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An Analysis of the Solutions that could be applied to the  
Ethnic Conflict in South Asia with Special Reference  
to Sri Lanka

මෙම නිබන්ධය

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this thesis is two folds: first, examine the ethnic conflicts in South Asian countries and to examine the solutions that can be applied. When examining the situations in these countries, the most prominent feature is that except Maldivian islands, all other south Asian countries face complications due to differences such as religion, cast, ethnicity and language. All these differences reflect the complexities of these societies. However, this study is concerned only with the ethnic problems of these countries and will be limited to analyze some of the major ethnic conflicts they face today. It is clear that the ethnic conflicts are very common in South Asian countries and mostly these conflicts are centered on the identity of a particular ethnic group. These conflicts emerged due to the differences between the minority ethnic groups and the majority ethnic groups and it seems that the minorities believe that they have been discriminated by the majority. Hence, the minorities tend to struggle for more economic and political rights, to have a self-rule or for a separate state. For example, while the LTTE in Sri Lanka fight for a separate state, the Nagas of India fight for self-rule. Hence it is clear that the interests of the minorities in these countries differ from each other.

One of the factors examined in this thesis is whether the major reason for ethnic conflicts in these countries was the failures in the process of nation building. It is clear that the national identity in South Asian countries is still at a micro level. For example in Sri Lanka people identify themselves as Sinhalese, Tamils or Muslims but not as Sri Lankans. Therefore, ethnic identity is a major barrier for becoming one nation.

Since this thesis has given an emphasis to the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka, this study analyses the steps that have been taken to bring a solution to the problem, namely, third party mediation, agreements and constitutional reforms. However, these attempts have

failed to a great extent and the major reason for that is the intensity of the ethnic conciseness and the distrust among the ethnic majority and the minorities.

To solve the ethnic crises of these countries it is important to adhere to the concept of nation building. However, if it was not a long-term evolution as in Britain, other measures should be employed in the nation building process. Therefore, in this study I have examined the measures such as constitutional reforms and devolution of power. Nevertheless, I have suggested that the federal system is one of the best solution for the problem of nation building and ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka.

However, the findings of my research show that both minorities and the majority ethnic group fear such a solution without a proper reason. It also shows that the attempts to achieve peace have failed because of disagreements over federal system, unitary system or devolution of power. It is my contention that a federal system that is not based on an existing model but a new federal system based on the fundamental principals of federalism is the best solution for Sri Lanka. This new federal system should go beyond the thirteenth amendment and should be appropriate as a solution for the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.