U.S. RESPONSE TO ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN INDIA AND SRI LANKA: 1980-96 - A SURVEY

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P.R. RAJESWARI

American Studies Division
Centre for American and West European Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
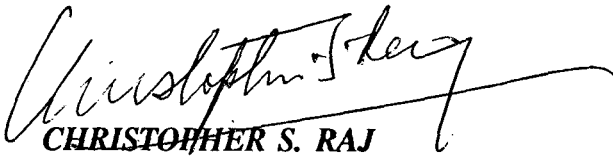New Delhi - 110 067
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जवाहरलाल नेहरु विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI - 110067

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Centre for American and West European Studies
School of International Studies

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled, "U.S. RESPONSE TO ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN INDIA AND SRI LANKA: 1980-96 - A SURVEY", submitted by Ms. P.R. Rajeswari in partial fulfilment of the Master of Philosophy in Jawaharlal Nehru University, is a product of the student's own work, carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

been

It is hereby certified that this work has not presented for the award of any other degree or diploma by any University in,or outside India and may be forwarded to the examiners for evaluation.

CHRISTOPHER S. RAJ
(Chairperson)

R.P. KAUSHIK
(Supervisor)

CONTENTS

PREFACE

Multi-ethnicity has become a socio-political phenomenon in most civil societies and in the present century inter-ethnic cleavages, competition and conflict seem to have acquired a higher intensity. As a result, ethnic mobilisation has posed various challenges to many developing as well as developed countries. It has become a critical variable in the formation and re-formation of states. Some scholars have argued that even the partition of colonial India into the two new states (India and Pakistan) had its roots in the ethnic distinctiveness of the two nations. What followed much after in the form of the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 signified yet another step in the furtherance of this ethnic secessionist movement. On the whole, the South Asian region, had been experiencing ethnic conflicts of different magnitude and has thus invited the attention of scholars to deal with such multi-ethnic societies in this region.

In the wake of such developments, the present study is a modest attempt towards analyzing the two specific cases of India and Sri Lanka.

In constructing a historical conceptual base, one has to take into account variables like state, ethnicity, democracy and security. Ethnic dissonance has its roots in the policies that had been pursued since the colonial and post-colonial days. During the colonial period, the empire

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building was based on an imperative that required trans-border placement of ethnic groups. Even the geo-political map was drawn in a manner that left the ethnic groups on both sides of the borders. This explained why internal ethnic turmoil crossed the border and acquired an international dimension. Ultimately, what really happened was that the ill-perceived priorities and misdirected policies that suited the ruling elites made ethnic communities marginalised. They, in turn, got and politicised, and retorted with demands ranging from share of resources, power and even the territory, and hence virtual separation. Once such movements took place, the state became vulnerable. Therefore, it would be significant to study how these burning issues created a crisis in the state system.

In the Indian context, one could see various tribal groups moving to the phase of ethnic community encompassing a number of tribes, eg., Mizo, Naga or Meitei Community. Similar was the process through various dialects among linguistic groups which formed a number of ethnic communities, eg., Tamil, Telugu, Kannadiga, Nepali, Malayalam, Bengali, Assamese. Yet another was the case of religious groups developing themselves into ethnically self-conscious communities, eg., Muslims, Sikhs, and Parsees. Some of them made their claim for a nation, others did not.

It would, therefore, be important to examine the American response in terms of its policy framework. It

would take into account all the factors cited above. Besides, it would be relevant to study the checkered history of the U.S. attitude towards India, more specifically on the ethnic issues and the conflicts arising therein.

The ethnic structure in the case of Sri Lanka had been dominantly influenced by the processes of colonisation, conquests from the West, and conversions from India in the North. The exception to this seemed to be the Arab traders who formed a large part of the Muslim community (7 per cent), Malay soldiers brought by the Dutch, and the Burghers, a community of Eurasian and European descent. The indigenous population of the island state was called Veddahs. They did not number more than 1000 individuals.

The extent to which Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic configuration had been determined by its proximity to India and its distance from any other land was clear from the fact that more than 90 per cent of its population had Indian antecedents. Thus, this migration process had not only created a bulk of Sri Lanka's population, but also had provided the majority-minority component of its social structure, with the Sinhalese comprising 74 per cent of the total population and claiming Aryan descent and the Tamils accounting for 18 per cent of the total population and claiming Dravidian descent.

The United States in regard to Sri Lanka showed considerable sympathy towards the government and the state in general. To examine the differences, the compulsions and

the vantage points in the broad U.S. foreign policy approach in regard to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka would be another aspect of this dissertation.

The present study, provides the focus on the ethnic conflicts in the two countries - India and Sri Lanka and the US response towards this malady. It has examined U.S. response and the factors that have guided such responses.

The first chapter of the dissertation is titled as Introduction. It gives an historical overview and discusses ethnic concepts and theoretical formulations.

Second chapter is related to India. It discusses conflicts and conflagrations as well as insurgence of ethnic groups. It also discusses the governmental accords that were reached with various ethnic groups in the nation.

Third chapter deals with Sri Lanka. The mainstay of this chapter is political and ethnic insurgency in Sri Lanka. It also deals with historical and social problems that have existed in the island nation.

Fourth chapter is regarding the U.S. response to ethnic conflicts in India and Sri Lanka. It briefly reflects on the U.S. objectives and its foreign policy commitments in the region.

The last chapter is Conclusion. It provides a few nuances of the problem with a view to understand it in its totality.

I am indebted to various libraries and their staff members for their co-operation, in writing this dissertation. They are the Library of Jawaharlal Nehru

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In writing this dissertation, I owe my deep sense of gratitude and sincere thanks to my supervisor Professor R.P. Kaushik for his constant guidance and unfailing support in the completion of this work. I am also thankful to professor Christopher S. Raj, Chairperson of the Centre and Dr. K.P. Vijayalakshmi for having provided able guidance from time to time.

My friend, Ms. Joyee has helped me in proofreading the dissertation and I am thankful for the co-operative and friendly attitude. I am also thankful to all my friends who have given me their support in the completion of this dissertation.

Last, of course, are my beloved parents who have enabled me to reach this stage in my academic commitments. I owe a great deal to my brother who has also contributed towards my work by his smiles and encouragement.

P.R. Rajeswari

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic Concepts and Theoretical Formulation

Ethnicity, ethnic groups, ethnic conflicts, race, are some of the key words, which have enjoyed wide currency in social sciences, especially in the realm of ethnographic studies. However, each term has had its own meaning different than the other - and there has been no respite from conceptual wrangling.

The word 'ethnic' has been derived from the Greek word 'ethnos'.[1] The word refers broadly to:

a)   Nations not converted in Christianity, heathans pagans;

b)   Races or large groups of people having common traits and customs;

c)   Groups in an exotic primitive culture.[2]

This term 'ethnic (adjective of ethnicity) came into widespread use, in modern sense, since the post world war two period. The term has been used differently by different

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1   Ali Mohamad Rather, "Ethnicity in Kashmir - A Study of Watals", *Journal of Peace Studies*, vol.III, Issue 4, January-February 1996.

2   Urmila Phadnis, *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage India Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1989), p.13.

scholars. Yet, most of the scholars define ethnicity taking hint from the last definition. For instance, Raoul Naroll, a well known Anthropologist defined the ethnic unit as a comparatively small community with a predominantly archaic character.[3] Naroll's usage of the term in a narrow gamut is useful from a traditional anthropological point of view. Today, the approach to study ethnic groups has undergone a significant change. It includes not only small communities but also those with large memberships. Sometimes, the entire state is an ethnic group, as in the case of states in the north-eastern region of India like Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. In recent times, any study of ethnic group includes not only primitive backward sections of people, but also those in highly industrialised, developed countries.

Many a time, an ethnic group has been considered as a substitute for a minority. But it is neither size nor status that determines an ethnic group, but their own distinctiveness in the society. Max Weber[4] gives a definition which is much closer to reality. He defines ethnic groups as those human groups that entertain

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[3] Raoul Naroll, "On Ethnic Unit - Classification", *Current Anthropology*, October 1964.

[4] Max Weber, "Ethnic Groups" in Talcott Parsons et al Theories of Society, vol.1 (New York: Free Press, 1961), pp.305-6.

subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities in physical types or customs or both, or because of migration or colonisation in such a way that this belief is important for the continuance of non-kinship communal relationship.

A mono-cultural approach will not give a holistic perspective of the term 'ethnicity'. Thus, there are a few cultural markers, like, race, religion, language, dress and diet, a shared historical past and a symbolic or real geographical centre. One of the leading Ethnographers, Schermerhorn includes all of these in his definition of ethnicity.[5] The New Encyclopedia Britannica defined ethnic group as an alternate form for race or as a group of persons sharing common heritage.[6]

Ethnic group is considered so much like a race but without the biology. Racism is a mix of ideology and practice based on imputed biological differences. It has a cultural element because ultimately it is a socially and

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[5]   R.A. Schermerhorn describes an ethnic group as a collectivity existing within a larger society, having real or fictional common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic element defined as the epitome of their peoplehood. Examples of such symbolic elements are kinship patterns, physical contiguity, religious affiliations, nationality, pheno-typical features or any combination of these. Taken from ibid., n.2.

[6]   The New Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol.3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p.480.

culturally constructed phenomenon. The concept of ethnicity is more explicitly cultural in character. Like race, it does not necessarily entail superiority or inferiority. At the same time, ethnic groups often define themselves as superior and perceive the culture of others as inferior. Recently, some authors have proposed the term ethnicism to refer to discrimination based on ethnicity.

Ethnic conflict is another term that is being used frequently when one studies ethnicity. Ethnic conflict means violent conflict among groups who differ from one another in terms of culture, religion, physical features or language. In the recent past, ethnic conflict has been the most collective form of collective violence in the world. In 1988, the majority of the 111 violent conflicts in the world involved minority and majority groups within nations. In July 1993 there were no less than 25 ethnic conflicts that involved the regular use of violence - mass killings, executions, terrorist bombings, assassinations, looting, rapes, and forced expulsions-by one or both groups to achieve their aims.[7] There are also several other conflicts that are non-violent in nature, but which may eventually turn into open conflict and violence.

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[7]   David Levinson, *Ethnic Relations - A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia* (ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, California, 1994), p.62.

Today, the whole world's attention is concentrated upon the violent and most protracted conflicts like Serbs, Bosnian Muslims, and Croats in the Balkans, Sri Lankan Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, and Kurds in the Middle East. However, one should not overlook the nonviolent conflicts, as they are the seeds of tomorrow's violent conflicts. The non violent conflicts take the shape of political, economic or cultural repression of ethnic minorities, in the form of restrictions on voting, burdensome taxes, exclusion from certain professions, residential isolation, prohibitions on the use of ethnic language and restrictions on religious worship.

There is yet another form of ethnic conflict. The legal conflicts are taking place with some frequency in North America, Australia and areas where native peoples seek to reestablish their legal, economic, political, cultural and religious rights through petitions to state and national governments seeking legal action. Their aims are to restore their ancestral lands or get compensations for the land that are now owned by non-indigenous people, seek religious freedom, recognition as a political entity and the right to have determination and self-government.

Ethnic conflict doesn't always mean conflict among groups only as there is conflict among factions within each group and other nations and peoples often get involved. Sri

Lanka, for example, the conflict between the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils has been accompanied by assassinations, bombings and riots by political factions in both groups, and violence has also been directed at Muslim communities in Sri Lanka. Such situations occur in other places also where the political rivals and their followers battle for influence and power. Often the key policy distinction between factions is the support for peaceful-accommodation resolutions to the conflict versus violent-conquest resolutions.

When one goes deep into the study of ethnicity, three approaches have been devised: (a) objective, (b) subjective, (c) syncretistic or composite.

The objectivists claim that cultural markers like race are closely linked with ethnic identity. To them, language and descent are the other two cultural markers along with race, but not history. Historical past is not considered as an immutable attribute to ethnic identity. A study with exclusive emphasis on ethnic groups as culture bearing units gives a narrow view stressing on social continuity rather than social adaptation. So, such a mono-culture perspective should be replaced by a multi-culture approach having a cluster of cultural emblems for identity selection.

On the other hand, the subjectivist believe that ethnic identity manifests itself through a few cultural markers and they stress on the self as well as group related feeling of identity and its recognition by others.

Therefore, it is not the pre-eminence of one group over the other but the linkage between the two, the complementarity of one with the other that makes the understanding of the process of the evolution and growth of an ethnic group a holistic (complete) one. Such a perspective has been adopted by syncretists.

As such, ethnic identity formation is done by the process of fission and fusion. While fission denotes the contraction of the groups boundary through division and the creation of new groups, fusion refers to its expansion through assimilation which is brought about by incorporation and amalgamation of some groups with others.[8] Groups of various religions like Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists typify the process of fission or separation. The process of amalgamation can be found in the formation of the Anglo-Indians in India and Burghers in Sri Lanka.

Ethnic conflicts have been often considered to be a single type of conflict, but these conflicts take a variety of forms. One chief distinction is between conflicts that

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[8]   Donald Horowitz, "Ethnic Groups in Conflict" (Berkely: University of California Press, 1985).

occur in ranked situations and those in unranked situations. In an unranked situation, various ethnic groups are more or less equal in power or presume themselves to be so, whereas in a ranked situation, the ethnic groups are hierarchically placed. As the conventional thinking does, it says that ethnic conflicts will be more frequent and less amenable to control in unranked situations where these groups compete with each other for wealth and power and where one group is not powerful to suppress the other groups. A second one related to the first one is of conflicts occurring in the developing world and those in the industrialized world. The former often center on competition between ethnic groups for political dominance whereas the latter often involve in separatist movements by minorities on the one side and repression by the government on the other. Yet another distinction can be made on the goals adopted by participant in the conflict. On the basis of this distinction, violent conflicts have been divided under five different headings:

1. Separatist movements
2. Internal Rivalry for Autonomy, Political Power, or Territorial Control.
3. Conquest
4. Survival

5.   Irredentist[9]

A related phenomenon which could sometimes be interchangeable or indistinguishable is the religious conflict. This conflict arises between various religious groups. As religions of the conflicting groups portray themselves as conspicuous aspects to the outsiders, many conflicts between ethnic groups are seen as religious conflicts. However, this is only a perception by outsiders

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[9]   In separatist movements, violence occurs as part of an effort by an ethnic group to become politically independent, or as part of an effort by a nation to prevent the group from doing so. These type of conflicts are quite common and they try to establish an independent nation in their ancestral homeland. In the second typology, when the goals of the group seeking autonomy or more power or wealth seem unattainable, they may shift their goal to separatism. These conflicts are quite rampant in former colonies, which have been largely a result of colonial policies that purposefully created rivalries between indigenous peoples. Because of the historical link to colonial policies, such conflicts are most common in former colonized nations in South Asia and Africa. The objective of war might be the conquest of the other ethnic group or the group's removal from all or some of its territory. In the fourth type, violence occurs as part of an attempt by a national government to forcibly assimilate, harm, remove, or drive out an ethnic minority or deprive them of social, religious, political or economic rights granted to other residents of the nation. In the last type, violence occurs as part of an attempt by an ethnic group(s) or nation(s) to regain or retain territory on the basis of an alleged ancestral or historical right to the territory. These movements are very common today which are often the result of national boundaries established during colonial times and which ignored the existing ethnic boundaries and claims by local groups to their ethnic homelands. This has been explained by David Levinson in *Ethnic Relations - A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia*.

who are unaware of the long standing enmity between the groups competing territorial claims. A fact to be remembered here is that not all ethnic conflicts emanate from religious differences nor are the religious conflicts considered as ethnic conflicts. It could be possible that in some conflicts, such as, between the Protestant and Catholic Northern Irish, religious differences are there, but there are other factors like economic conditions and political separation which are the basic issues. But at the same time, there are some conflicts that are purely religious in nature as in the case of Muslims and Hindus in India.

After analysing the kinds of ethnic conflict, one is still left with the question of the cause of ethnic conflict. To this eternal question, there has been no easy answer. Hence, given the variety of ethnic conflicts, and the situations in which they break out, there could be varied explanations. While explaining ethnic conflicts in general or specific cases, one has to take into consideration the nature and strength of ethnic ties, situational factors that help the development of ethnic solidarity and ethnic based competition, and the motives behind these movements. In the words of the great Political Scientist, Donald Horowitz, ethnic solidarity is "powerful,

permeative, passionate, and pervasive".[10] Besides this, some biological researchers suggest that strong feelings of ethnic solidarity and ethnic conflict have their roots in human biological evolution and that is why one sees the ethnic groups fighting to dominate other groups or to protect their own interests. Another fact to be noted is that in recent decades, in many nations, these ethnic groups have emerged or reemerged as interest groups which become instrumental for gaining economic and political power.

There is a different scene in the ethnic conflict front. Following independence, the context and the issues changed. The issue of struggle against external powers lost its paramountcy. No longer was colonial domination the issue. Self-determination was implemented only upto the level of already existing colonial boundaries. Within these boundaries, the question was to whom the new states belonged. Here, it is worthy to note what Anthony Trollope wrote in 1860, "the discontinuance of a sin is always the commencement of a struggle".[11]

In an attempt at explaining rebellions by minority groups, Political Scientist, Ted Gurr has suggested a

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[10]   Ibid., no.8, p.12.

[11]   ibid., no.8, pp.4-5.

complex theory incorporating many factors, in the most

general sense, related to ethnic conflict:

> The minority group's history and current status,
> which includes the group's degree of
> disadvantage relative to other groups in the
> nation, the strength of the group's self-
> identity, the extent of group cohesion and its
> capacity to mobilise its sources, and the extent
> of repression by the dominant groups;
> The opportunities available to the group for
> political action including the control exercised
> by the ruling regime, the group leader's
> strategy and tactics, and shifts in state power
> that provide the opportunity for rebellion;
>
> Global processes that intensify grievances such
> as the modern state system, which stresses
> nationalism and centralized control, and the
> global economy, which has led to the economic
> exploitation of some groups;
> The international spread of conflict, which may
> involve the same group in a number of nations or
> the spread of conflict from one group to other
> groups;
> The effects of state power on political action
> such as the form of government, which may lead
> the government to try to resolve the minority
> group's grievance or alternatively to repress
> it.[12]

Writing on modern racism, Ali Rattansi and Sallie

Westwood have some apt analysis to make. They say:

> The spectre that haunts the societies of 'the
> west' is no longer communism but, both within
> and outside their frontiers, a series of racism
> and ethno-nationalisms. These are part of the
> fall-out from the crisis of the institutions and
> settlements which provided 'the west' with a
> period of unprecedented prosperity and global
> dominance in the second half of the twentieth
> century. Both the internal and external

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[12]   ibid., no.7, pp.67-68.

settlements have come under increasing pressures.[13]

The two distinguished authors believe that it has occurred due to economic recessions, decolonisation, globalisation, collapse of the former Soviet bloc, and a kind of breakdown in a equitable and stable world order.[14] It is also argued that the Euro-American societies have long cherished the dream of material comforts and invincibility of their social order.

As a result, the multi-ethnicity has become a socio-political phenomenon in most civil societies. In the present century, inter-ethnic cleavages, competition and conflict appear to have acquired a higher intensity. Also ethnic mobilisation has posed several challenges to the developing as well as developed societies.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the process setting in 1989 with the fall of Berlin wall, everyone was filled with euphoria over the collapse of communism and presumed that the whole world was moving towards democracy. Contrary to the expectation, the collapse of communism led not to democracy, but to the

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[13] Ali Rattansi and Sallie Westwood (eds.), "Modern Racism, Racialized Identities", in *Racism, Modernity and Identity* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p.1.

[14] The expressions are of the authors, ibid. p.1.

unleashing of virulent nationalism and or religious passion. After several years, the world has yet not moved towards 'global village'. It is retreating into atavistic tribalism, whose ugliest expression is the 'ethnic cleansing'."[15] Ethnic turbulence, as Martin Heisler says, has been the single most important source of long-term conflict leading to civil war and insurgencies and even to the disintegration of states.[16] It is the replacement of authoritarian regimes by democracies that has allowed free expression of demands, leading to such explosive and ethnic turbulence. The tide of nationalism and ethnic passions are rising in a wide arc -- from Central Europe to the heart of Asia. Ethnicity, as such, does not always relate itself to the security of the states except when it gets politicised and lead to conflicts.

The eternal question, therefore, arises as to why, ethnic conflict occurs. Dr. Husain, after analysing the relevant literature cites two major reasons. First, conflict presupposes the presence of a mixed ethnic community within a single state. Second, ethnic conflict

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[15] Francis Fukuyama, Against the New Pessimism, *Commentary*, February 1994, p.25. Ethnic cleansing is the systematic elimination of ethnic minorities from a given territory using such means as terror, expulsion and murder.

[16] Martin O. Heisler, "Ethnic Conflict in World Today: An Introduction", Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, vol.33, 1977, p.1.

requires a situation in which atleast one group feels deprived or aggrieved.[17] If it is impossible or perceived to be impossible to redress the grievances through political or legal lines, then violent conflicts occur. In the first case of such a conflict, state becomes the focal point as it involves a struggle between different groups for political power and status. Such conflict with transborder ramifications tend to involve the bordering states.[18] The conflicts cross the borders and with only a limited number of ethnic homogenous states, the potential for ethnic conflicts become almost universal.[19] In the present century, many states have been created on the basis of the Wilsonian principle of "Self-determinination". The key element in this approach has been division of territories and this has invoked ethnic principle for the equitable distribution of territories. Yet most of the national and ethnic conflicts that remain today can not be solved by changing the territories of states to give each community a state of its own.

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[17]   Dr. Syed Anwar Husain, Internal Dynamics of South Asian Security: Ethnic Dissonance, paper presented at an International Seminar on Ethno-Sectarian Conflicts and Internal Dynamics of Regional Security in South Asia (2-4 September 1996).

[18]   ibid.

[19]   ibid.

The South Asian region is no exception to this kind of ethnic struggle and has been experiencing ethnic conflicts of different magnitude. Ethnic dissonance in South Asia has its roots in the policies that has been pursued since the colonial period. Post-colonial period was based on a principle that made possible transborder placement of ethnic groups. The geo-political map too was drawn in a manner that left the ethnic groups on both sides of the borders. This explained how internal ethnic turmoil crossed the border and acquired an international dimension. Ultimately, what happened was that the ill-perceived priorities and policies that suited the ruling elites made ethnic communities marginalised and politicised, and they retorted with demands ranging from share of resources, power and even territory, and hence virtual separation. Once such movements took shape, it was the state that was vulnerable. It became, therefore, significant to study how these burning issues created a crisis in the state system.

Until the advent of Western powers, the migrants as well as invaders seemed to enrich the cultural diversities and get integrated into the age old civilisation of the Indian sub-continent. This old sub-continental civilisational thrust was not statist and encompassed within its fold the kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan in the north, and Sri Lanka in the south, under this order. The

unifying thread was its hierarchically structured social system along with a moral code explicating mutual obligations and at the same time preserving plural identities therein. In due course of time, these pluralities did acquire their own specificities and ethnic identitities but without subverting from the core of the system. The Western colonial era (particularly the British) was more penetrative and intrusive in nature not only in terms of institutional structures but also of ideas and ideologies. The impact of such intrusion was much severe in British India and colonial Sri Lanka and even in these areas, the pattern of intervention varied. Such divergence in the colonial administration and intrusion was due to the imperial imperatives of political governance, economic exploitation and strategic dominance. Consequently, 'if the strategy of coping with multi-ethnic India was that of divide et impera, in the Sri Lanakan context it was through the co-option of the elites of both the Sinhalese and Tamil communities'.[20] These strategies, to a great extent, influenced the nationalist movements. The Indian nationalist movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi was more strident than the constitution oriented moderate ethos of nationalist movement in Sri Lanka. While the Tamil-Sinhalese interaction during the

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[20]   ibid., no.2.

colonial era was at best competitive, in India, Muslim-Hindu separatism and the Muslim affirmation under the leadership of Jinnah culminated in the partition of colonial India into the two new states of India and Pakistan.

Intertwined to this historical past was the ethnic mosaic of the South Asian states. The least populated state of Maldives had the maximum ethnic homogeneity and the most populated state of India had the maximum heterogeneity. However, population was not that counted in the case of ethnicity, because the next populated state, Bangladesh had greater ethnic homogeneity, in relative terms. It was neither size nor status but the group distinctiveness or the subjective criteria which was the critical factor in ethnic group identification.

In regard to India it could be said that it is the most populated state in the South Asian region (800 million). One of the leading Ethnographers, Schermerhorn, identifies ten ethnic minorities: Scheduled castes, Scheduled tribes, Jains, Jews, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Anglo-Indians, Parsees, and Chinese.[21] However, he omits other categories like linguistic minorities. His justification for doing so is that there are far too many

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[21]   ibid., no.2, p.34.

linguistic groups and because of their fractional nature, it is difficult to treat them on a societal basis.

Schermerhorn's assumption that only minority groups qualify for ethnic group status is not fully agreeable. Linguistic states cannot be a substitute for linguistic groups because not all members of a linguistic group reside therein. Besides this, the states and union territories in India have been formed not only on linguistic basis but also on the tribal criteria. In the states of the north-eastern region, the tribal population is in a majority, eg. Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh. Also, the idea of smallness does not hold ground. Studies by several other scholars on South Asian ethnicity prove that language is as critical an ethnic group maker as tribe and religion are.

Thus, in the Indian context, one can see various tribal groups moving to the phase of ethnic community encompassing a number of tribes, eg. Mizo, Naga or Meiti community. Similar is the process through various dialects among linguistic groups which form a number of ethnic communities, eg. Tamil, Telugu, Kannadiga, Nepali, Malayali, Bengali, Assamese. Yet another is the case of religious groups developing themselves into ethnically self-conscious communities, eg. Muslims, Sikhs, Parsees. Some of them make their claim for a nation, others do not.

The ethnic structure in the case of Sri Lanka had been dominantly influenced by the processes of colonisation, conquests from the west and conversions from India in the north. The exception to this seemed to be Arab traders who formed a large part of the Muslim community (7 per cent), Malay soldiers brought by the Dutch, ·and the Burghers, a community of Eurasian and European descent. The indigenous population of the island state was called Veddahs. They did not number more than 1000 individuals.

The extent to which Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic configuration had been determined by its proximity to India and its distance from any other land was clear from the fact that more than 90 per cent of its population had Indian antecedents. Thus, this migration process had not only created a bulk of Sri Lanka's population but also had provided the majority-minority component of its social structure, with the Sinhalese comprising 74 per cent of the total population and claiming Aryan descent and the Tamils accounting for 18 per cent of the total population and claiming Dravidian descent.[22]

The Sinhalese-Tamil sense of identity and distinctiveness reflect religio-racial, linguistic congruence. Thus, community-wise religious indicators prove that more than 80 per cent of the Sinhalese, Tamil and

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[22] ibid., no.2, p.43.

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almost 100 per cent of the Moors and Malays had remained Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims respectively. The Burghers had been mainly Christians. So had been the rest of the Tamils and Sinhalese. Only Christianity seemed to have cut across the racial boundaries as a result of the western colonial rule for over 450 years.

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CHAPTER II

INDIA

India and Sri Lanka have largely been on the amplification of racial conflict. There has been no uniform pattern in the upsurge or the tension of the racial conflicts. They have, nonetheless, shown heightening of the conflagration from time to time. India has been a case of composite culture, while Sri Lanka has not been into that kind of a frame.

First, one should analyse the fusion of several social forces in the case of India. India largely represents through the millennium a case of the amalgamation of various cultures and civilisations. From the Indus Valley period through the Vedic and post-Vedic period, the 'Hindu' mind brought about synthesis of the indigenous as well as the external social, religious and cultural forces. The Muslim period added its own dimensions, from Arab invasion through the Sultanate followed by the Mughals (700 A.D. - 1857). The Indian society absorbed several socio-cultural aspects which eventually became the mainstay of the civilisational milieu. The catholicity of its cultural ethos absorbed several facets of other civilizations.

With the advent of the British and the spread of its liberal education, there came about a number of reform movements in the form of Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and the Brahma Samaj. The last movement started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy added the much awaited zeal to the gender ailing society of India.

Several of these breakaway sects from the religious mainstream of Hinduism came to symbolise a break from the past or the delinking of its ritualistic aspects under which thousands of innocent people groaned. While religion had its sway in the context of Hinduism, it did not spare other religions like Islam and Christianity by adding their own reform components. The Sufiism and unorthodox personifications of Islam happily blended with Indian civilisation. Christianity also accepted in its fold the followers of the Church in India and there were large scale conversion to its religion as were that of the Islam. Meanwhile, the political situation in India gave a definitive signal. The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 by Sir David Hume. The Indian National Congress represented a pluralistic approach to Indian polity. That it was founded by a British, added to its acceptance in the Indian multitude. The British Crown and the Parliament took deep roots in the Indian polity. Hence, India's national movements symbolised by its 'moderates' viz., Gopal Krishna

Gokhale, Dadha Bhai Naroji, Sir Feroz Shah Mehta, became the followers of the British ideology. The 'extremists', on the other hand, as represented by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Vipin Chand Paul emphasised values of Indian culture and asserted that the end of the British Raj must come.

Tilak's much acclaimed concept of Swaraj was based on Hindu philosophy of the freedom of the self from the physical bonds. Subsequently, Gandhiji had much to learn from this concept. Lajpat Rai's assertion on Indianness and infusing the militancy of the Hindu mind with Vipin Chand Paul reiterating it brought about a new dimension to the Indian political movement.

From 1917 on, Gandhiji's contribution cannot, but, be a very significant third factor in the political plurality of India's national movement. Gandhiji evolved an approach which brought Indian masses close to the movement with its mass upsurge in the form of Civil Disobedience Movement and Sathyagraha. Gandhiji's path was substantially followed by Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Ravindranath Tagore, and subsequent pioneers to the movement. Meanwhile, the Muslim factor played its own role in laying the future directions of the Indian polity. The founder of modern Pakistan, Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Liaqat Ali Khan were not too far behind to bring about the fourth dimension of Indian

pluralistic projection of the Indian polity. Howsoever controversial the events of the political movements or the political actors of this national liberation movement might have been, the fact remains that the pluralistic aspect was deeply embedded from its inception to the founding of modern India.

It is not within the purview of this chapter to discuss several facets of Indian National Movement, suffice to say that India presented its political personality in a multi-fold manner during its transitional period, between colonial and its post-colonial periods. The expulsion of colonialism from the sub-continent remained a waxed issue and it reflected intermittently from one period to another. It also ranged from one group to another and different community of leaders under different labels. Such comprehension and vastness of India's political ethos was bound to reflect in its socio-cultural spheres. India, therefore, inherited a mixed baggage of plurality not merely in socio-cultural and religious spheres, but also in the pursuit of sharing of political power.

It may not be totally out of focus if modern India could be connected with the multi-ethnic groups who sought the political patronage through several channels. The ideological versions of the Marxist-Leninist, socialist, nationalist or different political ideologues "singing

their blues" at the same time with different rhythms - became the characteristic of the movement.

India's social structure, thus, is a unique blend of diverse religions, cultures, and social groups. Historically, India has been a hospitable land to numerous immigrants and invaders from distant parts of Asia and Europe. The cultural patterns of these alien settlers have, over the past many centuries, been interwoven with the native culture to produce India's glorious cultural heritage.

The uniqueness of India's social structure lies in its unity amidst diversity. The population of India is socially diverse combining elements of six main social types, viz., the Nagrito, the Proto-Australoid, the Mongoloid, the Mediterranean, the Western Brachycephals, and the Nordic.[1] All the great religions of the world, viz., Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc. are found here. There are 15 major literary languages, besides numerous other languages and dialects. Diversity is seen between various communities and groups in the pattern of rural and urban settlements, community life, cultural and social behaviour as also in the institutional framework.

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[1] Sachdeva S.K. (ed.), *Competition Success Review Year Book 1993* (New Delhi: Competition Review Pvt. Ltd., 1993), P.549.

The caste system, a system of hierarchical social organisation that was evolved and practised almost from the beginning of the early civilisation, forms the basic foundation of India's pluralistic social structure. The significance of caste is often a mystery to westerners, who confuse its divisions with those of class. Many find it hard to believe that men and women can accept that they are born into unalterable social categories - an hierarchy starting from the highest (Brahmin) caste to the lowest. Man is born unfree and is everywhere enchained - that appears to be the Hindu belief in regard to the caste system.[2] Once one is born within a particular caste, it is one's duty to live that life according to the function it is best suited to: the Brahmin to teach and officiate as a priest, the Kshatriya to fight, the Vaishya or Bania to create wealth, the Shudra to till the soil. This is the *varna* system that Hinduism believes in. But God or Natue or Fate has also kept some who are achhut, untouchable, who carry out the necessary but polluting tasks of which the removal of night soil and the handling of dead animals are the most familiar.

The Indian constitution abolished untouchability and successive governments drew up a register or schedule of

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[2]   Dennis Austin, *Democracy and Violence in India and Sri Lanka* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1994), pp. 39-40.

the Harijans (Gandhiji renamed the untouchables as Harijans, the people of God) to which were added 'other backward classes' (OBCs) and tribal peoples - 'scheduled tribes. But the social stigma remained unchanged, despite the fact that the lowest of the low existed in their millions: scheduled castes constitute roughly 15 percent (125 million) of the total population - as much as 27 per cent in Punjab and as few as 7 percent in Maharashtra.

The Indian society today is divided into numerous castes and sub-castes within the four main orders, existing in different parts of the country, under different names and having a different status. What is significant about the caste system is that castes are found not only among the Hindus who are more rigid in preserving and practising this system, but this system also exists to some extent among the Indian Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains and Jews. To look at an example, caste is important for Sikhs for certain purposes like marriage. There are four major categories: 'ex-untouchable (sometimes called Mazhbis); artisan castes (Ramgarhias, or carpenters); clerical and commercial castes (Khatris, Aroras etc.); and Jats'. And it is very seldom that Hindu Jats and Sikh Jats enter into marriage. On the classical Hindu scheme of things, Jats had

relatively low status, belonging either to the third or fourth of the four great varna system.[3]

Looking at the religious front, India, being a secular country does not have any state religion. The state of India allows freedom of faith, worship, and religion. The amazing diversity and plurality of India is reflected in the number of religions and faiths practised by the Indian people, some of which were born on this land while others were brought in by the successive political and cultural invasions and assimilated by the people of this country. Among the major religions in India, Hinduism is the largest, followed by Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and Zorastrianism.

The Hindus, i.e, the followers of Hinduism, account for over 80 percent of India's total population. It is a henotheistic religion where Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras have been assigned strictly compartmentalised functions. However, with the passage of time, the caste distinctions have become loose, and with the growing social awakening, the lower caste people, who had been looked down upon by those belonging to the higher castes, are now getting their rightful place in the Hindu society.

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[3] Robin Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India ?* (New Delhi: Mac Millan Press Ltd., 1986), p.48.

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The Muslims, the followers of Islam, form the second largest religious community in India accounting for over 11 percent of the total population. Next to Islam, it is Sikhism which takes the next position with a little less than 2 per cent of India's population. The Sikhs are a sturdy martial race known for their valour and broad mindedness. This religion, which emerged in the 15th century tried to bridge the gap between Hinduism and Islam.

The Jains form about half a per cent of India's population and Buddhists constitute less than three quarters of one percent of India's population.

Coming to Christianity, they comprise about two-and-a-half percent of India's population. They are largely concentrated in Goa, Maharashtra, Arunanchal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the last three states accounting for over 60 per cent of the total population in the country. The Parsees also form a very small element in the religious plurality of India.

Despite these numerous social, cultural, religious and racial diversities, India still remains a largely unified society. India is a political entity every part of which is governed under the same constitution. But one has to agree to the fact that in India, political parties appeal to caste interests, or Hindu emotions, or Muslim rights, or state loyalties, and these are the primary sources of caste

violence, communal conflict and provincial insurrection. Politics is caught up in the violence of opposing factions by which they are shaped and through which they prosper. In that kind of a situation, democracy itself is a spur to violence. When societies are divided, democracy adds depth to the sense of division. South Asian society is excessively plural, its divisions deep and jagged, its democracy corrupted by the distortion of its virtues.'[4] A good example is majority rule, a basic tenet of democratic government.

It is, nevertheless, important that problem of ethnicity in the case of India should be understood in the context of its socio-cultural milieu. Political considerations, of late, have had their own sway in ushering in the era of ethnic conflicts in the Indian sub-continent. One can reflect briefly on some of the problems which emerged in the past four decades.

There have been several peace accords signed during these years. Peace Accord in Assam 1985, Bodo Accord 1983, have taken care of problem of the East. Although the North-East simmers with socio-political problems, it appeared that the major problem of Assam regarding the issue of erstwhile Bangladeshis has been put to rest. It is essential to note that in such cases the problem is more

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[4]   ibid., n.2, p.3.

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social than political and vice-versa at the same time. This intemashing of ethnic issues with politics as well as regional considerations have been commanding attention.

The Sub-Himalaya region had experienced the issue of Gorkha identity. The displaced Nepali Gurkhas living for generations in the region demanded a separate hill-council for attaining the autonomous status. It was however, in the form of an Accord on Darjeeling in 1988 that peace returned to the region. It was followed subsequently by the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Act, and thereafter its amendment in 1994 that the matters were resolved.

The Twenty-Seventh Amendment Act of 1971 of the Indian constitution brought about Peace Accord in Mizoram. The accord conferred normalcy in the state. It was primarily meant to restore peace and normalcy in Mizoram and was agreed within the time frame,

> ... to take all necessary steps to end all underground activities, to bring out all underground personnel of the MNF with their arms, ammunition and equipment to ensure their return to civil life, to abjure violence and generally to help in the process of restoration of normalcy. The modalities of bringing out all underground personnel and deposit of all arms, ammunition and equipment will be as worked out. The implementation of the foregoing will be under the supervision of the Central government.[5]

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[5]   P.S. Datta, *Ethnic Peace Records in India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1995), p.146.

The Shillong Accord of 1975 (11th November 1975) and its supplementary agreement to the Shilling Accord (5th January 1976) was also directed towards peace and normalcy between the government of India and the underground Nagas. It was agreed that arms and underground activities against the security forces will come to an end.

On the other hand, the Peace Accord in Punjab, Anandpur Sahib Resolution signed in August 1977 were of great importance, as Punjab had experienced violence and ethnic turbulence for quiet sometime. The accord provided a temporary respite to the Government of India, its security forces and warring factions among Sikhs, who were asking for separate state in Punjab. The Anandpur Sahib Resolution was adopted by the Shiromani Akali Dal, which emphasised its "Human Co-existence, Human progress, and ultimate unity of all Human being with the Spiritual Soul".[6] The political objectives of the accord were primarily meant to negotiate with the Government of India on the Akali position regarding Punjab. While it accepted the foreign policy matters within the ambit of the Central government, it almost insisted for autonomy of Punjab. It lashed out considerably the discrimination against the Sikhs by the Central or State governments in any form or manner, so perceived by the Akalis. They emphasised their

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[6]   ibid., p.178.

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general policy towards self-assertion, gaining adequate concessions "...and proper safeguards for a life of self-respect and dignity. Besides this, the Akali Dal brought out an extensive programme towards making Punjab as a predominant Sikh state. They even reflected on the centre-state relations; transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab; sharing of river waters; representation of minorities and promotion of Punjabi language.

The Punjab accord was short-lived. Shiromani Akali Dal leader, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal fell victim to the terrorists. Nothing less than total independence of Punjab as a separate state would satisfy them. Punjab was soon engulfed into crisis with terrorist activities on increase. Thereafter, it was a long turmoil between the different groups of terrorists among Sikhs, the state government and the central government. The unfortunate 'Blue-Star Operation' under the Prime-Ministership of late Smt. Indira Gandhi had borne deep scars on the psyche of average Sikh in Punjab. This story therefore, could not come to any tame conclusion.

Next development in the Indian polity took place in an agreement between Indian government, the Chogvil and the political parties of Sikkim in 1973. This brought Sikkim into the Indian Union. Although Sikkim had not provided any significant resistance to the Government of India in any

meaningful fashion, it nevertheless put India into questionable position. India's desire to induct Sikkim into the union provided a sense of alienation on the part of a few Sikkimese. However, this has not created any great stir, political or social, by which India could feel threatened.

A brief reference may also be made of the Memorandum of Settlement of 1988 between the Government of India and the tribals in Tripura. This was primarily meant to restore peace and harmony, where disturbed conditions existed. The Tripura National Volunteer (TNV), through its letter dated 4th May 1988, agreed to resolve the problem through negotiations. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was accepted for resolving the TNV problem. The rehabilitation of the undergrounds reservation of seats in the state assembly for the tribals, and restoration of alienated lands to the tribals took place. The economic development of Tripura was also highlighted and this was given a further fillip though the Memorandum of Settlement of 1993 between the All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF) and the Governor of Tripura. Same policy was followed regarding developmental plans and restoration of confidence among these tribals. There appeared to be normalcy getting back to the north - eastern region.

The Indian situation demands a closer look at its social fabric. The Hindu society has long been a subject of social hierarchy, based on caste system as mentioned earlier. The socio-political and economic dispensation have historically been based on this casteist boundaries. Although one must differentiate that the caste boundaries have not universally been the same all over India[7] and different regions have different punctuations, as it is said the fortired *varna* system have been more marked in the northern than in the southern parts of India.[8] In northern India, there are Brahmins, Rajputs and Takurs. The latter are based more on clan than on caste. They belong to the landed strata and are relatively well-off. On the other hand, Kurmis, Ahirs and Yadavs are "the middle classed or the so called 'clean' agricultural castes."[9] Chamars and Parsees are the lowest castes and belonged to the landless labourers category. They are the downtrodden and are also found as Dalits in some other parts of India.

In southern India, on the other hand, there are only three distinguishable classes - the brahmins, the non-

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[7] For detailed analysis see Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia*, (UK: Cmabridge University Press, 1995), Ch.Six, pp.201-220.

[8] ibid., p.204.

[9] ibid.

brahmins and the scheduled castes and tribes.[10] Gandhiji called these people as the 'Harjans' (the children of god). In other north-eastern regions, tribal affiliations are not so caste-based. The same could be said about different parts of India. From the above analysis, it would appear that the caste does not strictly fit into the ethnic concept. There may be some variations but, not always are they so counter- distinguishable in terms of their ethnic affiliation. India may have witnessed and continues to witness a great deal of inter-caste rivalry in socio-political spheres. The same could be said in regard to the inter-religious communal fights between Hindus and Muslims. Conflicts in such matters have also been largely triggered by the economic advantages and benefits in the government jobs, which have largely been captured by the forward castes.

It has been argued that about 17.6 per cent of the total population of India, the forward castes enjoy a disproportionate measure of political and economic power. Brahmins constitute only 5.5 per cent of the population of India, but they had about 37.6 per cent their share in the prestigious Indian Administrative Service (IAS). During 1980s, upper castes accounted for 68 per cent of the IAS

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[10]   ibid.

post and had their maximum share in the top position of public and private sectors.[11]

Scheduled castes and other tribes constitute about 28 per cent of the population, but unneglible in their government representation. Although government has provided a protective discrimination to allocate 15 and 7.5 per cent of openings in the IAS to scheduled castes and tribes respectively, this is not all! In between, there are two layers which number between 3,000 and 4,000 - intermediate caste by *jati*, which have been termed as other backward classes or "OBCs". They constitute nearly 43.7 per cent of the Indian population.[12] Experts have since long argued that inter-caste and intra-caste placements have been conditioned by social and economic disparity - as a result of which there have been considerable constraints in the Indian social set-up. A few notable points are worth obtaining even in regard to making a general categorisation of these castes in India. Not all forward castes are rich as there are a few segments of scheduled castes enjoying a better economic standing in the social hierarchy. Likewise, the so called other backward classes (OBCs) are also

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[11] Most of these details have been drawn from the ibid., pp.204-206.

[12] For details see, Marc Galanter, *Competing Inequalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India* (Delhi, 1984); also Rajani Kothari, *Caste and Indian Politics*, (New Delhi, 1970).

somewhat better placed as farmers and peasants. They got their proprietorship after Zamindari abolition in the 1950s.[13]

All these regional, linguistic and cultural variations, registering their variabales from region to region, make India a highly ethnic hetrogenous social system. More often than not the acrimony and hostility experienced either politically or socially are not necessarily based on rigid ethnic considerations. And yet, they may have occurred due to the adherence to ethnic identities.

India has proclaimed in its constitutional apparatus that it would promote equality among its people and it would also strive to achieve ideals of a secular state.

Although India achieved its independence by partitioning the sub-continent on Hindu-Muslim basis, there did not emerge a distinct Hindu state in the context of India. India's political experimentation has continued to be on a jolty path, when it comes to question of communalism, casteism and intra-religious factionalism. The state, as a system, has not always succeeded in defending the cause of aggrieved parties nor has it always succeeded in being the promoter of their causes, either socially,

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[13] See Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A. Rao (eds.), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: the Decline of Social Order* (Delhi, 1990).

politically or economically. As a result, it has manifested that many minorities in India continued to nurture their multiple identities based on their respective caste, religion, jati or tribalism. The denials caused and the points of deprivation in either sphere have caused sometimes a tension - leading to a conflict from region to region. Whenever these exists a perceptible threat to each others' identity, the clashes beocme a common feature.

This, in nutshell, provides the ethnic acceptance as well as non-acceptance of India's socio-cultural and 'political-cum-economic system.

CHAPTER III

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka, formerly called Ceylon, is an island nation located at the Southeast coast of India. Sri Lanka, like India, is a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious country. Its population by the Census Report of 1993 is 17.8 million, and is composed of four major ethnic groups: Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Moors or Muslims. A fifth group, the Veddhas, numbering several thousands are descendants of the original inhabitants of the island.[1] Their traditional culture has disappeared due to their contact with the Sinhalese and Tamil.

The ethnic structure in Sri Lanka had dominantly been influenced by the processes of colonisation, conquests from the West and conversions from India in the North. The extent to which Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic configuration had been determined by its proximity to India and its distance from any other land was clear from the fact that more than 90 per cent of its population had Indian antecedents. Thus, this migration process had not only created a bulk of Sri

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[1]   David Levinson, *Ethnic Relations - A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia* (ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, California, 1994), p.214.

Lanka's population, but also had provided the majority-minority component of its social structure, with the Sinhalese comprising 74 per cent of the total population and claiming Aryan descend and the Tamil accounting for 18 per cent of the total population and claiming Dravidian descend.

Majority of the Sinhalese are Theravada Buddhist and the remainder are mostly Roman Catholics. Their areas of inhabitant are western, central and southern provinces, where they are politically and economically dominant. The Sri Lankan Tamils are mostly Hindus and a small minority belongs to Protestants and Roman Catholics. They live primarily in the eastern and northern provinces, with cultural and political activity centered on the Jaffna peninsula.

Modern Sri Lankan Tamil culture is a blend of Indian Tamil and Sinhalese culture, with additional borrowing from other South Indian cultures such as those people in Kerala. Thus, Sri Lankan Tamils are culturally different from Indian Tamils or from the Sinhalese. Indian Tamils are descendants of Indian Tamils brought to Sri Lanka by the British in 1800s as labourers on tea plantations and they constitute 8.5 per cent of the total population. Sri Lankan Moors or Muslims comprise 7 per cent of the population and

they live primarily in the southern and western provinces of the island.

Having said so much about each group, now one needs to study the genesis of the crisis in a historical perspective. The roots of insurgency lie deep in the social, political and economic situation at a given point of time. The insurrectionary movements took shape due to the existence of sharp divisions within the society owing to regional, ethnic, linguistic, religious and communal differences along with issues of legitimacy and authority. There are different versions on the question whether the Sinhalese or the Tamils were the ones who came to the island first. Secretary of the Tamil Eelam Friendship Association, Somanur claims that the island had been originally inhabited by the ancient Tamil natives.[2] He believed that the Sinhalese had no right to claim the island as their's alone. Their Mahavamsa admitted that their history in the island commenced only after the arrival of Prince Vijaya (500 B.C.) from an upper kingdom in the sub-continent. It seemed that the prince wooed and married a Tamil Princess, Kuveni usurped the Tamil Kingdom, brought in more people of his race, thereby subjugated the Tamils and established Sinhala rule. The Tamils reasserted

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[2]   P.A. Padmanabhan, 'Historical Perspective', in *Tears in Teardrop Island*, M.V.M. Alagappan (ed.) (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1985), p.15.

later with the help of Tamil Kings (Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas) in the adjoining Tamil country just across the straits. The history of Tamil Nadu was, thus, replete with incidents of meddling in the politics of Tamil kings by the Sinhala rulers from the island.

If there was credibility in this version, then 'President Jayawardene was not telling the truth when he announced over the national radio and TV in the island in the wake of July genocide of the Tamils that it was really the Sinhalese who were the true historical victims of Tamil arrogance and treachery.[3] The subjugation of the island's ethnic Tamils in modern times took place in 1619 A.D. when the Portuguese captain Philip De Olivera took the Tamil King Sangili as a prisioner of war and hanged him at Goa. Thereafter, the Jaffna Tamil Kingdom went into the hands of Portuguese, followed by the Dutch and the British. Among the three colonial powers, the British were the most efficient as they were able to conquer colonies and control the entire island, which until then had been shared by the Tamils and the Sinhalese within their own territories by their respective kings.

A different version about the first inhabitants in the island country had been related by Dr.Swaroop Rani Dubey. She gave an interesting aspect of the history of Sri Lanka

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[3]   P.A. Padmanabhan, ibid., pp.19-20.

that the two principal races, Tamil and Sinhala, originally belonged to India. She claimed that it was the Sinhala to come to the island first.[4] And the Tamils followed later, attacked the Sinhala and ruled over the northern region. The rivalry between the Tamil and Sinhala, however, persisted over centuries and this continued to have a significant bearing on the political life of the island.

By 1505 A.D., the island nation was under the control of the Europeans, the first being the Portuguese. The island was under turmoil due to invasions and incursions. The Dutch made their appearance in 1656 A.D. and finally, the British in 1796 A.D. The British ruled the country till 1948 when Sri Lanka gained independence to become a republic in 1972.

The British having established themselves as the sole master of the island, sought to streamline the separate administrative and judicial systems for the Tamils and Sinhalese and to strengthen their hold on the island by integrating its politically divided territories. In the meanwhile, the Colebrook Commission had been appointed by the British Crown in 1829 to examine the ways to implement the 'political philosophy and administrative system' of the British. The report submitted by the commission in 1832

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[4] Swaroop Rani Dubey, *One Day Revolution in Sri Lanka: Anatomy of 1971 Insurrection* (Jaipur: Aalekh Publishers, 1988), p.4.

said that there was no need for continuing the separate administrative systems in different parts of the country for different people. In 1833, the British King issued a charter to render justice in the island of Ceylon and the recommendations of the commission were made laws. Thus, Ceylon - a single political state-came into being.[5] During the British rule till 1948, the Tamils were not discriminated or treated as a minority group of people.

But once the British left, the Sinhalese became obsessed with their numerical superiority and started a cruel process of racial discrimination interspersed with periodical violence against the Tamils.

Thus, it was only to ascertain their survival and progress that the Tamils in 1976 decided to demand a separate and sovereign state. A separate Tamil state for the Tamil people meant the revival of the pre-1833 Tamil territorial boundaries and integrate them into a state. There was a kind of jusitification in this demand for a separate state as the July genocide had amply demonstrated the vulnerability of the Tamils to the frenzy and fury of the Sinhalese. If the Tamils were not considered as equals to the Sinhalese, it became quite understandable on the part of Tamils to organize themselves for having a separate and sovereign state.

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[5]   P.A. Padmanabhan, n.2, p.20.

The current strife in Sri Lanka is thus, a violent ethnic separatist conflict that mainly involves the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalese. The Tamils seek political autonomy for the eastern and northern provinces as a Tamil homeland. This has been vehemently opposed by the numerically and politically dominant Sinhalese population of the country.

Hence, it appears that issue has been the long-felt economic and cultural grievance of a Sinhalese - Buddhist 'majority' against an articulate Tamil minority, who as a minority, have apparently fared far too well under the British and have acquired a sound base after independence. What makes the situation even worse is that the Tamil minority make up an overwhelming majority - 95.6 per cent of one province, situated on the Jaffna peninsular, and also constitute significant minorities on the district of Trincomalee (33 per cent) and a large majority in Batticoloa (70 per cent).[6] Both of these districts are situated in the eastern province. While the distributions of economic wealth and employment make up much of the grievances on both the sides, the problem of the role that cultural and religious symbolism play within Sri Lankan

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[6]   Vernon Marston Hewitt, *The International Politics of South Asia*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp.142-143.

society and within the structure of the state also constitute sore points in their relations.

Under the colonial rule, relations between the Tamil and Sinhalese were relatively harmonious. The first eight years after the independence (in 1948), Sri Lanka was ruled by a multi-ethnic coalition government. It was in 1958 that the Sinhalese-Tamil resentment turned bloody as some Sinhalese rioted against Sri Lankan Tamils in the south. During the next two decades, the Sri Lankan economy began deteriorating and the unemployment rates also rose up.

The political unrest within the Sinhalese community resulted in the creation of a leftist youth movement, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) or People's Liberation Army as a powerful political force. The leading terrorist group within the Tamil community has been the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The events that took place in Sri Lanka were quite contradictory. One side of the political coin had been that of a parliamentary democracy engaged in periodic elections between competing parties on both sides of the communal divide - including the socialist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the conservative United National Party (UNP) among the Sinhalese, and a kaleidoscope of groups within the Tamil minority. The other side of the coin had been violence, murder, torture, secessionist claims, revolutionary demands, state repression. Thus,

despite a parallel history of constitutional parties, the elections and parliaments, it continued to be a tale of murder, torture and bloody destruction.[7] As mentioned earlier, the first violent attack between the two communities occurred in 1958 and thereafter such attacks became much more frequent. The years 1958, 1977, 1981, 1983 witnessed increasing fights between the warring groups. Thus, the violence against the Tamil community grew sharply more focused towards their brethren.

In the early 1970s, the Sinhalese dominated coalition government brought about restrictions on the seats for Sri Lankan Tamils in the Universities (and hence government jobs) by setting up new quotas. This was part of their activities aimed at destroying the Tamil langauge and to enshrine the Sinhalese Buddhism as the national religion.

If Sinhalese national identity seemed to be problematic, based upon an elusive link between religion and language, the concept of an independent Tamil state was even more pronounced. The language had failed to provide the basis for agreement within the Tamils even though it had provided the basis of opposition against the Sinhalese majority. What had featured prominently as the pattern of communal violence in Sri Lanka's eastern and northern

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[7]   Dennis Austin, Democracy and Violence in India and Sri Lanka (London: Pinter Publishers, 1994), p.63.

provinces since 1983, had been the killing of various Tamil groups on the basis of different ideological orientation or a rise in factionalised rivalry.

The matter further worsened when the Muslims began demanding for significant autonomy of the community and the territory they occupied. Ethnic violence was reaching its frenzy on the black Friday of 29 July, 1979 when rumours of Tigers attacking Colombo led some Sinhalese to murder Tamils mercilessly not only in Colombo but other areas as well. The fury of such violence took expression in wild forms in the killing and burning of Tamils both young and old. Quite a number of Tamils took refuge in Sinhalese families and a large number of Tamils were put up in camps, some being shipped to Jaffna. The loss of life and property itself was bad enough, but worse was the insecure feeling among the Tamils.

Efforts on the part of UNP (United National Party) to evolve a consensus on an ethnic formula acceptable to all groups did not make any headway. Thus, the All Parties Conference convened in 1984 proved abortive. Consensus was reached on the idea of devolution, but differences arose on the form and content of devolution. There were two contradictory and inflexible positions - 'District councils and no more' and 'Regional councils and no less'. The Sinhalese-Buddhist group opposed any unit of devolution

larger than the District council and viewed Regional Councils, adopted by the Tamils as a step toward Eelam. The SLFP (Sri Lanka Federation Party) adopted more or less a similar approach to that of the Sinhalese.

Finally in December 1986, the government evolved set of proposals for Provincial Councils modelled so much on the Indian federal system. Though, this received qualitative support from some parties and groups, the SLFP and Tamil militants rejected them. Followed by this, there were a lot of clashes between the militants and the military in the northern and eastern provinces. The situation was becoming quite grim as incidents like imposition of an economic embargo on Jaffna occurred, making life very tough and dangerous. The strafling of the areas led to high causalities among the militants.

At various points of time, India intervened and tried to broker a settlement and the significant Indo-Sri Lankan Accord of 1987 was an outcome of that attempt. The accord provided a framework for the restoration of peace and normalcy in the area. It stipulated the surrender of arms by the militants followed by amnesty, the formation of an interim administrative council in the northern and eastern provinces, the holding of elections in the area and the devolution of powers at the provincial level. Under the terms of this accord, the Indian government supported a

rival group of Tamils, the EPRLF (Eelam Popular Revolutionary Liberation Front) which, with Indian support, contested provincial elections in 1988. Meanwhile, Indian Government made a headway in its accord with Jayawardhene Government to police the conflict in Sri Lanka's Jaffna area. Hence, in 1987, 60, 000 Indian troops - Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) were placed in Tamil regions to control the violence.[8] The Indian troops left the island in 1990 at the request of the Sinhalese government, and EPRLF faced the wrath of the Tigers. With the presence of Indian army in the area, there was much control in the violence, but the Indian army was accused of killing thousands of Tamil civilians and allegedly destroying much of their property. The Indian army's presence also led to political unrest in the south, which led to JVP violence against Sinhalese officials, culminating in several thousand Sinhalese deaths. In 1987, former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in the state of Tamil Nadu. It had been argued in political circles that Rajiv Gandhi assassination was committed at the behest of the LTTE leadership. Infact, Prabhakaran was accused to be the principal actor in the criminal design. This fact has continued to be the main aspect of Rajiv Gandhi murder case

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[8]   David Levinson, n.1, p.215.

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and continued to be the main point of acrimony between India and warring Jaffna LTTE leaders.

In March 1993 bombings in Bombay killed more than 250 people. The Tamils had been accused once again of the crime. In 1990, the Muslim community was also drawn in when the Tamil Tigers destroyed mosques and villages and killed hundreds of Muslims in the east. Consequently, many of the Muslims fled to the western province.

Attempts to satisfy demands from the moderate and extremists of both communities squeezed out the middle path. It suggested that Tamil demands should be settled within a federal constitutional structure. The Sinhalese majority was to accept a significant degree of political devolution in the process.

The devolution of powers to the provinces had taken three attempts. The first attempt, the so-called 'Development Council' plan of 1982 was a failure as it failed to satisfy Tamil demands because it was based upon district and not provincial autonomy.

The second attempt was the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord of 1987 which gave significant powers of devolution to the provinces, and merged the northern and the eastern provinces into one. This policy was severely opposed by radical Sinhalese and the JVP as well as members of the government, including Premadasa.

The third attempt followed from the governments' recent decision to embark upon a plan to copy the Indian federal system and grant the nine provinces significant powers of devolution - although it remained unclear what these powers were and which Tamils actually supported the initiative.

The two consecutive elections in Sri Lanka, parliamentary and presidential held in August and November 1994 respectively, and the victory of Chandrika Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA) in both the elections proved that people largely supported Chandrika's initiative to end the country's protracted ethnic problem.

The peace talks between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil separatist rebels to end the secessionist war initially received a boost with the two parties reaching to a point for the cessation of hostilities. The agreement on cessation of hostilities came through a cease fire which came into force on January 8, 1995. This was maintained by having demilitarized separation zone of 800 metres between the two forces and was monitored by six teams of five observers each - two from the Sri Lankan Army and two from the LTTE with a Chairman from a western country (Norway,

Netherlands, Canada or International Committee of the Red Cross). This was the first step taken by Chandrika.[9]

In the beginning, Chandrika's government was able to put the LTTE on the defensive and gained international sympathy for it peace efforts. With minor violations here and there, cessation of hostilities continued. The LTTE's main contention was that they were never considered as 'a serious political party' but as 'a guerilla group'. This seemed to be one of the major constraints to the easy passage of political dialogue.[10]

Also, the changing stance of the LTTE making new demands stood on the way of peace process. They made some new conditions like total removal of restrictions on fishing and free movement of boats off the north-eastern shore and permission for armed LTTE cadres to move about, who were earlier confined to the jungles in the eastern province.

Inspite of the efforts on the part of Chandrika's government for a peaceful and agreeable settlement of the ethnic crisis, it was a clear fact that without the participation of the Tigers, such a settlement would be in vain. LTTE supremo, V.Prabhakaran, on his part, claimed

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[9] Arvind Kumar, "Sri Lankan Ethnic Crisis", *Strategic Analysis* (December 1995), p.1184.

[10] *Indian Express*, March 11, 1995.

that hostilities had started again as the government failed to live up to the demands and promises to the Tamils.

Tamils in the north and the east of Sri Lanka seemed to be happy with the peace process as supplies of essential commodities had started reaching them. Thus, the common people were becoming admirers of Chandrika which was becoming a point of uneasiness to LTTE leader - Prabhakaran. He started thinking of ways and means to disrupt the peace process. He had done it twice earlier: in October 1987 and June 1990. This time, he had already acquired anti-aircraft weaponry in the LTTE arsenal. Also, surface-to-air, heat-seeking missiles seemed to have reached the LTTE by the beginning of 1995, around the time when Chandrika worked out the ceasefire with LTTE. And the LTTE seemed to have accepted the ceasefire only to train its cadres in the use of such new weapons.

On April 19, 1995 the LTTE ended the ceasefire of hostilities.

History, thus, repeated itself in Sri Lanka with the LTTE getting on to the warpath again. Again, it looked as if there was no meeting ground between the LTTE's dream of Tamil Eelam and Chandrika's dream of having a united and peaceful Sri Lanka, a variety of communities living in harmony with each other, maintaining their own cultural

identities. The peace process had again suffered a major setback with the end of the cessation of hostilities.

The prospects for peace with the Tamils did not appear very bright even if there was a change of government in Sri Lanka. It was a fact that unless and until both parties i.e., the government and the LTTE made some compromises, it was difficult to attain peace.

Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka in the form of terrorism, riots, government - sanctioned attacks on civilians, destruction of property and assassinations had caused more than 3,. 00, 000 deaths since the early 1980s, and the forced relocation of hundreds of thousands of Tamils and Muslims.[11] And so far, there has come no political or any kind of solution to the issue of Sri Lankan Tamil autonomy.

It is against this background of the three decades that ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka must be understood and evaluated as a spill-over in the South Asian context. The Tamil population, as well as, the Sinhalese component, along with religious variables suggest that there has been a considerable intermashing of communities, races, and religions. A long history of Sri Lanka, in terms of racial composition of the island, does not lead to a rigid

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[11]   Syed Anwar Hussain, 'Internal Dynamics of South Asian Security: Ethnic Dissonance', paper presented at the International seminar on 'Ethno-Sectarian Conflict and Internal Dynamics of Regional Security' 2-4 September 1996.

identity to each one of these population. It is shrouded in the mystery of long historical experience.

However, the identity in terms of Tamils, Sinhalese and others are now based on the basis of separate community and religious adherents. Sometimes, it has also been argued that the question has been not so much of racial cum religious identity, but that of economic disparity among different classes. One group accuses the other of enjoying the supremacy in bureaucracy, governmental patronage and running the elite based institutions. Some groups, among Tamils, appeared to have enjoyed this historical legacy, although it is hard to accept this as a general rule to all Tamil population in Sri Lanka.

On the other hand, Sinhalese population, which constitute majority, feel that the root cause of Tamil belligerency against them is buttressed by the south part of the Indian sub-continent. The sanctuaries of the Tamil rebels are to be found in Tamil Nadu. The government of India has strongly prevented any such congregation of LTTE - more particularly after the death of India's late Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, but all is not under control.

The mounting pressure of the military against LTTE has also brought countless deaths to the rank and file of the LTTE groups. They have been subjected to rigorous attacks by the Sri Lankan government with a decisive advantage in

their favour. The fight, however, persists. Sporadic Tamil guerilla attacks in the city of Colombo and at times targeted at government buildings prove that situation has not been diffused fully. One does hear, however, violation of human rights as a case against Sri Lankan government in suppressing the Tamil groups with a high hand.

The ethnic conflict, thus, in Sri Lanka, assumes significance in the context of what has appeared to be a malady of its kind. Political, social turmoil with a desire to have a decisive mileage in these affairs has remained a guiding spirit in this case. The economic disadvantage and insecurity cause further distance in bringing about a rapproachment between the LTTE and the Sinhalese.

CHAPTER IV

AMERICAN RESPONSE

The response of the United States to ethnic conflicts in the sub-continent of India and its neighbour, Sri Lanka, did not articulate itself in concrete terms. Its policy towards India and Sri Lanka had largely been conditioned by its foreign policy - approach towards South Asia. Although, significant reports and the media coverage were tangible regarding ethnic disturbances in these two countries, the official statements made by the U.S. government showed restraints as well as an element of ambivalence. While the U.S. government had not been altogether condemnatory, it nevertheless had indicated in its statements that there were violations of human rights as well as certain aberrations in the functioning of democracy in India as well as Sri Lanka.

U.S. policy towards India became a part of its cold war approach since the end of the Second World War. The policy of non-alignment was not appreciated by the policy planners during the 'Dulles era'. Jawaharlal Nehru had made it abundantly clear that India would not be a party to any ideological skirmishes as well as groupings. Nehru said as early as 7th September, 1946:

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We propose as far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which we have led in the past two World Wars and which may again lead to disasters on an even vaster scale. We believe that peace and freedom are indivisible and the denial of freedom anywhere must endanger freedom elsewhere and lead to conflict and war. We are particularly interested in emancipation of colonial and dependant countries and peoples, and in the recognition in theory and practice of equal opportunities of all races.... We seek no domination over others and we claim no privileged position over other peoples. But we do claim equal and honourable treatment for our people wherever they may go, and we can not accept any discrimination against them.[1]

India's enunciation of its non-aligned policy attracted the U.S. attention in a rather dubious way. Jawaharlal Nehru emphasised again and again that India, in its post independent period, would devote its utmost energies on social, economic and domestic spheres towards its development. It would desire that peace and stability prevailed in the sub-continent. Nehru also realised that to be left totally unconcerned and unaffected by the bi-polar division of the world was not an easy course to pursue. Science and technology tended to contract the world into a smaller sphere of operation. He believed that if there was outbreak of a world war, it would affect equally any nation, irrespective of what foreign policy it pursued.[2]

[1]   Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches*, September 1946 - April 1961, (New Delhi, 1961), p.22.

[2]   ibid., p.24.

Hence, Nehru attempted to prevent any outbreak of a war in Asia and the world. If India wanted peace for itself, it would need to endeavour that peace prevailed in the whole world.[3]

Such expressions of India's foreign policy aroused an interest in the political circles of the United States. George E. Jones, correspondent of the *New York Times* in New Delhi, acclaimed that India would not like to entangle herself with other people's feuds and imperialist rivalries".[4] However, some other sections of the press in the U.S. believed that the U.S. faced a tough position in the oriental world. Joseph Fromm, a correspondent for *U.S. News and World Report*, gave his estimate of the orient as a case of increasing influence of the Soviet Communism. He said: "An on-the ground study of the situation in Japan, China, the Philippines, French, Indo-China, Malaya, the East Indies, Burma and India indicates that the United States and the West are losing the 'Cold War' in Asia by default.[5]

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[3]   Michael   Brecher,   *India's   Foreign   Policy: An Interpretation* (New Delhi, 1957), p.51.

[4]   George E. Jones, "Nehru Lists Aims in Foreign Policy", *New York Times*, 1 September 1946.

[5]   Joseph Fromm, "Soviet Rising Powers in Asia", *U.S. News and World Report* (Washington D.C.) vol.25, 1 October, 1948, pp.15-16.

Sri Lanka did not figure extensively in terms of U.S. coverage in its post-independent period. However, as an erstwhile British colony, U.S. interest was seen in the context of naval strategy. America was also keen to contain Soviet influence in the east. Since Sri Lanka, as an island nation occupied an important harbour, Americans evinced interest in substituting the British paramountcy in the area. Sri Lankan governments were provided with U.S. cultural dialogue. The island nation should preferably be within the ambit of American influence. The liberal education and programmes related to it, were among a few significant steps taken to inculcate U.S. influence in the area. However, the contiguity of the island nation to India made the sub-continent as a major focus of American ideological stances. It was viewed by the policy planners in Washington that India would play an important role in Asia. Columnist, Walter Lippman described Nehru as the "greatest figure in Asia".[6] Lippmann further said "we would be well advised to enter into intimate consultations with Pandit Nehru about our whole course of action in China and Indonesia'. Another important American journalist, Louis Fischer agreed in the same vein.[7]

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[6]   As reported in *The Hindu*, Madras, 6 January, 1949.

[7]   ed., 'Indonesia', ibid., 13 January, 1949.

The subsequent period throughout 1950s and thereafter, represented a chequered history of U.S. responses towards India, in particular, and South Asia, in general. India's neutral position in the Korean War, 1950-53 was subjected to stresses and strains in Indo-US relations. Despite the food aid programme and subsequent aid to India, the administration in Washington was not well-poised towards India.[8]

India's position was further weakened by subsequent policies that it took on Indo-China crisis and also the Vietnam war. Relations had, however, improved during the interragnum period of the Kennedy Administration, but it did not last long with the heightening of the Vietnam war and Nixon-Kissinger period of hostile attitude towards India, made relations far worse.

Before one analyses the U.S. response to ethnic conflicts in South Asia, one cannot but see definite diversions in U.S. policy towards Asia. Signing of Sino-U.S. detente, 1971 and thawing of the Cold War with the Soviet Union in 1973, U.S. policy became rather bleak towards India. India suffered in the U.S. estimate what has been described as the "benign neglect'. It is China, Japan and the West Pacific that occupied increasing interest in

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[8]   See Nehru-Acheson Correspondence, *New York Times*, 30 June, 1950; also U.S. Department of State Bulletin (Washington. D.C.), vol.23, 31 July, 1950, p.170.

U.S. foreign policy. The psycho-dynamics of international relations seemed to have changed considerably.[9]

With the onset of 1980s, U.S. foreign policy revived the neo-conservative era of John Foster Dulles. The 'evil-empire' of the Soviet Union was put on constant pressure and subjected to verbal attack during Reagan's presidency. United States perceived a mounting threat from its principal adversary and deployed forces of containment to its maximum. NATO was strengthened and so were its allies for withstanding any onslaught of the Soviet Union. The "star-war" programme under Reagan gained further momentum. U.S. also had its threat perceptions in regard to other governments. The first two terms of Reagan administration were devoted to as to how best America could prevent spread or proliferation of nuclear weapons. India was viewed along with some other countries like Pakistan, Israel, South Africa, Argentina and North Korea among the threshold states. Among these threshold states, who were adding to its arsenal, Iran and Iraq constituted another mark of danger. West Asia had been a vast repository of oil on which depended almost 60-70 per cent of industrial output of Japan, Western Europe and the United States. With the "rogue states", like Libya, Syria and North Korea, coming

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[9]   See for details, Vamik D. Volkan, et al, The Psychodynamics of International Relationships, (Lexington Books: Lexington, 1995).

in under the purview of the U.S. foreign policy, the pressure points were getting further articulated in its approach towards West Asia. Hence, U.S. believed that the heartland of Asia i.e., South Asia (India in particular) became paramount in the U.S. estimate. As a result, a good deal of arm twisting began taking place vis-a-vis India against its developing nuclear warheads. Pakistan, as a constant irritant to Indian diplomacy in the sub-continent, was favoured by the U.S. as a pressure point on India. Another traditional and strong adversary of India i.e., People's Republic of China became another pressure point for softening India's position on nuclear weapons.

The U.S. response, thus, towards India was tangible in the area of foreign policy. United States also opposed India's position on economic nationalism. Private sectors which had received no particular interest in India's economic planning were revived. Economic liberalisation, opening up of markets to the U.S. merchandise, trans-national corporations, capital investments as well as opening up of key economic sectors became the mainstay of the U.S. response to the Indian polity.[10]

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[10] See for example, Remarks by U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Ronald H. Brown at the Vidhan Sabha, Bangalore (United States Information Service: Madras, January 8, 1995), and also Press Release "US Commerce Secretary Ronald H. Brown leads Presidential Business Development Mission to India, January 14-21, 1995 (United States Information Service: Madras, January

Regional hegemonic positions, with India enjoying a supreme position in the region, was also of interest to the U.S. position in South Asia. It is against this background that the U.S. response towards ethnic conflicts taking place in India must be viewed. United States believed that India's Punjab problem in which majority of the Sikh population felt aggrieved after the blue-star operation must be assuaged from deep-hurt-psyche. Several clandestine activities of the terrorists in Punjab brought out a case of ethnic conflict in India. Washington felt during early part of 1980s that it was almost a war of insurgency against the central government of India. Pakistan, which had been serving as a sanctuary for harbouring terrorists with adequate training and arms supplies, became a major point of contention between India and the U.S.

United States' favourable approach towards Pakistan in the field of international affairs became another sore point between India and the U.S. Several terrorist organisations came to exist in the United States, Britain and Canada. They became the vocal venues of tremendous propaganda as well as malicious campaign against India. The West became a nursery towards maintaining and training these voices of dissent against India. Many of these organizations had no links with the official position of

10, 1995).

America, yet they mobilized a good deal of American political opinion about India. As a result, United States was viewed as playing a leading role in this direction.

Hence, America's response to the Punjab problem symbolised a dual approach. One, that it regarded so-called oppressive activities of the government of India as a kind of violation of human rights. *Asia Watch Society, Civil Liberties Union, Amnesty International* and such other public forums became actively engaged in criticising India. The two administrations of Ronald Reagan and initial years of George Bush gave sufficient vent to the U.S. thinking on these matters. Second approach, which found sufficient manifestation in this regard was the problem of Kashmir. Kashmir had been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan since their independence. The initial response of the U.S. to the Kashmir problem was well-known. It constantly shifted its position between sympathy, and indifference towards India while supporting Pakistan and its demand for plebiscite in Kashmir.[11]

The ethnic aspect of the Kashmir problem was closely linked to the religious - islamic factor in the sub-continent of India. In order to woo the Muslim population in the sub-continent, U.S. policy regarded Kashmir as a

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[11] Speech by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Robin L. Raphael (American Center: New Delhi, March 25, 1994), p.5.

live and volatile issue. India's high-handed approach in Kashmir, its military accesses, forceful suppression of minorities and prolonged rule of the Central government and through it, the military control of the state were clearly covered in the U.S. media as cases of crime against humanity. Pakistan drew a considerable mileage out of this propaganda. Pakistan's closeness to the Islamic world played a vital role in the U.S. response towards the ethnic problem of Kashmir in India.[12]

With the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1990 and emergence of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS), U.S. policy lent credibility to the rise of sub-nationalism in the world state system. Erstwhile Soviet Union broke into several states. Each one claimed identity of its own and sometimes, based on vital ethnic background - Armenians, Slavs, White Russians, Euro-Asians. Ethnic compositions and various other kinds of religious-cum-cultural backgrounds came into the focus of the U.S. policy planners. The CIS was not alone in their calculation. World was witnessing fragmentation in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe. Somalia, Ethiopia, Angola, Kurds in Iraq, Cyprus-Greek-Turks as well as the problem of erstwhile

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[12]   ibid.

Yugoslavia brought about sharp focus on the rise of sub-nationalism.[13]

United States, therefore, viewed that India's ethnic problem of Punjab and Kashmir as well as that of the Bodos and Nagas in the North-east could as well be seen as a part of sub-national syndrome. America, therefore, expressed no strong resentment, either officially or otherwise, in matters concerning active ethnic violent incidents in the subcontinent of India.

On the other hand, Sri Lanka's case of ethnic violence during the two decades of 1980s and 1990s represents a curious blend of response on the part of the United States. First and foremost, traditional geo-strategic interests of the United States regarding the island-nation must clearly be understood.[14] U.S. interest in the Indian ocean, its naval exercises in the zone as well as its proximity to Duego-Garcia, which had been a heavy naval base of the United States should be a major factor for U.S. response towards Sri Lanka's problem. During the period of President Jayawardane and the coming of the SAARC as a regional organisation in South Asia, U.S. believed that intra-regional co-operation might not succeed beyond a certain

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[13]   See Barry Gills and Shahid Qadir (eds.), *Regimes in Crisis* (London, 1995), Ch.7.

[14]   ibid., p.11.

point. It was also opposed to any economic monolith emerging in this area. Economic nationalism may prevent liberalisation of economy, and thus, not being very conducive to the economic interests of Washington.

Sri Lanka also presented a duality of conflict. First, it was a problem between Sinhalese and Tamils within Sri Lanka and second, a problem of the Tamils based in India and having their tacit understanding with the Tamil minorities in Sri Lanka. Hence, India became a suspect in the eyes of western world that Sri Lanka's ethnic problems were partly inspired from the mainland of India. Washington further suspected that Rajiv Gandhi's frequent meetings with Prabhakaran, the LTTE leader, were a part of the strategy for Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict resolution at the promptings of India. There had existed earlier that India had provided a training ground for Tamil militants and easy access to its land in case of Sri Lanka army chasing the culprits. The ethnic problem in Sri Lanka showed no signs of improvement. LTTE continued to mount its pressure of guerilla attacks, extreme violence against army and police forces, and ruthless killing of civilians with different racial backgrounds.

India's despatch of Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) brought about some comforts in the western world that India was not playing the role of villain of the peace. With the

deployment of the IPKF, Sri Lankan government felt assured of India's co-operation. Washington also viewed India's policy with a sense of appreciation. Official statements of the presidents and other functionaries in the State Department showed remarkable resilience towards India's position.[15]

However, ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka was far from resolution. The acquisition of the sophisticated weaponry in the hands of the Tamil militants with their intermittent attacks on Colombo and the Jaffana areas revived the international dynamics of the ethnic conflict. The United States had acquired a vast Voice Of America (VOA) programme station in Sri Lanka and it felt somewhat threatened by the war torn nation. There were some signs visible through the American media that LTTE leadership was not altogether disowned by Washington.[16] There existed a considerable sympathy for the militants as they were regarded an equally aggrieved party. The Sinhalese majority was guilty of human rights violations in attempting a simultaneous 'extermination' of the Tamil minority there. Political asylum to the Tamil minorities in different parts of the western countries became another dimension of this ethnic

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[15]   J.N. Dixit, *My South Block Years* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers, 1996), pp.95-102.

[16]   ibid.

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conflict. London, France, Germany and some other isolated pockets of Europe also constituted part of the syndrome. This ethnic spread out of the limited populace both from India and Sri Lanka attracted wide publicity in the U.S. media. The United States government had been cautious and watchful on this ethnic spill-over of the two countries.

On the one hand, United States sympathises ethnic displacement of Indian Sikhs, Kashmiris and other north-eastern components and regards them as cases of good political asylum. It also keeps these people as some kind of pressure points on India. The Sri Lankan Tamils and the displaced Sinhalese are also a subject of sympathy for the United States, but they also constitute a disturbing wave of migration, thus, adding to the problem of unemployment and economic responsibility in the economy of the west. This has also caused hostile reactions in the western society against illegal immigrants to their respective lands. Domestic compulsions, therefore, do not necessarily synchronise with the internationally proclaimed concern for human rights.

The United States has, however, not equated the problem of ethnic conflicts in India and Sri Lanka at par. India has enjoyed far more varied interest on the part of the United States. Sri Lanka, on the other hand, has assumed limited interest in the estimate of Washington.

U.S. primary interests during the two administrations 1980-96, have largely been based on post cold war considerations. After collapse of the Soviet Union, the three presidencies of Reagan, Bush and Clinton have maintained the primary national interest of the U.S. During all these years, it has supported the basic premise that U.S. must preserve its prosperity coupled with its military supremacy all over the globe. It must maintain international markets for its goods and third world countries must also fall in the line with that objective of the American interests. Secondly, United States also view the continued access to the Persian Gulf oil and other identical resources. West Asia must maintain its position of statusquo. They have also shown significant interest in the rehabilitation of the Russian economy on the lines of the western society. There should be continued co-operation and co-option with the CIS in one form or the other. The United States, therefore, treats the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka and India as a matter of subsidiary interest as long as it doesn't come in the well-pronounced national interest of the U.S.

The balance of power approach becomes relevant in the context of ethnic conflicts in India and Sri Lanka. President Bill Clinton has inherited the legacy of two predecessors, President Ronald Reagan and President George

Bush in protecting the United States from the forces of destruction. American participation in the Gulf War was a case in mind. The United States sought its paramount interest in preserving the statusquo in West Asia. The supra-nationalistic attitude of Iraq had to be destroyed. The rogue states like Libya and North Korea have been kept under constant pressure. Recent U.S. postures in maintaining a high profile in the form of peace keeping forces in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Angola and its naval blockade earlier of Nicaragua with the economic boycott of Cuba are some such illustrations in this direction.

United States also maintain its national interest of protection of global environment, and has supported the slowing of global warming, stopping the destruction of ozone layers and has continued to warn the developing nations to shift towards a better technology. U.S. has advised that 1987 Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer must fully be supported. It also feels that it must increase energy efficiency and make the world safe in the environment field.

The next objective of the U.S. response in regard to India and Sri Lanka has been the issue of human rights. Washington has astutely kept its option to pressurise India and its neighbours that democracy and human rights must remain foremost considerations in any meaningful dialogue

between the two countries. The report that it brings out through voluntary organisations, with a cautious attitude of preserving good relations with India and Sri Lanka are worth noting.

Hence, the issue of ethnic conflicts in India and Sri Lanka are adequately reflected in the U.S. response towards these countries from time to time with certain amount of consistency and inconsistency. There are no hard and fast rules in their enunciations. Ethnic conflicts assume different names and nomenclatures as and when the objectives of the U.S. foreign policy are adequately spelled out in one direction or the other. But this certainly has not constituted an extraordinary viable proposition between 1980 and 1996 in regard to major postulates of U.S. foreign policy.

United States concern in South Asia has largely been tangible on problems of India and Pakistan. The U.S. goals for South Asia were spelled out by Robin Raphael, Assistant Secretary of State. She said, the United States has major concerns in South Asia, chief among them being ..."the underlying tension between India and Pakistan".[17] Raphael has been stressing that the United States would wish

"that the Kashmir issue must be resolved through negotiations between Pakistan and India taking

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17   USIS, *Wireless File* (American Center: New Delhi, December 12, 1996).

into accoundt the interest and desires of the
people of Kashmir.... We continue to believe
that the Indian authority should work further to
curb human rights abuses, and that the Pakistani
authority should stop material support for the
Kashmiri insurgency."[18]

The United States has further acknowledged the changes

of political leadership in the government of India,

Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan. The State

Department acknowledges that the new governments are made

up of diverse coalitions of parties from the centre and the

left, most with regional power bases. This reflects the new

realities of politics in India where trend towards more

devolution of power from New Delhi to the states has at

last begun. "At the same time, the coalition is fragile,

held together largely by the desire to stay in power. It is

a struggle to agree on any but the lowest common

denominator of policy approaches".[19]

Hence, it would appear that the United States has been

watching political developments in India with a view to

examine the prospects of its stability. It has, however,

given sufficient attention towards its economic interests.

It believes that U.S. economic thrust is being feasible in

the South Asian region- Sri Lanka included. The persistent

move of the U.S. towards market-based economy continues.

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[18]   ibid.

[19]   ibid.

They believe the "Indian government has approved nearly six million dollars in U.S. direct investment since 1991, although actual U.S. investments during this period have totalled less than a billion dollars".[20]

This increasing interest in the economic aspect in South Asia minimises its attention on problems of ethnicity. Same thing could also be said of U.S. interests in matters such as communications regarding Sri Lanka. President Clinton said recently that the Voice Of America programme is a 'key weapon in the war of ideas, waived and won against communism.'[21] He further said that it "beams America's voices to nearly 100 million listeners in every corner of our planet every week".

Therefore, America's VOA programme in Sri Lanka and gaining an access of such facilities make it a viable proposition. These programmes continue to dwarf any other programmes including ethnicity as regards India and Sri Lanka. It must, however, be said that problems regarding ethnic conflicts have dominated the scene in some of the "Third World" Countries. Whether those problems have emanated due to the historical factors of the past colonialsim or are the creations of modern time. The Indian and Sri Lanka's cases also come into such categories.

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[20]   ibid, p.20.

[21]   ibid, p.54.

Washington has, therefore, watched these conflicts
with no great interest, one way or the other. U.S. major
concerns are global and regions become important only when
they comprehend in its interest within the larger framework
of its national interest. Hence, no path-finding approach
appears to be the *dietat* of the U.S. response in regard to
Sri Lanka and India.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of ethnicity is an intrinsic component of the socio-political realities of multi-ethnic states in South Asia as well as in other parts of the world. Today, ethnicisation of politics and politicisation of ethnic communities have become very common and have diffused mutual toleration, and have thus, sharpened ethnic consciousness among various communities. At this juncture, the processes of socio-economic change, the ethnic dimensions of the power structure, and the policies, strategies as well as tactics adopted by various governments in response to the urges and aspirations of different ethnic groups provide a ground for a clear understanding of ethnicity, ethnic conflicts and their dimensions.

Doing a study on ethnic conflicts in South Asia would necessitate one to clarify certain basic concepts like ethnicity, ethic groups, ethic conflicts and race. The word 'ethnic' (adjective of ethnicity) has come into widespread usage in its modern sense, only in the post second world war two period. The word 'ethnic' has been derived from the Greek word 'ethnos' and has been used differently by

different scholars. Still, most of the scholars defined ethnicity taking hint from the definition 'groups in an exotic primitive culture'. This definition gives a narrow view of the concept and is useful from a traditional anthropological point of view. Today, the study of ethnicity has undergone major change. It includes not only small communities but also big groups. At times, it includes the whole state as in the case of states in the north-eastern parts of India like Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. It includes also peoples of highly industrialised society, and not jut primitive backward sections of people.

It has often been a mistake to consider a minority group to be an ethnic group. It need not be the case always, because it is not either size or status that define an ethnic group, but their own distinctiveness in the society.

For any ethnic group, there are a few cultural markers like race, religion, language, dress and diet, a common history and a geographical centre. Sometimes, an ethnic group is mistaken with race, but an ethnic group is much like race, without biology. Racism has a cultural element in it, since it is a socially constructed phenomenon, otherwise it is a combination of ideology and practice

based on biological differences. But the concept of ethnicity is more explicitly cultural in character.

Connected to ethnicity, one always comes across another term - ethnic conflict. Ethnic conflict, in the recent years, has become the most collective form of collective violence in the world. It means violent conflicts among groups who differ from one another on the basis of their religion, culture, physical features or language. There are also conflicts that are non-violent in nature today, but which may turn into open conflicts and violence. There is still another form of conflict called legal conflict which is taking place mostly in North America, Australia where native peoples seek to reestablish their rights through petitions to national and state governments for legal action.

A phenomenon that is closely related to ethnic conflict is religious conflict that arises between various religious groups. What happens here is that religions of the conflicting groups become a prominent factor and is thus, construed as religious conflict, whereas religion is not the important factor there, but other factors like economic conditions and political separation are the primary issues. At the same time, there are a few conflicts that are purely religious in character.

Having done so much about theoretical part of ethnic conflicts, one is now required to see South Asia, especially India and Sri Lanka from a historical point of view. Today, the tide of nationalism and ethnic passions are rising in a wide arc-from Central Europe to the heart of Asia. South Asia is no exception to this kind of ethnic struggle and has been experiencing conflicts of varying magnitude. Ethnic turbulence in South Asia dates back to its colonial days. In the post-colonial period, empire building was done on a principle that left ethnic groups on both sides of the borders. That was how internal ethnic conflicts crossed the borders and acquired an international dimension. Ultimately, what happened was that the misdirected priorities and policies made ethnic groups feel marginalised, and they retorted with demands ranging from share of resources, power, and even territory. The state became vulnerable, once such movements took shape.

India and Sri Lanka have largely been on the amplification of racial conflict, although there has not been any uniformity in the upsurge or the pattern, and the tension that has been aroused due to racial factors. India stands out as a case of composite culture, but Sri Lanka may not fit into that kind of a frame. India's plurality could be seen in its society and political movements. First of all, one has to understand that India has been a fusion

of several social forces. It largely represents the amalgamation of different cultures and civilisations. The Indian society has absorbed several socio-cultural aspects which have eventually become the mainstay of its civilisation.

India's social structure has been a unique blend of diverse religions, cultures and ethnic groups. Historically, India has been a hospitable land to numerous immigrants and invaders from distant parts of Europe and Asia. The cultural patterns of these alien settlers have over the centuries, been interwoven with the native culture to produce India's glorious cultural heritage.

India's uniqueness in its social structure lies in its unity amidst diversity. All the great religions of the world viz., Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism etc. are found here. There are 15 major languages, besides numerous other languages and dialects. Diversity could also be seen between various communities and groups in their community life, cultural and social behaviour as well as in the institutional framework.

The caste system, a hierarchical social organisation, forms the foundation stone of India's pluralistic social structure. The importance of caste is a mystery to westerners, who confuse it with class divisions. It is quite unbelievable that men and women can be born into

unalterable sections starting from the highest (brahmin) to the lowest. As per one's caste, he is assigned a duty, where a Brahmin is to teach and officiate as a priest, a Kshatriya to fight, a Vaishya to create wealth, and a Shudra to till the soil. There is also the 'achhut', untouchable, who carry out the necessary but polluting tasks of the society.

The Indian constitution abolished untouchability. The successive governments drew up schedule for Harijans to which were added other backward classes and scheduled tribes. But the social stigma remained unchanged, despite the fact that the lowest of the low exist in millions.

The number of castes and sub-castes that are found in different parts of India, under different names and different status, is innumerous. What is interesting about the caste system is that castes are found not only among the Hindus who are more rigid in preserving and practising this system, but this system also exists among the Indian Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains and Jews.

Looking at the religious front, India, being a secular country does not have a state religion. Indian state allows freedom of faith, worship and religion. The amazing diversity and plurality of India is reflected in the number of religions and faiths practised by the Indian people, some of which were born on this land, while others were

brought in by the successive political and cultural invasions and assimilated by the people of this country. Among the major religions of the country, Hinduism is the largest, followed by Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Zorastriansim.

Despite these numerous social, cultural, religious and racial diversities, India is a single political entity, every part of which is governed under the same constitution. But there is a fact that, in India political parties appeal to caste and religious interests or state loyalties, and these are the primary sources of caste and communal violence in India.

Thus, the problem of ethnicity in the case of India should be analysed in the context of its socio-cultural milieu. Though of late, political considerations have started to have their sway in ushering in the era of ethnic conflicts in the Indian sub-continent. A brief reflection on several peace accords signed during these years gives a sketch of some of the problems that emerged in the past four decades.

Peace accord in Assam 1985, Bodo Accord 1983, Accord on Darjeeling 1988, Peace Accord in Mizoram, the Shillong Accord of 1975 are some of the accords that brought peace and normalcy in the north-eastern region of India. On the other hand, the Peace Accord in Punjab, Anandpur Sahib

Resolution signed in August 1977 were of great importance, as Punjab had seen violence and ethnic clashes for quiet sometime.

The Punjab Accord was short-lived. Shiromani Akali Dal leader, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal fell victim to the terrorists. Nothing less than total independence of Punjab as a separate state would satisfy them. Thereafter, Punjab had sunk into deep crisis with terrorist activities on the rise. And the unfortunate 'Blue-Star Operation' under the Prime Ministership of late Smt. Indira Gandhi had borne deep scars on the psyche of average Sikh in Punjab.

Although India achieved its independence by partitioning the sub-continent on Hindu-Muslim basis, it did not create a Hindu state in the context of India. India's political experimentation had been on a jolty path, when it came to the question of communalism, casteism, and intra-religious factionalism. The state, as a system, could not always defend the cause of the aggrieved parties, either socially, politically or economically. The points of deprivation in either sphere have caused tension leading to a conflict from region to region.

The next case to be looked in detail is that of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka, like India, has been a multi-religious, multi-racial and multi-lingual country. The four major ethnic groups in Sri Lanka are Sinhalese, Sri Lankan

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Tamils, Indian Tamils, and Sri Lankan Moors or Muslims. A fifth group, the Veddhas, numbering several thousands are descendants of the original inhabitants of the island. Their original culture has disappeared due to their contact with the Sinhalese and Tamil. The ethnic structure in Sri Lanka had dominantly been influenced by the processes of colonisation and conquests from the West and conversions from India in the North. The extent to which Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic configuration had been determined by its proximity to India and its distance from any other land is clear from the fact that 90 per cent of its population had Indian antecedents. Thus, this migration process had not only created a bulk of Sri Lanka's population, but also had provided a majority-minority component in its social structure, with the Sinhalese comprising 74 per cent of the population and the Tamil accounting for 18 percent of the population.

Majority of the Sinhalese are Theravada Buddhist and the remainder are mostly Roman Catholics. The Sri Lankan Tamils are mostly Hindus and a small minority belongs to Protestants and Roman Catholics. Modern Sri Lankan Tamil culture is a blend of Tamil and Sinhalese culture, with additional borrowing from other south Indian cultures such as that of Kerala.

Having said this much about various groups, now one should see the genesis of the crisis, in a historical perspective. The roots of insurgency lie deep in the social, political and economic situation at a given point of time. The insurrectionary movements took shape due to the existence of sharp division within the society owing to regional, ethnic, linguistic, religious and communal differences along with issues of legitimacy and authority.

First of all, there was a controversy on the question whether it was the Tamil or the Sinhalese who reached the island first. There have been different versions to this question. The rivalry between the Tamil and Sinhalese on this issue, persisted over decades and this continued to have a significant bearing on the political life of the island.

By 1505 A.D., the island nation was under the Europeans- the first being the Portuguese and the last being the British. During the British rule till 1948, the Tamils were not discriminated or treated as a minority group of people. But once the British left, the Sinhalese became obsessed with their numerical superiority and started a cruel process of racial discrimination interspersed with periodical violence against the Tamils. Thus, it was only to ascertain their survival and progress

that the Tamil in 1976 decided to demand a separate and sovereign state.

Thus, the current strife in Sri Lanka is a violent ethnic separatist conflict which mainly involves the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalese. The Tamils seek political autonomy for the eastern and northern provinces as a Tamil homeland. This has been vehemently opposed by the numerically and politically dominant Sinhalese population of the country.

Therefore, it looks that the issue has been long-felt economic and cultural grievance of a Sinhalese-Buddhist majority against an articulate Tamil minority, who as a minority, have apparently fared far too well under the British and have acquired a sound base after independence. While the distributions of economic wealth and employment create much of the grievances on both the sides, the problem of the role that cultural and religious symbolism play within the Sri Lankan society and within the structure of the state also constitute sore points in their relations.

Under the colonial rule, relations between the Tamil and Sinhalese were relatively peaceful. It was in 1958 that the Sinhalese-Tamil resentment turned bloody as some Sinhalese rioted against Sri Lankan Tamils in the south.

During the next two decades, the Sri Lankan economy began deteriorating and the unemployment rates also rose up.

The political unrest within Sinhalese community resulted in the creation of a leftist youth movement, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) or People's Liberation Army as a powerful political force. The leading terrorist group within the Tamil community has been the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The events that took place in Sri Lanka were quite contradictory. One side of the coin had been that of a parliamentary democracy engaged in periodic elections and the other side of the coin had been violence, murder, torture, secessionist claims, revolutionary demands and state repression. Thus, despite a parallel history of constitutional parties, the elections and parliaments, history of Sri Lanka continued to be a tale of murder, torture and destruction[1]. As mentioned earlier, the first violent attack between the two communities occurred in 1958 and thereafter such attacks became much more frquent. The years 1958, 1977, 1981, 1983 witnessed increasing fights between the warring groups. Thus, the violence against the Tamil community grew sharply more focused towards their brethren.

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[1]   Dennis Austin, Democracy and Violence in India and Sri Lanka, (London: Pinter Publishers, 1994), p.63.

If Sinhalese national identity seemed to be problematic, based upon an elusive link between religion and language, the concept of an independent Tamil state was even more pronounced. The language had failed to provide the basis for agreement within the Tamils even though it had provided the basis of opposition against the Sinhalese. The matter further worsened when the Muslims began demanding for significant autonomy of the community and the territory they occupied. Ethnic violence was reaching its frenzy on the black Friday of July 29, 1979 when rumours of Tigers attacking Colombo led some Sinhalese to murder Tamils mercilessly not only in Colombo but other areas as well. The fury of such violence took expression in wild forms in the killing and burning of Tamils, both young and old. The loss of life and property itself was bad enough, but worse was the insecure feeling among the Tamils.

At various points of time, India intervened and tried to broker a settlement and the significant Indo-Sri Lankan accord of 1987 was an outcome of that attempt. The accord provided a framework for the restoration of peace and normalcy in the area. Hence, in 1987, 60,000 Indian troops-Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) were placed in Tamil regions to control the violence.[2] The Indian troops left

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[2]   David Levinson, Ethnic Relations-A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia, (ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, California, 1994), p.215.

the island in 1990 at the request of the Sinhalese government.

The devolution of powers to the provinces had taken three attempts, but none was up to a satisfaction.

A long history of Sri Lanka, in terms of racial composition of the island, does not lead to a rigid identity to each one of these population. It is shrouded in the mystery of long historical experience.

However, the identity in terms of Tamils, Sinhalese and others are now based on the basis of separate community and religious adherents. Sometimes, it has been argued that the question has been not so much of social cum religious identity, but that of economic disparity among different classes. One group accuses the other of enjoying the supremacy in bureaucracy, governmental patronage and ruling the elite based institutions. Some groups, among Tamils, appeared to have enjoyed this historical legacy, although it is hard to believe this as a general rule to all Tamil population in Sri Lanka.

The ethnic conflict, thus, in Sri Lanka, assumes significance in the context of what has appeared to be a malady of its kind. Political, social turmoil with a desire to have a mileage in these affairs have remained a guiding spirit in this case. The economic   disadvantage and

insecurity cause further distance about a rapproachment between the LTTE and the Sinhalese.

Having dealt with the ethnic conflicts in India and Sri Lanka, one needs to examine the American response to these conflicts. The response of the United States to ethnic conflicts in the sub-continent of India and its neighbour, Sri Lanka, did not articulate itself in concrete terms. Its policy towards India and Sri Lanka had largely been conditioned by its foreign policy-approach towards South Asia. Although, significant reports and the media coverage were tangible regarding ethnic disturbances in these two countries, the official statements made by the U.S. government showed restraints as well as an element of ambivalence. While the U.S. government had not been altogether condemnatory, it nevertheless had indicated in its statements that there were violations of human rights as well as certain aberrations in the functioning of democracy in India as well as Sri Lanka.

U.S. policy towards India became a part of its cold war approach since the end of the second world war. The policy of non-alignment was not appreciated by the policy planners during the 'Dulles era'. Jawaharlal Nehru had made it abundantly clear that India would not be a party to any ideological skirmishes as well as groupings.

India's policy of non-alignment created a sense of doubt and suspicion in the minds of the policy planners at Washington. Jawaharlal Nehru emphasised again and again that India, in its post-independent period, would devote its utmost energies on social, economic and domestic spheres towards its development. It would desire that peace and stability prevailed in the sub-continent. Nehru also realised that to be left totally unconcerned and unaffected by the bi-polar division of the world was not an easy course to pursue. He believed that if there was outbreak of a world war it would affect equally any nation, irrespective of what foreign policy it pursued.[3] Hence, Nehru attempted to prevent any outbreak of a war in Asia and the world. If India wanted peace for itself, it would need to endeavour that peace prevailed in the whole world.[4]

Such expressions of India's foreign policy aroused an interest in the political circles of the United States. But they also created a sense of animosity among the U.S. official regarding its future placement.

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[3] Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, September 1946-April 1961 (New Delhi, 1961), p.22.

[4] Michael Brecher, India's Foreign Policy: An Interpretation, (New Delhi, 1957), p. 51

Sri Lanka did not figure extensively in terms of U.S. coverage in its post-independent period. However, as an erstwhile British colony, U.S. interest was seen in the context of naval strategy. America was also keen to contain Soviet influence in the east. Since Sri Lanka, as an island nation occupied an important harbour, America evinced interest in substituting the British paramountcy in the area. Sri Lankan governments were provided with U.S. cultural dialogue. The island nation should preferably be within the ambit of American influence. The liberal education and programmes related to it, were among a few significant steps taken to inculcate U.S. influence in the area. However, the contiguity of the island nation to India made the sub-continent as a major focus of American ideological stances. It was viewed by the policy planners in Washington that India would play an important role in Asia.

Therefore, the ethnic conflicts in India and Sri Lanka were interwoven with socio-political complexities and a historical legacy to them. The United States had, therefore, spelled out its basic objective in the context of its foreign policy commitments in South Asia. Ethnicity per se aid not constitute a major concern to Washington. It also had maintained a watch and wait attitude regarding its commitments on ethnic conflicts.

On India, Robin Raphael's remarks on Kashmir issue clearly indicated that U.S. position was awaited on the results that usher in with the tripatrite agreement-India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir. Earlier, America had suggested more or less the same way on Punjab problem that the people of Punjab must be duly satisfied in any accord with the central government. As a result, Washington kept its option open just in case the ethnic conflicts led to cessation of territories or setting up of autonomous territories.

Likewise, Sri Lanka was brought into same parameter. U.S. interests in putting the Voice of America programme in Sri Lanka and gaining access to its harbour facilities had become the major interest of the U.S. Its response had remained more on its immediate interests, economic or otherwise rather than on the future of its ethnic conflicts.

It may not be altogether outlandish to conclude that Washington has watched ethnic conflicts in India and Sri Lanka with no significant interest or commitment to either parties. America's major concern has been in harnessing its geopolitical cum strategic and economic interest all over the globe. India and Sri Lanka constitute viable as well as non-viable propositions on the above scale of priorities. Hence, there is no strong visibility of Amerian responses

towards the ethnic conflicts per se in regard to these two

countries.

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