'.⁴⁰

One of the first things the UNP government did was to liberalize imports. Along with this, the government sought to privatize most of the industrial sectors. In the name of creating an 'open and free economy', the government abolished all import

³⁹The de-secularization of the state was another 'gamble' the UF government had to make in order to solidify the support of the masses. Since the Buddhist clergy had the undying allegiance and obeisance of the masses-at least 65% of it- the government sought to secure the support of the clergy by giving Buddhism the 'utmost' place in the Constitution.

⁴⁰ Can development be achieved? When does a country attain development? How does one determine which country is developed and which is not? and finally what constitutes development? are some of the many questions which need to be addressed when one talks of 'achieving or attaining development'. Since such a discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will like to keep the term 'development' within quotation marks.

controls in the form of licenses and quotas and opened the door to unrestricted private sector imports. This resulted in the abolition of all public sector monopolies for the import of yarns, textiles, oil, fertilizers, milk, medicines, and tractors, etc. All restriction on foreign travel was lifted, which resulted in a massive brain drain.

The results of the import liberalization policy came to be seen within the next few months. The country was inundated with all kinds of foreign luxury and consumer goods. When most of the industrialized countries were lobbying for import protection, Sri Lanka opened its market for all kinds of imported luxury goods. These goods included, according to Ponnambalam(1981)," expensive radios, tape recorders, refrigerators, air conditioners, liquor, tinned foods, carpets, toys and trinkets"(149). All this was financed by Sri Lanka's new masters, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund[IMF].

At the behest of these new masters, the UNP Government adopted certain policies that dealt serious blows to the welfare of the people. These policies included the abolition of subsidized food, 100% devaluation of the Rupee, unrestricted imports by the private sector, privatization of education and health care and a general boosting of private industrial sector activity. Ponnambalam states that these policies did bring the desired results for the IMF, and paid little or no regard to the general standard of living(Ponnambalam, 1981).

Since independence till 1977, the total expenditure on social welfare services accounted for 14% of the GNP and 40% of the total government expenditure. By reducing the government expenditure on such essential services, the government

opened the way for private sector influence. For example, privatization of education led to the introduction of some private universities, which not only attracted the rich students but also drew a lot of academics from the state-owned universities.

Compared to the state-owned universities, the private universities not only proved to be well equipped but also promised higher remuneration for the teachers and instructors. This resulted in a lower standard of instruction in the state-sponsored universities. The same fate befell the health care services. The opening of private hospitals and nursing homes drew more and more specialized medical personnel into the private sector. The government hospitals became ill-equipped and poorly operated. Those who could afford it went to the private sector for better care, while the poor[who invariably formed the majority of the population] had no other option but the minimal care the government-run hospitals provided(A. Jayaratnam Wilson, 1979, Ivan, 1989 and Kumari Jayawardena, 1990).

Abolition of food subsidies led to more poverty. If one could argue that the previous governments had substituted social welfare for economic welfare, then, the UNP government substituted economic growth for economic welfare. The country was drawn into a whirlpool of economic percentage growth, and according to the following Table, it did show impressive growth in the beginning.

Table 1 Economic Growth Rate(in percentage):

| Year | Percentage |
|------|------------|
| 1978 | 8.2% |
| 1979 | 6.3% |
| 1980 | 5.8% |
| 1981 | 5.8% |
| 1982 | 5.1% |
| 1983 | 4.9% |
| 1984 | 5.0% |
| 1985 | 5.3% |
| 1986 | 4.5% |
| 1987 | 1.6% |

(Source Annual Report of Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 1987)⁴¹

The rapid economic growth that was recorded in the initial stages reduced, to a certain extent, the gravity of the unemployment problem. Though the creation of jobs through the trading sector managed to bring the rate of unemployment from 19.7% in 1975 to 14.7% in 1978, this quickly rose to a record high of 21% in 1985. Furthermore, as Ivan (1989) argues, "the inherent feature of the newly created jobs was that they did not require much learning, were low-paid, often without any permanent base, and temporary in nature"(41). He continues to point out that "the most popular jobs in the country were those of bus conductors, bus drivers, hotel workers, tourist guides, security guards, Middle East house maids, salesmen, temporary laborers, race chit writers and instant lottery vendors"(41). The government did little or nothing to provide employment to graduates. According to the *Report of Consumer Finance and Socio-Economic Survey, 1981/82*, about 31% of university graduates were unemployed, while only 14% of high school graduates remained unemployed.⁴²

⁴¹As cited by Victor Ivan, 1989, 39.

⁴²Published by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 1982 and cited by Ivan, 1989, 41.

On the social front, the unequal social system continued. As expected, economic inequalities came to rest upon the existing social inequalities. The gap between the rich and the poor continued to widen. In order to make the multi-nationals 'feel' more at home, the government had successfully eliminated all trade union activities. In its bid to achieve 'political stability', the government outlawed all forms of protests and anti-government demonstrations. In this fashion, even the university student councils were banned(Ivan, 1989, Wilson, 1988 and Ponnambalam, 1981).

Furthermore, the government continued to perpetuate ethnic tensions and ethnic identity for its benefits. Though the UNP government promised to 'solve' the conflict through structural and institutional reforms, they failed to carry them out. Despite the creation of a presidential system and the introduction of proportional representation, the political problems remained unsolved.

The preceding survey of successive Sri Lankan governments' economic policies and performance since independence reveals that Sri Lankan economic history is a history of costly failures. The brief 'flirtation' with tailored socialism soon gave way to the adoption of a dependent capitalist structure, which continued to perpetuate the existing socio-economic inequality. The belief that economic growth and development would eventually override ethnicity and ethnic conflict was proven to be a fallacy. Rather, the governments used ethnic identity and ethnic tensions to continue their hold on power through institutional and structural changes.

The next section attempts to provide a brief survey of the ethnic conflict.

3.2 Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka:

There are four main ethnic and ethno-religious groups in Sri Lanka(see Tables below). Each of these four groups has its own culture, language and aspirations. The Sinhalese form the majority and are distinguished from the others primarily by their language, and secondly by their religion. Most of the Sinhalese are Buddhists (about 69%), while the rest profess Catholicism and Protestant Christianity. The Tamils, on the other hand, are mainly Hindus(about 85%). A Third category, the Moors, are distinguished from the others on the basis of religion-Islam. Moors are generally considered a 'religious' minority, for the language of the Moors is dependent on where they live. Thus, the most of the Moors in the North and East have chosen Tamil as their language while those who reside in the South speak mainly Sinhala. The Indian Tamils or People of Indian Origin as they are generally called, are almost indistinguishable from the Tamils in that majority of them speak Tamil and profess Hinduism. Nevertheless, The Sri Lankan Tamils claim themselves to be culturally different from the People of Indian Origin.

Table 2 Ethnic Representation in Sri Lanka:

| Ethnic Groups | Percentages |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| Sinhala | 74% |
| Sri Lankan Tamil | 11% |
| Indian Tamils | 07% |
| Sri Lanka Moor | 07% |
| Burgher, Malay, Vedda | 01% |

Table 3 Religious Representation in Sri Lanka:

| Religion | Percentages |
|-----------|-------------|
| Buddhists | 69% |
| Hindus | 16% |
| Christian | 7% |
| Muslim | 8% |

(Source: World Fact Book, Internet, 1996)

In general, the discussion on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka refers to the conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils. Nevertheless, one should not assume that the other ethno-religious groups are 'divorced' from the conflict. A discussion on the demands for recognition of a separate Muslim enclave and the struggle of the People of the Indian Origin for equality and parity status are equally important and necessary. Yet for the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to focus only on the Sinhala-Tamil conflict. Furthermore, since the argument for an alternative forum for peace includes the society as a whole, a separate discussion at this point might be considered redundant.

3.2a. Roots of Ethnic Conflict in the Colonial Era:

Until the Portuguese conquered the maritime areas of the country in 1505, there were three kingdoms which were the centers of political power. These were the Kotte Kingdom in the south- west, the Nallur Kingdom in the north and the Kandyan Kingdom in the central highlands. The first two fell victim to foreign conquest by the Portuguese in 1505, and later by the Dutch in 1656 and finally by the British in 1796.

The capitulation of the Kandyan Kingdom by the British in 1815 brought the whole island under foreign rule.(Satchi Ponnambalam, 1981, K. L. Sharma, 1988).

After the conquest in 1815, the British continued to administer the Kotte, the Kandyan [home to the Sinhalese], and the Nallur kingdoms[home to the Tamils] as separate entities. Later, in response to the Colebrook- Cameron Commission recommendations, the separate administrations were abolished. The Sinhalese and Tamil people were brought together in a single politico-geographic entity under a centralized government. A nominated legislative council was established in 1833. Thereafter, progress to representative government was through reform of the council and membership in the council became the grand prize that the Sri Lankan elite fought for. For purposes of administration, the island was divided into western, northern, eastern, southern and central provinces, each under a government agent. Since the northern province, administered from Jaffna, was found to be too large, the north-central province was created in 1873. Two additional Kandyan provinces, Uva and Sabragamuwa, were set up in 1886 and 1889 respectively (Ponnambalam, 1983 and Manogaran, 1987).

The colonial government encouraged the study of English. English education was provided mainly by Christian missionary schools. The colonial government recruited local personnel, proficient in English, for junior and middle-level bureaucratic positions. Hence, English education came to be valued as a means of social mobility. This was particularly true in the northern provincial town of Jaffna. In this way, English education, Christianity, western culture and values all became dominant forces in the country.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the civil-service was opened to Ceylonese, and the slow process of Ceylonization of the bureaucracy began. This upward mobility also spread to other professions such as medicine, law and teaching. This created a middle-class, which having achieved superior socio-economic status and

control over the less privileged and less educated masses, moved on to assume political power as well. The positions of this middle-class were strengthened by the rulers, who rewarded it with patronage appointments (Ponnambalam, 1983 and Ivan, 1989).

One could argue that, during the colonial era, issues of class conflict and colonial rule prevailed over ethnic interests. Yet, ethnic identity and ethnic consciousness surfaced soon after the communal representations were established in 1913 by Governor Henry MacCallum. According to this, unofficial members⁴³ were given representation on communal basis. For example, of the ten unofficials, six were to be nominated by the Governor, but four were to be elected⁴⁴ on a communal basis -two for the Europeans, one for the Burghers, and one for the 'educated Ceylonese'. This last heading comprised Sinhalese, Tamils and Moslems(Sir Charles Jeffries, 1962). Thus, the attainment of that 'educated Ceylonese' seat became one of the forces of ethnic mobility.

The divide and rule policy of the British was well administered, and it did give the desired result. The British were well aware that, to counter the growth of Buddhist revivalism [spearheaded by the spiritual leader Anagarika Dharmapala], the Legislative Council had to be reformed. The growing nationalism, which had effectively united the local elite against their common enemy -the British- had become a real threat to the colonial power structure. Hence, to hold on to power, the British played one ethnic group against the other. The unity forged by class interests was soon

⁴³The Legislative Council which was established by the Colebrook-Cameron Commission, sought to create a semblance of representative government in the colony. Hence, the British Crown created two forms of representation in the Legislative Council: the official memberships and the unofficial memberships. Both memberships were initially opened only to European settlers. The official members exercised actual power in terms of policy making and execution, whereas the unofficial members provided token representation. This state of affairs continued till 1910s. In 1913, the strength and power of the unofficial members were increased by Governor Sir Henry MacCallum. As a result of continued political agitation of the local elite, the Crown realized the need for expanding the Legislative Council, and this led to the creation of communal representation. See Jeffries, 1962 for more details.

⁴⁴A limited franchise was introduced in 1910. This gave about 4% of the population the power to elect their representatives.

shattered by the government. The Ceylon National Congress, which, until then, had proven to be a unified umbrella organization of resistance for both the Sinhalese and Tamil elite, split on communal lines in 1920. From this point onwards, the contradictions that matured were not between the nationalists and the colonialists, but rather between different national communities. Communalism was consolidated in the process. The visible manifestations of this trend were the different political organizations: the Tamil Mahajana Sabhai [1920], the Sinhala Maha Saba [1937], the Muslim League and the Tamil Congress[1944](Manogaran, 1987).

After 1920, ethnic identity rapidly became a major factor in all the political debates; and by 1931, the Sri Lankan elite had regrouped and re-divided themselves along ethnic lines. Old familiar alliances between the Tamil and Sinhala elite were broken. New alliances were forged where none existed earlier, and old alliances which had stood decades of political maneuver were ruptured.

The Donoughmore Commission, which arrived in Ceylon in 1927 headed by the Earl of Donoughmore, made many recommendations of far reaching significance. The Commission recommended the abolition of ethnic representation and the extension of territorial representation. It was said that the Commission faced a dilemma. This was evident in the reports. According to one of the reports, "territorial electorates, drawn with no eye to the distribution of communities, mean rule by the majority community with no safeguards for the minorities, while safeguards for the minorities inevitably deepen the division of the nation on communal lines"(quoted by Ponnambalam, 1983, 52).

Manogaran argues that by abolishing communal representation altogether, the Donoughmore Commission removed a delicate and pivotal balancing mechanism built into the political system to mirror the ethnic composition of the country. Until then, the Legislative Council had representation of the local elite on a 2:1 ratio[Sinhalese 2: Tamil 1]. Territorial representation changed the ratio to 5:1 (Manogaran , 1987).

However, the abolition of communal representation would have been a progressive step if adequate measures to ensure constitutional protection were put in place. In this sense, one could argue that the Donoughmore Commission failed to anticipate the centralizing power of a unitary structure in a multi-ethnic country. Furthermore, the introduction of universal suffrage[voting rights] and territorial representation could have worked successfully, if there had been political parties operating within the system. Instead, the absence of party politics paved the way for communal and ethnic alliances to grow. Hence, as it turned out, territorial representation, instead of rooting out the 'canker' of communalism, actually encouraged it. When political parties were finally formed, they continued to perpetuate this trend(Manogaran, 1987).

The Donoughmore Constitution of 1931 granted universal suffrage for all. As anticipated, the introduction of universal suffrage did broaden the base of political power. It also had an unanticipated effect on politics. The power of election in the hands of the masses did not lead to further democratization. Instead, in the hands of demagogues, universal suffrage was used to consolidate the numerical power of the majority.

As Sri Lanka moved towards independence, Sinhalese and Tamil leaders continued to disagree with each other regarding Tamil representation in parliament. Tamil interests, as represented by the Tamil Congress, complained to the Soulbury Commission(1947) that the State Council, as it was, did not address their needs. They argued for specific safeguards in the Constitution. The fear of Sinhala domination was so intense that G.G. Ponnambalam[then President of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress] even advocated that one half of the seats in the new legislature be reserved for minorities, so that the "Sinhalese majority would not hold more than 50% of the seats in the legislature and this balance would be reflective in the executive and would be a series of checking clauses against discriminating legislation"(as quoted by Manogaran,

1987, 37). This demand was rejected by the Soulbury Commission as being contrary to democratic principles, especially since the Sinhalese accounted for nearly 70% of the population. The safeguards of multi-member constituencies -whereby more than one member could be elected by the same constituency- and the creation of a Senate proved to be inadequate up against a predominantly Sinhalese parliament.

Thus, at the time of independence, Sri Lanka had already institutionalized communalism. The post-colonial era reveals the problems of national integration and nation-building. The following section discusses the growth of ethnic conflict in the post-colonial era: a period of political bargaining, political accommodation, and separatism.

3.2b. Ethnic Conflict: The Parliamentary Phase

Tensions between the majority and minority groups reached a new stage during the post-independence era. The Tamil fear of being permanently side-lined by the majority Sinhalese was soon confirmed. Post-colonial politics can be divided into two major phases during which Sri Lanka experienced the pains and problems of national integration, nation-building and state-building. Creating a 'nation' - that is, "a people welded together by common ties of culture, descent and territory"- (David Welsh, 1993, 63) in a multi-ethnic society is an arduous task.

The first thirty years after independence constitute the parliamentary phase [1948-1978] Following the general elections of 1977, Sri Lanka adopted a Gaullist style presidential system. It was believed by the elite -both Sinhalese and Tamils- of the time that Sri Lanka could better carry out the process of nation and state building through a presidential system than through the existing parliamentary system. The presidential phase is further divided into two periods: the pre-militant and militant eras.

The politics of post-colonial Sri Lanka was also the politics of bargaining for power and resources and accommodation between the majority and minority. This required Tamils' commitment to the parliamentary process. It entailed an exchange of support and participation in government for measures safeguarding minority interests. Such a strategy involved inter-communal elite consensus on parliamentary democracy and the acceptance of the constitutionalist ethos of the island's independence movement. This kind of political bargaining proved to be ineffective because, "political accommodation, although subscribed to in principle, was not fully reflected in practice by government policy" (P. Saravanamuttu, 1990, 456). Political accommodation was carried out by the 'inter -communal elite' on a non-confrontational and peaceful manner.

Parliamentary democracy was accepted as the framework for managing political bargaining. However, this was undermined by inter-elite competition which exploited ethnic populism for partisan advantage. Explicit identification with ethnic populism came to be regarded as crucial to electoral success, thus legitimizing the older and divisive bases of identity as the ultimate source of political power. This exposed the inability of the elite to create or at the least, fuse a 'national' identity.

The safe-guards provided by the new Soulbury Constitution were soon discarded by the government. The Ceylon Orders in Council of 1946 and 1947, and Article 29, section 2[b] and [c] of the Soulbury Constitution outlined the provisions made for the minorities against domination. Section 29 subsection 4 required that no less than two-thirds of the total membership of the House of Representatives, including those not present, had to cast their votes in favor of any of Bill to amend or repeal any of the provisions of the constitution. Furthermore, such a Bill, before it was presented for the royal assent had to carry a certificate from the Speaker that it had obtained the requisite majority. In addition to this, a Senate was created through which the Soulbury Commission sought to provide a political space for the minorities to

articulate their interests. The Senate consisted of thirty members, fifteen elected by the House and fifteen appointed by the governor-general on prime-ministerial advice(Wilson, 1979). The conventional belief that the Senate would act as a chamber of 'sober second thought' was the influential force behind this. These constitutional provisions and the verbal assurances given by Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake, persuaded the Tamil leaders to join forces with the ruling party to form the new and independent government.

It is interesting to note that the Tamil leaders were willing to 'exchange' anything for safeguards and political recognition. The major exchange at that time was the support given by some of the Tamil leaders to the United National Party in disenfranchising the people of Indian origin. The legislation denying citizenship and suffrage to most people of Indian origin was passed by the parliament 1948. The new government hoped to, on the one hand reduce the numerical strength of the Tamils who constituted nearly 20% of the total population, and on the other, to appease the Kandyan Sinhalese.

The Kandyan Sinhalese who lived predominantly in the hill-country of Kandy and Nuwera Eliya considered the people of Indian origin as usurpers of their economic position. The people of Indian origin were 'imported' by the British in 19th century to serve as indentured labor in the plantations. These plantations are mainly situated in the hill-country. The existence of this 'alien' group has always been a bone of contention for the Kandyan Sinhalese. Though the people of Indian origin had no political clout, their cheap labor had prevented the Kandyan Sinhalese from gaining employment in the plantations. Since most of the Sinhalese leadership came from this region, the leaders were keen to look for ways to appease the Kandyan Sinhalese 'grievances'.

Manogaran claims that the denial of voting rights to Tamils of Indian Origin adversely affected the capacity of the Sri Lankan Tamils to defend their legitimate

rights as citizens. When 90,000 Indian Tamils lost their voting rights, the parliamentary strength of the Sinhalese was increased from 67% in 1947 to 73% in 1952(Manogaran, 1987).

Political accommodation and elite consensus reached a new level in the mid-1950s. Sri Lankan Tamil leaders were still hopeful, despite the discriminatory legislation of 1948 and 1949, that their rights would be protected under the Soulbury Constitution. They continued to believe in the secular state concept. They were rudely awakened to face the reality of brooding Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism and communalism, as language policies were changed.

The continuation of English as the Official language perturbed the Sinhalese intelligentsia. They perceived this as a threat to both the Sinhala language and Buddhism. Sinhala is a language spoken only in Sri Lanka. Theravada Buddhism, as opposed to Mahanama Buddhism, has peculiar underpinnings of caste and class hierarchies and is indigenous to Sri Lanka. The Sinhala language and Buddhism as well as the Tamil language and Hinduism all suffered heavily at the hands of the British. Yet, the Tamils were more tolerant towards Christianity and English than their Sinhalese counter-parts. As for the Sinhalese, during the colonial era, they fought against all efforts at assimilation. The Sinhala-Buddhist leaders continued to accuse the political system of discriminating against them, even after independence. It was during this period that the term under-privileged majority gained fervour amongst the Sinhala masses(K.N.O. Dharmadasa, 1992). Sinhala nationalists maintained that opportunities for greater mobility and the distribution of power in socio-economic terms pointed unequivocally to the supremacy of the English language over vernaculars(Dharmadasa, 1992). Hence, it was argued that it was imperative to reduce the influence of the foreign language [and religion]. Thus, the stage was set for the introduction of the Sinhala Only bill in 1956.

The Sinhala Only legislation, whereby Sinhala was made the only official language of the island, was based on two principles. Firstly, it was based on a majoritarian principle, which claimed that since Sinhala was spoken by two-thirds of the total population, it made political sense to make it the official language. Secondly, the legislation was based on the principle of safe-guarding the interests of the Sinhalese people by institutional means. The Sinhala Only legislation was the inevitable result of the 'ingrained' minority complex of the Sinhalese⁴⁵(Wilson, 1988, Ponnambalam, 1983, Tambiah, 1986 and Dharmadasa, 1992).Needless to say, the legislation not only marked the end of western domination in all spheres of life but also sowed the grains of Tamil nationalism in the minds of Tamil youth.

Following the introduction of the Sinhala Only bill, ethnic relations deteriorated at a rapid pace. The Tamil leadership continued the practice of parliamentary accommodation even though the government vigorously implemented the official language policy. Mrs. Srimavo Bandaranaike(the widow of the assassinated Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike) discarded the devolution of power proposals made between the government and the Tamil leadership under the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact of 1957. This Pact was proposed by the government in a conciliatory attempt at appeasing the Tamils.

Despite the rejection of the Pact, the Tamil leadership continued to seek political accommodation with the Sinhala leadership. The Federal Party⁴⁶[hereafter referred to as FP], in a desperate attempt to undo the damage caused by the government, decided to join forces with the opposition party. The FP made a secret pact with the

⁴⁵Sinhalese, as a people, always considered themselves a minority, especially when compared to the Tamils of Sri Lanka and India. This 'minority complex' is further demonstrated in the myths and legends of Sinhala-Buddhists. The legend of Mahavamsa is one example.

⁴⁶The FP was the second Tamil political party to be formed after independence. The Tamil Congress, FP's fore-runner, was formed in 1944. The FP was a splinter group of the Tamil Congress which, under the leadership of G.G. Ponnambalam, sought non-confrontational political accommodation. The dispute over the Citizenship Act of 1948 resulted in a split, and the FP was formed. Of the two, the FP had a wider -base, and was more militant in its activities. I will discuss the role and achievement[s] of FP in more detail in the following Chapter.

UNP(Senanayake- Chelvanayagam Pact of 1965).The UNP, when it assumed power in 1965, carried out the first half of the Pact, which allowed for the **reasonable use** of Tamil through the Tamil Regulations Act of January 1966, and discarded the section relating to the devolution of power. This ended the FP-UNP coalition in 1969(Manogaran, 1987, Saravanamuttu, 1990, and Ponnambalam, 1983).

Hence, one could argue that the first twenty years of independence made two major impacts on Sri Lankan politics. In the South, the triumph of ethnic politics [through Sinhala Only legislation] amounted to the capture of the state by the majority community for the purpose of political consolidation and control of economic power through nationalization and, in the North, it represented the beginnings of a serious challenge to the unitary status of the state(Wilson, 1988 , Dharamadasa, 1992).

The pattern of political activity initiated in the 1970s signaled the collapse of the parliamentary consensus and institutionalized state's recourse to violence in the resolution of political conflict. Disenchantment with the elite leadership among both Sinhalese and Tamil youth culminated in the conviction that their grievances could only be met through armed insurgency against the political center. In the South, the basis for grievances had been the call for greater access to socio-economic and political benefits. The Janata Vimukthi Peramuna's insurrection of 1971, which claimed nearly 10,000 lives, exposed the inherited as well as the inherent problems of the Sri Lankan political system.⁴⁷ In the North, youth dissent has been fed by frustration with the failure of political accommodation to prevent discrimination. The United Front government's policy regarding university admissions led to mass dissatisfaction in the North. Until 1971, the admission criteria to university were based on merit. But the standardization policy of the UF government decreed that university admissions should be given according to ethnic ratio and merit. This had a

⁴⁷The JVP, though it claimed to be Marxist-Leninist in its ideology, was very much bound by the ethnic constraints.

very serious effect on the youth of the North, many of whom were denied access to higher education. By the mid-1970s, the growing bitterness of the Northern youth had spawned a plethora of guerrilla groups, the most famous and deadly of which is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam[hereafter referred to as LTTE] (Ponnambalam, 1983, Tambiah, 1986).

Established political parties, in turn, have deepened this alienation by seeking to extend and consolidate their monopoly of state power at the expense of the parliamentary framework, thus reinforcing the trend towards violent opposition. Both the left-wing UF government of Mrs. Bandaranaike[1970-77] and its right-wing successor, the UNP regime of J.R. Jayawardene[1977-89], were guilty of this. Both were swept into power with unprecedented legislative majorities, which they used for partisan advantage. Both governments changed the constitutions-the first [1972] making Sri Lanka a republic in which the primacy of the majority was ensured, and the second[1978] replacing the parliamentary system with a Gaullist-style executive presidency⁴⁸(Wilson, 1988, Tambiah, 1986, James Manor, 1984).

The common attitude of the government toward these challenges by militants uprisings, had been, in the case of JVP, to treat it as a threat to the hegemony of the state, and in the case of Tamil militancy, to treat it as a threat to Sri Lanka's territorial sovereignty. Both the left-wing UF government and the right-wing UNP government attempted to de-legitimize the challenges by defining them as essentially terrorist in nature. The JVP insurrection of 1971 was defined as anti-democratic and terrorist and was successfully suppressed. The UF government, with the help of the Indian Army, ruthlessly⁴⁸ suppressed the revolution aimed at overthrowing the government. When confronted with Tamil militancy and the demand for secession, the response was uncompromising and militaristic; the search for political solutions was necessitated

⁴⁸These two Constitutions and their political impact on Sri Lankan society will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

only by military stalemate. Saravanamuttu contends that the state, when confronted with the challenges, proceeded to treat the one from within its own ethnic group mainly as political, and the other as a territorial issue(Saravanamuttu, 1990). Hence, the government response to Tamil militancy took the form of military operations. This justified the military's occupying intentions and its treatment of Tamils in the North and East as foreigners and enemies.

The response of the Tamil leadership was conditioned by the need to preserve their credibility in an era of growing militancy. Following the satyagraha⁴⁹ of 1957 and the first race riots of 1957⁵⁰ Tamil demands and interests became more 'politicized'. The failure of the two Pacts added to the frustration of the Tamils. The Constitution of 1972, which among other things gave Buddhism the foremost place in the Constitution[which meant that Buddhism will be protected and preserved by the State] helped to further aggravate Tamil discontent. At the same time, the seeds of Tamil nationhood, sown during the colonial era, had taken root in the hearts of Tamils. Majority-minority 'conflict' became a conflict of nationhood and a fight for the right to self-determination.

The FP, frustrated and thwarted by the UF government in its attempts to demand a federal state⁵¹walked out of the Constituent assembly of 1971 and closed ranks with other Tamil parties including the All Ceylon Tamil Congress and the Tamil Youth Congress to form the Tamil United Front. In 1976, they adopted the Vaddukoddai resolution calling for a separate state of Tamil Eelam through armed struggle if necessary thereby becoming the Tamil United Liberation Front(hereafter referred to as TULF). The Tamil leaders, who had hitherto championed Tamil nationalism, adapted

⁴⁹Satyagraha is a kind of peaceful protest and was popularized by Mahatma Gandhi in the days of the Indian freedom struggle

⁵⁰See Tarzie Vittachi's The Race Riots of 1957 for further details(Vitacchi, 1958).

⁵¹The first demand for a federal state as a viable solution to the growing ethnic conflict was put forward by the FP in the late 1960s.

themselves to the political situation. This resulted in massive support for the TULF mandate in the 1977 general elections. The Tamil leadership, under the umbrella organization of TULF, returned to the National Assembly to form the opposition and to show that they were still open to political bargaining and accommodation within the existing political framework.

3.2c. Ethnic Conflict: The Presidential Phase

It was argued by the framers of the 1978 constitution that a presidential system with clear separation of powers would rectify the imbalance of power caused by a parliamentary system. They further argued that a change in the electoral system would reduce the preponderance of the ethnic majority. A system of proportional representation was proposed. Furthermore, promises of power sharing and all-party conferences to solve the ethnic conflict were put forward.

When the UNP gained a majority of more than two-thirds in the parliament, the Tamils prepared themselves to ask for more political accommodation. The UF government was cast in the role of the 'villain', and the new government assumed the role of the 'savior'. Tamil hopes were raised. Belief in structural remedies was renewed once again.

The new UNP government(1977-94) set up a Constitutional Committee to draft the new constitution. The Committee, among other things, attempted to identify the sources of ethnic conflict as issues deriving from the grievances of Tamils. The issues were categorized as education, land, language and employment. Reducing the movement for separation and self-determination to such issues, is an indication of an inherent incapacity of the government to either understand or acknowledge the growth of Tamil nationalism. The government further chose to ignore the mandate of the TULF, given by the Tamils of North and East(Manogaran and Pfaffenberger, 1994).

The new government, through the new Constitution [1978], strove to address the ethnic conflict at two levels -political and military. On the one hand, Constitutional recognition was given to the Tamil language, making it a national language and the official language in the North and East. The system of District Development Councils, a relic from the political accommodation era, was proposed to ensure power sharing between the majority and minority communities. On the other hand, the government continued to deploy troops in the North and East, and governmental control was further strengthened by the all-powerful Prevention of Terrorism Act. Unlawful arrests, arson, rape, killing and disappearances were carried out by the security forces as measures of intimidation.

This 'carrot and stick' approach of the government did not bring the desired end. Instead, it not only encouraged more Tamil youth to become involved in the 'liberation struggle', as it was beginning to be called, but also created a vicious cycle of ambush, atrocity and an untold amount of destruction, which continued to destroy all prospects for ethnic reconciliation. As in all civil wars, the civilians were targeted by both sides, and this added to the hatred and mistrust of both communities. That ethnic reconciliation was a thing of the past was proved beyond doubt in 1983. The mismanaged funerals of Sri Lankan soldiers killed in an LTTE ambush served as the catalyst for the most savage outburst of anti-Tamil violence in the South. Thousands were massacred or made homeless; many of the survivors fled to refugee camps, to the North, to India or abroad. Extensive damage was done to Tamil property, with the worst atrocities being committed in the heart of Colombo. Most damning was the reported acquiescence and participation of sections of the security forces and allegations that elements within the ruling party were the instigators of the riots.⁵²

⁵²Extensive reports have been written on the communal riots of July 1983. For a more concise and largely unbiased account, see Lionel Piyadasa's Sri Lanka: Holocaust and After , 1984.

The government's response to the riots was, to say the least, ironic. Not only did it fail to take immediate action to curb the eruption of violence, but it continued to blame the victims. It further attempted to use the volatile situation to outlaw the Tamil political leadership. The Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, which was hastily drawn and passed in parliament, effectively outlawed the advocacy of secession. Furthermore, to appease international, especially Indian, suspicion, the government tried to blame the ultra left-wing groups for the slaughter. The JVP[which regained political status in 1977, with the advent of UNP] along with other supposedly ultra left-wing parties and groups were proscribed. Other measures aimed at 'dismantling' the democratic traditions and ethos of the island were taken. The government assumed wide range of emergency powers which were very effective in suppressing most of the freedoms outlined in the Constitution. Basic democratic rights were curtailed, and censorship of all information concerning the ethnic conflict was imposed. This state of affairs continued until 1994. The year 1983 became a watershed in the modern history of Sri Lanka. The Tamil struggle assumed the proportions of a struggle for independence from the Sinhala state. It also marked the end of nation-building and state building, for, from 1983 onwards, the politics of Sri Lanka came to be regarded as the politics of two nations. The unitary state structure was being challenged continuously and effectively.

3.2d Ethnic Conflict: The Militant Phase

The twelve years following the communal riots of 1983 bear witness to two major developments. On the one hand, the State and its machinery started to lose legitimacy not only amongst the Tamils but also amongst the Sinhalese. State terrorism was unleashed on the nation as a whole even though the main target was the Tamils. On the other hand, Tamil nationalism started to manifest itself in terms of chauvinism and communalism. Democracy, as it had been practiced in the previous thirty five years, was deliberately dismantled.

In 1984, the year following the communal riots, both state terrorism and militant terrorism took hold of the society. Dozens of militant groups⁵³ escalated their campaign of terror on two fronts. One front concerned the Sri Lankan state and its machinery. State employees from bureaucrats to policemen came under attack. On the other front, the 'enemy within' was scrupulously 'identified' and destroyed. The ensuing years saw fierce and brutal fratricide amongst the militant groups.

The State continued its 'carrot and stick' approach. The All Party Conference, the 'carrot', was convened in January 1984 to discuss the future of the country. The TULF, though outlawed from the parliament, was included in the discussions, which came to be known as the Amity Talks. Edgar O'Ballance cynically points out that, "The Amity Talks dragged on fitfully and fruitlessly throughout the year..." and were "...held merely to placate international opinion"(Edgar O'Ballance, 1989, 33). Two months after the Conference was convened, the State created a Ministry of National Security, which was given de facto powers to eradicate terrorism. When asked about the object of this new Ministry, President J.R. Jayawardene admitted that his "National Security Minister was working towards a military solution.as Tamils now would

⁵³Dagmar-Hellmann Rajanayagam, in her article "The 'Groups' And The Rise Of Militant Secessionism" in The Sri Lankan Tamils , claimed that, "there were no fewer than thirty Tamil militant groups..."(Manogaran and Pfaffenberger, 1994, 169).

accept nothing less than an independent Tamil Eelam state"(quoted by O'Ballance, 1989, 33).

Similar Talks [Conferences] were convened and reconvened to no avail. India's intervention, both as peace-maker and peace-preserver[the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord of 1987] brought only temporary relief to the suffering people. Cease-fires were used by both sides to replenish their military as well as physical strength. In the North, political leadership had shifted from the 'moderate', traditional elite to the hands of militants. Of the thirty-odd militant movements, only LTTE, through its assertion of massive physical as well as financial strength, has managed to uphold the cry for Tamil Eelam. The other notable militant groups, EPRLF(Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front), EROS(Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students), TELO(Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization) and PLOTE(People's Liberation Organization Of Tamil Eelam) were soon subjugated by LTTE in its bid to assume total control. LTTE's apparent dislike of power sharing had become a fact in the later years. The remnant 'vanquished' militant groups formed ENDLF (Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front) under the auspices of the IPKF(Indian Peace Keeping Force) and later aligned themselves with the Sri Lankan government and the Security Forces in a desperate attempt to destroy LTTE(Manogaran and Pfaffenberger, 1994, O'Ballance, 1989, Shantha K. Hennyake, 1993 and Angela S. Berger, 1992).

Political accommodation, in its crudest sense, is still being carried out by both the State and the militants. The LTTE aligned itself with the government of President R. Premadasa[1989-93] in its attempt to remove the IPKF from the North and East. It was alleged that the government even went to the extent of providing arms to the LTTE to fight the IPKF, who came to 'keep the peace'. The Indo-Lanka Peace Accord of 1987 had decreed the deployment of a peace keeping force, and India deployed close to 100,000 soldiers to 'keep' peace in the North and East. The LTTE and the Sri Lankan government supposedly signed a 'pact' that was to bring 'peace'. In a sense,

one could argue that the presence of IPKF fused a 'bond' or a consensus between the traditional 'enemies'. But this bond was short-lived. Two months after the last of the IPKF troops were withdrawn, both the government and the LTTE resumed the civil war. Until recently, the 'outlawed' militants, who were working with the IPKF in its fight against LTTE, joined hands with the Sri Lankan Security Forces in its fight against the LTTE. Thus changing loyalties and temporary accommodation had become part of politics. Sinhalese and Tamil citizens have come to be regarded as pawns in this dangerous political game. The LTTE has declared itself the sole protector and savior of Tamils. As the strongest and most tenacious of all militant groups, the LTTE has proved itself to be a formidable enemy, both as a guerrilla force and as a conventional army. From 1990 June till recently, the LTTE was in control of large sections of the North. The UNP government[1977-94] was fully aware of LTTE's fighting stamina, yet it continued to press forward for a military solution. Having lost its legitimacy amongst their own people due to the ruthless suppression of the JVP insurrection in 1987-90 which claimed close to 65,000 lives, dead or missing, in the South, the government saw the prolonged war as the only means to continue in power. A deteriorating economy and escalating foreign debt further provided reasons for continuing a meaningless war. Until recently, the Sinhala political leaders had continued to use the ethnic conflict or Tamil separatism as it is now called, for their own political gains.

The People's Alliance government, which came to power in September 1994, under the leadership of Mrs. Chandrika Kumaranatunga -widow of an assassinated presidential candidate and daughter of Mrs. Bandaranaike- was elected with a more promising mandate. The People's Alliance government promised to a) eliminate the presidential system of government and b) find a 'humanitarian' and 'political' solution to the ethnic conflict. Yet, the break-up of Peace Talks with the LTTE in April 1995

and the ensuing war does not point towards a political solution(Manogaran and Pfaffenberger, 1994).

This brief survey of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has revealed the deeply divided state of the Sri Lankan polity and has exposed the inability of the political structures to 'solve' the conflict. The obstacles to peace in Sri Lanka come mainly from two sources: 1) her transplanted political structures, and 2) her divisive institutions.

The next Chapter attempts to identify the institutional and structural sources of ethnic conflict. In this examination, one could find out how they have become obstacles to peace in Sri Lanka.

Chapter 4

Structural And Institutionalized Obstacles To Peace In Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan society is in the grip of a protracted conflict which has become militarized. Many observers have repeated that Sri Lanka is at war with itself. In fact, there are several wars going on at the same time in Sri Lanka. The war between the state and the LTTE in the North-East has been going on for more than twelve years. There are the constant internecine armed conflicts between different Tamil militant groups. There is also a war between the government and the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna-a Marxist militant movement mobilized to overthrow the government. These wars have cost thousands of lives, most of them civilians. The population of the North-East dropped from 1.7 million in 1987 to 900,000 in 1992, i.e. it has dwindled by about 47% in a matter of five years. Of the 800,000 that are not there, about 50,000 are dead or missing, 500,000 have left the country and most of the others are living outside the region in refugee camps (Report of the University Teachers for Human Rights, Aug. 1991). Until recently, successive governments have unsuccessfully launched military operations to capture LTTE controlled territories. The present government has asked the international community to 'recognize' Sri Lanka as a 'state at war'. This means the government no longer regards the conflict as a civil war but has 'elevated' it to an all-out war between two nations. Sri Lankan society has become de-sensitized to violence and terrorism. Terrorism at state and society level has created a generation of youth steeped in gun-culture.

Understandably, *peace* is the first thing people yearn for in such a situation. But, peace in Sri Lanka is inconceivable without solutions to conflicts that have become militarized. Peace is inconceivable, inasmuch as the conflicts are entrenched in the structures and institutions of the country. In Sri Lanka, communalism, which means

the transforming of politics in a multi-ethnic society into a hotbed of competing communal identities whose ideological consolidation relies on targeting the 'other' as the enemy(Kothari, 1988, pp. 240-53), has become entrenched in the state and the civil society. Certain political structures and institutions were put in place in the Constitutions that continued to ensure discrimination and the oppression of minorities. The state has continued to use its 'brute' force against all types of popular mobilization and calls for democratization.

In such a situation, a discussion of the obstacles to peace should include a critical analysis of the sources of ethnic conflict as well. The objective of this Chapter is to examine and analyze the structural and institutionalized obstacles to peace in Sri Lanka.

Sources of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka:

The main obstacles to peace in Sri Lanka come from the sources of her ethnic conflict. These sources are both institutionalized and structural. They are entrenched in the political system and society. The emergence of ethnic conflict could be regarded as an inevitable result of nation-building, which was carried out first by the colonial powers and then later by their successors. Building a nation and/or a nation-state where more than one 'ethnic group' are present is a difficult task. The objective of this section is to examine the basic concepts of nation and nation building with particular reference to Sri Lanka.

In almost all ex-colonies, during the pre-colonial period, there existed problems with regard to the integration of minority ethnic communities under the governance of a ruling group. Hence, nation states as we know them now, did not exist. Teresa S. Encarnacion and Eduardo C. Tadem(1993) state that, "various kingdoms flourished and, when they acquired enough wealth and military power, brought other ethnic

peoples or less powerful or declining kingdoms under their suzerainty. In either case, the paying of tribute and other subservient services were imposed, which often led to internal tensions and political instability”(150).

Political instability and ethnic tensions assumed a greater significance when the Western colonizers tried to integrate the colonies into the international market. As Encarnacion and Tadem(1993) argue, an important prerequisite for this integration was “..the establishment of a central government directly or indirectly controlled by the colonial power”(150).⁵⁴ The creation of an artificial state with an artificial nation was the eventual result of such thinking.

What is nation-building? Nation is a term which has been, according to Walker Connor(1994), most commonly used inter-changeably with state. He goes on to argue that defining a state is much easier than defining a nation. A State can be defined as a 'political subdivision' of the globe. It also can be defined in quantitative terms, since it invariably involves a given population, a territory, a governing institution and 'legitimate' authority. The definition of nation, on the other hand, becomes more difficult because of its intangible nature. "This essence..." of a nation, Connor(1994) explains, "...is a psychological bond that joins a people and differentiates it..."(92). Hence, nation can be loosely defined as a human collectivity joined together by a common ideology, common language, customs and traditions and a *sense* of 'homogeneity'. Definitions of nation generally include a 'sense of belonging', a 'feeling' of togetherness, 'oneness', 'sameness' etc..⁵⁵ Hutchinson and Smith(1994) claim that, of all the various definitions of 'nation', Renan, Stalin and Weber provide definitions

⁵⁴This has been discussed in more detail by some of the scholars from the South. See Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez, ed., The Making Of Social Movements in Latin America, 1992, Arturo Escobar, Encountering Development, 1995 and Rajni Kothari, State Against Democracy, 1988, and Gail Omvedt, Reinventing Revolution, 1993 for further discussion.

⁵⁵The concepts 'nation', 'state', and 'nationalism' has been the primary focus of much of the literature in social science. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith provide a rather concise and comprehensive reader of these concepts in Nationalism, 1994.

which cover a 'wide spectrum'. According to Hutchinson and Smith, Renan rejects the statist concept of nation and identifies nation as a "form of morality"(15). Thus Renan claims that "a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle"(Ernest Renan, 1994, 17). Renan goes on to elucidate his claim stating that two things-the past(a common legacy) and the present(the will to live together)-constitute this 'spiritual' principle(17). Stalin, on the other hand, combines a mix of objective and subjective elements. His definition tries to differentiate races and tribes. He claims that "a nation is not a racial or tribal, but a historically constituted community of people"(Joseph Stalin, 1994, 18). Stalin then endeavored to provide a list of 'characteristic features' which compose a nation. The list included a common language, a common territory, a common economic life -economic cohesion, and a common psychological make-up manifested in a common culture(18-20). Weber differed radically from both Renan and Stalin. He describes the nation as a 'prestige community' endowed with a cultural mission (Max Weber, 1994, 21-25).

It is not the scope of this Chapter nor of my thesis to survey the diverse definitions of nation as provided by various eminent scholars. Hence, for the purposes of this section, I will define 'nation' as an entity that "..consists of a people, sharing a common language(or dialects of a common language), inhabiting a fixed territory, with common customs and traditions, which may have become sufficiently conscious to take on the aspect of law, and who recognize common need for a single sovereign"(Roger Scruton, A Dictionary of Political Thought, 1982, 312).

What are the problems of nation-building? Arnold Rivkin, in his "The Politics of Nation-Building: Problems and Preconditions"(1962) suggests three problems of nation-building that he considers as primary,. According to Rivkin, "..the definition of the physical proportions, the geographic configuration, the legal limits of the unit within which the nation is to be built"(131) becomes the primary problem. The second problem is determining the structure of the state within which to build the nation once

the geographic limits are defined. The third and final problem according to Rivkin is the approaches and methodology employed in "investing disparate groups within the state with a consciousness and sense of national identities..."(132). This last problem is closely related to homogenization.

Nation-building in Sri Lanka became an arduous task. Sri Lanka has faced all three problems and the present conflict is an inevitable result of failed nation-building. The country is populated by two 'nations', who until the 1500s had remained separate and independent of each other. The Tamils had an independent kingdom which encompassed the north-east⁵⁶ region of Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese, on the other hand inhabited the rest of the country. Both kingdoms had clearly delineated territorial boundaries. With the advent of, first the Portuguese, then the Dutch and lastly the British, the country was brought under one administrative unit in order to expedite the functioning of the export economic structure they had created. The whole country was brought under the Crown, which paid no respect or regard to the existing boundaries. Furthermore, a unitary state structure was imposed upon the local people. Here again, the Crown and its successors paid no regard to the diversity of the populace. Thirdly, an identity was created for the local people to adopt. The people were given a 'label' which described them as Ceylonese, regardless of whether they were Sinhalese or Tamils. All three problems need to be discussed in detail for us to understand the serious impact they had left on Sri Lanka. This will be attempted in the next section which undertakes the discussion of structural sources of the ethnic conflict, which now have become obstacles to peace in Sri Lanka.

⁵⁶Generally, North-East is used to denote the political region whereas north-east is used to describe the geographical area.

4.1 Structural Sources of Ethnic Conflict:

The structural sources of ethnic conflict in the Sri Lankan case are political homogenization and ethnic majoritarianism. Political homogenization, a process started by the British in their quest to 'democratize' Sri Lanka, took the form of a unitary state, a parliamentary system of government, universal franchise, a party system and a constitutional process of government. Majoritarianism, on the other hand, was interpreted as rule by the ethnic majority.

Considerable amount of controversy surrounds the concept of homogenization. Is homogenization a tendency of development or is it a process deliberately set in motion to reach certain self-serving goals? Cultural homogenization or assimilation as experienced in the West can be considered as a tendency of development. Political homogenization as 'implemented' in most of the ex-colonies needs to be recognized as a set of deliberate processes which were set in motion to facilitate the smooth functioning of the colonial machinery. Hence, I am using homogenization as a political process rather than as a 'cultural tendency'.

Can the process of homogenization be considered as structural? In the case of Sri Lanka, the process of homogenization became structural when it was entrenched in the Constitutions and the polity. The creation of a unitary system where more than one 'State' had existed, the implementation of an 'administrative' language which, the colonialists believed, would 'unite' the country, the introduction of an export-import economic structure which was capitalistic in nature and practice, and the agents of 'modernization' - 'modern' schools, a unified code of law - are some of the results of political homogenization that have become entrenched in the political structure of the country.

4.1a Homogenization and its Effects on Sri Lankan Polity:

Rajni Kothari, in his Rethinking Development (1990) argues that ethnicity is "a response to the excesses of the modern project shaping the whole of humanity(and its natural resource base) around the three pivots of world capitalism, the state system and a 'world culture', based on modern technology, a pervasive communications and information order and a universalizing educational system"(191), all aimed at homogenizing and straitjacketing the world. Modernization theorists of the 1950s and 1960s assumed that "nation-building was a viable option"(Welsh, 1993, 64). It was further believed that, either 'parochial and subnational' loyalties would give way to state-wide loyalties or an overarching sense of 'national identity' would eclipse them. Similarly, a long tradition of Marxist theorists, beginning with Karl Marx himself, viewed ethnicity as " an evanescent, retrograde phenomenon that would ultimately be transcended by class solidarity"(Welsh, 64). In such thinking homogenization was accepted as the means of countering the influence of ethnicity. Marxists' way of homogenization took the form of 'uniting the working class' which would result in the eradication of ethnic identity. Furthermore, Marxists believed ethnic identity and its resurgence were manifestations of inherent class conflicts in the society. Hence, to counter ethnic identity, one has to 'eradicate' class. This could only be carried out by creating a common economic life and economic cohesion. It was also argued that the creation of 'supra-nations' such as the former USSR, would override 'micro' nationalisms and ethnic affiliations. Nowhere has this been realized. 'Parochial' ethnic loyalties have proven to be stubbornly intractable. Furthermore, though class has become a significant basis of stratification within 'developing' states, it did not undermine the power of ethnic identity as a mobilizing force. In reality, class solidarity and 'national-identity' have been subsumed by ethnic loyalties. This was exemplified by the break-up of the former USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia along ethnic lines.

Homogenization in classical liberal practice took mainly three forms-colonialism, economic development and the concept of nation-state(Kothari, 1990). It is an accepted practice of most of the Third World to blame colonialism for all the evils they have undergone. While colonialism should bear a reasonable amount of the blame, the political elite of the ex-colonies ought to bear the bulk of the blame for having continued the exploitative systems created by the colonialists.

Eradication of existing boundaries and the creation of artificial nation-states was the first and foremost attempt at homogenizing the colonies carried out by the colonialists. In Sri Lanka, this meant the creation of a unitary state in place of the three Kingdoms which had existed until colonization. With the advent of the Colebrook-Cameron Commission of 1831, a number of 'reforms' were recommended for the smooth running of the colonial economy. The reforms included a tighter degree of centralized administration, a form of representation and the right to vote along with other economic and judicial reforms. Centralization involved the reduction of the administrative provinces from fifteen to five. The redrawing of boundaries reduced relative autonomy of the Kandyan province, which had hitherto exerted a major influence in the affairs of the country.⁵⁷ The redrawing of boundaries produced some unfortunate results. It more or less forced the assimilation of the two major ethnic groups and also created large-scale displacement of Tamils and Sinhalese who were living in territorial border villages. Tamils were moved involuntarily into predominantly Sinhalese areas, and vice versa. Until then, the separation of the three kingdoms warranted ethnic separation as well. The Sinhalese and the Tamils had had very little contact with each other. The British, in order to curb the emergence of ethnic or national assertiveness, decided to divide the country into small administrative

⁵⁷ The Kandyan Kingdom was the last one to come under British Crown(1815). Since the Kandyan kingdom proved to be a formidable enemy for at least 20 years, the Crown had to devise 'schemes' to rid the country of Kandyan influence.

units. These administrative units either cut across or 'united' villages which had been either predominantly Tamil or Sinhalese. As a result, the border villages became 'multi-ethnic' in nature. The inhabitants were forced to assimilate and forge new identities. After independence, this forced assimilation had led to serious disputes over who belongs where. Thus, the issue of 'traditional homelands' has become one of the major problems in today's ethnic conflict.

The official language policy of the Crown was the second attempt at homogenization. English was declared to be the official language at the expense of native languages. While one could argue that English did 'unite' a linguistically divided country, the disadvantages far outweighed the advantages. The imposition of the English language, the establishment of a British style educational system and the forced and encouraged proselytization of the indigenous people all helped to create the petty-bourgeoisie which in turn helped sustain the colonial economy. The dominant thinking that western education would eventually lead to homogenization of the society, which would bring about the desired result- modernization, informed colonial policy in Sri Lanka. Instead of homogenizing the society, western-education had the opposite effect. As discussed in the previous Chapter, English education and Christianity led to the growth of religious revivalism among the non-Christians. Thus, the late 19th century saw the unprecedented growth of Buddhist and Hindu revivalism.

The second major form of homogenization is economic development. Economic development, advocates of development theory argued, would produce a highly industrialized economy, a sophisticated communications and information order and the emergence of a global culture. Coupled with this was the misconception of progress as a linear process. However, as discussed elsewhere, economic development in Sri Lanka did not produce the desired results. The society became more sensitized to its differences than before. Sophisticated communications and information systems, one of the results of economic development, instead of overriding the ethnic differences,

seemed to aggravate them. The Tamils of Sri Lanka strengthened their ties with the Tamils of Tamil Nadu, India rather than with their fellow Sinhalese compatriots. In the same fashion, 'cultural imperialism' and cosmopolitanism- another aspect of economic development- proved to be ambiguous forces, in that they did not produce homogenization. Sri Lanka's integration into the world economy and the involvement of multinational corporations in the local economy again failed to provide the desired fringe benefits of homogenization and the eventual withering away of ethnic identity.

Homogenization also took the form of 'nation-building'. Theories of 'nation-building' have tended either to ignore the question of ethnic diversity or to treat ethnic identity merely as an impediment to state-integration (Connor, 1972). Coupled with the notion of modernization and industrialization, 'nation-building' came to be identified as a prerequisite for the 'attainment' of democracy. Hence, 'nation-building' becomes a necessary characteristic of homogenization. Nation-building is a project that has failed, except, of course, in those rare states in the 'developing' world that have culturally homogenous populations. 'Melting pots' have not succeeded in creating homogeneity. As Welsh argues, 'nation-building' has, in some cases, led to the creation of tyrannical or authoritarian systems(Welsh, 66). In Sri Lanka, the process of nation-building as a form of homogenization not only failed to take root but also had become a major source of ethnic conflict and later an obstacle to peace.

The second structural source of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is majoritarianism. Rule by majority was interpreted as rule by ethnic majority and not pluralism. The democratic principle of rule by the majority was abused by the post-colonial governments of Sri Lanka. The following sub-section attempts to analyze majoritarianism and the effects it has had on the Sri Lankan polity.

4.1b Ethnic Majoritarianism:

The second structural source of ethnic conflict is majority rule. It is structural because the Constitutions decree that only those who hold the support of the majority, in terms of electoral votes and parliamentary seats, could assume political power. Hence, a government, according to the democratic assumption of representative government, should have the support of the 'majority'.

Rule by majority is a prerequisite for representative' form of government. This is primarily a liberal conception of democracy. Conventional thinking about democracy was based on a harmony model. This thinking assumed that the state will be the arbiter of power, which will be dispensed with restraint and moderation, to mediate conflicts and cleavages. This would lead to harmonious societies. This assumption of harmonious communities has no basis in reality, be it at the local, national or global level.

The discussion of majority rule is based on two concepts: the role and legitimacy of the state and participation of the people in the process of government.

The role of the modern state has gone through various changes over the last four centuries. According to Rajni Kothari(1988), the modern state has evolved out of the *ancien regime* to become a social institution. He argues that:

...the very processes that put an end to the *ancien regime* in various regions of the world also gave rise to a new conception of the State as a social institution. Among these were: the expansion of the base of political participation, extension of the reach of the State to cover economic tasks that were hitherto performed by diverse 'estates', and the emergence of the State as a mediator, indeed an arbiter, in conflicts arising out of divisions based on class, and on ethnic and nationality factors(Kothari, 1988, 15).

Since the state is required to play the role of a provider-protector and mediator; it also becomes the arbiter of legitimate power. This role of the state can only be played in a 'fair and free' system, where the majority of the people participate in the process of

governance and development, and the plurality of the people is represented. This provider-protector-mediator role of the state is jeopardized if and when the state represents only one segment of the population and alienates the rest. Therefore, when rule by the majority, the democratic principle in its pristine form, comes to mean rule by an ethnic majority, the legitimacy of the state comes into question. In such a situation, the state also loses the provider-protector-mediator role to the ensuing class and ethnic conflicts. This eventually results in state repression and state terrorism.

When the Sri Lankan elite compromised the democratic principle of rule by majority, they also jeopardized the state's legitimacy. The ethnic composition of Sri Lanka facilitated this abuse of the principle. The post-colonial governments did not have to seek the support of the minorities, especially Tamil votes- who formed only about 18-20 percent of the population. As discussed in Chapter Three, the Sinhalese leaders found it too 'costly' to engage in political accommodation and bargaining. Since mobilizing support along ethnic and communal lines proved to be easier and less 'costly' in terms of power-sharing, the Sinhalese elite chose to espouse ethnic chauvinism. Such political maneuvers clearly alienated the minority Tamils from the political process. Furthermore, the Language Act of 1956, which was based on a 'majoritarian' principle further contributed to this process of alienation. The argument behind the Language Act posited that since the Sinhala language is spoken by the two-thirds of the population, it made political sense to make it the official language. Thus, the state came to be identified with the majority, in this case, a Sinhalese state. When the state's legitimacy was questioned through protests and people's movements, the state resorted to repression and terrorism.

The impact of political homogenization and majoritarianism on Sri Lankan politics has become unalterable. The major forms of homogenization set in place a political system which is ill-suited to the country's multi-ethnic nature. The unitary structure of government, with its emphasis on 'majority rule', had successfully

alienated the minority Tamils not only from the political process but also from effective power-sharing. The multi-party system, which emerged long before independence, failed to cut across ethnic lines, rather parties were based on ethnic identities. Furthermore, the electoral district divisions, first put in place by the colonial masters, continued to perpetuate ethnic imbalance in representation. It is true that the UNP government of 1977 did try to eliminate this structural imbalance by introducing proportional representation, but this reform came in the wake of yet another round of ethnic riots, and thus it was ineffective.

Furthermore, these structural sources of ethnic conflict did not and could not, by their very nature, create a conducive environment for any kind of solution. None of the governments was prepared to create a federal structure, which could have led to effective power-sharing between the ethnic people groups. Instead, all efforts at power-sharing were proposed within the existing unitary structure. The Banda-Chelva Pact of 1957, the Senanayake-Chelva Pact of 1964, the District Councils Proposal of 1981 and the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord of 1987 managed, without fail, to commit the same 'blunders' over and over again.

On the other hand, one also should note that, even if major structural reforms had been proposed, they still would not have been adequate. For, the protracted nature of the ethnic conflict had effectively institutionalized the sources of the ethnic conflict. Communalism, de-secularism and violence had become institutionalized in the Sri Lankan polity. Hence, for the structural reforms to be effective, Sri Lanka has to 'de-institutionalize' these negative results of ethnic conflict.

Before one examines the hows and whys of 'de-institutionalization', one has to analyze the institutionalized sources of obstacles to peace in Sri Lanka. A brief analysis of three major sources of ethnic conflict will be provided in the following section.

4.2 Institutionalized Sources Of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka:

The institutionalized sources of ethnic conflict differ from the structural ones in that they emerged from within the Sri Lankan society and therefore reflect the nature of the society. Unlike the structural sources, the roots of communalism, violence and de-secularism come from within, and are therefore deeply entrenched. In such a situation, the attainment of peace becomes a near-impossible task. Institutionalized sources of communalism, violence and de-secularism demand an alternative approach to peace. This approach has to involve the Sri Lankan people as a whole, and initiate the process of peace from the people. This also has to involve rethinking democracy and development, from the people's point of view. Creating the environment for dialogues between people, educating people for peace, and involving people in the process are some of the ways this alternative approach can be carried out.

The purpose of this section is not to explore the alternative ways to peace, but to examine the institutionalized sources of ethnic conflict. An examination of communalism, violence and de-secularism is necessary in any research for peace in Sri Lanka, for the removal of the structural obstacles alone cannot provide a long-term solution. Removal of such obstacles involves a 'top down' approach, while creating the environment for a long-term solution involves grass-root participation in the process. Both have to go together for these solutions to work. This will be discussed in my conclusion, where I will suggest that critical rethinking is needed for the creation of peace.

4.2a Communalism and De-Secularism

Communalism means the transforming of politics of a multi-ethnic society into a hotbed of competing communal identities whose ideological consolidation relies on targeting the 'other' as the enemy(Kothari, 1988, pp. 240-53). This becomes especially

dangerous when those with power start targeting the other as the enemy. Sri Lankan society has become an extreme case of a vicious circle of communalism and imagined enemies, beginning with the majority Sinhala Buddhists and then inevitably engulfing the Tamils and Muslims. Therefore it is important to examine the manifestations of communalism in both Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups. Since the Muslim community of Sri Lanka is generally considered as a religious group⁵⁸, and its demand for a separate Muslim enclave is of very recent-late 1980s-origin, I will not discuss the 'communal' manifestations of the Muslims. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the fact that any solution to the ethnic conflict which excludes the Muslim community will not be adequate.

4.2b Institutionalization of Communalism by the State and the Sinhalese Society:

It is generally accepted by Sri Lankan scholars that the process of communalization of politics started with the introduction of the Citizenship Act of 1948 (Manogaran, 1987, Ponnambalam, 1983, Thornton and Nithyanandan, 1984, and Tambiah, 1986). This Act effectively deprived 90,000 Tamils of Indian origin of their right to vote and increased the parliamentary strength of the Sinhalese from 67% in 1947 to 73% in 1952.

The second demonstration of communalism was revealed in the early 1950s in the contention over the national flag (Satchi Ponnambalam, 1983 and Thornton and Nithyanandan, 1984). The national flag depicted a lion as a symbol of the ancient

⁵⁸The status of Muslims in Sri Lanka is a controversial issue. The Muslims are generally considered a religious group. Since Muslims, in general, speak either Tamil, Sinhala or both, depending on where they live, their demand for recognition as a 'nationality' has not been accepted by the Sinhala-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu communities. Hence, I hesitate to include them in this discussion. See Karthigesu Sivathamby's article on "The Sri Lanka Ethnic Crisis and Muslim Tamil Relationships- A Socio-Political Review" in *Facets of Ethnicity*, eds. Charles Abeysekera and Newton Gunasinghe, 1987 and Kumari Jayawardena's *Ethnic and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka*, 1990 for a detailed discussion.

Sinhalese kings. This lion held aloft a sword in its right paw, symbolizing victory, against a background of pipal tree leaves, under which the Buddha was said to have attained enlightenment. Thus it was essentially a Sinhala- Buddhist flag. Following protests, the state in a conciliatory attempt made a concession to include a stripe representing the minority Tamils.

However, the Tamil leaders did not realize the danger of growing communalism until the Language Act of 1956, which declared Sinhala to be the Official Language⁵⁹ and reduced the influence of English, was introduced. This Act had serious implications for the well-being of Tamils, who hitherto had been quite successful in asserting their influence through English.

The Language Act and the communalistic rhetoric which preceded the Act revealed the bankruptcy of parliamentary democracy in that the parliament could not curb the communal tide which was sweeping through the Island. The cathartic role of the legislature proved to be a failure. Rather, the legislature became a hotbed of racial and communal rhetoric.⁶⁰

Communalization of the society at large was carried out by some of the Buddhist monks-Bhikkus. As early as 1950's, the Buddhist monks- the Buddhist clergy - had started to organize themselves as a political force. What started as Buddhist organizations became federations of bhikku associations. Two of the large federations joined to form the Eksath Bhikku Peramuna(United Bhikku Front-EBP), which attempted to mobilize the monks to defeat the UNP at the 1956 general elections(Kumari Jayawardena, 1990).

Following independence in 1948 till 1977 each national election in the post-colonial period saw a gradual growth of perceptions of discrimination against the

⁵⁹K.N.O. Dharmadasa provides a very comprehensive study of the importance of language[and religion]to Sinhala identity in his Language, Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness, 1992.

⁶⁰The Parliamentary Hansards of 1938-1958 as cited by Thornton and Nithyanandan, 1984 bear witness to this fact.

Sinhala language and Buddhism and imagined enemies to Sinhala-Buddhism. In the early 1950s, the resurrected fear⁶¹ of a possible Indian invasion of the island added fuel to the already volatile situation. This fear was mainly propagated by Bhikkus who were unsure of their role in the independent administration. Thornton and Nithyanandan(1984) cite Munidasa Cumaratunga, a well-known Sinhalese writer, as one of the chief propangandists of Sinhala-Buddhist identity. They argue that Cumaratunga, who recognized the value of ballots, began to make the masses aware of their power as electors. Cumaratunga argued "if the people whom we send to the legislature cannot come into our midst and speak to us in our language about what is needed for the development of our own country, we will never be able to enjoy the benefits of self-government"(as cited by Thornton and Nithyanandan, 1984, 13). Furthermore, Cumaratunga continued to incite people along language lines and made Sinhala a sine qua non for political survival. Hence, as early as 1950s, the political elite of the time recognized the writing on the wall; they learnt Sinhalese[most of the Sinhala political leaders at the time could not speak Sinhalese fluently], abandoned Christianity and re-embraced Buddhism and quickly developed what Thornton and Nithyanandan(1984) cynically describe as a "belated enthusiasm for the historic past of their country"(13).

Following the enforcement of the Sinhala Only Act, the state faced the first challenge to its legitimacy. In 1956 the satyagraha movement of the Tamils challenged the Language Act. The non-violent demonstration was met with violent repression. This was followed by the first communal riots in 1956. According to Satchi Ponnambalam(1983), the riot was spearheaded by the Buddhist monks(100).

⁶¹This fear refers to the pre-colonial invasions of the Tamil- Chola kings of Ceylon. It is generally believed that these invasions were carried out in the hay day of Cholas, which places it between third and fifth centuries. This fear is repeatedly revealed in the legends of the Mahavamsa which incorporates earlier mytho-historical material on Sinhala-Buddhist identity. The Mahavamsa was compiled approximately in the fifth century AD. See Serena Tennekoon's, "Symbolic Refractions of the Ethnic Crisis: The Divaina Debates on Sinhala Identity" in Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka, eds. Abeysekera and Gunasinghe, 1987.

The period following the communal riots of 1956 saw communalism become entrenched in the society. The assassination of Prime Minister Bandaranaike in 1959 was another call of distress in the Island's failing 'democracy'. The Prime Minister was killed by a Buddhist monk, who claimed that Bandaranaike was a traitor to the Sinhala-Buddhist cause. However, the political leaders of the country, including the Left wing leaders, failed to recognize the signs of communalism and ethnic chauvinism. Thornton and Nithyanandan(1984) record that there was "a surge of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism during the latter part of the fifties. Hence, by the time the United Front government came into power in 1970, communalism had already become institutionalized as an immutable aspect of life in southern Sri Lanka.

Another form of state entrenchment of communalism was carried out by the development schemes of the post-colonial governments. Diversion of large rivers into dry zones(those regions with the lowest rainfall and least accessibility to water) was considered as a major form of development.

What started as dry zone development schemes, which aimed at increasing agricultural productivity through inhabiting certain parts of the country that were not habitable because of lack of drinkable, non-saline water, soon came to be used for communalistic purposes. Land colonization in the North, Central and Western provinces had been a part of the development strategy of all governments. The various governments hoped to solve the problems of landlessness and agricultural development through dry-zone colonization. The process involved choosing an area, developing an infrastructure suitable for living and cultivating, and then settling families and individuals in the area. This was coupled with several irrigation schemes in which big rivers were diverted to irrigate these parched lands. The areas chosen for the development schemes were mainly in the North-East, where the majority of Tamils lived. The governments, instead of settling people from these regions in the newly developed areas, brought in people from the South, most of whom were Sinhalese, and

settled them in these regions. What the governments hoped to achieve was an adjustment of the demography of these regions to reduce the preponderance of Tamils. The Tamil districts in this region cover approximately 25% of the total land surface of the country and close to 60% of the coastal area. The Sri Lankan Tamils inhabiting this region at the time of independence formed about 5% of the total island population. Hence, it was argued, both by the Sinhalese population and the governments that new settlements would help the country to eliminate the problem of landlessness and thus make this region economically profitable. This cause would have succeeded if the government had tried to include the people of the North in the colonization schemes. Rather, it only served to entrench communalism. Thirty to forty years of such colonization schemes, especially in the East, which has an almost equal distribution of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims, has not only reduced the predominance of the Tamil population but also has created a volatile zone where no ethnic group is safe (Manogaran, 1987 and Ponnambalam, 1983).

The UF government further sought to communalize and de-secularize the state through constitutional provisions. The first Republican Constitution not only declared that "the official language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala" (Article 7), but also ensured that "the Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism" (Article 6) (As quoted by Thornton and Nithyanandan, 1984, 25). Thus, the state set in motion a process of communalism and de-secularism, which reversed whatever democratic process the civil-society has started.

The educational reforms carried-out by the UF government further added fuel to the growing fires of Tamil nationalism. This resulted in the birth of Tamil militant movements, which later became Tamil liberation movements.⁶² The 1970s also bore

⁶²This will be discussed in more detail in the following section on Tamil nationalism and secessionism.

witness to the dismantling of 'democratic' institutions, such as the independent judiciary (Tambiah, 1986, and Gananath Obeyesekere, 1984)).

This process of de-secularism and communalism continued under the new government of 1977. The UNP, though radically different from its predecessor in economic ideals, saw no reason to rectify the situation. The new Constitution of 1978 established in Sri Lanka a presidential system with a liberalized economy and a proportional representation form of elections. Despite the stated ideals, the UNP government continued to uphold the 'foremost' place of Buddhism. Sinhala continued to be the official language, but Tamil and English were given the status of national languages.

Following the general election of 1977, another anti-Tamil pogrom was unleashed, this time directly incited by the political leaders. This pogrom was followed by others, which were mainly organized and carried out by the ruling party. It was around this point in time that the state completed its process of alienating the Tamils from the political process. This was done by instituting state terrorism to counter Tamil militancy.

4.2c The Rise of Tamil Nationalism and its Movement towards Secessionism:

No fewer than thirty militant groups have sprung up over the last two decades. The militant groups, their ideology, and their strategies have altered significantly over the years. The latter years of 1980s saw the mostly forcible dismantling of some of the groups. Some others were either absorbed by the stronger groups or dissolved. The early part of the 1990s have seen just one group, the LTTE, emerge as the only voice of the beleaguered Tamils. The purpose of this section is to trace the development of

Tamil nationalism⁶³ and their movement towards secessionism. Any discussion of Tamil nationalism has to involve a fair assessment of the situation. As a Tamil, I have found it hard to engage in a dispassionate and impartial discussion of Tamil nationalism and the Tamil struggle for a separate state. This is made even more difficult by the academic sources I have used for my research, for very few of them provide a 'cold and academic' assessment of the conflict. Most of the scholars are influenced by their ethnic affiliations which has often led to clouded assessments of the conflict.⁶⁴

Various explanations have been offered for the rise of Tamil nationalism. Some trace the roots of the conflict to the history of the island and to the memories of past conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamil kings. Others prefer to interpret historical memory as having been shaped by contingencies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet, it is widely accepted by scholars that modern Tamil nationalism is essentially a reaction to the resurgent Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism of the late 19th and early twentieth centuries (Ponnambalam, 1983, Manogaran, 1987, Tambiah, 1986 and V. Nithyanandan, 1987).

Early manifestations of Tamil assertiveness can be seen in the formation of the Tamil Maha Sabha in 1920, when communal electorates put an end to inter-elite consensus. The disagreement between the Sinhalese and the Tamils regarding the communal seat of Colombo, which was created to protect minority interests in the legislature, led to the break-up of the Ceylon National Congress which had been formed in 1919.

⁶³It has to be noted that though the Tamil assertiveness started as an ethno-regional movement, in the 1970s it has evolved into a nationalist movement. Hence the use of Tamil nationalism becomes appropriate.

⁶⁴Radhika Coomaraswamy in her article "Myths Without Conscience: Tamil and Sinhalese Nationalist Writings of the 1980s" in *Facets of Ethnicity*, (eds). Abeysekera, Charles and Gunasinghe, Newton, 1987, argue that most of the literature concerning the ethnic conflict reflects the ethnic prejudices of the authors. This argument is supported by Tennekoon, 1987.

From this period onwards until the eve of independence, despite differences, the political elite of the country continued to work together against their common enemy- the British Crown. Yet, as Sri Lanka moved towards independence, some of the Tamil leaders began to realize the precarious position the minorities would hold in an independent Sri Lanka. The most notable amongst them was G.G. Ponnambalam, the leader of the Tamil Congress(1944), who demanded a legislature where 50% of the seats would be reserved for the minority communities. The Soulbury Commission(1944-45) did take this demand into consideration. The result of this was the provisions made in the Constitution of 1948 for the protection of the minority communities.

The unwritten support given by G.G. Ponnambalam to the Citizenship Act of 1948 which effectively stripped 90,000 Indian Tamils of citizenship rights, resulted in the break-up of the Tamil Congress in 1949. The Federal Party which was formed in 1949 under the leadership of S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, a Tamil Christian, took the Tamil demands a step further, in their demand for a federal structure of government. The Tamil Congress under the leadership of G.G. Ponnambalam continued to support the UNP government.

The continued compliance and support given by the Tamil leaderships to the UNP government despite occasional walk-outs and resignations from governmental positions, which were 'patched' up, reveal the nature of Tamil assertiveness. Though the Tamils, following the Tamil-Hindu religious revival spearheaded by Sri la Sri Arumuga Navalar(1822-1874), had come to consider themselves as a nation, the serious implications of such consciousness did not surface until the middle 1950s. The reason for this type of latent nationalism is best explained through Donald Horowitz' analysis of 'backward' regions and 'advanced' groups. Here Horowitz argues that 'advanced' groups from 'backward' regions are reluctant and late secessionist in nature(As cited by Amita Shastri, 1994, 208-9). He further argues that,

coming from a 'backward' region, they continuously seek access to jobs and economic opportunities in the whole national market. It is only when they are forced out from positions in the rest of the country through discrimination and violence along ethnic lines that the option of a separate state through secession gains support. Though Horowitz' argument mainly concerns secessionism, it adequately explains the latent Tamil nationalism of the 1950s.

As discussed in the previous Chapter, the enactment of the Sinhala Only bill(1956) proved to be a turning point in Sinhala-Tamil relations. The enactment of the bill and the debate which preceded it triggered Tamil nationalist sentiments.

This nationalism manifested itself mainly in two ways(Nithyanandan, 1987). One was the demand for parity of status for both national languages. The other was the demand for more regional autonomy. Thus the beginning of Tamil nationalism was manifested as regional and linguistic assertiveness. These two demands further show us that the Tamil leaders were still willing to negotiate settlements within one state unit. The Tamil elite at the time believed that a federal constitution was the only mode by which Tamil interests and rights would be better protected. It was, in fact, a call for constitutional reform and underlined the desire to preserve the single 'nation' status of Sri Lanka.

Moreover, the elite continued to rely on the parliamentary process as their vehicle of agitation; and the few extra-parliamentary measures adopted did not go beyond non-violent forms like sit-ins and satyagrahas. Even though the Language Act had effectively reduced the number of Tamils in government services, the political leaders did not consider this as a serious cause for alarm. Nithyanandan(1987) claims that according to the estimates of the Arasanga Eluthu Vinaignar Sangam(a trade union of Tamil government civil servants), the percentage of Tamils in Government Clerical Service declined from 50% in 1955 to 30% in 1965. A similar trend was noted in the Ceylon Administrative Service where the percentage of Tamils declined from 30% in

1955 to 20% in 1965. However, the professional fields such as engineering, medicine and accountancy showed little or no change at all(Nithyanandan, 1987).

Tamil leaders continued to agitate for constitutional reforms in the late 1950s and 1960s. Political accommodation and political bargaining continued to determine Sinhala-Tamil relations. The two main outcomes of this political bargaining were the failed Banda-Chelva Pact of 1957 and the failed Senanayake-Chelva Pact of 1964, both of which attempted at devolution of power within the framework of the unitary structure.

The 1970s gave birth to the secessionist movement which held 'Tamil Eelam' as the goal for Tamil-speaking people. The 1972 Republican Constitution successfully entrenched Sinhala-Buddhist communalism, and effectively started the process of alienating the Tamils from power-sharing. The Tamils, on the other hand, formed the Tamil United Front in May 1972, which was later transformed into the Tamil United Liberation Front(TULF) and decided unanimously to press for a separate state of Tamil Eelam. The creation of the TULF not only symbolized the unity forged among the Tamils as a community but also made evident the growing support for Tamil nationalism. What was originally conceived as political opposition to certain government measures had now blossomed into a demand for an autonomous state.

The mid-1970s saw the birth of the first militant movement. In 1974, the Tamil New Tigers⁶⁵ was formed as an underground movement. This movement later became the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam(LTTE), the most formidable of all the groups. A second militant movement, the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students, which espoused Marxist ideology as its base and focused on mobilizing students, was formed in 1975. The early 1980s saw the birth of more militant groups, however by the end of the decade only three remained.

⁶⁵The tiger is symbolic of the ancient Tamil Chola kings who had invaded Sri Lanka in the pre-colonial era.

These militant movements signaled the end of accommodation politics. From then onwards Tamil nationalism assumed a 'narrow-nationalist' character. Narrow nationalism is a term popularized by the Tamil leftist movement. The term is used to differentiate it from Sinhala communalism and is used to describe the 'ethnic cleansing' policies employed by the militant movements, especially the LTTE. Ethnic cleansing in the North involved, at first, a forced de-colonization of border villages that had a Sinhalese population. This was undertaken as a reclamation program(reclaiming the traditional homelands of the Tamils). This program employed intimidation and terrorism as the means towards the end. The state reacted by arming the Sinhalese civilian population who were under threat. Reclamation of traditional homelands in the East became much harder, because the East, as a result of forty years of state colonization, has become a fairly multi-ethnic region, with both the Sinhalese and the Tamils forming almost equal percentages of the population. The Muslims have the deciding 'vote'. Hence, reclaiming traditional homelands has not been easy. The militants have had to use intimidation and terrorism aimed at not only the Sinhalese-their traditional enemies, but also at the Muslims.

Narrow-nationalism further defined Tamil identity along strictly religious lines. Hitherto, Tamil nationalism embraced all Tamil-speaking people. This meant the inclusion of Muslims and Christians. Nevertheless, the late 1980s saw a rather alarming change in defining Tamil identity. The present slogans do not claim liberation for Tamil-speaking people, rather they claim liberation for Tamilians, an ancient term used to describe Tamil-Hindus. This recent trend in Tamil nationalism has far reaching implications. The ethnic cleansing carried-out in the 1990-91 period targeted the Muslims. The result was the forcible 'eviction' of all Muslim people from the Northern region. The fear that Christians will be next is not unfounded(Reports of the University Teachers' for Human Rights, Aug., 1990-Feb. 1992).

The militants' turn to narrow nationalism is being firmly supported by Tamil academics. With very few exceptions, scholarship in Tamil and of Tamil history has tended to lend credence to the claims by resurrecting the ancient past (Rajan Hoole, Oct. and Dec. 1994). In certain cases, this meant re-writing Tamil history so as to either include the lands or to exclude the other ethnic groups' claims on the same lands.

The following section briefly examines the institutionalization of violence in the whole of Sri Lanka.

4.3 Institutionalization of Violence:

The third institutionalized source of ethnic conflict is violence. This has been a major obstacle to the peace process, not only because of its cyclical or reciprocal nature [violence breeds violence], but also because it contributed to the erosion of democratic principles. Sri Lanka has today several kinds of political violence and terrorism. There is the violence *in potentia* widespread among certain segments of the Sinhalese population, which is routinely tapped, triggered, and intensified by political patrons and bosses, who use it to further their populist causes.⁶⁶ Both UNP and UF governments are no strangers to this use of organized force. Secondly, there is the armed separatist actions of the militants, which have, over the years, become extremely dangerous. The fact that these militants are 'self-proclaimed' fighters for liberation does not negate the fact that they are terrorists. The nature of this terrorism is twofold: on the one hand, there is terrorism against the state and the Sinhalese people, and on the other, there is internal terrorism which is being carried out by the various Tamil militant groups against 'enemies' within their own people. And thirdly,

⁶⁶ Jonathan Spencer's article "Collective Violence and Everyday Practices in Sri Lanka," (1990) offers a rather interesting insight into this type of 'ingrained violence' in the society.

there is the deadly terrorism and intimidation practiced by the armed forces (Tambiah, 1986, Obeyesekere, 1984, Jonathan Spencer, 1990 and Reports of the UTHR, August 1990-February, 1992).

Extensive research has been carried out to study the impact of violence on state and society. Serious efforts have been made to study the nature of violence, the positive and negative potentials of violence, the effects on democratic institutions and the collective psyche.⁶⁷ Hence, it is needless for me to go into the workings of violence. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the everyday practice of violence in Sri Lanka, in one form or another, has led to a society which has become accustomed to violence as the norm. In the Northern and Eastern provinces, the continued practice of violence has led to the emergence of a generation of 'baby guerrillas', who are children under the age of eighteen. Northern Sri Lankan Tamil society has become accustomed to violence to the extent that human life is regarded as of less value than that of their homeland. The infamous motto of the LTTE (Tigers' Thirst is for Tamil Eelam) shows us that the LTTE is more interested in liberating the traditional homelands than the people.

Thus an examination of institutionalized obstacles, as the one carried-out above, reveals primarily two things. On the one hand, all three obstacles discussed above are linked with each other. Communalization of politics and de-secularization of the government were carried out by the governments and the society about the same time with the same objectives, and violence was and is used to achieve these objectives. On the other hand, all three obstacles are deeply rooted in the society, and are continuing to perpetuate the trend.

⁶⁷These studies have been carried out by human rights groups, feminist groups, independent journalists etc., in an effort to make both the state and the militants accountable for their actions. The now exiled group, The University Teachers for Human Rights of University of Jaffna, of which I am an active member, has been publishing frequent reports on the use of brute force in the daily lives of people in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

Hence, as discussed in the beginning of this Chapter, any solution to the ethnic conflict has to address both the structural and institutionalized sources of ethnic conflict. Until now, the various 'solutions' offered by the state only considered the structural sources of ethnic conflict. District Development Councils and Provincial Councils offered to initiate power-sharing, but it was never realized in practice. These and other attempts- Pacts, Peace Accords and Round Table Conferences- focused only on the structural sources, and failed to de-institutionalize communalism and violence. The more limited structural approach is an inevitable result of considering ethnicity as a negative and disrupting phenomena. What the Island needs, along with short term 'solutions', is a critical re-thinking of ethnicity in terms of human-development and participatory democracy. The last and concluding Chapter attempts to address this issue and suggest some possible means of arriving at solutions to the ethnic conflict.

Conclusion`

Towards an Applicable Model-

A Case For A People's Movement For Peace

The protracted and extremely violent nature of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka leaves little doubt as to the need for resolution or management of the conflict. Are the conflict resolution models discussed in Chapter Two applicable to Sri Lanka? If not, is there an alternative available for the attainment of peace?

Smootha and Hanf proposed partition as one solution for ethnic conflict resolution. Is partition and the creation of a Tamil Eelam a viable solution for Sri Lanka? Would partition provide the necessary space for political accommodation and consensus formation within Tamil society? While I agree that the protracted and extremely violent nature of the conflict might be brought to a halt by giving Tamils a separate state, one also should remember that partition would only be a structural solution. The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has, amongst other things, brought to light the oppressive institutions which helped to 'subordinate' lower castes, women and other religious minority groups within Tamil society. Analyzing this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this thesis, but suffice it to say that a structural solution will not be adequate. At this point one might ask whether peace requires an elimination of all types of discrimination. While I agree that it is not an 'all or nothing' situation, I am inclined to argue that a solution which does not consider other forms of discrimination is bound to be inadequate. A solution that does not address the societal issues is not a viable solution for Sri Lanka.

As for the applicability of the consociational and liberal democratic models, one needs to question the premises of these two models. Consociational democracy along with the requirement of 'co-existing' ethnic communities, also presupposes the lack of clear-cut majority, a no-win situation and a history and political culture of accommodation. While Sri Lanka does possess 'co-existing' ethnic communities

which are, for the most part territorially segregated, the other requirements make consociationalism utopian. The second condition - the lack of a clear-cut majority- is not achievable because the ethnic composition of Sri Lanka is not evenly split. Furthermore, the political culture of Sri Lanka does not allow for political accommodation. Hence, consociational democracy is not a feasible resolution for Sri Lanka.

As for the relevance of applying the liberal democratic model, it has to be noted that the present ethnic conflict emerged out of the failure of such transplanted models. Furthermore, the liberal democratic paradigm presupposes that equal rights also mean equal opportunity. The Sri Lankan experience shows that though the Constitutions provide for equal rights, they do not facilitate equal opportunity. The other assumptions and processes of liberal democratic theory [modernization, homogenization, progress and development] provide fertile grounds for the continuation of ethnic conflict. Democratization of a deeply divided society such as Sri Lanka cannot be realized with these assumptions and processes.

Finally, is ethnic democracy a viable solution for Sri Lanka? Ethnic democracy, being the least democratic of the three, emerges when the dominant group clings to exclusive, integral nationalism and constitutes a clear-cut majority. Here the state is given more control to curb the resistance of the ethnic minority. Ethnic democracy can be attractive to dominant groups which lead or support a drive for democratization of the political system but are unwilling to part with entrenched ethnic dominance. Sri Lanka did prove to be an example of ethnic democracy for a brief period [1948-56], when 'nation-building' and 'national-integration' were the motto of the political leaders. This was short-lived, for Sinhalese leaders, in their fight to consolidate and secure power, chose to enact laws which tightened the controls over the minority Tamils and increased the conflict. Therefore, one could safely argue that the present ethnic conflict is the result of a failed ethnic democratic model.

All four models for resolution as discussed above reveal one inherent 'weakness': the assumption of ethnicity as a source of conflict more than a source of strength, seems to be the pervading argument in all the models. When ethnicity is considered as a source of conflict, the resolution or management of the conflict fails to consider the institutionalized sources that perpetuate the conflict. This results in only short term solutions.

A Case for a People's Movement for Peace:

The history of Sri Lanka has shown us that peace means more than the mere absence of war. It has also revealed the inadequacy of transplanted 'democratic' institutions. Lasting peace can be achieved only through an acceptance by each ethnic group of each other and of each other's right to life and freedom. The warring parties need to realize that peace cannot be imposed upon, rather, it should come from the people. This can be possible only through the workings of a people's democratic movement, a movement that would go beyond the limitations of the existing paradigms of liberalism and Marxism.

The notion of 'empowering' people for peace is based on new social movement theory. The literature on social movements offers three views regarding their meaning and action (Ponna Wignaraja, 1993, Gail Omvedt, 1993, Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez, eds., 1992, and Rajni Kothari, 1988 and 1990). The first view holds that social movements in effect manifest the contemporary world crisis. The anti-colonial movements are a good example of such movements. Secondly, social movements are viewed as 'new' actors, performing multiple-social, political, cultural and economic functions. The forging of civil society in the former Communist bloc is a good example of such. Lastly, social movements are viewed as social experiments that

prepare the present for a future desirable society. Ethnic movements belong to this category.

New social movement theory has its origins in the South. These people's movements in the South not only express dissent; they are also providing some basis for a developmental and democratic alternatives to the system as it now works. Two dominant borrowed frameworks for thinking and action were Marxism (mainly Leninism) and classical liberalism. Their failure to set in motion the processes of social change in the South that would ensure the material well-being of large segments of people and be both participatory and humane is producing a 'grassroots' response in the form of people's movements and experiments(Wignaraja, 1993).

History has shown the world time and again what people can do if they are united in purpose and vision. The recent political upheavals which have swept across nations in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia continue to attest to the reality that people can shape their own destinies.

Empowering people for peace and mobilizing people for power-sharing involves the building up of what Ponna Wignaraja(1993) describes as the 'countervailing power' within the political spaces that are available. This also means rethinking democracy in terms of participation. If democracy means participation, representative democracy as it is now practiced is singularly limited. Here, representative democracy becomes mere participation in elections. Such participation is mere tokenism, where power is not shared. Participation also means trusting the people and a commitment to a more egalitarian society that would ensure equal access to resources to all human collectivities regardless of race, religion or ethnicity. Moreover, the extent of participation depends on the political space available for alternative means of participation to start.

The building of countervailing power in Sri Lanka has taken primarily three forms. First, the ethnic movements emerged as a result of the break-up of transplanted

democracy. Secondly, the Marxist-oriented Janata Vimukthi Peramuna emerged as a revolutionary force to challenge the hegemony of the state. Lastly, the other social movements-human rights groups, women's movements, and ecological movements-arose as a challenge to the earlier ones. It is the latter group of movements that has attempted to create an alternative consciousness through mass awareness and mass political education. One example of such a movement is the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality(MIRJE).⁶⁸

The importance of studying the various social movements which are working for a desirable future lies in the argument that these movements provide the only avenue for working towards peace amidst conditions of war. Since the conditions of war render the electoral process and other required forms of participation useless, various people's movements, such as MIRJE, Campaign For Democracy for Sri Lanka(CDSL)-a Toronto based organization, and University Teachers For Human Rights(UTHR) have been successful in educating and creating awareness for peace across ethnic barriers. The Conference for the Promotion of Peace, which was convened in 1993 April 4th-6th, was the second of such initiatives taken by those who are working for peace. This Conference brought together intellectuals and non-intellectuals, clergy and lay persons, students and workers alike, regardless of class or ethnic origins.

These social movements have started to provide the only alternative forum for dialogue between the two major ethnic groups. The numerical base of these social movements is small when compared to the leftist JVP or the ethnic LTTE. Yet, they have been fairly successful in their attempts to develop consciousness amongst the people. All three movements mentioned above, have bases in both communities. The UTHR, though started by a group of teachers from University of Jaffna, later included

⁶⁸Though these social movements have been actively involved in the political and peace process since the mid-1980s, no attempts have been made to document them. The Civil Rights Movement is an exception. Kumari Jayawardena et al(1979) provides a rather extensive study of the Civil Rights Movement.

University teachers from the southern universities (mainly the University of Colombo) and people from outside academia. The reports which are published by the UTHR are collected from and circulated amongst the Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim communities. The MIRJE on the other hand, is based in the South and has a fairly extensive membership amongst the clergy - Christian and Buddhist. The MIRJE has been fairly successful in helping dispossessed people, both in the North and in the East. Furthermore, the MIRJE newspaper, *Yukthiya*, has attempted, amidst threats, to educate the people about government corruption and mismanagement.

The CDSL is fairly new to the scene (1991-1992). The movement originated as a discourse on the current conflict and had a larger following amongst disaffected ex-militants. Later this grew into a movement that included all who strove to work for peace in Sri Lanka. Other social movements, including the Sri Lankan Committee of the World Solidarity Forum for Justice and Peace in Sri Lanka and the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances - a Colombo based movement which has tried to make the armed forces and the security forces accountable for their actions - have focused on specific issues

The People's Alliance government which came to power in the Fall of 1994, was another result of peace initiatives taken by the people. Though the People's Alliance is a coalition of traditionally 'left' parties, the origins of the coalition lie in grassroots activism. The continued repression of basic human rights in Southern Sri Lanka by the former UNP government resulted in widespread unrest, which in turn led to mass protests and demonstrations. Continued censorship of the print and electronic media and the brutal operations carried out by both armed forces and extra-legal armed groups,⁶⁹ which resulted in the death or disappearance of at least 66,000 men and women, over a four year period between 1988-1992, were the catalysts for the

⁶⁹ The UNP government created these extra-legal armed units - one example is Green Tigers - which had no civilian control and no limitations in its use and abuse of power.

resurgence of civil society in the early 1990s. This emergent civil society's support -in terms of educating the people and creating awareness- enabled the People's Alliance to defeat the UNP regime in 1994. The mandate of the Alliance Government declared, amongst other things, that the solution to the ethnic conflict has to be 'political' and not 'military'. The Government's willingness to re-start negotiations and the readiness to establish a Human Rights Commission to inquire allegations of armed force brutalities showed promise.

Though the People's Alliance Government had its partial beginnings in the grass roots movements of the South, it could not and cannot continue to work towards peace within the existing political structure. As discussed elsewhere, the very nature of the political system has posed serious constraints on the present Government's 'peace' initiatives. This became very evident when the Government launched a military operation to subjugate the LTTE in the early part of 1995. Hence, the success and effectiveness of these movements are yet to be seen. Nevertheless, given the constraints of the transplanted political institutions, the Island has no other alternative, but to pursue peace through a people's movement.

In conclusion, Sri Lanka has proved to be a case for not only rethinking democracy in terms of participation but also has provided the grounds for a people's movement for peace. Since peace can only be brought through people's participation in the process, people's role needs to be recognized as the basis for any future attempts at peace. For Sri Lanka, peace has to be more than the absence of war.

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