

The Construction of “One Nation One State”: From the Perspective of University Students

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After a thirty-year ethnic and civil conflict, Sri Lanka’s post-war reconciliation process is framed around the concept of ‘One Nation One State’. This concept refers to how nations and nationalities are reorganized in one spatial framework so as to correspond to the idea of a unitary Sri Lankan nation and the unified state of Sri Lanka. After the end of the war in 2009, the government attempted diverse reconciliation efforts. However, these efforts took place very slowly and to a great extent were of no avail. Within this context, little effort was made to understand the historical consciousness which prevailed amongst the Sinhalese and Tamil populations, which was necessary to bring about an effective solution for reconciliation. The objective of this paper is to examine how the historical consciousness of the Sinhalese and Tamils affects the process of social reconciliation in Sri Lanka. It will seek to determine how ethnicity is represented in the national identity of the country. The paper is written from the perspective of university students who participated in the History and Community Project of 2013 which was organized by the Department of History, University of Colombo. Data was collected using primary research and secondary sources. Primary research was carried out by interviewing a sample selection of undergraduates and graduates from the University of Colombo and University of Jaffna, using telephone conversations, face to face conversations and questionnaires. The research findings indicate that both Sinhala and Tamil ethnic communities are based on a fantasized historical consciousness. The creation of a Sri Lankan national identity is obstructed by the separate historical consciousness of the Sinhalese and Tamils, who associate the nation with their respective ethnic identities. Their historical consciousness is derived from the education system of the country which narrates a fantasized version of the historical past. There is also a desire amongst the Sinhalese communities to live in a ‘One Nation One State’ situation. However, there needs to be a long term approach to reconciliation which deals with the historical consciousness of both communities. This can be achieved by revising the education system, especially the syllabuses of text books, in the country. Although there is much discussion about the need for ethnic reconciliation, it is important to revise the secondary school syllabus as it contributes to creating a problematic historical consciousness. Intellectual approaches to the problem of historical consciousness are analyzed through this research paper.

Keywords: Historical Consciousness, One Nation One State, Ethnicity