

ETHNIC PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES AMONG
THE URBAN POOR IN THE CITY OF COLOMBO.

Hema Goonatilake
Universisty of Kelaniya.

The present study of two multi-ethnic slum and shanty settlements in the city of Colombo explores the perceptions, attitudes and human relationships between the Sinhala and Tamil communities.

This paper is based on data collected through intensive field work involving participant observation, indepth interviews and a structured questionnaire administered to a random sample of 60 households out of a total of 286 households.

The results indicate that there is very little ethnic antogonism between the Sinhala and Tamil communities in the two settlements studied. In fact, the most striking feature is the almost lack of ethnic prejudices at the lowest socio-economic strata. However, ethnic prejudices appear to increase (although still at a marginal level), as one moves up the socio-economic ladder. The socio-economic ladder is largely related to entry into formal jobs away from the informal slum economic activity and the socio-economic competition, it appears is the harbinger of ethnic prejudices and not the other way around.

This study was sponsored by the Voice of Women