

# EVOLUTION OF ETHNIC RELATIONS IN WAR AFFECTED AREA OF SRI LANKA: A CASE STUDY OF SERUVILA DIVISION IN THE TRINCOMALEE DISTRICT

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**Key words:** Ethnicity, Ethnic Relation, Conflict, Ethnic Groups

## **Introduction**

Ethnicity became an important topic of research in the 1950's. It refers to grouping of people based on cultural similarities and identities. Ethnicity is a relatively new concept. The term "ethnicity" first appeared in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1972. A more extended definition was given in 1973 in *American Heritage Dictionary*. "1. The condition of belonging to a particular ethnic group and 2. Ethnic pride." Ethnicity is important in different societies. Ethnic formation was evident in American immigrant experience. Although ethnic related studies started with American immigrants, ethnic conflicts and civil wars have become more evident in third world countries. By the end of the 20th century, ethnicity has emerged as a powerful force that mobilizes social groups on the basis common cultural identities vis-à-vis other similar groups. Thus the study of ethnic relations has become a major area of study in sociology.

This study examined changing ethnic relation a war affected area over a period of six decades, taking into account primordial, situational and competition perspectives in relation to ethnic relations. In addition, examined internal and external factors which led to the collapse of inter ethnic relations and produce war. How the activities of a local religious leader influence the process of inter ethnic relation and what were the causes for ethnic resurgence and ethnic conflict?

## **Research Methodology**

The study was exploratory in nature. The Trincomalee District in the Eastern Province was chosen and a sample of households from the Seruvila Divisional Secretariat was interviewed, representing three ethnic groups Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim. Quantitative and qualitative data collecting methods were employed. Review of secondary data, it was followed by primary data collection in the field through interviews, case studies, group discussion and participant observation.

## Results

An ethnically integrated society had been gradually emerging within the private sphere after the establishment of The Allai (Seruvila) colonization scheme in 1952. However social disintegration became evident, as a civil war unfolded since 1980s. Manifestation of ethnic polarization in society includes deterioration of second language skills in younger generation and decrease in inter-ethnic marriages and relationships. The development of mutual mistrust hindered harmonious relations and inter-ethnic economic transactions that prevailed earlier.

The ethnic competition and ethnic conflict is created primarily in the public spheres by action such as ownership of land and religious places, establishment of resettlement schemes, appointment of administrative officers, demarcation of electoral boundaries, cultural diversities and the changes of ethnic combination. This study points out the way in which ethnic conflict is intensified by external factors that operate in public sphere. Furthermore war has led to a weakening of Bridging Social Capital and corresponding increase in Bonding Social Capital. Even though the war has ended, buildings inter ethnic trust and bridging social capital remains a major social and political challenge in contemporary Sri Lanka.

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