

# **Sri Lankan Tamil Society and Politics**

**By Karthigesu, Sivathamby.**

## **Contents**

### **1. Tamils of Sri Lanka**

An ethnological introduction

### **2. Divine Presence and/or Social Prominence -**

An inquiry into their social role of the places of  
worship in Jaffna Tamil Society

### **3. The Ideology of Saiva-Tamil Integrality**

Its Socio-Historical Significance in the study of  
Jaffna Tamil Society

### **4. Strategies and Mechanisms for the Promotion of National Identity**

### **5. Cultural Heterogeneity and Political Homogeneity**

### **6. The Sri Lankan Tamil Question 1977-1983**

### **7. The Human Rights factor in the Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict**

A review of the developments 1983-86

# TAMILS OF SRILANKA

## An ethnological introduction

The ethnic crisis of Sri Lanka has internationalised the problem of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. A closer study of these people has now become essential to understand the nature of the Tamil demands, the group tensions within the Tamil ethnoses, the political nuances that one has to be aware of, and, of course, the attempts made to thwart the Tamil unity and thereby lessen the intensity of the Tamil political demands.

The preliminary problematic is to identify this "group" in exact terms and "describe" them comprehensively. The word "Tamil" refers both to the language and its speakers, and when it refers to the speakers, it does not denote them as speakers of a language, but refers to them as also an "ethnic" group, with an identifiable culture, and a consciousness among them that they belong to one group. The word used to denote this grouping and state of mind in Tamilnadu (India) is "Tamilian" and is not much in vogue in the Sri Lankan political vocabulary. In Sri Lanka, the term "Tamil" will not include the Muslims even though their mother tongue, except in the case of the few Malays of Sri Lanka is Tamil. The Muslims of Sri Lanka consider themselves as belonging to an independent ethnic group.

Nor are all the Tamils living in Sri Lanka referred to as "Sri Lankan Tamils" (SLT) for in all the government records and even at the level of group consciousness there is a distinction made between the "Indian Tamils" (IT) of the tea and rubber plantation areas, and the "Sri Lankan Tamils" (SLT) who are the traditional Tamil inhabitants of Sri Lanka largely confined to the northern and the eastern parts of the island.

It should be borne in mind that the political militancy found among the Tamils that characterises the current ethnic conflict is totally opposed to such a distinction being made, and prefers to call these Tamils the "Malaiyakattamilar" (lit: Tamils of the Mountain. Home referring to the Upcountry Tamils). Though it is true that the bulk of the Tamils of Indian descent bought in as plantation labourers by the Britishers are continuing to live in the "estate" areas in the central regions of Sri Lanka, it cannot be denied that a substantial number of them had to leave the estates and go into the "traditional" Tamil areas for reasons of safety and security - a process that started in the sixties increased in the seventies when the estates were nationalised and in the eighties when there were ethnic riots. Thus in the Census of 1981 it was officially acknowledged that the following districts which are predominately Tamil had the following percentage of Indian Tamils: Vavuniya 19.4% Mullaitivu: 13.9% Mannar: 13.2%

The figures for the recently created district of Kilinochi has not been given (it should at least be about 15%) and the figures since 1983 must be high. What is important is that, due to economic and socio-political pressures the pace of assimilation of the IT into the SLT is high. Marriages between IT and SLT Tamils are on the increase and there is an increasing sense of oneness politically. However, to understand their "group" solidarity and cohesiveness, it is important that they are studied separately.

The focus at first therefore should be on the Sri Lankan Tamils. Before we go into the problem of the groupings among these Tamils, their culture and the sub-cultures that are prevalent, we should understand the significance of this group of Tamils in terms of the history of the Tamils as a whole. It is this "historical" consciousness that has given a wider dimension - Pan - Tamilian solidarity.

The Sri Lankan Tamils are the largest and the oldest of the Tamils living outside "Tamilakam" (the Tamilian consciousness does not express this history in terms of India; it is always expressed in terms of the "Land of the Tamils"). The proximity of this country and the group to Tamilians on the South West of India contributes to sense of Tamilian elation over their "great Past". There has been a persistent

tradition of referring to Tamilagam as the mother (place of mother) and Tamil region of Sri Lanka is “CEYAKAM” (place of the child).

Besides this aspect of Tamilian ‘group-psychology’, there is also the fact of a variation in terms of socio-cultural organization which has given a sense of specificity to Sri Lankan Tamil culture, thereby also creating a sense of dedication and commitment to keep that specificity alive. The following, in brief, are some of the significant peculiarities of SLT culture, when compared to the Tamil culture prevalent among Tamilnadu Tamils (TNT).

- a) Brahmins do not exercise social control. Though they are ritually the highest caste, among SLT they do not have the necessary social power and authority. Quite often they are employees at temples with well-defined duties and obligations. Nor do the Brahmins officiate in all temples; there are non-Brahmin priests known as Saivakkurukkals, drawn originally from the Vellala caste.
- b) The dominant caste among SLT is the Vellalas, and except in rare cases they have the social control.
- c) Unlike in Tamilnadu where the caste system has an observable caste-tribe continuum (Vanniyar, Kallar, Maravar, Irular) among SLT castes are largely occupation based (Vellalar, Karaiyar, Nattuvar, Nalavar, Pallar, Vannar, Ampattar). Social control by the Vellalas except in the littoral towns where the karaiyars (lit. those of the shore, ref. to the fishermen) are dominant, is virtually a complete one.
- d) Among the SLT marriages are largely matrilineal; among the TnT it is largely patrilineal.
- e) Kinship organisation and sometimes even the kinship terms are different (for instances, at the non-brahmin level among the TnT uravinmurai (lineage) tradition is very strong; among the SLT even though they have the “pakuti” (lineage) tradition, it is not strong; it is not sustainable).
- f) In religious practices also there is considerable difference; there are also considerable differences in temple management.
- g) Food habits vary much (among the TnT there is not much use of coconut and chillies; among the SLT there is much less use of milk, esp. "tayir" and "mor").
- h) SLT dialect is very much different from the local dialects of Tamilnadu.
- i) The SLT literary culture too has been very different. In creative critical writings, SLT literary culture, responding to local needs and aspirations, has been able to carve out a distinct idiom of expression.

The SLT live mostly in the Northern and Eastern provinces. The following are the population figures of the SLT in the various districts of the North and East, for 1981.

Northern provinces:

Jaffna (including Kilinochi) -	95.3%
Mullaitivu	- 76.0%
Mannar	- 50.6%
Vavuniya	- 56.9%

Eastern provinces:

Trincomalee	- 33.8%
Batticaloa	- 70.8%
Amparai	- 20.1%

Of the population of 14,850,001, SLT are 1,871,535 (12.6%) and Indians are 825,238 (5.6%). The Tamils in all constitute 17% of the population.

*SOURCE: CENSUS 1981.*

Jaffna with a history of a kingdom of its own (taken as an important legitimising factor in the political demands of the SLT) has throughout been an articulating centre in the constitutional demands of the Tamils. The other major SLT regions are Vanni and Mattakkalappu (Baticalo).

In terms of the geography of Sri Lanka, the area referred to as the Vanni districts fall between Mankulam and Anuradhapura in the North covering Vavuniya and Mullaitivu among the Tamil districts, and Anuradhapura, Tammankaduwe, Kekirake of the Sinhala areas going up to the northern reaches of the Triconamalee District. As the term "Vanni" itself implies the word is derived from "Vana" (forest) - this is the area that came under the Anuradhapura Kings (c. 2 and c. B.C to 9th C.A.D) and later because of the drift of the Sinhala capitals to the South-West, became Jungle. These areas with their elephant infested jungles and malaria infested villages were kept aloof from the nuclear areas of post- 11th century Sri Lankan history. The area is divided into the Sinhala vanni and the Tamil Vanni. Thus the distinguishable Tamil areas are Batticaloa, Vanni, and Jaffna.

In an overall grouping up of "culture areas" within the Tamil speaking region of Sri Lanka, Mannar presents a problem. This region on the North-West of the Northern province, now taken as part of the Vanni electoral district, was till recently a bigger district with Mullaitivu within it. It lies to the north-western border and is the closest point in Sri Lanka to South India. It has a long littoral region thus making it a rich fishing area. It has been rich in pearl fisheries from historical times. In spite of the fact that in the land interior it has as much a tank-based agrarian economy as the Vanni, the littoral character dominates. Mannar has a substantial Muslim population (26.6%) and among the Tamils the Roman Catholics are very influentially placed. It is of interest to note that on the south it is contiguous with Puttalam district which until the first two decades of this century had a substantial Tamil Catholic population. It is well known fact of Roman Catholic Church history that there was a process of Sinhalisation of these fishermen during the time of Bishop Edmund Peiris. The fishermen of the north western coast beginning from Negombo go to the Mannar and Mullaitivu areas for seasonal fishing.

One should not fail to understand the rich Roman Catholic tradition that is prevalent in Mannar. It was the first area to be converted and had therefore come under the influence such illustrious personalities like Francis Xavier.

In the last days of the Jaffna Kingdom (17th C) it had to face a suppression of the Catholics by Cankili, the last king of Jaffna, the memory of which is preserved to this day in the remembrance of "the martyrs of Mannar". The Roman Catholics of Mannar have a rich literary and dramatic tradition. The memory of Matottam, the ancient port of trade, looms large in the traditions of Mannar, in fact one of their theatrical forms is referred to as the "Matottappanku".

To the Hindu Tamils, Mannar is hallowed by the presence of Tirukketisvaram the Hindu temple sanctified by the tevarams of Campantar and Cuntarar of 7th and 8th centuries A.D. The Hindu-Catholic relations have not always been friendly (it very often manifests in the identification of and erecting of places of worship) but with increasing Tamil political consciousness Catholic-Hindu hostilities have decreased. The pro-Sinhala position the Sinhala Catholic hierarchy took in and after 1983 had brought about an unprecedented unity among the Tamil Christians and Hindus. It should be mentioned, in passing, that the ideology of the Liberation Theology adopted by many of the younger priests of the Catholic Church had facilitated this Hindu-Christian Tamil unity.

It is equally important to note that the Muslim - Tamil relationship in Mannar has not been a hostile one and that there has been a history of friendly co-existence, especially among the Hindus and the Muslims.

In terms of anthropology the Tamils living in the Batticaloa district exhibit very interesting features indicating a tradition of social organisation and settlement quite different from other Tamil settlements, both in India and Sri Lanka.

Batticaloa is the anglicised form of “Mattakkalappu” (lit: shallow points in the sea/river) and is now used, as the term Jaffna is to refer to a system of social organisation (Batticaloa Tamils, Jaffna Tamils). Batticaloa lies on the central part of the eastern sea border of Sri Lanka, south of Trincomalee. Historically speaking it had come under the Kandyan Kingdom (from about the 16th century to 1815) thereby it has a completely different geographical and historical environment. Jaffna is close to South India and was able to found a kingdom of its own. Two factors which have determined the “politicality” of Jaffna when compared with Batticaloa. Batticaloa had been exclusive and has therefore been able to preserve many of traditional institutions which the much “exposed” Jaffna has lost. Even under British rule, Batticaloa was not “modernised” as comprehensively as Jaffna was. Modernisation in Batticaloa was confined only to the town of Batticaloa and a very sharp rural-urban discontinuum is a striking feature of Batticaloa district.

The social organisation of the Tamils of this district in terms of caste formation is slightly different from the one that obtains in Jaffna and is definitely less rigid. The traditional agrarian organisation is characteristically feudal in terms of the extraction of surplus. Within the Sri Lankan Tamil dialect, Batticaloa has a distinctly separate mode.

It is important to note that the differences that one sees on the social and cultural organisation of Jaffna and Batticaloa are not that fundamentally different from each other, because if one analyses the basics of both the “systems” one will not fail to see that they emanate from the basic Dravidian kinship system (Trautmann) – South Indian system. Uneven development arising out of years of exclusive existence have sharpened the dis-similarities.

The term “Mattakkalapputtamilar” refers to the Tamils living in the present Batticaloa and Ampara districts.

The following are the castes found in Batticaloa – the dominant ones –

Vellalar, Cirpatakkaral\*, Mukkuvar, Karaiyar

(there has always been wrangling arguments on the order of precedence among these castes; one of them as recently as 1980/1., when a book on Batticaloa was published.)

- other castes:

Tanakkarakar, Kaikkulavar, Canar, Pallar, Vannar, Ampattar, Vanniyar\*, Kollar, Tattar, Taccar, Kataiyar\*, and Vetar\*.

Castes marked with the asteric (\*) are found only in Batticaloa.

A special feature of the caste organization of Batticaloa is the “Kuti” system. The Tamil word “KUTI” means “a house”, a settlement. In Batticaloa Kuti is found among all the major caste groups, and every context it refers to the exogamous matri – clans. The kuti system among the Muslims of Batticaloa. The number of Kutis within a caste is always seven and the names vary. The significance of the kuti system lies in that,

- a) it is related to matrimonial alliances (None carry with him the kuti of his birth and one always joins the wife’s kuti on marriage)
- b) control of the places of worship (temples) is through the kuti system

For Instance the following are the kutis among the Vellalar and the Mukkuvar.

**Vellalar** Kantankuti, Carukupillikuti. Kattappattankuti, Kavuttankuti, Attiyayankuti, Ponnaccikuti and Vaittikuti.

(the Vellalar consider themselves to be the deseants of Magha of Kalinga who invaded Sri Lanka in the 14th century A.D.)

**Mukkuvar** Ulakippotikuti, Kalinkakuti, Patayiantakuti, Pettankuti, Panikkankuti, kaccilakuti, and Pettantapata antakuti.

The kuti system is also found among the Cirpatakkarar, the Cettis, the Karaiyar and the Kammalar. It is of interest to note that the names of kutis are common to some of the castes.

Besides those castes which have an internal kuti system there, are seventeen (17) caste groups which ~ are called "CIRAIKKUTIS" (lit: prisoned kutis, meaning these are under "captivity" and they are confined to the work they have got to do). Those are Matular, Koil Pantaram, Pantarappillai, Kucavar, Kollar, Mutalikal, Valipan, Nampikal, Vannar, anipattar, Canar, Pallar, Paraiyar, Koviya, Tavacikal, and Kataiyar.

In the traditional agrarian system the "feudal" landlord is known as the "POTT", the reverential form being "potiyar". The Batticala potiyar is a regular farmer; he is not an absentee landlord. But there is a system of leasing land to "Kuttakaikkarar" (lessees), who undertake to do the cultivation (vellanmai) by paying a lump sum to the potiyar. There are instances when one potiyar could lease out land from another. Under the potiyar come the "vayalkarar" (those of the field) who work on the fields. Labour is their main input, and the potiyar 'looks after' them, giving them what they need. These vayalkarar of the Batticalo system would correspond to the 'pannaiyal' of the ryotwari system in Tamilnadu.

The religious tradition of the Batticalo Hindus are very important. Sanskritization, which is a characteristic feature of Jaffna Hinduism is very much absent. Religious practice in Batticalo is mainly non-Agamic (Agamas are the Sanskrit texts dealing with the practices in rituals and religious behaviour. They prescribe how the rituals are conducted). In fact there is only one major Civan temple Kokkaticcolai Tantonri Isvaran Koyil. There are of course a number of Pillaiyar (Ganesa) shrines in Batticalo, most important of which is the Mamankappillaiyar temple. But it should be noted that Pillaiyar is an agrarian deity among the SLT.

Batticalo has a large number of Murukan shrines, at Verukal, Cittanti, Tirupperunturai, Mantur, Tantamalai and Ukantamalai.

The most important popular cult found in Batticalo is the Pattini cult in which Kannaki, the chaste goddess, is worshipped. The important cult centres are Karaitivu, Palukamam, Kulakkattu, Makilativu, Aracativu, and Kannakuta. Another important cult is the Draupatai Amman cult. Whereas Kannaki worship is also found among the Jaffna Tamils mostly at the Little Tradition level (the Great Tradition), the Draupathai Amman cult is only seen at very rare places in the Jaffna tradition. Fire-walking, though performed at other cult centres also, is the main form of votive offering at these shrines.

There is also the worship of Marianiman and Kali.

Some of the major art forms of Batticalo are yet associated with rituals - the Kuravai, Vacantan, and the Kompu-murittal. The Batticalo theatre, consisting of the Vatamoti and Tenmotti plays are even now largely votive offerings performed during the post-harvest season. The entire village joins in the production of a "kuttu"(play).

It is important to note that when compared to the religious tradition prevalent in Jaffna and in South Tamilnadu, where the non-Brahminic traditions are very strong, one could see that the cults now prevail in Batticalo are really the pre-sanskritized forms or those forms which were widely prevalent among the Tamils before Brahminism gained ascendancy.

Batticalo has a strong Muslim presence (Batticalo 24.0% and Amparai 41% of the population) and unlike in the case of the Muslims of the western Province and Southern province, who are the richer and political the more articulate, are agrarian and thus land based. They are very strongly steeped in the Tamil tradition (they share the kuti system) and the much published oral poetry of Batticalo is really the folk-songs of the Muslims. But this should not under play the intense suspicions one group has of the other, which is quite manifested in the Tamil-Muslim fights. Regardless of this a lot of sancretism has been taking place, and it is unfortunate that no objective scholarly study of this has yet been made.

Trincomalee (Tirukkonamalai) on the north of the Eastern Province is really a halfway house between the Jaffna and the Batticalo systems. With Mullaitivu on its northern boundary and Batticalo on its south it has had a Tamil population which has been maintaining its relationship with both parts. Trincomalee with its famous Tirukonesvaram, the second of the Hindu shrines hallowed by the Tevarams of Campantar and Cuntarar is vital to the Hindu Tamil traditions of Sri Lanka.

Going northwards from Trincomalee we come to Vavuniya, Mullaitivu districts, known as the Vanni.

Vanni is characterised by the developed village, with a tank-based cultivation a highland settlement and the jungle beyond. The livestock of buffaloes, bulls and cows is related to the agrarian system. Hunting in this area is more than a pastime; it is necessary to keep the cultivation going.

The Tamil Vanni consists of Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and Eastern Mannar. A census taken in 1890 listed 711 tanks in this area.

Historically speaking this area has been in direct contact with South India in the Late Medieval period.

Nedunkerni, Putukkuttiiruppu, Mulliyavalai and Tenneeruru are some of the better known Vanni villages and their characteristics and social composition could be taken as representative of the Vanni traditions.

Vanni Tamils distinguish themselves from those of Jaffna. But quite often they have marital relations with the Tamils living in the peninsula. For instance the Vellalar of Tenneeruru, Odducuttan and Netunteni have marriage relations with the Vellalars of Mattuvil and Itaikkatu, Kaikkular of the Vanni with the same group at Kallinankatu, the Karaiyar of the Vanni have marriage relations with those living in Valvettiturai and Karaveddi (and also with the Karaiyars from Tennamaravady and Tampalakamam in the eastern province). Once the marriage is over the couple, generally speaking, settle down in Vanni because of the availability of land.

Vanni being primarily agricultural, farmers dominate, but there has always been a tendency for all these castes to take to agriculture. The Tamil proverb current in vanni, a variation of a well known one indicating the upward mobility of many non Vellala caste groups to Vellala status, depicts the Vanni situation rather pithily,

Kallar Maravar Kanatta Akampatiyar mella mellap pallarkalum vellalar anarkal

(Not only) the Kallar the Maravar and the weighty Akampatiyar even the Pallar gradually became Vellalar).

J. P. Lewis in his "THE MANUAL OF THE VANNI DISTRICT" gives a list of 36 castes from Brahmins, Vellalar, Karaiyar to Nalavar. There is also mention of the Vanniya caste, one which is not found in the Jaffna system but is very important in the Tamilnadu system.

The caste system is less rigid in the Vanni, but one could see all the castes found in Jaffna e.g. in Mulliyavalai there are the following castes:- Brahmins, Vellalar, Koviayar, Karaiyar, Kaikkolar, Taccar, Kollar, Vannar, Ampattar, Pallar, Paraiyar, and Turumpar. The service castes, as mentioned earlier besides doing their caste services are also engaged in agriculture.

Because of the peculiar feature of the Vanni where elephant noosing is done there has been a caste-the panikkans doing that particular work.

Vanni has a very rich oral tradition connected with agriculture, a feature not seen much in other areas. The oral poetry of Pantippall kuruviccintu, Kuruviappallu, Murukaiyan cintu and Amman cintu are connected with agriculture. It has also a very rich dramatic tradition kattavarayan Kuttu and Kovalan kannaki Natakam are well known.

It is the system of caste and social stratification that prevails Jaffna that is better known, but even here it should emphatically be mentioned that there are not enough studies and whatever that is available cannot be taken as comprehensive and adequate.

The major studies on Jaffna social organization are those of Banks, David, Skjonberg, Pfaffenberger and Holmes.

The studies of David and Pfaffenberger seem to fit the caste mode that exists in Jaffna into some of the “reigning” theoretical moulds. That is not a thing to be criticized for it is a welcome attempt to understand the society that exists in Jaffna in wider perspectives and in terms of the existing knowledge of the discipline. But the crucial fact is that these studies have been done in such a manner that it would not be possible to generalise on the basis of the findings because each of these has been confined to areas with which it is not possible to make an assessment of the system that exists within Jaffna as a whole. Banks, study was based on Sirupiddy in which there is no Karaiyar caste, and it will not be possible to decide on caste ranking in without understanding the importance of the “unbound” groups (as very well pointed out by David). Pfaffenberger’s study also suffers from the fact that his area of research-Tenmaradchy also cannot be considered as typical of Jaffna caste system because of the absence of the Karaiyar population. Kenneth David’s study is in this respect more **typical**, because it deals with Vellala-Karayar interaction. Unfortunately it does not possess an active and representative enough Koviya caste for one to get a picture of how the relationship within the “bound modes” are under transition. And that is something that would be crucial to the understanding of the **system** as it operates/functions now. Nor do we have any caste studies which could be related to each other and thus a picture be obtained of the overall situation.

It is only when we look at the problem of caste and inter-relationships and at the possibility of getting at an overall picture, we would realize the need to identify the sub regions within Jaffna where dominances and, therefore, caste relationships vary. A closer look at the social system of Jaffna from this point of view would necessitate the demarcation of the sub-regions. I would on the basis of my observations taking into count the occupational patterns, availability of resources, the build-up of local traditions and positions of economic strength and dependence suggest the following sub-regions:

Vadamaradehy  
Tenmaradehy  
The Islands  
Jaffna Town, with Vannarponnai,  
Nallur and up to Kopay  
Manipay  
Tellippallai, Cunnakam  
Chulipuram Pannakam  
The littoral area from Kankesanturai to Palaly  
Vaddukkottai, Araly

The last 4 sub regions covering the present Valikamam North and East should be worked out in better detail. A thorough going analysis of the systems in each of the subregions followed by a comparative analysis would throw up a picture of the system that is in operation in Jaffna. One should not forget the significance of the social relationships that are emerging in the Kilinochi, Paranthan area, the area opened up for agricultural development in the North. The people who have gone into these areas are from Jaffna, and there (in the new settlements) due to economic needs and social situations not experienced in Jaffna have evaluate mode of social relationships characteristic of or demanded by the mode of agricultural production that exists there is emerging between groups of persons who retain an active contact with their native villages in Jaffna. A contrast of these relationships would enable us to understand the current system better and to see how there is a transformation taking place.

The following are the important caste groups seen in Jaffna today:

Piramanar, Saivakkurukkalmar, Vellalar, Karaiyar,  
Koviyar, Tattar, Taccar Kollar, Nattuvar, Kaikkular,  
Chcttikai, Timilar, Mukkuvar, Kucavar, Vannar,  
Ampattar, Nalavar, Pallar, Paraiyar, Turumpar

(the names of the castes are not given in any order of precedence)

It is the hierarchic order that is crucial to the discussion of caste **as a system of social organization and action** among the Tamils of Jaffna. Kenneth David very rightly spoke of the “bound” and the “non-bound mode”, the former refers to the relationships those caste groups which have been considered dependent on the Vellalar for their economic subsistence and thus were bound to the Vellalar through the **kutimai-atimai murais**. Both the kutimai and the atimai systems are there no more in the manner they are expressed and articulated in traditional terms but the this concept of being “bound” has a significant role in assigning the hierarchical order. The term “non-bound” refers to those groups which are not dependent on the Vellalar for their sustenance. This would refer to those non-agrarian pursuits like fishing.

The caste system in Jaffna is very much Vellala based and an ideology of Vellala hegemony has been built up over the centuries through caste myths and “Histories” which have legitimised the hegemony. Ideologically speaking the most interesting are the sat-sudra concept which takes away from the Vellalar the defilements spoken of in relations to sudras as the lowest in the varna hierarchy and the formation of the pancama castes (lit: the fifth caste consisting of Nalavar, Pallar, Vannar, Ampattar and Paraiyar) so that the Vellalar as sudras are no more the lowest.

The characteristic feature of the caste system is that it prescribes the vocation for a person on the basis of his birth and a system of social network is worked on that basis. Variations were permitted in so far those did not threaten **the system**. In contemporary Jaffna the caste-vocation cotinuum is seen in the following manner.

- a) Those which have a significance in ritual practices.

Brahmins (Rituals are done by those Brahmins who are qualified to do it: other Brahmins though are of the caste do not do it)

Vannar (the washermen: they have important ritual functions at temples, at domestic level ceremonies child birth, coming of age, marriage, and death).

Ampattar (the barbers, they have an important place in death ceremonies and

- b) Those who are engaged in the field of traditional technology:

Taccar (carpenters), Kollar (blacksmiths) Tattar (goldsmiths)

Here too it must be remembered that not all who are born into these castes take the caste jobs.

Nattuvar (the traditional musicians, name the nadadeswaram, tavil players) will also come in this category.

Besides these the main division would be in relation to the two main economic activities AGRICULTURE and FISHING.

In the case of fishing the following are the caste groups that are considered as traditional fishermen: Karaiyar, Mukkuvar and Timilar. It is true that occasionally Nalavar and Pallar do some shallow water fishing during rainy season. They use very very primitive forms.

Vellalar are the agriculturists. In the native perception a Vallalan is one who is engaged in vellanmai: They own the lands.

A close analysis of the caste formation in Jaffna would show that many of the intermediate caste groups which were doing vocations which ceased to exist after the socio-historical changes that have been taking place through modernization, like the Matappallyar, the Akampatiyar, the Tanakkarar and even the local Chetties, have been now absorbed in to the Vellala caste. Thus the proverb “Kallar, Maravar...” referred to earlier. There used to be a concept of Chinna Vellalar.

The Kutimakkal are no more dependent on the Vellalar and the mode of remuneration is no more the Varucappati (the annual gift in kind) but a monetary payment on the basis daily wages. In the case of Vannar and Ampattar there are yet places where an annual donation of paddy is given, but that is in addition to what is given as cash payment.

An important feature of contemporary caste in Jaffna today is the formation of what I would describe as the “Mega castes”. By this is meant the absorption into one caste all those intermediate castes the specific vocations of which do not exist now, or those which, irrespective of the technologies they use are doing the same vocation and are clustered together now. The mega castes that have arisen thus are the Vellalar, the Karaiyar and the smiths.

It should be noted that the social position assigned to the intermediate castes in the sub regions vary, for instance the social position of the Karaiyar is low in Karaveddi whereas in Valvettiturai they are the dominant caste. Social mobility is now a feature of caste life in Jaffna and it is important to know the manner the change takes place.

With the opening up of Education in the British period and education itself becoming the gateway to white collar jobs in the government service the consciously guarded social power began to disintegrate. At the beginning it was Christianity that provided the breakthrough. One should not altogether dismiss as mere Christian propaganda that the early efforts at the revitalization of traditional religion (Hinduism) were also meant to check the social mobility that had started taking place. When the traditional main groups found that their social pre eminence was at stake they began to collaborate with the rulers.

With modernization and the ensuing mechanization there came up new professions which eroded the caste-vocation continuum. Driving lorries and tractors, being masons, running and working in motor-repair shops and garages and such other secondary technology led to a number of people from the lower rungs of the society to get out of the tyrannies of the caste system. Also important was the emergence of urban trade, mostly small trade which again eroded the social exclusiveness that the caste system tended to impose.

Politicization, especially the emergence of Tamil nationalism, was another factor which enabled social mobility.

All these led to a process of Sanskritization and many caste groups and subgroups assuming “respectable” position within the system itself. These led to the absorption of many of the intermediate caste groups onto the higher groups and to many of the lower groups to be independent of the religious isolation that the higher castes tried to impose on them.

The social rigidities of the caste also began to loosen. With the development of the subsidiary food crop production, especially with the boom of the early seventies the traditional tenorial system relating to leasing began to change. Men and women from the lower caste groups began to be employed as agricultural wage labour. They began to demand new work conditions which challenged the traditional caste norms. There began in the fishing industry also the employment of wage labour in fishing.

Equally important, though a later day phenomenon, is the exodus to the Middle East which enabled carpenters and masons to get very high incomes. This newly earned wealth has led to a new wave of Sanskritization by which social position accruing out of management of religious institutions is being shared by the once socially un-privileged, and underprivileged.

The need of the day is not to study caste system as an unchanging one but to study the caste-class relationship. It would yet be tenable to argue that the caste as a system of social behaviour has ceased to be effective. The “system” exists but in new forms. It is important to identify these new forms and also the efforts taken to counter them.

It is at this point sociology should take over from anthropology.

With the new problems as Sri Lankan Tamils are facing as Tamils and because they are Tamils, there is no doubt an increasing emphasis on the Tamil identity than on the “intra” identities. When one takes into count the fact that many of the youth are out of the country as refugees, and a large number of families have migrated or are migrating, the question is how does the social organization among the Tamils stand today?

At this point the problem has got to be viewed in an all Tamil perspective for we will find that all the Tamils virtually share the same concepts relating to “family”.

The Tamil word for “family” is “KUTUMPAM” and it does not, even today, refer only to the “nuclear” family. It is the “extended family” that is always referred to. There may be so many bickerings (and there are many) within “Kutumpam” but it is the unit of social existence when it comes to matters relating to marriages and deaths. The extended family would definitely include the parents, brothers and sisters and their children. It is at this point a “Kutumpam” becomes a PAKUTI (making “a section, division”) a Caste group really consists of such Pakutis. The pedigree of the family, the moral values of a family are all judged in terms of the pakuti’s standing in those matters. This is so because marriage in this situation is largely a question of forging relationships with other situation is largely a question of forging relationships with “other” families to form not only new solidarities, but also to establish the internal unity of the family that seeks or accepts the marriage proposals.

Marriage in such a situation becomes an important social arrangement which has got to be carefully “negotiated”. The choices have got to be made very carefully, because on it would depend the future position of that “sons” or “daughter” in the family, his/her usefulness to the younger siblings and the maintenance of that family relationship with the other members of the Kutumpam.

It is true that love marriages do pose problems for this type of family-oriented organizations. And the experience so far has been that love marriages ultimately end up with the parents’ families also getting together or the couple being absorbed into one of the families, either that of the husband or that of the wife.

Marriage of a sister therefore becomes the responsibility of a brother. The social norm yet is that the brother helps enable the sister married comfortably so that the standing of that family goes up in relation to the pakuti.

One could say that the individual in among the Sri Lankan Tamil is, if we understand that term in its original meaning – “that which cannot be divided further into substantive figures” - **it is the family that is the unit of existence, not the single person.**

The traditional property law among the Tamils yet envisages such a social organization in which the “Kutumpam” is taken as the unit of social existence. This is very much so in the Tecavalamai (lit: the usages of the country) the law relating to the Property rights of the Tamils of Jaffna.

1989

#### **Further reading**

- Byran Pfaffenberger - Caste in Tamil culture. Syracuse USA- 1982
- Banks, Micheal - Caste in Jaffna: an aspect of caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan (Ed.) Learn: Cambridge 1960.

David Kenneth

- Hierarchy and Equivalences in Jaffna North Ceylon
- Normative code as mediators in the New Wind
- changing identities in South Asia. (ed.)
- K..David - Hague - 1976.
- J.P.Lewis. The manual of Vanni.

# DIVINE PRESENCE AND/OR SOCIAL PROMINENCE

## An inquiry into the Social role of the places of worship in Jaffna Tamil Society

### The concept of worship

The concept of worship in the social discourse in Tamil Hindu tradition is expressed by two terms: 1. **Kumpitatal** like in **cami kata vul kumpitatal**, worship of the lord god and 2. **valipatu** like in **kata vulal valipatatal**, following the god.

Anyone interested in a study of religiosity among the Tamils should be aware of the distinction between “worship” and “prayer”. Whereas “to pray” means “to make devout supplication to”, and beseech earnestly, “worship” (the verb) means “adore as divine”, “pay religious homage to”, “idolize”, and regard with adoration.. The Tamil word **kumpitu** comes from a combination of **kumpu** and **itu**, “to join hands (in worship)”. This form of establishing a relationship with the deity one worships, arises out of the **bhakti** concept in which there is an emotional relationship established with the deity in a highly personalized manner.

The literal meaning of the first word is “worship” (not “prayer”) and that of the second term is “proceeding on the way, following”. This attitude towards god in which one adores god and not makes just petitional prayers is implicit in the concept of **bhakti**. It is well reflected in the Tamil proverb **kulantalyum teyvamuin kontatum itattil**, “a child and the god are ‘seen’ best when (or where) you ‘celebrate’ them”. The more you are near Him (or Her) play, with Him (or Her) speak to Him (or Her), the more He (or She) gets attached to you and thus a permanent relationship is established. This would imply that one should have more places of worship, where one could ‘befriend’ Him (or Her).

This concept of **kumpitatal** and **valipatatal** thus takes us on to the concept of **cannityam**, (**Skt sam-nidhya, from sam-nidhi**,) “the being near”, “nearness”, “vicinity”, “presence”, “attendance”. When one worships, there is the presence of god and when there is a presence of the god one worships. Therefore the place where one worships should be kept in such a manner as to enable His (or Her) presence. Such places of worship could range from the **camiarai**, the room for keeping the pictures of the deities, to the **koyil** or **kovil** (temple) proper, from the personal to the public place of worship. The Tamil word for temple is **koyil** or **kovil**. It is a compound of **ko**, “king” and **il**, “abode, residence”. In Tamil tradition both the palace and the temple are referred to by this term. “Palace” is always referred to by another word also - **aranmanai**, “fortified house”. This concept of palace-temple continuum arises from the concept of the state since the Pallavas (ca 600-900) and gained its popularity during the Cola rule (900-1230) of Tamilnadu.

And given the enduring concepts like **kulateiyvarn** “family”, “clan”, “caste-deity”, **urkkavalteyvarn**, “the deity that guards the village”, a common place of worship for the group becomes sine qua non. Besides, a special place is also predicated by the need of **kontatatal** ‘celebration’ of Him (or Her), to demonstrate to Him (or Her) how we adore Him (or Her). It is only then we would find a full presence of His (or Her) divine qualities.

Thus the need for a place of worship emerges from the very concept of god or deity and of the relationship established with Him (or Her).

Within this psychology lies intertwined the social relevance of not only the worshipped deity but also questions relating to the place where this worshipping is to be done, the sanctified form in which the place has to be kept, the things essential for it (this would range from the design of the building to the things that are to be done to demonstrate our feelings toward Him (or Her)), the persons who would be coming to the place, what are the things one should do to enable them perform those things for which they have come,

etc.. An answer to anyone of these questions would find ourselves dealing with some place (locus) of and for worship.

### **Siting Places of worship**

First, let us see the places of worship in terms of those who constitute the groups that are expected to worship at a particular place. It could be the family (by this it is the extended family that is always referred to), or the clanlineage (**pakuti**) or the entire caste group. In terms of the deity concerned, this would be the **kulateyvam**. Or it could be the place of worship for the entire village itself. The place of worship of one group does not necessarily mean that worship in the former place of worship is specially reserved for that group only. Anybody could go to it and worship at that place, according to the social traditions of worship assigned to Him (or Her) within that community.

There could be three or more important centres of worship for a village. The size of the village, the constituent groups of the village, their relative importance within the village are important factors in this regard. Or, it could even be a temple for the entire region. There are temples, which, because of their sanctity become the centres of worship for a region. The significance may be district level or area level; by the former is meant places like Nallur Murukan temple, Mavittapurani temple etc, and temples like Celvacanniti (Tontamannaru) would be having significance within a region like Vatamaracci. It is important to mention at this stage that a place of worship which had started as a cult centre for a kin group located in their area of residence, could, due to its importance in terms of the manifestation of divine presence, or the significance of its **tirttam**, ‘(holy) - waterspot’ could become a centre of worship for all.

Siting of a temple is, it is said, based on the concept of **murtti**, **talam**, **tirttam** (Tamilised Sanskrit terms). **Murtti** refers to the manifestation of that particular deity fully bringing out His (or Her) characteristics; **talam** refers to the significance of the place of worship (it might be the place where certain divine manifestations had taken place) **tirttam** refers to the main water source of the temple, pond, well or/river which would have holy power.

### **Temples - common categories and average structural patterns**

The places of worship could vary in terms of the object of worship and how it is housed. At best it could be in the form of an agamic **koyil**, constructed according to the **akamam** (Sanskrit **agama**), which is a set of scriptures regulating the temple cult. By an agamic temple is meant a temple replete with a **mulattanam** “rootplace”, (Sanskrit **garbhagrha** “womb house”., which is the innermost room. There is also a **kotittaampam** from **koti** “flag” and **tanipam** “pillar”, which indicates the god or goddess. You also find the **eluntaruli**, the room on the eastern end of northern side of the inner **pirakaram**, “precincts” (of the temple), in which the icons, which are taken out on the round inside and outside the temple are kept.

There is also a **vasantamantapam**, (lit. the spring hall) referring to the spacious hall within the temple. Within the inner **pirakaram** there will also be the various micro-size structures within which the other deities worshipped in that temple are enshrined. There is always an **ulviti**, “inner pathway”, within the walled inner temple area used for circumambulating the icon when they are taken on their ritual rounds and the **veliviti** “outer path way”. This is really the open space around the four sides of the temple. People congregate here and the icons are also brought out here along this pathway during the festivals.

There is also the **keni**, “(square or oblong walled) tank”, which is the built water pond, and the **nantavanam**, “flower garden”.

These types of big temples are bound to have an elaborate entrance. It could be a **kopuram**, “tower (of a gateway at the entrance of a town or a temple)” or an elevated **mukappu**, “frontage”, which is the outer face of the temple. The “belfry” tower would be an important construction and would have a bell which is rung just prior to and during the time of the **pucai** hours. In temples of this type there would be six **pucais** a day (the first one around 5 am, the second one around 7 am, the third one by 9.30-10 am, the fourth one around 5 pm and the last one around 8 pm).

This type of temple is more the exception than the rule. Very often the temples are not that replete, the barest essential would be the **ulviti** and the **veliviti** and the important shrines being housed alongside the **ulviti**. There will be the **mulattanam** and the **eluntaruli**. **Kopuram** is not always there.

Normally there would only be three **pucais** (one in the morning 7.30 am, one in the noon around 12 or 12.30. and one at nightfall 6.30 or 7 pm). This would be the general pattern in a **mahotsava koyil**, “temple for the great festivals”, that is, a temple which has annual festivals. This would be the typical village level temple. The area level, or district level temples would be the ones mentioned earlier, i.e. those which have all the six **pucais**. Even at some of the area level or regular level temples three **pucais** a day might be the order on all non-auspicious days.

During the period of ethnic crisis during times of night curfew the **pucai** hours are shortened, and all the **pucais** would be over at least an hour before the curfew begins. During times of day curfew no **pucais** are held. The conducting or not doing so is known by the sound of the **kopuram** bell or the absence of it.

In both these types of temples there would be a resident **kurukkal** or **aiyar**. An **aiyar** is always a Brahmin; a **kurukkal** would refer to one from the **Caiva-kurukkal** tradition also. These are priestly families which have arisen out of the **vellalar** caste but observe all the ritual purities that are essential for those who officiate at the **pucais**. It is said that a **Caiva-kurukkal** does not chant the Vedic texts. They chant all the **mantrams** that are essential for the conduct of the **pucais**. The word **kurukkal** consists of **kuru** (Sanskrit **guru**) plus **kal**, which is a Tamil suffix now used to denote the honorific plural. It also refers to a person who has, through a process of **atiyayanam**, “education”, achieved the status of a **kurukkal**. It is those who have attained that status who could perform the rituals for the annual festivals. Thus even a brahmin priest could also be referred to as a **kurukkal**. **Caiva-kurukkal** is also a caste name of a brahmin.

In temples of the descriptions mentioned above the **kurukkal's** family is always given a residence. It could be alongside the **matam**, “rest place” (house like structure close to the temple which is used as a resting place). The temple **matam** is a building close to the temple, in which people congregate during festivals. It is also the place where people are fed on occasion of **annatanam**, “food-offering” this is done as a votive offering and is usually meant to feed the poor and needy, but there will be a good number of the relatives of the one who gives this **annatanam** there on invitation by the host.

In the area-level or regional level temple there would be more than one **matam**. The largest number of **matams** in a single temple in Jaffna are seen at the Celvacanniti temple, Tontamannaru, where the characteristic votive offering is the feeding of the needy. Celvacanniti incidentally has **kurukkals** who are neither brahmins nor **Caiva-kurukkals** but who are from the **karaiyar**, (fishermen) families. Those who perform **pucais** observe strict vegetarianism.

In terms of the overall number of the places of worship in the Jaffna district these village-level temples would be only a small proportion. Among those with permanent stone-cult structures there is a category of places of worship which would have just one building built in the traditional Dutch architecture having only one small room inside (or some times without a room) to house the icon of the deity. In such temples, which are clan or caste levels ones, there will be no daily **pucais**. Some one from the caste-group would light the coconut oil lamp every evening and that too if he is ritually clean. The **pucai** would be only on Friday noons or fore-noon. It may be done by a professional priest, usually a **Caivakurukkal**, not a brahmin. These are also referred to as **koyilkal**, “temples”.

Special **pucai** is normally held at these places on the **Tai Pongal** “(rice) cooking in (the month of) Tai”, (January 14 or 15), and the **Varucappirappu**, the New Year, (April 14 or 15). At all these places of worship, normally **pucai** is done by an elder in the family at these places of worship. The professional priests come only during special occasions.

In terms of the number of “temples” in Jaffna district this category would be the largest. Any village unit would have about at least 100-150 of such places. Most of these places of worship do not have icons proper. They would have a **culam**, “trident” if the worship is of Kali or Vairavar, and a stone.

There is another category of worship-spots. These are under trees usually big, spreading ones, often **alamaram**, “banyan tree”, **araca maram** “king-tree” (ficus religiosa, “bo-tree”), **naval**, “blackberry-tree” or **pulia maram**, “tamarind tree”, or even **puvaraca maram**, “king trees with flowers”. This is the Portia tree (*Thespecia populnea*) and is found in large numbers in Jaffna.

There will be a few stones placed at the trunk of the tree with a **culam**, “trident” stuck in. Invariably the offering would be done by an elder of the family. On Fridays a coconut oil lamp would be lit. There will be

a special **ponkal**, “(rice) cooking” done annually or there would be a **ponkal** done on the **tai ponkal** day (January 14/15) and/or the New Year Day (April 14/15).

It needs mention that in the two types of worship-spots (cult-centres) mentioned above, special votive offerings are given on the auspicious days of the year (**tai ponkal**, **putu varucapponkal**, (ponkal on the New Year day), **vaikasi** full moon-day (Sinhala **vesak** (April / May) etc, or on any Friday in case of any emergency within the family. The emergency would arise because of the illness of some one in the family or some severe stress period someone in the family undergoes. During such times the blessing of these “deities” are quite often invoked.

It should be mentioned here that during times of stress, offerings are paid or worshipping is done at all levels. Thus there would be **pucais** done or a trip undertaken to the temple of regional importance, there would be special **pucais** done at the village level temple, and also at the clan/family level cult spot. It is at time like this the concept of **kutumpattheyvam kulateyvam**, “deity of the family/caste” is seen in full action. These family deities are very often worshipped within the compound in which the house stands. This would be the **vituteyvam**, “deity of the household”. I know of the worshipping of such deities at the trunk of trees or in specially constructed small buildings, within the compound of a house. In lands which have come under housing settlement lately, say since the 1930s, there would be no cult spot of this type. These cult spots are seen in compounds of households with a long history. It is said that these types of a **vituteyvam** worship came into existence during the period of Dutch rule when public worship was forbidden.

Sometimes the tree itself is the object of worship. The belief is that a particular “deity” resides in the tree. Quite often an icon of the deity or an insignia is then placed under the tree, later a small structure is built over it and from then on, it becomes an important cult-centre. Then it emerges as a “temple” proper, the priest of the cult spot, changes from a family elder to a caste elder and from that to a **Caiva-kurukkal** and finally to a brahmin.

The deities thus worshipped could range from Annamar, Vairavar, Kali to Pillaiyar and Murukan. The following is an incomplete list of such deities.

1. Annamar is a caste god of the castes **nalavar**, toddy collections, and **pallar**, a low servant caste.
2. Mutalikal is possibly a caste deity. The example I know of it is that of the karaiyar.
3. Periyatampiran, “the great master”, a caste god of the washermen.
4. Aiyandar (Skt. Sasta).
5. Virumar is possibly a caste god of the smiths.
6. Kattavarayan (the Saviour hero).
7. Naccimar, “the ladies” - now quite often given in the form Ampal, the Mother Goddess.
8. Sapta Kanniyar, “seven virgins”.
9. Naka tampiran, “snake master”
10. Vairavar (skt.Bhairava).
11. Kali, “black goddess”.

It is interesting to note that the identities of some of the lesser known deities are getting lost and most of them are now identified as Vairavar and Kali. Both are worshipped in the form of **culams**, “tridents”..

12. Pillayar, the child God referring to Ganapati or Ganesa.
13. Murukaiya or Murukan. This deity is often referred to at the dialectal level as Murukaiya (Skt. Skanda).
14. Amman, the mother goddess. There are various forms of amman worship, important of which are Mariamman, the goddess of Rain, Kannakai amman which is Kannakai, the chaste goddess.
15. Civan, (Skt Siva). Civan is never worshipped at this level. The number of temples dedicated to Civan are few.

In agamic tradition distinction is made between temples based on the nature of the rituals performed, the buildings available in the temple, the icons that are installed for worship etc... At the popular level categorisation is done normally on the following basis: a) Those temples which have annual festivals. b) Those which have only an annual *canakapicekam*. **canaku** is a “shell” and **apicekam** is “sprinkling”, i.e. “consecration” after an elaborate **pucai**. c) Those with an annual **ponkal** or **kulutti**. The first would be agamic in nature, the last one would not be. But in all these cases the **pucais** would be performed by a professional priest-brahmin or Caiva kurukkal.

Children are given the names of gods, especially the ones that are perceived as dear and near to the parents. Such a god is called *istateyvam*, "the god chosen.", "favourite god..

At the village level temples, it is the Pillaiyar temples that are the largest in number. Pillaiyar worship is very much associated with the farmers.

The temple significant at the village level will be the focus of study in this paper.

### **The Pancankam**

Before we get on to an analysis of the pivotal role the village temple plays in the social organization of the Jaffna village, it is important to state the usefulness of the pancankam "almanac of the five things", which are the lunar days, solar days, periods of the asterisks, junction of the planets and the zodiac, as an important source for the study of the socio-religio-cultural life of the Hindu Tamils. Literally the word means "five limbs (units)"; they are *varam*, "day" **titi**, "lunar phase", **karanam**, "division", **nakshatram**, "asterisk" and **yokam**, "junction" - all these are divisions of time. One should not fail to mention that even the non-Hindu Tamils, the Christians- both Catholics and non-Catholics, resort to it. The **Pancankam** provides the astrological almanac for the Tamil year (April 14/15 to March 13/14) on the basis of the Tamil months. The Tamil year consists of the months **cittirai** (April / May), **vaikaci** (May/June), **ani** (June/July), **ati** (July/August), **avani** (August / September), **purattaci** (September/October), **aippaci** (October/November), **kartikai** (November/ December), **markali** (December/January), **maci** (February / March), and **pankuni** (March/April).

Pancankams are prepared on the basis of two differing traditions - the **vakiya** and the **kanita** ones. The former means "spoken tradition" and the latter means "astronomical calculation". The two traditions can be traced back to very ancient times. It is the **vakya** tradition that is most popular in Jaffna although the adherents of the latter often argue that the **kanita pancankam** is astronomically the more correct one.

It is claimed that the first vakya pancankam is in use from 1666 AD.

The pancankam gives the auspicious days and inauspicious days for all the social educational and economic activities ranging from wedding to admitting children to school, to harvesting and to the dates of all the important annual seasonal festivals, days of fasting etc, along with the dates of the annual festivals of the different temples.

It is an important handy reference book used in almost every literate household. It provides a clue to a socio-religious study of the Hindu Tamil community of Ilankai. Its price (Rs.60) is within the range of an average literate family in Jaffna.

### **The temple in society - its place, its role, and the manner it is managed**

The village-level temple is one of the most important institutions of the village. It reflects the hierarchy, the power-balance between the groups living within the village, and is an indicator to the type of social mobility that is taking place within that society. An analysis of the working of the temple would reveal the internal dynamism of that society that takes that temple as the religio-cultural focal point of their living. The social ranking a man has within that society could be judged from the place he occupies in the temple affairs.

The temple may belong to a particular family or may belong to the traditional "congregation" of the temple. The latter is a term that is quite often used in contemporary courts of law to describe those permanent residents of the area to whom that particular temple is the one where all their important religious needs are catered for. They have a claim on it and have known to be associated with it for generations. Where the temple is a property of a family (by this it is the extended family that is meant) they could also be, in rare cases, the officiating priests as is the case at Canniti temple. Tontamannaru and the Atulu

kannakiamman temple, Karaveddi. That is more the rare exception than the rule. If the temple belongs to a particular family, then the koyil maniyam, the lay Superintendent of the temple, is nominated by them. There have been instances of family feuds over the proprietorship of the temples and when such litigation goes to the courts, the courts have in general terms, provided for better participation by the congregation in the running of the temple.

In case of those temples where the temples are of great significance to the people and have been well managed, the proprietor-superintendent is referred to respectfully as the ecaman, Sanskrit Yajaman, "sacrificer", who is the owner and master. Such reference is made to the superintendents of the Nallur Kantacami temple and the Valvettiturai Civan temple. But this is a very rare phenomenon. Even in such cases he could only "govern", not "rule", because much depends on the people of the area, who really are the ones who matter. The "ecaman" is bound to consult them, in some form or other.

This is perhaps the appropriate stage to mention the role a particular kind of temple devotees in the affairs of the temple. These are people who "serve" the temple on their own accord. Such a service is undertaken because of the special liking one has for the temple. They would be helping the administrators in all the Koyilkariyam, "affairs of the temple". It would range from cleaning the temple premises to getting ready for the conduct of the Pucal, or the maintenance of the nantavanam or the carrying of the icons during festivals etc. Their opinion in matters connected with the day today affairs of the temple is important. They would be normally elderly people of both sexes: occasionally there would be younger persons too; the younger persons are generally males.

The management of a non-private temple is normally in the hands of a committee of office-bearers. They are normally elected to their offices. The electorate is the "congregation". Legally speaking "the congregation" could consist of (a) all those adults (usually males) who consider that temple as their chief temple (this would refer to a geographically defined area) those people living temporarily away are also members; marriage in certain case entitles membership to the congregation, sometimes not (it is normally decided by the congregation in one of its meetings) or (b) those who conduct festivals and pucals on important days and those who have made some substantial donations of buildings, jewellery, vakanams, "Vehicle" (refers to the wooden structures made like the animals on which the deities are supposed to ride), pucal accessories, or had constructed the ter "(temple) car" etc. In most cases the arrangement is on the basis of a decree of a court of law. The question of the administration of almost all the important and the

influential temples in Jaffna have been canvassed in a court of law and the current system of administration is invariably based on the judgement given or agreement arrived at.

The temple committee would generally consist of the President, the Vice President, the Treasurer, the Secretary and committee members. The officials have an important place because they are entitled to the **kalancis** from the priest on important occasions. **Kalanci**, “betel holder” contains betel and plantain fruits and is handed over by the officiating priest himself before the piracatam of the pucai consisting of holy ash, tirttam etc is given to those who are present. This is considered a great honour. The piracatam, “favour” is in the form of boiled rice handed over at first to the person who had contributed to the conduct the **pucai**. The priest himself hands it over with due respect. The chief lay executive of the temple who superintends like a working director is referred to as the **koyil maniyam**.

The position of the priest should now be explained. The priests in Jaffna temples are either brahmins or **Caiva kurukkals** (except in very exceptional cases like the Celvacanniti temple at Tontamannaru); even there once they are the priests they keep themselves ritually clean like the brahmins or Caiva kurukkals. The priest in charge is expected to have got the **kurutitcai**, **Sktguru-diksa**, “consecration as a teacher”, qualified to perform all the rituals, and is married. Unmarried or widower priests cannot perform any of the auspicious ceremonies, they also cannot conduct the **tiruvila-utcava-pucaikal** which are the **pucais** at the occasion of the holy festival festivity. In Jaffna the brahmins and **Caiva kurukkals** are generally not the proprietors of temples. A major exception is the Mavittapuram koyil. Atcuveli Pillaiyar koyil is also one. It had been decreed as belonging to the priest only after long and arduous legal battle. But the priest - cum - owner is expected to consult the “congregation” in the running of the temple. In such case where the priest runs the temple, he is always assisted by a lay congregation, which may or may not have legal basis.

Generally speaking, the priest is an employee. He might have inherited the position from his forbears or would have been appointed by the temple committee. There is a clear-cut understanding as to what he is entitled to. Usually the money given for **ariccanai**, “honouring (of the gods)” is taken by the priest. **ariccanai** is the Tamil form of Sanskrit arcana meaning “honouring” “praising”, “pay homage (to deities and superiors)”. This actually constitutes the act of worship. But since in the agamaic Hindu tradition the average lay devotee of the cariyai order cannot do this on his own, and also because he cannot enter the **sanctum sanctorum**, the priest who is considered qualified to be near the “deity”, is called upon to the “honouring”, “praising” on behalf of the devotee. The arcaka-priest in the course of doing this praising and honouring, states that is being done on behalf of, for the benefit of so-and-so, born under such-and-such nakshatra, “star”.

**Caiva Cittanta** (Sanskrit **Saiva Siddhanta**), the school of Hindu thought which is the governing, religious ideology of the upper castes from Jaffna, divides human beings into four categories in terms of their “spiritual maturity”.

1. Those at **cariyai** level which is, the first stage. They need representation of god in iconic form and temples are important for them.

2. Those at the **kiriyai** level are second of the fourfold means attaining salvation, which consists in worshipping Civan with rites and ceremonies prescribed in the akamas. In this case this worshipping is done by the person himself.
3. Those at **yokam** level, i.e. the path of yoga which consists in the mental worship of Civan in his subtler form.
4. Those at the **nanam** level. This is the path of wisdom which consists in the realization of God as transcending form and formlessness.

Of the other things offered (the coconut, the betel, the fruits etc.,) half is taken by the priest and the other half is given back to the devotee. What is returned is considered holy and is never allowed to be polluted. **ariccanai** money given during important, heavily attended occasions like the **tiruvila** days, “holy festival days” or important **pucal** days is shared between the priest and the management. The vital aspect of the office of the temple priest at the village level is that it entitles him to do the **purokitam**, “household ceremony” for the village or the congregation. This includes the conducting of the ceremonies at weddings, on **cirattam** days - these are the days on which dead members of the family are remembered and oblations done - and performing the house warming ceremonies or performing the **canti** rituals which clear the household of evil things. Funerary rites will not be performed by the temple priest. He is called upon to fix the days of auspicious function. All these entitle him to payments in cash and kind. If he is of amiable, at the same time, venerable character, his income would really be good.

In recent times when the army, after arresting the young men of the village was prepared to release them to the priests on the latter’s assurance, some of the village level temple priests had a very trying time. Unlike the Christian priests, these priests are not used to these social roles. In spite of such handicaps, some priests played useful role in going to army camps. Generally speaking this is not the type work the congregation would expect from a priest. He is expected to be somewhat “other worldly” in his approach, in personality terms, a “splendid man”. The term used in **polinta manitan**, “man who is endowed with a gait of splendour” and it includes his personality, his marital life, his knowledge of men and matters, his ability in human management and above all his knowledge of the **sastras**.

There could be occasions when the management and the priest do not see eye to eye on matters relating to the running of the temple. In such circumstances the standing the priest has in the community is very crucial. If he is a respected man, the committee will find it very difficult to go against him.

In busy temples, the priest is expected to have assistants to help him in his work. He could employ them or the committee could appoint them.

The temple revenue comes from the earnings of the immovable properties of the temple, the donations it receives from the devotees, and from the payments devotees make for the performance of certain rituals/ offerings. That is, a portion of the payment is set apart for the day to day running of the temple.

There is a strong tradition of making endowments of lands to temples. This could be by the original founders of the temple or staunch devotees. Sometimes rich old men, without children, when they do not have eligible relatives to transfer the properties bequeath their properties to the temple.

Under the Tecavalamai law, which is the customary law that governs property rights among the Tamils of Jaffna, codified by the Dutch in 1707 under the heading “The Malabar Laws and Customs”, not all property could be given away. A person could give away only the tetiatattam, i.e. property acquired by either husband during the period after married life and or the priests acquiring from such properties. Even of the tetiatattam property, the husband cannot alienate the whole property; the wife is entitled to half of it. Those properties inherited from the parents cannot be given away according to ones own wish. There are also cases of old ladies who do not have any children gifting their properties to the temple.

The cash revenue for running day to day affairs of the temple comes from moneys given for that purpose and from those put into the untiyal petti, “alms box”, which is the temple-till.

Some big temples have ticket system for **ariccanai**. These are printed cards with the amount of money paid printed. The type of **pucal** offered by the brahmin on behalf of the devotee will depend on the amount paid. Bigger amounts have to be paid for elaborate **pucals**. The normal ariccanai would be for two rupees. This system does not apply to the village level temple.

The efficiency of the committee of management or the **manlyams** is judged in the way they are able to run the temple on the lean days. They are expected to see that none of the essential services to the deity are given up. Any work in the temple involving large scale labour would be done as a sramadana, “gift of toil”, unpaid, voluntary labour.

The temple staff in normal circumstances would consist of the priest, his assistants for the preparation of the piracatam, "favour. the food offerings to the deities, and another lay assistant to do the odd job. The social standing of the last named employee is very low.

It is enjoined by tradition that during times of pucal, there should be accompaniment of music. In the average temple, music consists of the conch-shell and the **muracu**. There is also the playing of the **nadaswaram** and the **tavil** played by the professional musicians. In fact, they constitute a separate caste known as **nattuva** or **melakkara** caste. The more important temples have their own **melakkara** families maintained for the services in the temple. The average village temple would not have its own **tavil** and **nadaswaram** players. The services of the professional **melakkarar** would be obtained only for the annual **tiruvila** and for important occasions.

The success of the management depends on how it motivates its congregation in the affairs of the temple and particularly in the way it handles the annual festival-the **tiruvila**.

Any festival in a temple would be referred to as the **tiruvila**, “holy festivity/festival”. But it is the annual **tiruvila** that is the most important. It runs for ten or fifteen days. There are some temples which have more number of days, e.g. Nallur koyil in Jaffna, but in the case of the village level temple it is mostly either 10 or 15 days.

The power balance of a village is seen in the manner it assigns the festivals. The ranking a family or a group has in the village is seen from the festival it runs. All festivals are, no doubt, important, but some, like the **koti erram**, “flag hoisting (day)” done on the first day, the **ter** “car (festival)” and the **tirttam** “consecrated water”, which is used to sprinkle the idol, and is the finale, are more important.

Within a village some of the festivals are run by families. These would have been important well to do families at the time the festival was assigned to them. Sometimes the fortunes of a family might change and would find at another time difficult to run the festival. However they consider it below their dignity to hand it over to others. In such circumstances, someone who is a “newcomer” to the family, i.e. who has come into the family through marriage, might begin exerting influence and take it over. These festivals are expected to go patrilineally. Therefore someone taking it over through his wife (if she is not the only child) would be unusual. But there are instances of such take-overs. Yet the festival would remain within the family.

Some of the festivals would be on a group basis, the smallest of such groups would be **pakuti**, lineage group, and the largest would be the entire caste group. In a purely **vellalar** dominated village level temple the **koviyar**, the servants of the **vellalar**, and the **karaiyar**, the fishermen, would each be given on the caste basis. Such caste groups make their own arrangement to run the festival. The usual way is to divide the caste group into the major lineages that constitute the group in that village, appoint an influential person from the lineage, and collect the dues, the amount being decided at a meeting of the entire caste group.

The committee of such influential men would elect one or two of them to be coordinators with the temple management. In normal circumstances, it would be the chief coordinator who would take the ritual responsibility for running the day's activities. The ritual expression of this is seen in the tarppaipotutal, wearing the (sacrificial) grass to perform the festival. The man who performs that is considered *primus inter pares* for that day.

These groups mentioned above are castes which have no problem in being inside the temple and do all the ritual obligations. It is significant that even castes which have no right to enter the temple are also given the right to conduct festivals. Thus **nalavar**, *toddy tappers*, **pallar**, low-caste servants, traditionally agricultural slaves but now *tappers* and also cobblers, and even **ampattar**, barbers, are assigned festivals: In case of such festivals one of the members of the management committee or someone assigned by the **rmaniyam** would perform the rituals on their behalf. The washermen though considered low are allowed to enter the temple. They are also allotted a festival. Thus the entire village is represented in the annual **tiruvilas**.

But society changes and families and groups rise and fall. An arrangement worked at one time cannot continue throughout. Families which had a marginal existence in the last decade would have now become rich through employment openings in the Middle East or because of some success in business or through some young man in the family getting a good post in the public or private sector. Such families are keen to establish their new found social position. The temple as the status marker has got to respond. In such cases effort is made to draw them into those other major rituals other than the annual **tiruvila**.

Those are the kantacatti, “fast (in reverence of the god) Kantan”, which is a six day observance in the seventh month called Aippaci, and the **navarattiri**, nine nights of strict fasting, chiefly to Durga, in the ninth month called Karttikai. When these are also full up new rituals are taken into the temple calendar.

The celebration of the annual festival in an important occasion and the family/group that runs it would like to demonstrate its social importance by making the festival a grand one. Traditionally rich families do not spend much on the festival but the group run festivals are generally celebrated in a grand manner. They would spend much money on **cattupati**, “beautifying” the icon with flowers, vestments etc, on the structure that is used to take the icon round, which is called **capparam**, “portable car” or **tantikai**, “palanquin”, on fireworks, and, above all, on hiring the best musicians available.

Those who run the festivals on the different days (these people are referred to by the term **upayakarar** explained as those who make the offerings) engage the services of the lesser known players, and the grandeur of a festival is always judged by the grandiose manner the festival has been conducted. There is always competition between the different **upayakarars** to conduct the festival in a grand manner. It should be added that such a feeling exists only at the level of the non-**vellala** groups. Quite often the entire earnings of some of the lower groups are siphoned off by the annual festival expenses.

Most of the temples now publish an annual handbill giving the temple calendar and the details of who contributes for which.

It should not be forgotten that the temple was also the major centre of religious arts of the community. This does not mean that all the folk arts also found a place; some did, some did not.

### **Movement for the temple entry**

The village temple thus becomes the status marker in the Jaffna society, and given the sudra character of the dominant caste itself, it is no wonder that the temple entry movement has been a persistent one in Jaffna. With all the secular benefits being assured at least nominally by the concepts of rule of law and representative government, refusal to enter the temple has been a problem of constant social embarrassment to those who come from the hierarchically low placed groups especially after they have been able to overcome the barriers through the acquisition of education. It should be noted that the social management of the state administration done by the grassroots level administrators (the headmen, the **maniyakaran** - a district level official, and also quite often the police official) was carried out in such a manner as not to upset the social hierarchy of the Yalppanam society. Thus these officers devised ways and means of keeping the castes apart. There were separate schools established, wherever needed, for the lower castes and it was also scrupulously seen to that those finish their schooling from those schools do not get into the schools meant for the higher castes, especially into the English school, which was run mostly on denominational lines. So any of the students from the lower groups whenever they wanted to go for further education had to get out of the village. Outside the village, in the town, it was possible to obtain English education in a Christian school. Thus in a way it was within the village that caste discrimination was at its worst. Thus the demand for entry into the temple was to offset these manifest social inequalities. The movement for temple entry was spearheaded by the Left movement. There was also the impact of Gandhism and the social reforms that flowed out of the Indian Independence Movement.

It must be admitted that the movement for temple entry was not a success. It remained a symbolic one, the expression of the social willingness to demonstrate the sense of egalitarianism of those belonging to the higher groups. Even where temple entry had been done, there was no consequent change in the power balance of the village to allow those admitted to have equal say in the running of the temple. Temple entry in the context should have also included a demand for effective participation of the oppressed groups in the running of the temple. This has not taken place. The demand was for entry into the temple for worshipping only, and when it was found that it was no more socially prudent not to disallow it. The groups that clamoured for it were ceremonially allowed inside the temple. One days **tamaca**, “show”, “pomp”, “spectacle” to demonstrate equality was not going to alter the existing social relationship in the village. I

had the chance of discussing the aftermath of the temple entry with the treasurer of one of the leading temples in Vataramaracci in 1971 and asked him what the committee proposed to do as follow-up after the temple entry. He said that all what has to be done is done and the matter ended there.

Formal temple entry was done at all area-level or regional level temples, even though it had led to certain problems as in the case of Mavittapuram koyil. The case of the Mavittapuram koyil is an interesting one. It is one of the very few brahmin owned temples. It is significant that those who came forward to physically stop the entry were the **koviyar**, an intermediate caste. Even among those who wanted to enter, most of them were from other villages. It was part of the political action of the Shanmugathan-led Communist Party (the Peking wing), and it was accused that the other Communist Party (the Moscow wing), which had within its local leadership M.C.Subramaniam, a depressed caste leader, did not want to throw its full weight behind the Mavittapuram struggle. Mavittapuram became a symbol.

The other leading area-level and region level temples which were being managed by the **vellalars** did not want their temples dragged into the politics of temple entry. Thus very nominal and extremely formal entry was performed. By and large the village temples were not affected by this. Most of them went through it as a political exercise so that the Sinhalese will not be given a chance to make political capital out of this. It was an embarrassment which the Federal Party wanted to avoid.

The social lesson that emerged out of the Temple Entry Movement was that if one wants equal participation then one should have his own temple. The tendency had been for the left-out group, even if it is of equal rank, to develop its own temple, in which it could establish and demonstratively exercise, its social power. The history of many Hindu temples, particularly among those that were founded in the late 19th and early 20th century, would show that they were developed because the owners or the managers of the leading temple of the area did not extend the social courtesies befitting their new found social status of those who ultimately went to the new temple. Tiruvil Civacuppiramaniam temple, which has known literary works in praise on it, was developed by Arulampala Mutaliyar because of some feuds he had with the other leading family of the village Utupitti. Taiyalpakar who built Citampara College, Valvettiturai, built a Civan temple, though small in size, because he had problems with the owners of the Valvettiturai Civan temple. The large number of litigations in the various district courts of Jaffna, and the appeals made to the Supreme Court against the decisions would show how important are the village-level temples in the exercise of social authority and power within the village.

### **Developing their own temples**

It was therefore nothing unusual when those of the depressed castes, especially the more educated among them, began to develop their own temples and to run them themselves. There are a number of such temples in Jaffna. The Murukaiyan temple at Kalikai, Tunnalai, and the Puvarkkarai Pillaiyar Temple at Alvai are two such temples. The former is temple of those of the Nalavar caste and the latter is the temple run by the Pallar caste. People of higher castes normally do not go to such temples. In the case of such temples the main problem would be the recruitment of the priests who are qualified to perform all the rituals. At the start the priest will be from their own ranks. Later in the case of some temples in Vataramaracci it was possible to obtain the services of a sub-group of brahmins living in Tunnalai. These brahmins are ranked very low in the brahmin hierarchy and the brahmins who officiate in the temples of the higher groups will have nothing to do with them. As in the case of the other temples, here the priest of the temple is called upon to officiate the domestic rituals like the **sraddha**, and also the weddings.

This type of temple faces another problem too. Professional musicians-the nadaswaram-tavil players -who have a role to play in the rituals during the festival days would not accept to perform in these temples of the lower groups. There was a movement to take steps to overcome this handicap and to get the leading professionals to perform at all temples. As things of this type are done more on the sly, one cannot say that the movement had been very successful.

The trend of the new rich developing their places of worship to attain village level significance is becoming a more pronounced socio-cultural feature. Those concerned, while maintaining their relationship with the already established temple (these relations would be rather marginal), are developing their own temples. We do not come across the founding of absolutely new temples. What is taking place is development of some existing cult-centre into a formal agamic temple. An inevitable process in the promotional transition from non-agamic to agamic worship is the construction of the temple in such a manner that the agamic rituals could be performed. This would mean the installation of the worship of more deities and the provision of those infra-structures for the conduct of more elaborate rituals. On the completion of such a construction programme, then the **kumpapicekam** ceremony is held. This word means consecration from a jar and refers to the consecration of an idol by pouring water from a sacrificial jar with appropriate ceremonies. A number of such new temples have come into existence in Yalppanam. This is really a process of Sanskritization, as Srinivas would define it.

Another process of upgrading a temple is by conducting the annual **tiruvila** holy festival. Prior to that there would have been only an annual **cankapicekam**, which is only a one day ceremony. Cankapicekam can be explained as a ceremonial bath of an idol with chanks filled with water. It refers to the ritual act of invoking the deity for its full blessings. In the case of those temples which are not ready in terms of the necessary construction, an effort will be made to get the name of this temple included in the pancankam so that others could know that this is a temple of some importance. These are striking demonstrations of the process of Sanskritization.

In this process of Sanskritization arising out of the modernization of hitherto less privileged groups, some of the non-agamic deities which have been worshipped in those cult-centres are losing their original identity and are being worshipped or taken as deities of the Sanskritic pantheon. Thus one would come across references in the **pancankam** to Rajarajeswari Amman known/referred to as Kannakai amman.

There are at least two temples in Jaffna where the transition to the Sanskritic pantheon is yet taking place - one at east Punctuvu and the other at east Putur. In some of the temples this transition has already taken place, e.g., the current "official" name of the Naccimar amman temple (close to the University of Jaffna) is Puvaneswari amman temple. The upward social mobility of the congregation is well mirrored in such transformations.

Because of the social significance of these temple activities there is a great media interest in the temple rituals. There has been for the last two to three decades media interest in the area-level and region-level temples. The national Tamil dailies would carry special supplements on the day of the **ter** festival and the State radio would be relaying alive the **ter** and the **tirttam** festivals from the temples. This practice started with the Nallur Kantacuvami temple, Jaffna, was later extended to Tiruketiccaram, Mannar, and now includes Tirukkoneccaram, Trincomalee, Mantur Mamankapilliyar koyil, Batticalo, Mavittapuram and other region-level and area level temples.

The village level temples, of course, cannot be given that type of media coverage. The authorities of the village level temple, with the assistance of those from their village and are devotees of the temple who are in positions of authority and influence in both the public and the private sectors, would take steps to see that those verses sung on the temple by some local pandits (this, again is one of the status markers of village level temples - they should have some poetic composition in praise of the deity) are included in the daily broadcasts and that the news about the temple and its festivals appears in the dailies. Now with the publication of local dailies in Jaffna, paid for supplements appear on the day of the **ter** or the **tirttam**. In the case of temples celebrating the **kumpapicekam** a special supplement in crown/octavo size is published with articles written by the leading scholars of the area.

All these indicate in unambiguous terms the social significance of the village level temple to its congregation.

### **Temple as centre of socialization**

There are some more aspects of the temple as a centre for socialization and as organ of social control.

The temple has been traditionally an important place for socialization. That continues in Jaffna even to this day, especially during festival time. It is the holiday season in the village. Earlier there had been a ban on any travelling during the festival time. It is difficult to observe it these days, but every one takes effort to see that he/she is in the village during festival time and once there not to undertake trips outside the area. Special effort is taken not to miss the main **pucai** referred to as the **tiruvilappucai**, worship at the holy festival. There is sense of participation arising out of the fact that many observe fasting during these days. These fasts are not rigorous like the **kantacatti** fast of six days in Aipparai during which one takes only one meal or one glass of tirttam or sometimes even less for a day. In fact, during the annual festival days all the households ensure they are well-stocked for preparation of wholesome, hearty, vegetarian meals.

Attendance at the festivals becomes a social event and adequate notice is taken of who wears what (sarees and jewellery). Those without enough jewellery would prefer not to go to the festival rather than go with an empty neck. Some borrow jewellery, some redeem the pawned jewellery in time to wear them for this occasion, some of the generous pawnbrokers would loan the pawned article for use during festival time and return.

The annual festival time affords an opportunity for concerned people to meet and discuss problems connected with the village and the community. This is also the time for exploring possibilities of marriage, but no wedding ceremony will take place during the annual festival time. The general belief is that when the temple flag is up there should be no other festive ceremony.

The temple as an agent of indirect social control is seen best in the case of the lower groups. The conducting of the festival often drains them of the surplus earnings they have had in the previous year, because of the heavy expenses they incur in the way they conduct the festival. Their belief is that if they have a grand festival there are chances for better earning in the ensuing year. There is also a puritanistic trend that discourages expenditure of this type. The puritan school would like to spend money for arranging lectures by the learned.

### **The present situation**

From about the beginning of 1984 to July 29, 1987 when the accord with the Indian government was signed, many temples were damaged and rendered non-functional. Even amidst those calamities people were keen to continue the day to day observances in the temple, for they feared that if those rituals were also disrupted they would suffer worst. Wherever possible effort was taken to continue in highly shortened form the festivals with the permission from the military authorities. With the accord, every village was keen to revive the normalcy in the temple. Permission is now obtained to run the temple without interruptions. Permission is essential because of the continuance of the curfew (generally from 5 am to 9 pm). There is much less expense on festivals now, even lesser are the expenses on those demonstrative acts relating to affluence. It is important to note that attendance at temple functions have increased because it provides a temporary release from the stresses and strains that have now become part of the existence.

What has been the impact of the crisis of temple entry at the village level temples? During the Operation Liberation at Vattamaracci (May 30- June 7 1987) undertaken by the Sri Lankan army, the army ordered that people gather at certain temples to avoid arrest and escape from the dangers of aerial bombing. People flocked at these temples. Almost all the temples opened their doors to all, except Taccan-toppu Pillaiyar koyil, Karavetti, because, the committee of management claimed, the annual festival was drawing near and there should be no defilement.

It is very difficult to change a Jaffna village. Amidst all the changes that are taking place, there is also within the village a silent but a conscientious struggle going on not to change.

**Reading list**

Banks M, "Caste in Jaffna". **Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon, and North West Pakistan**. Ed. E R Leach. Cambridge 1960.

Casie chitty S, **The Castes, Customs, Manners and Literature of the Tamils**. Colombo: Ceylon Printers, 1934.

Kanapathipillai K, **Iattu valavum valamum**. Madras: Pan Nilayam, 1962.

**Kenneth D**, "And Never the Twain Shall meet? - Mediating the Structural Approaches to caste ranking". **Structural Approaches to South India Studies**. Ed. H M Buek, G L Yocum. Wilson Books, 1974.

Kenneth D, "Spatial Organization and Normative Schemes in Jaffna, Northern Sri Lanka". **Modern Ceylon Studies**. Vol 4, No 172 (1973), pp.

Marthyn J S, **Notes on Jaffna**. Tellipillai: 1923

Murukan J (Rev), **Hinduism in Ceylon.**, Colombo: Gunasena, 1957. Navaratnam C S, **A Short History of Hinduism in Ceylon and Three Essays on the Tamils**. Jaffna: 1964.

Pfaffenberger B, **Caste in Tamil Culture. The Religious Foundations of Sudra Domination in Tamil Sri Lanka**. New Delhi: Vikas, 1982.

Raghavan M D, **Tamil Culture In Ceylon. A General Introduction**. Colombo: 1971.

Sivathamby K, **Iattitamnillakklyam**. 2nd Ed. Madras: New Century Book House, 1987.

Tambiah H W, **Laws and Customs of the Tamils of Jaffna**. Colombo: 1951.

Vithiananthan S, **Vithiananthan. Collection of Articles Written by Professor S Vithiananthan**. Jaffna: 1984.

Holmes R, **Jaffna(Sri Lanka) 1980**. Vadukkoddai: Jaffna College, 1980.

**Kanapathipillal Memorial Seminar on Sri Lankan Tamil Folklore. Collected Papers**. Ed. K Sivathamby. Jaffna: University of Jaffna, 1980.

Kenneth D, "Hierarchy and Equivalence in Jaffna, North Ceylon: Normative Codes as Mediators. **The New Wind. Changing Identities in South Asia**. Ed K David. The Hague: Mouton, 1976.

Raghavan M D, **The Karava of Ceylon. History, Society and Culture**. Colombo: 1961.

Raghavan M D, **Malabar Inhabitanats of Jaffna**. Paul E Peirs Feliciatajon Volume. Colombo 1956.

**Report of the Special Committee on Hindu Temporalities**. Sessional Paper V. Pts 122. Colombo: Ceylon Government Press, 1951.

Sivathamby K, "Inledning till de lankesiska tamilernas etnografi". Lanka 2 (1989).

Sivathamby K, "Niraiivurai". **Arrankaraiyan**. Ed. A. Shanmugada. 1989. Sivathamby K, "Some Aspects of the Social Organization of the tamils in Sri Lanka". **Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka**. Colombo: Social Scientists Association, 1984.

Sivathamby K, 2Towards an Understanding of the Culture and Ideology of the Tamils of Jaffna". **Commerorative Souvenir of the Public Library, Jaffna**. Jaffna: 1984.

## **The Ideology of Saiva-Tamil Integrity - Its Socio Historical Significance in the study of Jaffna Tamil Society**

The current ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka, especially because of the manner the government of the country had handled the problem, in the manner the popular Tamil response to those moves had manifested, and particularly in the manner militant Tamil opposition had been organised against the government moves, has brought about an overall and solidarity among the Tamils.

However, in terms of social formation - the social structure and relationships, the modes of production at the peasant level - we could easily see that there are three discernible Tamil "formations" within the Sri Lankan Tamils definitely two formations, the Jaffna Tamil society and the Batticalo one, with the Tamils of the Vanni district falling in between.<sup>1</sup> This is a formational difference which has been surfacing at all critical moments of joint Tamil demands or when solutions are put forward by the state.

Nevertheless, it is indisputable fact of history that, of the Sri Lankan Tamils, it was the Jaffna Tamil who had been most articulate politically and, if we go through the Tamil demands put forward at various times, we could easily detect also the fact that it was the "problem" of the Jaffna Tamil that had been universalised as the problem of the Sri Lankan Tamils. One should hasten to add that at this point that the successive Sri Lankan governments also failed to see the fact that there had been considerable uneven development within the Sri Lankan Tamils, and what is intended to cheer or stall the most articulate among them, viz the Jaffna Tamils, would hurt other Tamils worst. This was exactly what happened when educational handicaps and military moves were brought about... And when that happened Tamil politicians and militants had also begun to put forward in unambiguous terms the concept of Sri Lankan Tamil solidarity: the government had created the need for it. We could see this trend developing ever since the formation of the Federal Party in 1949.

So, any study of the history of the Tamil demands within the Sri Lankan context should necessarily focus on the nature and the role of the "Jaffna Tamil Society", the type of problems it faced, how it expressed and formulated them as its political grievances, and the type of solutions it put forward, should necessarily look into the factors that contributed to this internal dominance and the ideologies that "ruled" the socio-political perspectives of the Jaffna man. The pre-eminence of Jaffna has been brought about by many factors, its political articulation since the 14th century AD, when there was a kingdom of Jaffna, the historical experiences it underwent as a distinct administrative unit in the Portuguese and the Dutch periods, the advantage it had through the educational activities of the Christian missionaries in the early, and middle British period, the socio-religious and political experiences it had thrown up to maintain its identity, and the dominance it began to enjoy in the city of Colombo through its early entrepreneurs and the manner those "elites" came to be identified as symbols of Tamil culture, and politics. These coupled with the historical handicaps the Eastern Province, especially Batticalo (not Trincomalee so much) had in having been a part of the Kandyan Kingdom till late (thus not coming within the vortex of English dominated "westernisation" the rigid feudal formation and the consequent, inescapable rural-urban discontinuum, and the disparities in educational development, the total economic backwardness and social "stagnation" of the Vanni district, all enabled Jaffna to gain the social and political ascendancy it was able to have.

Amidst the social and political challenges which it had to confront, the Jaffna Tamil society developed two ideologies which have been the main source of its social, intellectual cultural and political sustenance. Those are

- a) the Saiva Tamil ideology propounded by Arumuka Navalar and

b) the reformist liberal ideology of the Youth Congress.

They are, in fact contradictory to each other but in the manner they have been coalesced into that society and its political articulations, one finds the specific characteristics of the Jaffna society emerging. A full scale intellectual history of Jaffna would be the apt academic way one could see how these two strands have been woven into one whole.

An attempt is made here to present in a preliminary manner the formation and the subsequent history, in outline, of the continuity of the Saiva Tamil ideology.

Any study of the process of social transformation and the political means adopted for it, would be incomplete without an adequate acquaintance with the ideologies that provide the perspectives for that transformation. It would be useful, at this juncture, to remind ourselves of the Althusserian concept of ideology. For Althusser ideology is a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts depending on the case) endowed with historical existence and role within a given society. He insisted that "ideology (as a system of mass representations) is indispensable in any given society, if men are to be informed, transformed and equipped to respond to their demands of their conditions of existence." <sup>2</sup>

Saiva-Tamil ideology is that social concept that is rooted in the intellectual and cultural conviction that Saivism and Tamil are essential to each other in determining each others basic characteristic, and that it would be impossible to have one existence (either as a Tamil or a Saivaite) without also being the other (Saivaite Tamil). This view is taken as explanatory of the entire history of the Tamils and of Saivism.

The implications of this view and the actions that flow from it are very far reaching. This argues that no other religion has had any formative influence on the Tamil man, his language and culture. It rejects completely out of hand, the contributions of the Jams, the Buddhists, the Ajivikas, the Muslims and the Christians to Tamil. It also rejects the place of the Vaisnavaites in the Tamil tradition. It is important to state unambiguously the fact that this ideology considers Saivism as the characteristic religion of the Tamils and that neither Vaisnavism, nor the innumerable rituals of the Little Tradition, which are part of the socio-religious life of the various caste groups, as constituting the foundations of Tamil social and religious life.

It considers Saiva-Siddhanta as the philosophical sheet-anchor of Tamilian life. Here again, it should be clarified that in the Saivism that is "assumed" within the context of Saiva Tamil ideology, neither Kashmiri Saivism nor Vira Saivism is even thought of as having something to do with Saivaite thought. It is the Saiva Siddhanta that flows from the Tevara and Tiruvacaka traditions, and conceptualised and formulated in the works of Meykanta Tevar, Arunanti Civacariyar, Umapaty Civacariar and the other theorists of the Saiva Siddhanta School of Hindu philosophy in the 13th-14th Centuries that is taken as Saivism.

This philosophy runs counter to be Advaita philosophy advocated by Sankara, and taken over as their religious view of the Smarta Brahmins. Thus within Tamilnadu where Saiva-Siddhanta was honoured it was also anti-Brahmanist. This philosophy upholds the supremacy of the Tevarams and the Tiruvacakam as the main source of its doctrine, thus placing them on par with the holy Sanskrit texts, which the Sanskrit oriented Brahmins did not favour very much. Thus this philosophy has within it a ring of pro-Tamil flavour.

By denying the Brahmin his place of importance, this school implicitly legitimatises the supremacy of the **vellala** caste as the custodians of the Saiva tradition. And to overcome the ritual assignment of the vellala to the sudra group, Saiva Siddhantins right from its inception had to argue for a new category of **satsudra** "good sudra" as opposed to the **asatsudra** "bad sudra". It is significant to note that Arumuga Navalar in his writing refers to the **sat sudra**.

The Saiva Tamil ideology as is presented within the Jaffna context has its founder and first exponent in Arumuka Navalar (1822-1879) of Jaffna. He formulated this concept in the course of his work to foster Saivism amidst Christian Missionary attack on it and to ward off the efforts of those missionaries in Christianizing the Hindus of Jaffna.

It is important to understand the socio-historical situation within which this concept and later the ideology, was formulated and explained within the Jaffna Tamil society.

This was formulated in the form it is perceived today, when Arumuka Navalar had to challenge the educational policy and practice of the Christian missionaries, especially the Anglicans, the Methodists and the Congregationalists (The American Mission) when they insisted on and formulated an educational policy and curriculum which taking advantage of the fact that the colonial government had made English the language of administration, had made Christianity an essential part of learning English language. The Bible was taught in the English class. This system of education which also introduced hitherto untaught subjects like Geography, Astronomy etc., did not give any place to the religions traditions of the Tamil people, especially at the beginners level. It should however be mentioned that the American Missionaries evolved a system of education in which, at a higher level, the native traditions were taken into count, and in fact efforts were taken to teach in Tamil medium.

Navalar responded to this system of “Christianizing” education by formulating a system of which the study of Tamil was undertaken within the religious and philosophic background of Saivism. He included subjects like geography in this curriculum. He also had a place for English in his scheme of things, and in the school he established at Vannarpannai one William Hughes taught English. When Navalar found that he did not have all the Saiva-Tamil texts (grammatical, literary and philosophical) readily available, he launched on a programme of editing and publishing the more important works. Navalar’s editions are to this day considered very reliable ones. All the major works of importance in the Saiva-Tamil tradition were published by him. In this regard it may not be out of place to mention that there persists among the more objective scholars of the Jaffna tradition a view that Navalar and his followers, in their anxiety to prove beyond doubt the indivisibility of the Saiva-Tamil character of the Jaffna literary tradition, underplayed, if not openly kept away, from public attention, the secular literature that was produced in Jaffna.

This is a very significant matter. From the few works that have escaped this literary “index” of the Navalar school, works like **Kanaki Puranan**, indicate a very lively, if not bawdy, literary tradition running parallel to the Puritanist tradition of Navalar. This underplaying of the secular, literary tradition was to show that no major literary activity in Tamil is possible without Saiva inspiration.

Navalar evolved his system of education and did most of his publicational activity during the six years of continuous stay in India (1864-1870). It is significant to note that Navalar during that time had the patronage and assistance of the non-Brahmin Tamil literary establishment and had in fact earned the wrath of the brahmins and also the Hindu liberals. The social implications of the education system based on the Saiva-Tamil unity are very important. Given Navalar’s stand on the need to maintain caste hierarchy, it was quite clear that education of the children from any of the untouchable castes would be out of question, if they continue to be Hindus. Once they became Christians their social mobility at least in a minimal way was assured.

In spite of the allround acceptance of the concept that education for the average Hindu child of Jaffna should be done within its cultural existence, Navalar school did not turn out to be a success. It was too religious. In a way it was also a missionary effort, in the saivaitic sense of the term. So after the passing away of Navalar a crucial modification was made in this educational concept viz. teach all the subjects in English medium, but within an overall Hindu framework, and that framework need not be over religious. If the Hindu environment is maintained it would be enough. This was the framework within which the Hindu-English schools started functioning. It could be said that this type of education started with the founding of the “Jaffna Hindu College” in 1888.

That led to an interesting social situation, that is, the student retains his Hindu background - he is taught all the basic text for that; in fact Navalar's books were taught - but in terms of his educational progress he could proceed unhindered in the English medium education.

More important was the social control of education exercised at the village level. Very soon the Hindu-English schools spread into the villages, but these schools were not open to the students from the depressed castes. They had to be at the primary level Tamil Schools built for them. Most of them went without education and when there came in the system of compulsory attendance, children from these castes studied up to grade V and did not continue thereafter.

In fact the major social change in Jaffna-Tamil society occurs with the abolition of the fee-levying system (free education) and with the adoption of Tamil as a medium of education at all levels, including the University.

Ponambalam Ramanathan, the celebrated Sri Lankan Tamil leader, who was the first educated Ceylonese member in the legislative council, was the political heir of the cultural legacy of Navalar. Both in politics and education he worked actively for the increase of the process of "modernisation" without widening the social frame work. This meant that he worked for a socio-educational and a political process that kept the traditional hierarchy intact with only those at the top enjoying the fruits of the British rule. This is well documented in the fact that he a) was against the extension of the right to vote to all adults. He argued that it would be degrading to request the pancamas - those of the fifth group - to vote and b) was opposed to equal dining of a teacher-trainee from one of the depressed caste groups - the pallar caste - seated along with other students who were from the higher castes. This happened at the Kopay Teachers Training College.

He founded the Parameswara College (for boys) and the Ramanathan College (for girls) and ran them very well.

With Ramanathan, the political dimensions of the Saiva-Tamil ideology was getting into shape. Politics is

for the upper groups, further and higher education will largely be confined to them. His writings were an intellectual exposition in English of the Saiva-Tamil ideology. Because of his eminence he was given a prominent place in the very first conference held for the propagation of Saiva Siddhanta, in South India. It should however be added that an association of the depressed caste Tamils opposed Ramanathan in his efforts to stop the extension of the franchise to all adults.

The Youth Congress of the late 20s and early 30s, with its policies of nationalism and social equality (based on the principles of Gandhism) constituted an ideological threat to the continuity of the Saiva-Tamil ideology, but with the political blunder it made, and the inevitable set-back it suffered, the Saiva Tamil ideology was back in prominence with the emergence of G.G.Ponnambalam as the major political leader. At the start Ponnambalam's political base was not identified that easily, but with the founding of the Ilankai Tamil Aracu Katci with a Christian as the leader - Samuel James Veluppilai Chelvanayakam - and the defeat this man was able to inflict on S Nadesan, the son-in-law of Ramanathan, the Saiva Tamil base of Ponnambalam was very much in evidence. It is true that Nadesan was defeated by Chelvanayakam when the latter was in the Tamil Congress: the point here is that traditional Saiva opinion did not like Nadesan being defeated by a Christian.

The formation of the Ilankai Tamil Aracu Katci (The Federal Party-FP) constitutes the first major ideological blow of the Saiva-Tamil ideology. The Saiva Tamil ideologues saw the FP as the political expression of a "Christian conspiracy" against the Hindu Tamils and ridiculed the concept of the Tamil speaking people (but forwardly the FP to accommodate the Muslims), as revealing their inadequacy as genuine Tamils. ("These are Tamils who just speak the language but are not genuine Tamils", was the barter against the FPs). The sarcasm was directed against the Christians and those plebeian leaders who had by then emerged as leaders. It should be added here that this accusation was very caustically replied to by C Vanniasinkam, an FP leader who came from one of the reputed high caste families of Jaffna.

With the increasing anti-Tamil stance of the government and the formation, first, of the Tamil United Front in 1972 and later the Tamil United Liberation Front, - TULF - in 1976 and with the emergence of Sivasithambaram as one of the leaders of the TULF (after the death of Ponnambalam) the Saiva Tamil ideologues were not that active. But it should be noted that during the early seventies, when the Tamil leftists were also supporting the government because of the LSSP-CP presence in the government, there was in circulation among some Hindu Tamils the view that Buddhist Sinhalese and Hindu Tamils and really nothing against each other, it was the Christians, who wished to continue their educational dominance through such leading schools, such as Jaffna College, Vaddukodai and St John's College, Jaffna, and who were at the back of all the problems. Yogendra Duraisvamy was the known exponent of this view and was active in promoting a Hindu-Buddhist dialogue on this issue.

The rise of Tamil youth militancy was a major setback to this way of looking at the Tamil problem. Firstly,

because the militants came from all ranks of society and the leadership was~ not based on caste. Any analysis of the social composition of the militant leadership will show that caste is not a matter of consideration among them.

In recent times there has been some echoes of the Saiva Tamil ideology seen in the writings of Natesan Satyendra and he has been heavily criticised for it<sup>3</sup>. It has been attacked as a “survival” found among of the Tamil expatriates who have not been able to understand the “liberationist” character of Tamil militancy.

It should also be mentioned that one of the chief factors that hit at the roots of the Saiva Tamil ideology had been the impact of the adoption of the Liberation Theology by many of the young Tamil Catholic priests, who took up the cause of the political liberation of the Tamils as a part of their religious work. Their work in the field of human rights has been significant. This has earned a name for them both among the militants and the public.

But to say that the Saiva Tamil ideology has been weakened or is no more effective is to run to hasty conclusions. It should be remembered that the social base of this ideology at the place where it really rises- the rich peasantry - has not yet been changed in any effective sense. The possibilities of this ideology slowing down the social radicalization of the militants is not improbable.

---

<sup>1</sup>K Sivathamby, “Inledning till Tamilernas etnografi”. Lanka 2(1989), pp. 28-43

<sup>2</sup>L Aithusser, For Marx. London: Penguin Press, 1965.

## **Strategies and Mechanisms for the Promotion of National Identity**

**Getting the Questions correctly before sitting down to  
answer them.**

I am becoming increasingly convinced of the fact that, we, who have known and seen better times during our life time, are hurrying up with answers for recouping the lost world of shared traditions without pausing enough to understand in exact terms the question that is in front of us and how it is posed to us. Let us not beg the question anymore. I feel it is our duty to get the questions correctly, for incorrect questions only lead to incorrect, if not misleading, answers.

**HOW TO BE A SRI LANKAN AND ALSO A SINHALESE/TAMIL/MUSLIM AT  
ONE AND THE SAME TIME. WITHOUT ONE IDENTITY NOT BEING  
SUBMERGED BY OR SUBSUMED WITHIN THE OTHER.**

It is implied within the formulation of this topic that this parallel and non-conflicting identity/identities is that throughout its known history Sri Lanka has not been able to throw up such a two-pronged identity, and in fact has enabled the emergence only of a Sinhala-Sri Lankan continuum.

The need to discuss this problem in this manner arises out of an ideology that prescribes an identity for the citizen on the basis of the territoriality of the State (England-English, India-Indian; Canada-Canadian, etc), whereas at some other level of existence the person has another identity, which is now termed "ethnicity" (Earlier the termed used to be "Community")

It is true that whereas in Sri Lanka we have not been able to develop that dual identity in effective political and/ or cultural terms, some other countries have been able to do that. That classic example is "India". At one level of cognition the Indian citizen is a Tamil / Malayalee / Gujarati/ Bengali/ Maharashtrian and at another level he is an "Indian". The success of the Indian polity lies in the fact that in the life of an Indian, both identities exist and whenever there has been a threat, to one identity by the other, an effort is made to resolve the crisis. And, generally speaking, the resolution is done within the context of an over-arching Indian-ness. Subramania Bharathi and Rabindranath Tagore are very good examples. Bharathi was a great Tamil and Indian, and Tagore a great Bengali and Indian.

The problem in Sri Lanka is that we have great Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, but to call them Sri Lankans, in the sense we call Nehru and Annadurai, Abul Kalam Azad, and Vallabhai Patel, Premchand and Takazhi Sivasankaram pillai Indians, is to raise a whole series of questions relating to patriotism that transcends ethnicity.

One should not miss to locate the answer that is lurking within the question itself. In India this non-antagonistic dual-identity has been developed through too major factors:

- i) An age long assertion of an over-all Indianness by emphasising a religio-cultural legacy
- ii) A great mass-based political struggle for the independance of India, fought over almost a century, climaxing with the leadership of a person called Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who activated even the lowest of the lowliest in India with a sense of Indian one-ness amidst many conflicting (often contrary) diversities.

The problem in the case of Sri Lanka is that since the formation of the polity for the entire geographical terrain referred to as Ceylon/Sri Lanka/Ilankai, there has never been a historical opportunity for all the people living in Sri Lanka to struggle for something common and thereby develop a common Sri

Lankanness. The level at which of the layer of Sri Lankanness was formed, was at the level of the English medium educated people and when, as we shall see later, for very urgent democratic reasons that medium of instruction had to be stopped this thin layer also began to disintegrate.

In attempting to answer the question posed by Seminar, it is crucial to understand fully the historical context in which the problem is posed.

It should be realised that this seemingly academic exercise is the manifestation of an urgent political necessity.

We are discussing the question of an overarching “national” identity, amidst a violent, ethnic war which is characterised by one of the world’s bitterest militant separatist struggles. And this “ethnic patricide”, as a great anthropologist put it, has demanded Indian military involvement because this struggle has now assumed a regional and an international significance.

This question of this urgent need for a national identity in multi-ethnic society is being posed at a time when we do not have an effective political forum for peoples of all groups to meet with a sense of equality as Sri Lankans. The parliament is no more the political forum. Let it not be forgotten that extra-parliamentary struggles have become the order of the day only after the parliament had lost its validity as a representative institution (Sixth Amendment). The fall of the parliament is symbolised in the fact that at both the times when the All-Parties Conferences had to be held, it had to be done at the BMICH and parliament, which in real terms has got to be the representative centre of all the political parties had been physically shifted from the central metropolis to a peripheral suburban area.

A devalued legislature necessitated extra parliamentary struggle, both in personnel and strategy. The personnel was no more the institutionalised politician (M.P) but the “victimised” youth, with a grievance against the system and its engineers and the strategy was not “aired” through political debates but militant violence.

With Sinhala-Buddhist, Saiva-Tamil continuums getting emphasized, the Christian Churches especially the Roman Catholic Church, was one institution which could have Sinhalese and Tamil at an equal position. The Roman Catholic Church too is a victim of the ethnic divide.

At the other end were the Marxist parties which had a truly “national” character. But with the change of policies on issues like the Language Question and the Constitution of 1972, they could no more hold together the upcoming Sinhala Marxists and the Tamil Marxists. The result was there was Sinhala Marxism and Tamil Marxism, something unheard of in the early Sri Lankan leftist traditions.

It is equally important to remember that the emergence of the angry young men is not a feature of the eighties, it has started in the late sixties and exploded in the eighties.

Let it also not be forgotten that this question of “national” identity is posed to a community of people who in their languages, and therefore in their perception, find it difficult to distinguish between “nation” and “ethnicity”. The words they have are “Jatiya” and “Inam” and these are applied to mean both the national and the ethnic group.

Again there is another matter of historical significance.

The religio-communal response (of the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims) to westernisation corresponded with the British governments decision to appoint unofficial members to represent local opinion in the legislature. These appointments were done on ethnic basis. Later with the extension of the system representatives for Kandyan Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims were appointed. Thus, The entry of the British style of parliamentary democracy was through the gates of communalism. And this factor had decided the subsequent political evolution. In a country where each of the communities looked

introspectively and never recognised any binding factor of unity or union, this had set a precedent that was never given up". Ethnicity, thus, has been a factor that has conditioned political thinking in this country.

The search for a national identity amongst multi-ethnicity has got to be done within the existing political culture. And that makes the task extremely difficult.

We should not overlook the fact that even in the way the question is formulated or put across in this title, there is an attempt to hedge the more basic question.

We are now speaking of "national identity" in a "multiethnic" society. But let us see whether the concept of a multi-ethnic society is already a politically accepted fact within this society. The answer is a regretful. "No". If we have accepted that fact then we would have created the necessary political, legislative and executive structures to demonstrate this demographic fact. Should we not begin where we ought to begin and that is create a firm constitutional structure, consonant with the multi ethnic character of the society and then start moving towards welding of these ethnic units into one national whole? Let us not once again put the cart before the horse.

This takes us on to the vital question of the mental attitude with which we confront this problem of "one nation - many ethnic groups". One can observe two trends at the level of the involved parties - the first one is "let us give something or do something to avert this present calamity: we can look into the rest later", the other one is "let us try to wrest something when the other party is weak". There is a third opinion seen at the level of the non-combatant political parties, and that is "let us not commit on anything we will watch the mood of the people". The third one reveals the lamentable weakness of the vote-catching parliamentarian.

The problem has assumed such serious proportions that unless those concerned and involved approach the problem with a sincerity of purpose and willingness to find a lasting solution, the problem of national identity will cease to be the question and separatism would triumph.

The problem has got to be understood in its entirety and the agreed solution should meet the demands of implementation.

With this readiness, let us get to the problem per se.

Any strategy adopted or mechanism evolved for the promotion of a "Sri Lankan" national identity, that would politically transcend one's ethno-cultural identity as a Sinhalese, Tamil or Muslim, automatically implies that no single ethnocultural identity is synonymous with this "national" identity. Moreover, it should also be understood that being a "Sri Lankan" does not undermine one's "Sinhaleanness or Tamilness or Muslimness".

The need therefore is the creation of an intellectual cultural, constitutional and administrative environment which would operate on this fundamental assumption. The economic underpinnings to this environment is the crucial factor. The distributive system should be above ethnic discriminations.

If we are sincere and genuinely keen about building one-nationness amidst multi-ethnicity, then we should be prepared to learn from the mistakes we have committed and make a determined effort to rectify them, and more importantly, not to commit them in the future too.

To do this we have to ask the question, "how do multiethnic societies build up one-nation solidarity, how has it been achieved in the better known multi-ethnic societies?" United States of America is a good example. Howard Wiggins in his contribution on "National Integration", in a Voice of America Series on "Modernization" (ed M. Weiner 1966) has listed a few of the more important factors in national integration.

“First the effort to cope with the foreign foes: second the political style of leaders who play down differences and guide men together, third the character of political institutions, such as the bureaucracy, the army, the school system, communications in general and the political parties and legislature, fourth a national ideology defining both goals and ways to achieve them: and finally the expansion of opportunity and broad economic growth. None of these comes automatically all are the result of human effort and human choice.”

Let us go through the list thoroughly. The current trend of the unexpected unity of the opposites manifesting itself in a very welcome gesture of earnest political dialogues, seems to arise because of the first one. But in this matter, we know it is more perceived than real.

In fact it is astonishing to go through this list of the internal needs for effective national integration. It could be stated without fear of contradiction it is the absence of factors 2, 3, 4 and 5 that caused the ethnic war in Sri Lanka. It was in the manner the bureaucracy functioned and in the attitude that the army showed, and in the manner the school system was organised and candidates for higher education chosen and mutual jealousies that the system collapsed. It is a pity that we have so far not had any political leader with a great Sri Lankan vision, who played down differences and guided men together. It is true that during 1970-77 some efforts were made towards integration. This was possible due to the personal commitment of individual bureaucrats and Marxist-oriented academics/intellectuals who served as advisors to the administration. But the constitution of 1972 undid everything.

Next we come to the question of integration. And the very concept of integration presupposes:

- a) a pre-integrated situation in which those who have got to be "integrated, have their own identifies, and
- b) the act of coming together is an "act of combining parts into a whole”.

Incidentally it is important to realise the important historical truth that the term national integration was never a part of our political lexis. But it must be remembered that in the case of India, perhaps due to the formation of Pakistan, at the very hour of its independence from British rule, there has always been an insistence on national integration. From political structures to cultural programmes there has been a conscious attempt to be seen to be not altogether Hindi dominated. One could at this time profitably remind oneself of the manner India responded to its problem of regionalism by the creation of lingualistic states (1956).

It is understandable that while we discuss the question of national integration as Sri Lankans, The role of education is foremost in our minds. This is due to two reasons:

- 1) It was though ~a system of education in English medium that Sri Lanka was able to produce the very few "Sri Lankans”, we have had, and
- 2) It was the educational question-the strategies adopted to choose candidates for higher education, specially for professional courses - that led to the sudden build up of a Sinhala hostility towards the Tamil and the Tamil youths’ response to form the Tamil Manavar Peravai (The Assembly of Tamil Students) which was the precursor of the militant movements.

Education is an area in which both equality of opportunity and the choice of the truly capable should be cleverly balanced. But within a colonialist educational system which provided the most important avenue for upward social mobility, by providing the qualification for entry into public service, education meant white collar jobs, and the scramble for white collar jobs necessitated the control of the administrative machinery to feed which these jobs were required. Thus in the first phase of post 1956 Sinhala nationalism the emphasis was on the “language issue”, because given the water-tight compartmentalisation of the medium of education “Sinhala Only”, also meant Sinhalese only for government jobs. At the school and the university level the concept used was the language quota, but this was not used in the case of

recruitment to the public services at which stage it was openly “ethnic”.

The role of education in the exacerbation of the ethnic war should not be seen only in terms of the job opportunities given and denied. More crucial aspect in the field of education was the psychological conditioning the educational system was providing the fostering of inter-ethnic hostility and hatred especially among Sinhala students. The study by Reggie Siriwardena has brought out in full how the Sinhala text books reveal this feature.

As one associated with Tamil text-book writing, I should not fail to mention that at the level of the Tamil text-book writing every effort was taken to give a picture of "integration". There were two separate Advisory Committees, one for Sinhala and the other for Tamil. And there was no single Committee to which both the Sinhala and the Tamil texts were submitted for comparative analysis and approval.

There was within the Tamil text another crisis. There was a complaint that the Tamil reader texts were highly Tamil culture oriented and were not providing adequate material for the Muslim students to identify themselves with the readers. This was immediately redressed.

At this juncture it should be noted that the educational administration of the country had been on ethnic lines for some time now. At the Ministry of Education level there are the Sinhala schools, Tamil Schools and the Muslim schools. And there is no one body of experts with the right of superintendance over what is being taught, how it is being done, having equal authority over all the three streams. It is true that the curricula syllabuses are designed at a central place and worked out. But there is no effective co-ordination. What is expected at the Tamil medium level is to see that what is done at the Sinhala medium is translated not even adapted. And with the rigid imposition of only one text to be used as the text book (the one prepared by the Educational publications Department) all over the Island, there is not much possibility for “adaptations”.

To cut the long story short, education in this country is yet ethnically conceived and administered. The national “integration” the text books (the Tamil ones) speak of is so naive that they are patently artificial.

The question is what to do with this system ? The initial reaction at the English speaking level is to think in terms of reverting to the English medium. (It is significant to note that within the open economic system coming in English medium has become more popular and the number of “International” Schools have increased: a survey of these schools is bound to bring out interesting sociological truths about contemporary post-Economy -Sri Lanka).

Reverting to English medium is no answer to the problem. Our problem is to build up an educational system which will help build a Sri Lankan identity among Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, that is, that we accept that there is a primary ethnic identity which operates within the national identity and the main proviso in this thesis is that no one is a better Sri Lankan than the other and that the country belongs to all. Such a system of togetherness cannot be built up through English. While forging national unity of all the ethnic groups, we must not deny the children of their birthright to be taught in the mother tongue. Of course, given the historical associations English has in Sri Lanka, it can be very useful link language at this time of the ethnic divide. But our aim must be to promote Sinhala-Tamil understanding through the Sinhala and Tamil languages. It should be a two-way affair. Education should be structured in such a manner that a sympathetic understanding of the Tamil and the Muslim is made available in Sinhala texts and the Tamil text should enable and understanding of the Sinhalese. Students should be “educated” To have mutual respect for each others ethnicity.

The challenge that education throws is to keep the balance between the democratic demands of education and the need for building up a meritocracy of the country’s available talent. And such a system should stand on the pillars of trust and confidence and not on mutual suspicion and discrimination.

The role of cross-cultural communication becomes very crucial in this context of things. In a way the problem Sri Lanka faces today is one of political homogeneity amidst cultural heterogeneity.

In discussing problems of inter-ethnic communication, one should avoid being simplistic.

."Ethno centrism", the over evaluation of ones own group in comparison with other groups, especially those viewed as rivals tends to dominate the political thinking of the groups. It also implies that under such conditions of mutual fear, there is a conscious effort to deter acculturation in the fear that it would lead to assimilation. Also there will be a conscious effort towards verification of one's own culture. In such situations, there is a tendency to establish a religio-linguistic continuum, for in pre-industrial societies, quite often, it is religion and language that enable the maintenance of traditional cultural variations.

The appeal for preservation of traditional culture and the movements for preserving linguistic purity are manifestations of ethno centrism. At non-industrial level this concern for traditional cultural seems to be rather high.

Before thinking of how to use the media, one should be quite sure of the possibilities of cross-cultural communication. We should at first assure the possibility of this communication among the people, and thereafter make intelligent and artistic use of the media.

The role of the media should be to develop a sense of belonging to a common country, a sense of belonging to a common country, a sense of togetherness and a deep respect for each others culture.

A review of the role of the mass media will reveal that the media have also inhibited the growth of the sense of togetherness.

What is important in the handling of the media is that one should be careful about media exclusiveness. By this is meant the practise found in both the print and electronic media to completely ignore and disregard what is going on/among other groups. This is very well seen in the stereotypes the media have created of the non-Sinhala groups. Also there is a sense of alienation among the non-Sinhala groups from what is considered the mainstream national events because there is no focus on them and whatever is presented is seen to be done more for the sake of doing it rather than in the spirit of doing it. One should not take this as a result of the ethnic wars. These have been there prior to the start of the violence.

So what is important is the will to develop the “national” identity. As long as that will is not there, there is not going to be much use in taking “superficial” attempts.

The question is how to develop the national identity. First of all the need for it should be felt and explained.

In this process the most forbidding factor is the bureaucracy. We should not forget the fact that in education the media split with its rigid exclusiveness, mutual antagonism, fear and hatred has taken place over the last thirty years and the personal we have in the professional and the administrative services are the children of this split. Let us not forget that they have an in built suspicion of the other ethnic group. Therefore, it is important to see that without proper education these people should not be allowed to administer these programmes for National Integration. We have known instances in the border areas where the bureaucracy has been solely responsible for the worsening of the ethnic relations in those places.

With a situation like this, the very notion on national integration could be seen as something fore-doomed. It is therefore important to think in terms of a national level body which will not only advise but monitor the work done in regard to integration.

The writing on the wall is quite clear - if we do not make a sincere attempt to develop a sense of “nation-ness” on the basic of ethnic specifics and a common will and need to live together, Separation is not far off

The lessons of Sri Lanka’s contemporary history, that without solving the problems one ethnic group is facing other groups - major or minor - cannot have a peaceful existence, have come in as a timely reminder for the need for this togetherness.

(Paper presented~ at the Seminar on National Identity in a Multi-Ethnic Society 1990)

## **Cultural Heterogeneity and Political Homogeneity**

### **An analytical sketch of the viability of federalism as a constitutional answer to the Language and the National Questions with special reference to Sri Lanka**

In a seminar, that is primarily designed to discuss problems of Federal polity, i.e. problems that do and could arise within an already existing federal constitution, this paper, by providing an analytical sketch of the socio-cultural background to the factors that led to the opposition to the federal idea in the Sri Lankan political situation, seeks to show that (a) an acceptable adoption of the federal solution depends on the historical traditions and the socio-cultural disposition of the communities within a pluralistic territory, and that (b) the substance of federalism could very well be incorporated by such innovative administrative measures as decentralization, regional autonomy etc.

An approach is made in this paper to view this basic constitutional problem in socio-cultural terms. This means that the problem will be phrased and presented in a manner the political scientist or the constitutional analyst would not, but nevertheless, would have to take serious note of. Culture-history as an indivisible part of Social History aims to provide such supplementary knowledge in a world of increasing inter-disciplinary research.

It is also necessary, by way of introduction, to highlight the fact that it was Marxism and the examples set by Marxist governments that have raised those questions, which in a circumscribing manner were referred to as “communal” and/or “language” problems, to the status of “National Questions”, thus giving a wider and deeper dimension. But true to the demands of historical materialism, each of the socialist countries have discussed and resolved upon solutions that reflect their own historical and political situation, nevertheless, throwing up structures that demand closer look. Thus Lenin’s warning holds good: “the categorical requirement of Marxian theory in investigating social question is that the question be formulated within definite historical limits, and, if it refers to a particular country (e.g. the national programme for a given country) that the specific features that distinguish that country from other within the same historical epoch be taken into account.”<sup>1</sup>

This is especially so in the case of many Third World countries whose evolution to statehood had been under varying historical conditions of imperialism and colonialism, so much so that at least one eminent leader in the struggle for national liberation from colonialism had been forced to express his suspicion that the right of self determination of the minorities, the very corner stone of the National question as the Russian Marxists saw it, could be threat to the political viability, and economic self assurance of newly emergent state.<sup>2</sup> In the historical situation of many of the Third World countries, which faced problems of this type, it would be essential to view this problem in relation to the precarious balancing of group loyalties within the struggle for National Liberation. If it is after the winning of political independence, the problem would have to be viewed in the light of the character and the pace of the decolonisation process that had led to the identity crisis of many communities in many of the new states.

This would, for a student of Marxism necessitate a re-reading of the Lenin-Rosa Luxemburg debate and would call for a better familiarization with the constitutional structures and conditions in countries like Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and China.

## **II**

If the constitutional structure of a given state could be taken as the balancing of the power structure within that state, it could then be said that this power structure and the balancing of it be studied in relation to the

identity of the peoples and groups who vest this power with the state. In such a case the socio-cultural foundations of the various groups assume great importance, for it is those areas of conflicts and agreements that would determine the character of the power structure and thereby its reflection, the constitution. Thus one would be forced to go into historical, socio-cultural and economic realities. Any discomfort relating to an arrangement made, or a system imposed, would therefore be a manifestation of the discomfort at the deeper layers of group existence.

Therefore one would be forced to study problems of political structure and constitutional arrangements in terms of the uneven development of groups within the state and also the development or the potentiality for development of one state in relation to other states.

But very often the uneven character of development does not manifest itself in discernible economic outline; it is seen in strained socio-psychological relationships that manifest as either language problems or ethnic conflicts or cultural antagonisms that would provide a characteristic emotional fervour and sustenance to the basic bread and butter issue. It is therefore important that such maladies are diagnosed at both their manifest-levels and basic origins. Viewed in terms of the need for federalism or problems that arise within a federal set up, problems such as the language issue, ethnic conflicts and cultural conflicts are areas which are being studied within special disciplines and the entire achievements and advances in the field of sociology, anthropology and mass communication be brought to bear. That is, let those be studied as political manifestations of sociological and social anthropological problems. And these very disciplines have contributed a lot to the understanding of these problems, though the bulk of the field studies constitute eclectic theorisations based on empirical observations.

### III

In many of the Third World States the National Questions manifest itself as

- (i) Inter Ethnic rivalry
- (ii) Language Problem, and
- (iii) Questions of Cultural Autonomy

These are not exclusive categories and very often these exists an ethnic group religion-language-culture continuum. Basically speaking these problems manifest in societies where there have been no smooth transition from one mode of production to another (in fact there had been telescoping of these) so much so that the social superstructure stands in glaring contrast to the changed or changing socio-economic relationships. Where the economic causes are overtly intractable and social factors are manifestly apparent, it is the latter that decides the behavioral pattern of the groups.

Let us take the question of language issue, one of the aspects of the National Question which has demanded constitutional arrangements that accept it as a basic factor of political existence (India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka). It is one, if not the major, aspect of ethnocentrism because it determines the cultural identity of a group. The explication of this problem, in purely anthropological terms by Levi-Strauss provides us with a wider social perspective.

“In the first place language can be said to be a result of culture. The language which is spoken by one population is a reflection of the total culture of the population. But one can also say that language is a part of culture. It is one of those many things which make up a culture-and if you remember Tyler’s famous definition of culture, culture includes a great many things, such as tools, institutions, customs, beliefs and also, of course, language. And from this point of view the problems are not at all the same as from the first one. In the third place, language can be said to be a condition of culture, and this is two different ways. First it is a condition of culture in a diachronic way, because it is mostly through language that we learn our culture. But, also from a much more theoretical point of view language can be said to be a condition of culture because the material out of which language is built is of the same type as the material out of which the whole culture is built: logical relations, oppositions, correlations and the like.”<sup>2</sup>

It would be profitable to read this along with Lenin's statement on the character of the language question - how and where it arises.

“Throughout the World, the period of the final victory of capitalism over feudalism has been linked up with national movements. For the complete victory of commodity production, the bourgeoisie must capture the home market and there must be politically united territories whose population speak & single language, with all the obstacles to the development of that language and to its consolidation in literature eliminated. Therein lies the economic foundation of national movements. Language is the most important means of human intercourse. Unity and unimpeded development of language are the most important conditions for genuinely free and extensive commerce on a scale commensurate with modern capitalism, for a free and broad grouping of the population in all its various classes and lastly, for the establishment of a close connection between the market and each and every proprietor, big or little, and between buyer and seller”.

It is clear that language problem in the sense of the efforts to make the language of a particular group residing within a territory the language of all official communications, thus pushing off the other language into the background becomes an acute one in the process of transition from feudalism to capitalism. In the Third World situation very often this is a post-independence activity and is achieved or attempted to be achieved through or along with the process often described as “modernization”.

The language question thus raises immediately the question of the continuity of the cultural traditions of particular groups. It is in this context one has to analyse rather carefully the concept of “Traditional Culture” The concept of “traditional culture” refers to the existence of pre-modern phenomena in a “modernizing” context Consciousness of a traditional culture really comes up in a changing situation; “the substance of culture changes with every new period in human history”. We do not refer to that basic creative force of culture, which necessarily changes with the changing times, thus providing the adaptability of the human species, but to “those traditions reflecting the tenacity of inertia, stagnation and routine”. This again, in economic terms would indicate uneven development.

Thus, the whole question of unequal and uneven development gets reflected and symbolized in effective cultural terms, through the language problem. The question of language identity leads to recall of heroic and aristocratic traditions of the past. Thus communal and ethnic identities are reinforced and these demand commensurate constitutional arrangements.

The process of “modernization” and its social concomitants need a yet closer analysis, for those induce certain entrenched stands, which, in their turn result in demands for constitutional accommodation.

A sociological truism, so sensitively observed by sociologists, needs full presentation here.

“....contrary to expectations that modernization brings in its wake universal perspectives and values that facilitate integration, “among the many benefits that modernization brings communal harmony cannot be included”. In traditional societies groups live side by side in considerable isolation, each relatively sufficient unto itself. The purveyors of modernization the roads, the schools mass media, market economy and participant politics pierce the shell of communal autonomy and erode the inward orientation that accompanies it. As the psychological universe of individual and group expand, they experience the contacts with outsiders from which communal distinctions become more clearly defined. Without those interactions communal identities remain implicit rather than explicit. The emergence of a sense of distinctiveness and recognition of boundaries between one's group and outsiders depend on exposure to a social universe beyond the confines, isolated traditional units. Hence the intensity of communalism may reflect the pace of modernization and not the absence of change the more people are brought into a wider area of interaction with other groups the more they become aware of the differences that divide them”.<sup>4</sup>

From Ghana to Philippines and from Pakistan to Sri Lanka this has been a feature which has demanded constitutional adjustments.

It is not only modernization, in the sense of opening up of new areas that brings in its wake renewed solidarity of communal groups. It has been observed, in relation to the newly emergent states that even industrialization and economic development “do not necessarily weaken communal bonds.”<sup>5</sup> If “modernization” is taken as an all embracing process, then political modernization in Third World Countries had been observed to lead to communalism”.

“The transition to independence has left multi-ethnic anti-colonial movements bereft of their source of unity and brought with it now foci for societal division in the scramble for the political and economic positions formerly held by the colonial power. Attempts of governments in new African and Asian States to establish effective control throughout the states. territories have further intensified communal awareness”.<sup>6</sup>

These lead to communication bafflers, which in turn lead to the strengthening of introspective solidarity groups. As political events continue to strain the relationships, political polarization and entrenchment of groups becomes inevitable. In such a situation the concept of “nation-state”, a Western legacy, which is so deeply rooted in our political thinking, becomes the first casualty, and where ever there had been no pervading cultural traditions as in India, the political disposition to maintain unity amidst diversity, tends to get eroded, thus giving rise to constant friction.

It is in this context one would have to view the majority-minority conflicts in pluralistic societies. Permanent minorities, under these circumstances demand reasonable accommodation within the political structure. “A permanent minority cannot change its inferior status or ask for independence by using the usual form of democratic decision making.”<sup>7</sup>

Ethnocentrism, “the overvaluation of one’s own group in comparison with other groups, especially those viewed as rivals” tends to dominate the political thinking under such conditions. It also implies that in such situation there is a conscious effort to deter acculturation in the fear that it would lead to assimilation. It is in such situations that efforts are made to establish religioliinguistic continuum for, under non-industrial conditions, it is religion and language that enable to maintain traditional cultural variations. The appeal for preservation for traditional culture and its over-romanticisation and the movements for pristine linguistic purity are manifestations of ethnocentrism. for it is at the non-technological and pre-modern levels that such cultural traditions are preserved intact. Invocation to the great glory of “feudal” cultures and predemocratic, monarchical civilizations is another form of its manifestation. These factors erode a sense of common belonging to the state and ensure sub-national differences.

Viewed against the inescapable necessity of economic development which states of this type need urgently, one could see that even territorial weightages given in economic planning is heavily coloured by the extra-economic factors, which tend to keep development at a lower level and group frustrations at an optimum level. In such situation even temporary migration of labour becomes suspect.

Thus cross-cultural communications are made impossible and that has a damaging impact on the sustenance of a common political structure.

Thus most of the Third World countries are faced with the dilemma of preserving cultural heterogeneity while striving for political homogeneity, both essential when viewed from, its own point.

The concept of federalism naturally plays an important role in the efforts made to reconcile constitutionally cultural heterogeneity with political homogeneity. If federal constitutions are, conceptually speaking of a basic pattern but no two federal constitutions are identically the same, it is because different socio-cultural situations have found different ways of adjustments.

The case of Sri Lanka is interesting in that, as much as the problems of politicised culture demand constitutional preferences, and reconciliation are forthcoming to implement innovations, which technically speaking are, quasi-federal in nature, the concept of federalism had been found contemptible and inadequate by its opponents and advocates respectively.

#### IV

This is due to the fact that the basic issue of economic grievances and fears have been polarised into almost irreconcilable position in terms of culture and history, demanding assurance for ethnic linguistic integrity.

Therefore the analysis of this question - the sketching of its historical evolution-will be done in terms of that super structure; thus highlighting the role of culture and historical traditions as rallying points for political and constitutional issues.

Let it also be emphasised, at the very outset that the majority-minority problem of Sri Lanka has neither been described nor discussed within the country as a National Question - that itself indicates the inherit socio-cultural disposition not to view the country as a polygynous unit. The Federal Party, based as it was on the two nation theory did not do it and neither the U.N.P. (United National Party) nor the S.L.F.P. (Sri Lanka Freedom Party) did it. The Marxist parties themselves (the Communist Party (C.P.) and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (L.S.S.P.) have not used this term in their Sinhala or Tamil presses. It was the Marxist intellectuals who started using this terminology. This reluctance to phrase the problem in that manner reveals an important socio psychological factor.

The main aspect of the problem is that no satisfactory solution has yet been found to accommodate the conflicting demands of the two groups - the majority wishing to restore its position after long years of colonial rule and a minority that wishes to reassure its continuance as a separate identity without losing the democratic rights that are to it. These conflicting demands are made within the historical situations of the process of "decolonisation" within which the ensuring of both traditional identities and democratic rights are sought. "Modernization" in Sri Lanka has largely been synonymous with Westernisation and thus the national question is intertwined with decolonisation and westernisation.

One other economic process also should be mentioned and its cultural contradictions noted. Traditional culture at its economic base is primarily pre capitalist. While efforts are being made to defeudalise the economic relations within each community there is an effort made to strongly identify themselves with the cultural identities that the precapitalist sometimes feudal superstructure has provided. The manifestations of the cultural revival as in the field of Arts bears ample testimony to this.

What are the politico-cultural factors that have decided this pattern of thought in Sri Lanka?

Naturally the geo-physical fact that this is an island, a separate geographical entity, assumes great importance. Equal importance must be given to the fact that it is very close to India but separate from it. The closeness of South India and its Tamil people to Sri Lanka's Northern part, which has the largest concentration of the indigeneous Tamils, is another factor of great significance.

On the other hand, it should be admitted that Sri Lanka, is the only place where the Sinhalese traditionally live. Their language, social organization, political structure, though derived from India, evolved to its present position within this island. Buddhism gave a religio-cultural identity to this group so much so the history of the Sinhalese is also largely the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and the cultural achievements of the Sinhalese are to be seen in their involvement with Buddhism. Thus, in spite of the intensive to christianization policies of the state aided missionaries (which has resulted in only 7.7% of the entire population becoming Christians), "Sinhala-ness" goes with the locally developed Buddhist traditions. Thus a language-religion continuum is established. The language and the religion complementarily sustain their identity. The sociological significance of taking the myths and legends relating to the visits of Buddha to Sri Lanka and to the founding of the Sinhalese as history and the reluctance even at research

level to treat them as such should also be noted. Buddhist traditions with its important places of worship in each and every part of the country, including those where the Tamils predominantly reside, takes the island as one unit and calls it the Dhammadvipa - meaning both the Island of the Buddha Dharma and the Island of righteousness. Therefore any counter claim is resented. Nevertheless it is true that Buddhist rituals and customs are decidedly Hindu, with a South Indian flavour. Hindu Gods and deities which find a place more in the Tamil Hindu pantheon - Murugan and Ganesa - are worshipped by the Buddhists too, especially at the peasant level. But the monastic character of Buddhism with a hierarchically ascribed position to the Sangha (the community of Bhikkus) has always resented the Hindu syncretism within Buddhism. Thus the Sangha both in pre-western period and in the nationalist phase, has emphasised the Sinhala Buddhist continuum and upheld it as the essential characteristic of the religio-cultural survival of this group. Significantly enough there had been a purist linguistic movement which frowned upon the excessive use of Sanskrit in the Sinhala language, a parallel seen in the Tamil revival in 19th and 20th centuries in South India. Thus the polarisation has been on Arya-Sinhala identity and Dravidian-Hindu identity.

It is but a common feature among certain Sinhala intellectuals to equate Sri Lanka exclusively with Sinhala-Buddhist Culture only. At that level all the minorities including the Sri Lankan Tamils are considered extraneous to the “national” polity and aliens to the culture.

Springs from this socio-psychological position the feeling that the Tamils are not only “alien” but a threat to the continuity of Sinhala culture because of the proximity of South India to Sri Lanka. There is also belief among the less informed that the entire India is Tamilian in character and therefore Sinhala has to be saved from them.

Of a population of 12,711,143. 71.9% are Sinhalese 11.1% are Sri Lanka Tamils, 9.4% Indian Tamils, - Sri Lankan Moors 6.5%,. Indian Moors 0.2%, Malays 0.3% and Burghers (Eurasians) 0.3%.<sup>8</sup>



Thus next to the Sinhalese, the largest group is the Tamils. Tamils fall into two categories - Sri Lankan Tamils (SLT) and Indian Tamils, the latter are the descendants of those South Indian Tamils brought to work in the British Plantations in Sri Lanka. These plantations are in predominantly Sinhala areas. By a clever process of social manipulation in which traditional social organizations were preserved within an essentially colonialist structure South Indian identity and are very often reminded of it. In the 1930's they numbered more than the Sri Lankan Tamils and by a process of citizenship laws and pacts with Indian Governments a sizeable proportion has been sent back to India. But the younger generation among them, cutting through rigid trade union regimentation have responded to the ethnocentricist calls of DMK in South India and the Tamil leaders of Sri Lanka. The Trade Union leaders themselves have now come to accept this position.

It is the Sri Lankan Tamils whose historical presence, educational pre-eminence and geographical concentration in certain areas and widespread dispersion and in all other areas coupled with their demand for political and economic equality as permanent citizens that have led to the "explosion" of the National Question.

The Sri Lankan Tamils, migrants at various times from South India, have continued to live in this country from times immemorial. The Vijaya legend, that mythologises the arrival of the Sinhalese to Sri Lanka speaks of Vijaya as taking his second wife after driving away the aboriginal Kuveni - a princess from Pandu (Pandya) country (certain Sinhala historians have responded to this embarrassing connections with the Tamils at the very beginning of their history, by saying that the Pandu country really was a North Indian State). But political establishment of Tamilian sovereignty comes with the establishment of separate state - the Kingdom of Jaffna - in the 13th century. The sum and substance of their position is that for the Sri Lankan Tamils, Sri Lanka is their country and their contribution to this country has not minimal. Sri Lankan Tamil culture is distinguishable from its South Indian counterpart. From social organization to dialectal variations the distinction is clearly noted in all spheres. The traditional attitude of the Sri Lankan Tamil to look up to the South Indian Tamil as his brother is a source of fear and repulsion to the Sinhalese.

Populationwise, though Tamils are concentrated in four areas (Jaffna 92.1%, Mannar 61%, Vavuniya 61.6%, Batticaloa 67%, Trincomalee 35%, Amparai 22%) they are dispersed throughout the 22 districts of the country; there is not a single district without and SLT population. It is in Colombo district they are the largest (6.3%) in the traditional Sinhala areas. This fact of concentration in certain places and dispersal in all areas had determined the character of their constitutional demands. It also indicates the economic dimensions of this problem.

The Sri Lankan Moors - constituting only 6.5% the population speak Tamil. But in a country in which the predominant groups adopt a language culture-race continuum, the Muslims, though Tamil-speaking, have avoided calling themselves by the language they speak. The politically articulate among them do not want to accept Tamil as their "mother tongue", though that is their medium of instruction from kindergarten to the University. One had described it as "home language". They, therefore, emphasize the Islamic character. They are also dispersed in all areas - in South, North, East, West and in the Central part; The only district in which they have the largest concentration is at the Amparai District of the Eastern Province 45%.

This acute Culture-conscious "compartmentalization" is a comparatively modern phenomenon, especially after the initial response of each of these communities to Christian proselytization and Westernisation - a process that started in the latter half of the 19th century. The anti-imperialistic responses of individual religio-cultural groups paved the path for each of these communities to behave in introspective manner. The Hindu-Tamils of Sri Lanka were the first to respond. Arumuga Navalar (1822-1879) reacted to Christian proselytization by emphasizing the Saivaite(Hindu) Tamil identity. But this was limited only to religious aspects, perhaps so, due to the caste system among the Tamils. But the Sinhala response to Christianization and Westernisation, initiated and propagated by Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) had

ethnocentric overtones. M.C.Sideek Lebbe's (1838-1898) activities decided the religio-cultural revival of the Muslims of Sri Lanka.

This religio-communal response to Westernisation corresponded with the British government's decision to appoint unofficial members to represent local opinion in the legislature. These appointments were done on community basis. Later with the extension of the system representatives for Kandyan Sinhalese, Low country Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims were appointed. Thus the entry to British style Parliamentary democracy was through the gates of communalism. And this had decided the pattern of subsequent political evolution. In a country, where each of the communities looked introspectively and never recognized any binding factor of unity or union, this had set a precedent that never was given up. The introduction of universal adult suffrage in 1933 pushed this trend of communal introspection further, for the peoples did not emphasize the international bonds except the geographical factors that bring them together. Thus communalism became an established political tradition. The extremely urban centered Marxist groups could not create any impact on this trend. The politics of Sri Lanka before and during the Donoughmore constitution (the collapse of the Ceylon National Congress, the boycott movement led by the youth of Jaffna, the Pan-Sinhala Ministry of D.S.Senanayake, the formation of the All-Ceylon Tamil Congress by G.G.Ponnambalam) led the country's thinking and the political behaviour of the then unpoliticised masses, on communal lines.

This is not to deny the fact that there had been Sinhala Tamil collaboration or Sinhala Muslim concordance. But they were the alignments of the emerging English educated middle class on issues which did not politically inspire or motivate the large mass of the population. But the failure of the Ceylon National Congress and the formation of the Sinhala Maha Jana Sabha indicate that communal considerations were primary factors in their relationships.

There were vigorous intellectual movements among both the communities Sinhala and Tamil that emphasised the differences and minimised the role of each other in the general history, which either sought to exaggerate or completely nullify the roles of Tamils and Hindu culture. The extension of the Swabasha (Sinhala and Tamil) media in schools provided fertile ground for the propagation of views. A revealing example of how the History was viewed is seen in the History of Sri Lanka written by John M.Seneviratne. Conceived as Freedom of Lanka series, the first volume dealing with ancient Sri Lankan History was titled "The Struggles Against the Tamils". The rest of the volumes were to be on struggles against the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British domination. The first volume dealt with Dutugemunu -His Life and Times (1946). Even researches at higher academic levels were not free from ethnic prejudices.

The economic basis of the rivalry was the new areas of employment which political modernization brought about. Sri Lankan Tamils, with the educational advantages they had over the Sinhalese were in government Service in preponderant numbers, in jobs ranging from P.W.D. Overseers, health inspectors and postmasters to doctors, engineers and civil servants. It could easily be said that in average Sinhala villages, the Tamils, especially from the Jaffna district, represented the colonial authority. The inherent conservative outlook of such officers coupled with their inability to participate in Sinhala-Buddhist activities created a feeling of alienation from them among the Sinhalese. This image of the Tamil officer as the extended arm of colonial rule did play a major role in the excesses that occurred during the subsequent "communal riots". To add to this, the small trader in the Sinhala village too was a Tamil man.

As mentioned earlier, ethnic division assured a position of permanent majority for the Sinhalese and that of permanent minority for the Tamils.

Such a polarisation on the basis of culture which promoted and provoked ethnic rivalry, ruled out the possibility of any appeal to any force that could emphasize the unity in diversity, as was the case in India.

When after the second World War the country received a new constitution (1946) and subsequently independence (1948) the stage was set for a full display of these political rivalries. The first government in Independent Sri Lanka, though not fully reflective of the cultural base of the Sinhalese, decided to define the

citizenship of the country by disenfranchising the Tamils, who under universal suffrage were able to send in 1947, seven representatives from the plantation areas in the Central Region. It was the disenfranchisement which led to section of the Tamil Congress, under the leadership of S.J.V.Chelvanayakam broke away and thus the Federal Party was born.

The Federal Party (F.P.) was founded on the two-nation theory i.e. it argued that Sri Lanka consisted of two distinct nations, one the Sinhala and the other the Tamil-speaking nation. The concept of Tamil-speaking nation was intended to bring together the Tamils, Sri Lankan and Indian, and the Muslims together. As seen earlier, this concept never found, support with the Muslims.

“F.P. activists represent Tamil subnationalism. In the beginning they advocated federation with a future Dravidian state of South India. Later opinion stabilised in favour of a “Tamil homeland” federated to a Sinhalese Ceylon (Sri Lanka).”<sup>9</sup>

This was confirmation of the worst of the Sinhala fears. The Tamil name of the party – Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (The party for Tamil State in Sri Lanka) revived the worst of the cultural, communal fears of the Sinhalese. It must be admitted that the name of the party was never expressive of the federal intent of the party and quite predictably the Sinhalese thought this was an attempt at the division of the country. Its name indicated that it was logical manifestation of the gathering interethnic rivalry.

It was with the full political expression of Sinhala nationalism in the elections of 1956 that the confrontation came about. The very name of the political groups that played a decisive role in that election of 1956 and thereafter for some time would reveal the religio-communal polarisations - (Buddha Jatika Balavegaya -National Front for the Protection of Buddhism), Buddhist Republican Monks, Dhamma Samaja Party, Eksath Bhikku Peramuna, (United Front of Buddhist Monks), Jathika Vimukthi Peramuna (Sinhalese National Liberation Front), Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People United Front), Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Sinhala Mahajana Peramuna (The Sinhalese Peoples’ Front) Tamil Resistance Party, Tamil Self Rule Party, Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi.

The Federal Party, which in its first convention declared that:

“The Tamil speaking people in Ceylon constitute a nation distinct from that of the Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nationhood, firstly that of a separate historical past in this island as ancient and as glorious as that of the Sinhalese, secondly by the fact of their being a linguistic entity different from that of the Sinhalese...and finally by reason of their territorial habitation of definite areas which constitute over one third of this island”<sup>10</sup> and in its convention of 1956 formulated the following demands.

- (1) “the adoption of a federal constitution and the creation of one or more linguistic state or states enjoying the widest autonomous and residuary process consistent with the unity and external security of Ceylon.
- (2) bestowal on Tamil language of absolute parity of status with Sinhalese as an official language.
- (3) amendment of the citizenship laws to grant citizenship laws on the basis of residency in Ceylon, and
- (4) the immediate cessation of colonizing the traditionally Tamil-speaking areas with the Sinhalese people.”<sup>11</sup>

This formulation was a direct response to the “Sinhala Only” issue, which sought to make Sinhala, the only official language of the country.

Thus the concept of Federalism in Sri Lanka came to be associated in Sinhala minds with a denial of majority claims.

This indeed is an irony of history for in the history of Sri Lanka the idea of Federalism was first canvassed in 1926 by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who in 1956 represented and symbolised Sinhala nationalist resurgence. In 1926, on his return from United Kingdom he advocated federalism as a suitable constitutional device to overcome the problem of uneven development of the various regions within Sri Lanka. He went on the basis that the unity in such a federal set up would be the Kandy an areas, the Low Country areas etc. At that time, even though the problem of communal representation was very much in the air, the federal idea was never mooted as a solution to the "language problem" for it never manifested itself at that time. Nonetheless one could see a geographical and cultural basis in the proposal of 1926, for, the differences in terms of - the mores and modes of living differed between the Low Country, Sinhalese, (who came under the Western Influences) and the Kandyan Sinhalese (who were living in the geographically more isolated hilly areas came under the Kandyan Kingdom which was annexed by the British only in 1815.)

In the post 1956 situation, the demand for Federalism, as a basis to solve the language problem was understood by the Sinhalese as a means to divide the country.

The opposition to Federalism was further heightened by the fact that the F.P. stood for absolute parity of Sinhala and Tamil Languages. The Federal position was taken as a demand for special rights within Tamil areas and equal rights in Sinhala areas, which the Sinhala thought would exterminate the Sinhalese, Bandaranaike himself gave expression to those fears in the debate on the Official Language Bill - 1956.

"People in the South saw this thing scaring in the face - the parity of official languages - and felt that it would be gravely detrimental to the continuance and progress of the Sinhalese language; that it would almost imply the extinction of the Sinhalese language...They (the Sinhalese) felt that the Tamil language was spoken by so many millions in other countries, and possessed a much wider literature and as the Tamil speaking people had every means of propagating their literature and culture, it would have an advantage over Sinhalese which was spoken only by a few million people in this country. They felt that not only in Northern and Eastern provinces was there as majority of Tamils, but there was a large number of Tamil people in Sinhalese provinces - Indians who are also Tamil speaking peoples - and that taking into account that business was in the hands of the Tamil speaking peoples even to some extent - a fairly large extent - and that in our large towns all this would create a situation when the natural tendency would be for the use of Sinhalese to shrink and probably in the course of time almost to reach the point of elimination".

In this situation, where federalism was taken as the unjustifiable assertion of minority rights or threat to the majority community the more basic concepts relating to federalism, viz the territorial dimensions of development, its ability to contain within itself heterogeneous groups, were never discussed.

Thus it may be said that it was the peculiar socio-cultural situation that denied the chances for considering the viability of federalism as a solution to these problems.

The truth of this statement is further established by the fact that the grievances expressed by the Federal Party were considered real by successive governments. In fact within one year of the passing of the Official Language Act. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact (the B.C.Pact) of July 26, 1957, implicitly accepted that, (a) the use of Tamil should be ensured in the Tamil speaking areas, (b) there must be decentralised administration to facilitate regional development and (c) that colonization that would change the ethnic complexion should be stopped. Bandaranaike also passed the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No.28 of 1958). But the Sinhala mass fixation of federalism as dismemberment was so wide spread that any leading Sinhala based political party in opposition could easily rouse Sinhala mass action against the government of the day by dubbing any agreement reached with the Federal Party, which since 1956 is the largest single representative political organization of the Tamils, as dividing the country. Thus the UNP could create problems to the Bandaranaike government in 1958 by its march to Kandy against the B.C.

pact, the S.L.F.P. in 1965 to 70 could attack the UNP for having come to an agreement with the FP to form a National Government.

The role of the Federal Party in national politics also deserve closer observation. It is true that it was the mass campaign that it initiated that led to the first two communal clashes of the country (1958, 1961) which led the government to take measures against its members of parliament. At the same time because of their comparative solidarity, which reflected in the constancy of their number in the legislature, they began to play an important role in making and unmaking governments. With the periodical swing of the Sinhala votes between the UNP and the S.L.F.P. it was important for Sinhala parties to maintain perfect lobby contacts with the F.P. This led some parties to request the electorates to provide them with an absolute majority, so that they might not depend on the graces of the Federal Party.

The post 1970 political developments in Sri Lanka which led to the abandonment of the idea of federalism by the Federal party, the chief spokesman of the minority rights, indicate the culmination of these forces. The first major political reality of this period was that there was a United Front Government consisting of S.L.F.P. and the traditional Left Parties which has swung from an initial position of party for Sinhala and Tamil to Sinhala only with reasonable use of Tamil and regional autonomy for the Tamil districts. This reasonable use of Tamil and regional autonomy for the Tamil districts. This U.F. Government formulated a New Republican Constitution in which the worst fears of the Federal Party were written into. The Use of Sinhala only and the pre-eminence of Buddhism; thus giving constitutional expression to the Sinhala-Buddhist identity. The new constitution did not incorporate within itself even the reasonable use of Tamil, which meant that no constitutional guarantee was given to the rights of the Tamil minorities. Faced with an overwhelming majority of the government, which made them ineffective in terms of political bargaining, the F.P. was driven to the next logical step viz, the declaration of the intention to have separate state.

This was also the phase, which proved conclusively, much to the chagrin of those who stood for federalism and for inter-communal amenity, that none of the forces that actively contribute towards national integration were at work.

Heward Wriggins in his contribution on National Integration in a Voice of American series on Modernization has enumerated a few of them obviously the more important once, as essential for national integration....."First the effort to cope with foreign foes; second the political style of leaders who play down differences and guide men forward together; third, the character of political institution, such as the bureaucracy, the army, the school system, communications, in general and the political parties and legislature; fourth the matter of a national ideology defining both goals and ways to achieve them; and finally, the expansion of opportunity and broad economic growth. None of these comes automatically; all are the result of human effort and human choice."<sup>13</sup>

Fortunately for the country the first one was not there and unfortunately and tragically the other factors too were not there. In fact it could, in converse be said that it was due to the lack of them that the problem was attitude of the army and the organization of the school system that heightened the issues. The whole question was sealed on the problem of expansion of equal opportunity. It is true that during the 1970-77 period some, efforts were made towards integration. This was possible due to the personal commitment of individual officers and Marxist - inspired academics on intellectuals who served as advisers. Their efforts were fruitful: in the fields of literature and Drama. But those were only the exceptions in an otherwise gloomy sharpening of conflicts.

The history of federalism in Sri Lanka had been one of accentuating the dormant conflicts, instead of seeking to smoothen them out. It was the socio-cultural milieu of the country that determined this. Much as the demand for federalism was inevitable in the circumstances of the Tamil minority, it was also equally doomed not to succeed because in Sri Lanka, that "special mode of political as well as social behaviour..., involving a commitment partnership and active co-operation on the part of the individuals and institutions that at the same time take pride in preserving their own integrities" did not exist nor was consciously developed.

The historical experience of the island during its colonial days and the period of decolonisation, had mitigated against the concept.

But the objection to the form was mainly a problem of socio-cultural sensitivity. For at pragmatic political level, the solution suggested to overcome this problem, decentralization of centralized authority, regional or district autonomy are forms of territorial distribution of authority which form an aspect of contemporary federalism. It is heartening to note that, as far as Sri Lanka is concerned every major national party had advocated it.

"Perhaps a new word should be coined for the new combination of decentralization and autonomy on the sub-national levels with participation on the national level. Some may agree today with the observation made by Alexis de Tacqyeville, who in studying the American experiment with constitutional federalism, 170 years ago, concluded "The human understanding more easily invents new things than new words"<sup>14</sup>

(Paper presented at the Vth Indian Congress of Indian Social Scientists, Calcutta- 1978)

## REFERENCES

1. Lenin - The Right of Nations to Self-determination in Selections from Lenin and Stalin on National and Colonial Question Calcutta 1970 p. 16
2. q.v. Amilcar Cabral on National Question - Selected Writings of Rosa Luxumberg (Ed. 1-brace B.Davies) New York - 1976, p.39
- 2a - do -

3. Lenin, op. cit. p. 14.
4. Smock, David and Audrey, The Politics of pluralism, New York 1975, pp. 3 - 4.
5. ibid. p. 4
6. ibid. p. 5
7. Duchacak, Ivo D. Comparative Federalism. New York 1970, p.93.
8. Population statistics are taken from the Statistical Abstract of Sri Lanka - Department of Census and Statistics - 1973.
9. Wilson, Jayaratnam, Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947- 1973. MacMillan London, 1974 p. 195.
10. G.V.Kearney, Robert, Communalism and language in the politics of Ceylon, U.S.A. 1967, p.94.
11. ibid. p. 95.
12. Ceylon, House of " Representatives, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard Vol.4 - No.9 Col. 837.
13. Weiner, Myron (ed.) Modernization - The Dynamics of Growth Voice of America Forum Lectures, 1966 p. 207.
14. Duchacak, op. cit. p. 356.

# **THE SRI LANKAN TAMIL QUESTION**

## **1977-1983**

### **A Survey of the Tamil political demands and activities in Sri Lanka since 1977, including an analysis of the socio-economic and ideological orientations of the struggle.**

#### **Introduction**

This paper is an attempt to describe and analyse the gradual worsening, since 1977, of ethnic relations between the two major groups in Sri Lanka culminating in the violence of July 1983. In the analysis, attention will be focussed on the actions and the responses of each of the participant groups which have now locked them into positions from which they find it difficult to diverge and led them into an impasse in which it has become essential for an "external" third party to mediate between them; these events and responses will be described and discussed so far as they affect the Tamils and so far as they constitute reactions bearing a cause and effect relationship from the Tamil side. It is hoped that this will contribute, in a very limited way, to an understanding of how this problem has assumed its present gigantic proportions.

#### **The current situation**

The ethnic violence of July 1983 in Sri Lanka has evoked such an international response that it is no more just another internal problem of the country. The relations between the two major communities of the island have worsened to such an extent that it has become essential for another country to mediate between them.

The most appalling result of the July events has been the political vacuum that has been created among the Tamils living in Sri Lanka. There is no representation now of the Sri Lankan Tamils at any institutional level of democratic participation, from parliament to local government institutions. Even the few Tamils who are yet part of the government have expressed their dissent to with regard to some of the actions done in the name of the government. The credibility of the government with the Tamils is so low that without a third party standing guarantee there is no possibility of any face-to-face talks, leave alone, a settlement. The dilemma of the government was clearly manifested in that it could not keep the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) out of the subsequent Round Table discussions, even though it had earlier legally banned out of existence all political organisations committed to separation.

The position of the TULF, the leading political organization of the Tamils, is such that it found itself unable to continue in parliament. The Parliamentarist approach it has been advocating and adopting, much against bitter opposition from within, has collapsed.

The youth movement, with the proliferation of mutually opposed groups, also finds itself unable to continue with the type of attacks and actions by which, it was always argued, it was exposing the in-built oppressive, and anti-Tamil character of the government in power. It also accepts that the time has come for different strategies.

The situation therefore is one of a real impasse, with each of the three groups the government, the TULF and the Youth Movement now engaged in a soul-searching reassessment of strategies. The Sinhala forces that determine the intensity of the anti-Tamil character of the government are also going through a similar process but that is outside the scope of this paper.

The most important political reality of post-July 1983 Sri Lanka is the getting together of all the Tamils living in Sri Lanka. They feel now that a common cause binds them together. As Mr. S. Thondaman the Minister of Rural Industrial Development in the present government and the leader of the Ceylon Workers' Congress, the dominant trade union of Indian Tamil plantation labour, has said:

Whether it is Amirthalingam, or the CWC, or Maheswaran, I told you earlier that an identification has been created by the manner in which all Tamils have been treated in the past. We have different problems but when there is a determined policy to discriminate, to harass, to persecute, to crush, then all the Tamils whether in Tamil Nadu or here or anywhere in the world feel that injustice is done.<sup>2</sup>

It is evident that this profound unity of the Tamils cuts across class and religious boundaries. It is significant that the Catholics, who were considered "outsiders" to the Tamilian cultural legacies, considered synonymous only with Hindu traditions, have now emerged as disciplined fighters for the Tamil cause. The sudden impoverishment of the middle-class Tamils of Colombo by the looters and arsonists of July 1983 and the common sharing of the facilities at the various refugee camps also worked forwards bringing about a Tamilian unity.

All these factors have made the Tamils feel that they have a common cause. This closing of the ranks has made it impossible for the government to give the impression that the Tamil problem is only confined to the Jaffna area and that Tamils of the other regions are quite happy with the present state of affairs. The riots have exposed fully the insecurity of the Tamils in all non-Tamil areas. The Tamils feel that this insecurity is faced also by the Muslims, who though Tamil-speaking do not consider themselves as Tamils but as a separate ethnic group distinct from the Tamils. The recent attempt to form a United group of all Sri Lankan Muslims is a manifestation of those feelings.

The irony is that this worsening of inter-ethnic relations should have happened during the period of (and because of forces within) a government that had (a) allowed one of its members - K. W. Devanayagam - to be one of the founder members of the Tamil-United Front (TULF) in 1972 and (b) had accepted the existence of the Tamil Problem and had suggested a round table discussion as a means of finding a solution, implying thereby the need for the abandonment of entrenched positions in order to arrive at an acceptable and real solution to the problem.

However, a chronological review of events since 1977 would reveal that, given the events from 1977 to 1982, the events of July 1983 were not only predictable, but also inescapable.

### **Events In Inter-ethnic Hostility and Violence.**

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| 1977             | (UNP government in power)   |
|                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- widespread attacks on Tamils following an incident at a carnival in Jaffna; police attacks on people in Jaffna and Batticaloa; Sinhalese attacks on Tamils and their property in the Western coastal towns, Ratnapura and in some plantation areas.</li></ul>   |
| 1978<br>language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The inauguration of the Second Republic, Tamil given the place of a national language without a proper definition of its status, described by N.M.Perera as "too little too late".</li><li>- bombing of the Avro aircraft by the militants.</li><li>- the dramatic "exposure" by Cyril Mathew of the role of Tamil examiners in marking</li></ul> |

Tamil medium scripts in the G.C.E(A.L.), Examinations much to the detriment of the Sinhalese students; this charge was never investigated officially in spite of repeated requests for an impartial and objective investigation.

- 1979
- Attempt to transform Vavuniya into a Sinhala majority district by attacking to it certain parts of Medawachiya, later given up because of the TULF boycott of parliament.
  - Emergency 1979, consequent to the murder of Curuswamy, Inspector of Police by the youth militants.
  - Police and army excesses in Jaffna.
  - The Anti-Terrorist Act.
  - December 31 deadline (given in July) for the eradication of Terrorism in Jaffna. The operation was declared successful at the end of the year.
  - Appointment of a Commission of Inquiry into the powers of the intended District Development Councils (DDCs).
  - Attacks on plantation labour.
  - Attacks on Tamils at Trincomalee.
- 1980
- The Development Council Act No.35 of 1980, which was accepted by the TULF.
  - Increasing dissatisfaction of the Youth with the TULF for collaborating with the government for benefits seem to be marginal and meagre.
  - Rift within the TULF and the break away of the Sutaniran group.
- 1981
- Attack on the People Bank at Neervely and the robbery of money; unleashing of army and police brutality in Jaffna.
  - Burning down of the Public Library, TULF office, and the Eelanadu press in Jaffna.
  - The fiasco of the D.D.C. elections; there was blatant manipulation of the poll by the government and the results had to be postponed because a number of ballot-boxes could not be accounted for; yet the TULF emerged as winners.
  - Events in Batticaloa-an inter-school match between a Sinhala and a Tamil school led to ethnic violence spreading from Amparai. State forces play a prominent role.
  - Attacks on Tamils living in Negombo.
  - The killings at Embilipitiya.
  - Attack, arson and rape at Ratnapura, Polmadulla, kahawatte. Rakwana and Belangoda.
- 1982
- Clashes at Trincomalee.
  - Violence in some villages in the Batticaloa District.
  - Presidential Elections.

- D.O.Cs. found ineffective. Deterioration of political relations. TULF decision not to sit in parliament beyond 1983.
  - Youth attacks at Anaicoddai, Nelliadi and Chavakkacheri Police Stations.
  - Sinhala-Muslim ethnic clashes - Galle.
  - Referendum to extend life of Parliament.
  - Ordinance empowering the police and the army to dispose of bodies without judicial post mortem inquiries.
- 1983
- Killing of Police officers at Point-Pedro.
  - The ambush of an army unit at Paranthan.
  - Attempt to bomb the Jaffna Secretariat.
  - Local Govt. Elections in May 1983. TULF contested; Sutantran group and militant youths opposed TULF participation; Violence against the TULF; low turn out at polls.
- 1983
- Election day attack on army by youth militants and consequent army attack on the civilian population in Jaffna; there was much loss of life and property.
  - TULF forced to resign from local bodies.
  - Attack on Tamil students at Paradeniya.
  - TULF MPs boycott parliament.
  - Attack on Air Force personnel at Vavuniya; armed forces retaliate and ransack the town.
  - Armed Forces attack Tamils and their property in Trincomalee.
  - The killing of 13 army personnel in Jaffna, leading to
  - The violence of July 83; in Jaffna, the security force retaliated by killing 54 civilians.
  - Sixth Amendment to the Constitution outlawing advocacy of separatism; demands that administrative personnel and those connected with the judiciary should sign oath of allegiance to the Constitution, disavowing separatism.

The events speak for themselves. When these events are related to the anti-Tamil agitation that has been whipped up among the Sinhalese in a planned manner and to the general worsening of the law and order situation of the country<sup>3</sup> July 1983 emerges as something not unexpected; it lay in the logic of events.

Special mention should be made of the activities of the armed forces in the Trincomalee district in the first part of the month of July and before the Tamil peasants of areas like Pankulam were systematically attacked; almost all their places of worship were demolished. Most of them were agricultural labourers and farmhands who had migrated from the plantations and were settled in these areas. This makes it impossible to get the real figures of death and damage. The July '83 events of Colombo and its suburbs were only an extension of what was going on in Trincomalee in the previous months.

## **The Situation in 1977**

These events reveal quite clearly that there was a gradual worsening of the situation, one event leading to another, with greater intensity and more potential for fearful consequences and that the absence of a determined effort to come to grips with the problem was a causative factor in this worsening of the situation. A closer look would reveal that all these trends which assumed frightening proportions later were present in 1977 itself; it was the manner in which things were allowed to drift that led to disastrous consequences.

Firstly it should be noticed that the demand for a separate Tamil Eelam (the demand is for Tamil Eelam not Eelam; Eelam is the ancient Tamil word for Sri Lanka derived from the term "Hela" "Elu"; what is demanded is the Tamil portion of Eelam), had already been made in 1977. In fact it was made in 1976 when the TUF transformed itself into the TULF; the use of the term "liberation" indicates the socialist orientation the front was claiming for itself.

This indicates the emergence of the TULF as the major political organization among the Tamils. It is true that a section of the Tamil Congress under the nominal leadership of Kumar Ponnambalam, but really manipulated by the diehard anti-Christian, Hindu professional and feudal-clique of Jaffna, had been articulating itself, sometimes taking seemingly radical positions relating to separatism. But this group was living only on the omissions of the TULF; it had no initiative of its own within Jaffna. It did, however, serve one purpose. When Kumar Ponnambalam contested the Presidential Elections in 1982 it was possible for Tamils living outside the traditional Tamil areas to express their solidarity with the Tamils of the East and North by voting for Ponnambalam. With emerging youth militancy and changing styles of political leadership, the group went out of active, cognizable political existence. It must also be noted that the government patronage given to this group was merely to make the point that the TULF was not the only Tamil party.

Though the TULF was Union of the Federal Party, one section of the Tamil Congress and the CWC, it differed from its constituent groups in one important aspect; with Amirthalingam and Siva Sithamparam emerging dominant leaders, with actual power in hands of the former as the leader of the Federal Party, the leadership of the TULF was not as Colombo-based as had been the case with the earlier grouping. This is not to say that these two leaders did not belong to the same professional class which had given rise to the earlier leaders; it is only that they were not part of the Colombo establishment. In Amirthalingam one could see the emergence of the Jaffna-based party activist, Sivasithamparam, though a Colombo based lawyer, has firm roots in Jaffna. They were more accessible than the previous leaders - G.G.Ponnambalam and S.J.V.Chelvanayagam. It is true that class-wise there was no major change, but these two men were, in behaviour and spirit, more typical sons of the soil.

Prior to 1977, especially during the final years of the SLFP rule (1975-77), the TULF had received the support of the Colombo-based Tamil professionals and entrepreneurs, who as a class had not done so well under the SLFP. With the coming of the UNP in 1977 the picture changed. The Tamil professionals and entrepreneurs of Colombo gave their support to the UNP and pressurised the TULF to come to some understanding with the government. But the new leadership of the TULF (Amirthalingam) did not belong to the Colombo based establishment and it was difficult to achieve the same degree of rapport with them as had existed earlier. In this context, the Colombo-based groups needed, in order to advance their own interests, persons who could exert influence both on the TULF and on the Sinhala bourgeois i.e. in the state apparatus. This is the explanation for the rise of Dr. Jeyaratnam Wilson, an academic and the son-in-law of Mr. Chelvanayagam, who had been earlier the leader of the Federal Party and of Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam, a lawyer - academic and a son of another Federal Party stalwart. It is through them that the Colombo Tamil establishment sought to reassert its dominance. There had been building up a hostility to the Colombo-based leadership within the FP and the TUF. The TULF appears to have a leadership that is a half way house between the Colombo based Tamil bourgeoisie and Jaffna-Batticaloa based middle-class Tamilian interests.

Equally important in bringing about the present impasse has been the total collapse of Left activism in Tamil areas. Except in Trade Union matters the Left has ceased to attract political attention in the Tamil areas; even the organized trade union activity tends to be concentrated only in Jaffna town - not in other areas. The LSSP was the worst affected; it had lost its local leadership. The Communist Party too was not quite effective, a price it had to pay for its collaboration with the SLFP. It is significant that only those leftist groups which had cut themselves away from the "traditional" left found it possible to be active. This is how the NSSP was able to come into some prominence in Jaffna particularly.

With the collapse at the national level of the leftist parties, which were the only available political institutions in which Tamil and Sinhalese could be members with a common ideology and equal status and a say within the party, it was inevitable that ethnic divisions emerged as the sole basis of polarization.

This is perhaps the place where another significant factor ought to be mentioned: there has been a total absence of any dialogue at an intellectual level between the two major ethnic groups since 1977. In spite of its avowedly Sinhala position, the SLFP, perhaps because of its connections with the Left parties which continued to have regular Tamil intellectual cadres, was able to maintain a fruitful dialogue in cultural matters.

Literary and theatrical activities were co-ordinated and there was some cross fertilisation. But after the UNP coming to power, in 1977 there was a total collapse of the Sri Lankan cultural consciousness. The open economy policy perhaps did not encourage such development. Besides the cultural emphasis of the U.F. regime has been on the revival or reactivation of Buddhist and Sinhala rites and practices; in the drama, for example, it has concentrated on the revival of the Tower Hall theatrical tradition, a hybrid convention of nineteen twenties and thirties with a strong Sinhala nationalist content. With this emphasis, the alienation of the Tamils from the state machinery became almost total.

By 1977, the acts of political violence by militant youths too, had begun. Alfred Thuraiyappah a member of the SLFP and one time mayor of Jaffna, was killed in 1976 and a few bank robberies (Puloly and Puthur) had already taken place.

Equally well established was the pattern of state violence against the people. The action of the Police during the IV Conference on International Tamil Studies held at Jaffna had led to deaths of a number of innocents.

And the post - 1977 events show that it was these trends that worsened, interacting upon each other, and assuming fearsome proportions until at last they climaxed in 1983. The trends as they stood in 1977 and worsened consequently demanded a political solution. The absence of such a determined attempt towards a real political solution was all the more tragic, as the UNP had, before coming to power, realized the need for such a solution.

The United National Party accepts the position that there are numerous problems confronting the Tamil speaking people. The lack of a solution to their problems has made the Tamil speaking people support even a movement for the creation of a separate state. In the interests of national integration and unity so necessary for the economic development of the whole country, the Party feels such problems should be solved without loss of time. The party, when it comes to power, will take all possible steps to remedy their grievances in such fields as:

- (1) Education
- (2) Colonization
- (3) Use of Tamil language
- (4) Employment in public and semi-public corporations.

We will summon an All-Party Conference as started earlier and implement all its decisions.

*The Manifesto of the United National Party for the General Elections of 1977.*

It behaves the student of Sri Lankan politics to identify in clear terms the factors which inhibited the UNP from implementing the remedies suggested by itself, more importantly how sections of UNP took to open campaigning against the Tamils in the very problem areas identified by the party.

### **Post - 1977 Events and the basic grievances of the Tamils.**

The actions and activities leading to an exacerbation of Inter-ethnic hostility are interlinked and they also came in such quick succession, making it difficult to know identify any particular as cause/effect. The acts of the militant youth and the excesses of the army had such a relationship. But whatever the sequence was, it was undeniable that the Tamil masses were being subject to harassment by the party and the police. The fear of the armed forces and increasing difficulties in obtaining legal redress alienated the people from the government.

These actions and activities relating to the Tamil question could be seen at two levels:

- (I) the parliamentary level at which the UNP tried to solve the question either unilaterally or in association with the TULF which had emerged as the main opposition party in parliament.
- (II) the extra parliamentary level - the militant expression of the grievance and the actions taken to contain such expression through the use of the armed forces and the police.

Before discussing the characteristics of activities at these two levels, it is important to identify the main grievances of the Tamils that arose out of and were being aggravated with the events in and after 1977.

The first one undeniably is the increasing insecurity of Tamilian life and property in both the Sinhalese and the Tamil areas, arising in the Sinhala areas through the actions of Sinhala militants and in the Tamil areas, through the army and the police. This explains the demand for the establishment of Home Guard units as part of a settlement on a constitutional basis; it is a manifestation of the feeling of insecurity felt by all the Tamils as well as of the feeling that, with the failure of the state to guarantee such feeling, the lack is up to the people themselves.

Closely connected with this sense of insecurity is the real loss of traditional Tamil areas to Sinhala settler colonists. This process of Sinhalaization, carried out first in the Negombo and Pullalam areas, was continued in the Gal Oya Project region; Amparai District, the only district where there was a Muslim majority was subject to demographic change. The most crucial change was undertaken in the Trincomalee district; the pattern was establishment of state sponsored agricultural settlements where Sinhalese, not already resident in the area, were brought in and settled as colonists. Such state sponsored demographic changes were engineered - in Mannar and Vauniya districts, too. The worst was in the Batticaloa district in the Kalkudah and Paddiruppu electorates. This problem began to acquire a new dimension, when plantation labourers, displaced from plantation areas due to the Land Reform measures of 1972 and 1974 began to take up residence in the outlying agricultural lands adjacent to the traditional Tamil areas. Plantation labourers were the worst hit by the ethnic violence of 1977 and 1980; after constant attacks, more plantation labourers migrated to settlements mainly in Trincomalee and Vauniya districts. Much of the Sinhala fury was directed against them. In fact a closer look at the events of July 1983 would reveal that these were really an all - Island extension of the pogroms initiated in Trincomalee in May and June.

This Sinhala colonisation was being done with the full blessings of the administration, the best example being the attempt to make Vauniya a Sinhala majority district. There was also Sinhala colonisation at Madhu Road. There was also allegation made that migrant Sinhala fishermen were being used to threaten the traditional residents of the areas. The middle and lower levels of the bureaucracy, imbued with anti-

Tamil feelings, were enthusiastic proponents and implementers of these policies; their role was also significant in the worsening of ethnic relations<sup>3</sup>.

The use made of the Buddhist symbols of worship -the bo-tree and the stupa-in consolidating both legitimate and illegal settlements is significant. These provided a religio-cultural legitimization to the process of Sinhalization. In this connection the emergence of sacred cities in these areas of colonization - Seruvila and Digavapi - deserves close study. The use of this the Buddhist symbols of worship to legitimise Sinhalese “intrusion” into Tamil areas could also be seen in the controversy over the Buddha statue in Vavuniya town.

The significance of these grievances - insecurity and loss of traditional areas - is that these exposed the lower strata of the Tamil population to the cruel vicissitudes of ethnic disharmony, which until the sixties had been largely confined to the middle classes. The full fury of state terrorism was turned against Tamil inhabitants living near the newly established Sinhalese settlements.

Attacks on Hindu temples have been a characteristic feature during periods of ethnic violence; the worst damage during this period occurred in the Trincomalee district. The periodic statements issued by such organizations like the MIRJE (Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality) and the CRM (Civil Rights Movement) testify to the damage caused to life and property and to religious establishments.

While oppression was thus widening and bringing within its vortex hitherto unaffected persons and areas, the intensity of discrimination in education and employment faced by the middle classes was also not on the decrease; it was in fact becoming worse. The following tables provide the percentages relating to employment in state and public sectors in recent years. The figures provided relate to 1980.

#### **State Sector (excluding Corporation Sector)<sup>4</sup>**

Category	Percentage of Sinhalese	Tamils	Others
Professional and Technical	82%	12%	6%
Administrative and Managerial	81%	16%	3%
All Categories	84%	12%	4%

## **II**

#### **Public Sector (State and Corporation Sectors Combined)**

Professional and Technical	82%	13%	5%
Adm. and Managerial	83%	14%	3%
All Categories	85%	11%	4%

In the field of education, the main source of irritation has been the discriminatory admission procedures to the Universities. And here again the admission figures for 1981, 82 and 83 reveal the real position relating to the intake:

### Admission to Universities

#### 1981

	Sinhalese	Tamils	Others
Arts	82.8	13.3	3.9
Physical Sciences	63.5	31.8	4.7
Biological Sciences	72.5	24.3	3.2
Engineering	67.2	28.1	4.7
Medicine	72.7	23.1	4.3
Law	73.0	16.2	10.0
Total	76.4	19.2	4.4

#### 1982

Arts	79.4	16.3	4.3
Physical Sciences	61.1	33.5	5.5
Biological Sciences	71.7	21.1	2.2
Engineering	66.9	28.5	4.5
Medicine	72.4	25.3	2.3
Law	68.8	24.0	7.3
Total	74.3	22.0	3.9

#### 1983

Arts	77.1	16.4	6.6
Physical Sciences	73.4	23.1	3.6
Biological Sciences	70.3	23.1	3.6
Engineering	66.4	28.1	5.5

Medicine	72.8	22.1	5.1
Law	78.5	11.5	10.0
Total	75.0	19.3	5.7

The District Quota System of Admissions under which the majority of the students were admitted, no doubt, provided an opportunity for a larger number of Tamil medium students from districts like Mannar, Mullaitivu and Batticaloa to enter the University. However, these entrants were mainly into the Arts stream; the initial enthusiasm very soon gave way to severe disappointment, for after three to four years, there was graduate unemployment in areas where the social expectations through University education were very high. Youth discontent thus increased.

The lack of education facilities in that of the Tamil areas at the secondary education level is something which has not been highlighted. Even in Jaffna district, a good number of schools are understaffed there is a lack of proper facilities at the secondary school level.

It is no secret that recruits to the movement of youth militancy came mainly from the G.C.E.(A.L.) students and now, with graduate unemployment, the pool of recruitment seems to have become wider.

The most frightening development in the field of education was the attack on the Tamil students at Peradeniya University (May 1983). The fact that this could take place at Peradeniya, the major University in Sri Lanka and the tone-setter of intellectual liberation, was seen as a sure indication of the increasing insecurity of Tamil life and property.

The other major grievance of the Tamils is the neglect of the Tamil speaking areas in terms of economic development. There has been no major utilization of the physical resources of these areas and the only economic activity that was doing well - the cultivation of subsidiary crops in Jaffna - was affected badly by the liberal import policies of 1977. Perhaps one of the few favourable aspects of the impact of the open economy on the Sri Lankan Tamil rural population was that it enabled them to go abroad for manual labour. This exodus of manual labour, unheard of in these areas since the days of travel to the federated Malay states, helped to ease employment problems and paved the path for higher earnings at certain lower levels.

A look at these grievances brings out clearly what Thondaman has described as the common cause that today unites all Tamils as Tamils.

It is against this background that one has to review the political activities at the parliamentary and extra parliamentary levels. First, the activities at the parliamentary level.

### **The Collapse of Parliament as an effective national forum**

The parliamentary elections of 1977 brought out in clear terms the pattern of political polarization in the country. Except for a few seats in the East (e.g. Kalkudah) the TULF emerged as the dominant political party of the Tamils. The SLFP debacle (8 seats) made the TULF the major opposition group in the parliament and Amirthalingam, the TULF's parliamentary leader the official leader of the Opposition. It is true this leader of the opposition was not in any way the alternative Prime Minister, as the British parliamentary practice would have it, but in this leadership; the collapse of the left and the inevitable ethnic polarization of the country was fully manifest. The writing was on the wall.

Since independence it has been the parliamentary practice to have one, at best two, Ministers from the Tamil community and allocate to them such portfolios as Posts or Local Government; this was done to express the composite “national” character of the government. The ULF government of 1970 had to get a non-elected member to the Cabinet. The UNP did not have such a problem; K.W. Devanayagam had been checked as an M.P. from the Batticaloa district and he was made Minister of Justice. But the art of Cabinet making is also the craft of cutting the ground from under the feet of one’s political opponents. The UNP government of 1977 resorted to this by weaning away C.Rajadurai, the first M.P. for Batticaloa and one of the pillars of the TULF in the East, by offering him a portfolio; the government had to legalise this breakaway by an amendment to the constitution. But the most important inclusion was that of Thondaman, the leader of the CWC and therefore of the plantation Tamils, which, in terms of UNP strategy, assured the breakdown of the TULF; more than that, it also was expected to ensure smooth labour relations in the plantation sector.

The J.R.Jayawardena Cabinet is significant in the history of Sri Lankan Tamil politics, in that, for the first time, there was no Minister from the North. It was difficult to get a break-through among the TULF M.P.s from that area. However, this lacking was also sought to be used for strategic ends to show the absence of Tamil participation in the UNP Cabinet as one relating to the North only and that other Tamil interests were represented adequately.

Having thus singled out the North for special treatment, an attempt was made to make a UNP thrust into the North through the party organization. UNP branches were opened and organizers (for electorates) were appointed. Such attempts at political patronage by the party in power were not something new; the SLFP had in the period 1970-77 established the precedents for this practice.

At this point, it is necessary to refer to an important aspect of the sociology of the political culture of the Sri Lankan Tamils, especially those of Jaffna. Because of its long colonial subjugation, the longest in Sri Lanka, Jaffna has perfected over the centuries the art of plucking socio-economic benefits from the government in existence, pretending ideological concurrence, but never in fact allowing any change in its basic socio-economic relations. This game of “being close to the ruler” has been played with manifest devotion and commitment by retailers of political power at the grassroots level in order to maintain and advance their social dominance. In a community that was away from real political power, backdoor retailing of political patronage was developed as an art. There was a time when one had to pretend to be a Christian. Now, it was only a case of erecting a few *pandals* and ordering a few garlands for visiting Ministers. Another line of communication for patronage was through such forms of association as with Sinhalese classmates. The system had been perfected so well that there had always been in Jaffna somebody “influential” with some Minister and well-known to be so. Thus there were SLIP organizers in the early and the mid seventies, now there were the UNP organizers. The system was so well entrenched that even the leftist leaders in the UF Cabinet were considered accessible to some. But such men were not the acclaimed left leaders. The leading leftists of Jaffna were never suspected of political opportunism, but those SLFP and UNP organizers were. This explains the hostility of the youth towards these black marketeers of political patronage.

One of the chief factors that has tended to trod regular political authority in the Tamil areas is this highly abusive system of political patronage conducted through non-representative channels. The elected representatives were overlooked and the “organisers” of the party in power were used as the official channels for looking into any meeting the needs of the electorates. Unlike in the Sinhala areas where, generally speaking, there was a sharp UNP/SLPP polarization at electoral and rural levels, with each of the groups enjoying benefits during the period of the office of the respective party, this black marketeering of political parasites who owed nothing to the people whom they were supposed to convert to the party in power. They gave false impressions of undemonstrable political support. But at times of crisis they just vanished from the scene.

The UNP had one advantage in its early years after 1977. There was a feeling among the English educated, senior, citizens, the opinion leaders of Jaffna, that J.R. Jayawartena, unlike the plebeian SLFPers, would do something, tangible to solve some of their problems.

But the most disturbing feature in the UNP approach to the national question was that, while on one hand there were these attempts to dismember the TULF at geographical and sub-cultural levels, there was allowed to grow a vociferous anti-Tamil, Sinhala-Buddhist lobby in the Sinhala areas, with emphasis on Buddhism and intolerant of any Tamil presence, in the Sinhala areas. Cyril Matthew, the Minister for Industries, was the leader and the ideologue of the movement.

The main thrust of this propaganda went against the very basis of the UNP's stand on the national question as publicized in their election manifesto. With such forces within the party in power, the round table conference referred to in the manifesto became an impossibility. Nevertheless, the Tamil problem was a real one and efforts had to be made to solve it.

The TULF position was equally self-contradictory. Here was a party that had won the election on the pledge that "the members, when elected, will besides being members of parliament, will also be members of the National Council of Tamil Eelam working out a constitution for Tamil Eelam and taking steps, through peaceful means or direct struggles to bring into existence Tamil Eelam and to consolidate it".<sup>5</sup> Such a party was called upon to voice in Parliament, as the official leader of the national opposition the discontents of all the people, Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Burghers against the government. The TULF was not ideologically ready for such a role.

However, being caught up in a situation like this, in which there is a gap between what has been declared and what is immediately around - the concrete reality - was not something new to them. There had always been a gap between their rhetoric and the reality. The dominant partner of the TULF was the FP, which, when it demanded federalism (Samasti or Kuttatchi) had called itself the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi in Tamil (the Sri Lankan Tamil State Party). It was the semantics of the term "Tamil Arasu" that had been exploited against the FP and its demands.

This time the TULF had additional problems. Its own youth wing and the emerging movement of youth militancy demanded that they reject the parliamentary road to Tamil liberation; agitation within Parliament did not appear to solve any of their problems and they began demanding more effective action from the leaders of the TULF. Here the TULF was caught in a dilemma; there was (and is) a group which believed that continuance within a Sri Lankan state would best serve its interests. This group was not alive to issues such as discrimination at the level of pre-University education which meant much to the youths; non-attention to such problems meant losing the support of their youth. It is this situation - the loss of youth support that reveals the internal class and ideological contradictions within the TULF.

The 1978 Constitution, with its system of proportional representation, had opened up the possibility of the election of at least one or two UNP members from the Tamil districts. This alienated the Tamils still further and pushed all the component groups and classes within the Tamil movement to press, with greater intensity, for regional autonomy.

With increasing polarisation of views, it was not possible for the new Executive President to satisfy the TULF with a nominal raising of Tamil to the status of a national language. Something substantial had to be given in terms of regional autonomy.

The District Development Council was the concept that was evolved to meet this need. A Presidential Commission was appointed with a TULF nominee also in it (Neelan Tiruchelvam). In their report, the majority commissioners took the view that the "Commission was not appointed to or required to examine the ethnic problems which have manifested themselves in the demand for a separate state (but).... directed to devise a system of devolution and democratic de-centralisation which would enable the people of the

twentyfour districts to define their development priorities, to energise the district administration and give impetus to the process of social and economic transformation.”<sup>6</sup>

Even though the Commissioners, made this declaration there is no doubt when one considers the history of the concept of devolution in Sri Lanka that the DDCs were intended as one means of satisfying the demands of the Tamil people for regional autonomy.

Every government since 1956 had been trying to formulate some kind of non regional administration to meet the demands of the Tamils. But these attempts had been taken only at any administrative level without the necessary parallel political activity, viz, educating the Sinhala masses on the need to give the Sri Lankan Tamils, as equal citizens within the same polity, some form of discernible local administrative management so as to ensure their cultural integrity. In fact, it could even be said, that the contrary was true, that is, there was always an effort to implement some measure of devolution behind the backs of the masses. And in a political culture, where parties in opposition are always opposed to those in power and any type of political accusation or expediency was considered as proper within the realms of political ethics, the opposition always exaggerated any contemplated arrangement as a sell-out to the Tamils. This type of politics led to a sense of insecurity and distrust among the Tamils and a sense of fear and phobia among the Sinhalese.

The TULF'S acceptance of the DDC proposal created a major split in the party. Coming as it did after the racial riots of 1979, the TULF had to face bitter opposition from its own rank and file. Their youth wing collapsed and the “Sutantiran” group, (Siutantiran, was the official organ of the party and was owned in main by the family of the late S.J.V Chelvanayakam) led by Chandirahasan, Kovai Mahesan, Dr. Tharmalingam and Eelaventan split away from the TULF and formed the Tamil Eelam Liberation Front (TELF). Objective analysis made of the DDC Act regarded it as too little too late.<sup>7</sup>

Balakrishnan in his analysis of the DDC Act stated-

The main provisions of the Development Council Act relating to the organisational structure and the relationship between the different institutions do have a resemblance to the principles and arrangement suggested in the dissenting report (of Neelan Tiruchelvam). But this is only in form and not in substance for the actual power relations between the Centre and the districts have been weighed more in favour of the agencies of the Centre.

And predicted –

The Development Council scheme and its major provisions, presented as they are now, are not adequately geared to achieve such objects (decentralization and devolution of power). For this reason, as well as others which could be political, the TULF may not be able to work the scheme in the districts coming within its purview with that degree of “independence” and “autonomy” it could hope for”.<sup>8</sup>

This prediction ultimately proved correct, much to the bitterness of the TULF; but before this, the elections held for the DDCs eroded the very concept of electoral democracy.

A Grama sevaka, an oooice messenger (peon), several village level cultivation officers, junior clerks and assistant teachers were amongst those who officiated as senior presiding officers at the elections to the Jaffna District Development Council. Theses were not officials duly nominated by the Commissioner of Elections but were hand-picked by the high command of the United National Party. Altogether 150 officials picked by the Commissioner of the Elections were replaced by nominees of the ruling party just before the poll.<sup>9</sup>

Under the control of such officials, the election was conducted with many infringements of electoral law; several ballot boxes were missing and were never recovered, yet the results were declared valid.

The elections were held during the period police and army excesses unleashed after robbery of the Neervely branch of the Jaffna People's Bank and three days after the burning of the Jaffna Public Library. It is important to note that the TULF was the only opposition party taking part in the DDC polls, trying to fulfil its part of the obligation. In spite of the major disruptions, people voted *en masse* for the TULF.

It is interesting to note that in the context of contemporary events the entire idea that the DDCs were primarily aimed at a solution of the problems of the Tamils was lost sight of.



Commenting on the parliamentary debates on the police excesses in Jaffna, the Lobbyist of Lanka Guardian (15.6.1981) said:

Lands Minister Gamini Dissanayake did not contradict any of the basic facts given in Mr. Amirthalingam's detailed and vivid account of the days and nights of terror and rampage in Jaffna. Explaining the situation, the Minister spoke of near mutiny in the police. Surely that points to the first step. The vast majority of the people of Jaffna desire to live their - ordinary day to-day lives in peace. Those who are duty bound to guarantee peace and order cannot be the instrument of lawlessness, disorder and security. When normal conditions are restored (not merely physical but psychological) then real political solutions can be considered if the main parties to the dispute are capable of facing up to that daunting challenge.

The part I have emphasised reveals clearly that the whole idea that DDGs in themselves were an attempt at a political solution was forgotten at that stage. Such had been the extent of mishandling of the democratic processes.

This was followed by a no-confidence motion on the Leader of the Opposition moved by Neville Fernando, a member of the party in power, the UNP. This act was in itself unprecedented in a parliamentary system of government; but it served to reinforce the growing feeling that the parliamentary system had become incapable as a framework within which a meaningful solution to the Tamil problem could be evolved.

The Presidential Election of 1982 revealed the loss of faith of Tamils in Jayawardena; the SLIP candidate polled more Tamil votes than the President in Jaffna. What was left of the faith in parliamentary politics was further eroded with the referendum in late 1982, which sought to lengthen the life of the parliament up to 1989.

These events, coupled with the manner in which the Tamil questions was treated by the Parliament, a manner that appeared to the Tamil people as superficial and dishonest, convinced the Tamils that Parliament had been devalued in the context of the executive presidential system and had ceased to be an effective forum.

The local elections of 1983 were a landmark in that the militant youths called for a boycott of the elections and forced many of the contestants to withdraw their candidatures. Many of the elected Chairmen and members of Councils also decided, in the face of this pressure, not to take office.

This raises a question of great constitutional significance. How important is the parliament as an instrument of political action under the present constitution? It is quite clear that with an executive President, the parliament is unable to formulate from within its own deliberations any major activity. Also, the executive president except for his periodic addresses does not have regular channels for consulting the parliament. The cabinet, over which he presides is only a part of his political machinery. The parliament is often not "exposed" to the thinking of the President; and the President is seen outlining his approach on many problems at public functions.

The Round Table Conference on the Tamil Question is adequate demonstration of this feature. As Mervyn de Silva, editor, Lanka Guardian, commented, with the starting of the Round Table Conference the parliament was shifting to the BMICH, the venue of the Round Table Conference.

In such a situation, one is not surprised that politics tend to take an extra-parliamentary character, at the level of those who were worst affected by the activities of the government.



The increasing pressure of the militant youth movement and the impact of their extra-parliamentary tactics was soon brought within the parliamentary focus, when the TULF decided to nominate Kuttimani, one of the militant youths held in detention, to the vacant seat of the Vaddukkoddai constituency. This symbolises in a way the fusion of the lines of Tamilian struggle, and quite understandably provided the extremist Sinhala forces with the opportunity of charging that the TULF, in its turn, argued that it was done to highlight the state repression that Tamils were facing.



When it was ruled that Kuttimani could not sit as an MP in parliament, the TULF nominated Neelan Tiruchelvam, their leading intellectual and by now their chief negotiator. His nomination was taken as an indication of the leadership of the TULF, unaccustomed as they were to the styles of metropolitan lobbies, accepting the need for a Colombo-based person to become more effective in such dialogues.



With the July events and the logical expression of the ideology behind the events in the sixth amendment, designed to pacify the Sinhala demands, parliament ceased to be the natural forum in which the Sinhalese and Tamils could not meet in amity to agree or disagree.

## **The Indian problem as part of the Sri Lankan –Tamil Question**

The statement of Thondaman quoted earlier in this article, shows that he has viewed the July 83 incident as one affecting all the Tamils in Sri Lanka. This development is something interesting for in terms of political struggles and most importantly, social formation, the Indian tamils in Sri Lanka are distinctly different from the Sri Lankan Tamils.

“The leadership of the up-country Tamils conscious of the geographical distribution of their population, i.e. the fact that they have to live in traditionally Sinhala areas, have openly diassociated themselves from the separatist demand of the TULF. The Indian Tamil leadership also accepts the language policy of the present government...(but) it could be said that it was only when the demands of the majority were articulated in extremely chauvinistic, ethno-centric terms denying even the right of habitation in certain areas that the Indian Tamils and the Sri Lankan Tamils came together in demanding joint political solutions.”<sup>10</sup>

The presence of Thondaman in the Cabinet has no doubt enabled him to get certain benefits for the up-country Tamils, like franchise in local government elections, but these gains are very marginal, compared to what, as admitted by Thondaman himself, he could not achieve.

In 1948, they robbed us of the citizenship and then afterwards, our representation in Parliament. As a result a large number of persons are still stateless. President Jayawardena said in Delhi at the NAM Summit that he will resolve the matter .... .... He repeated this when the Indian foreign Minister Mr.Narasimha Rao came here. Then what happened? Extremist elements, racist groups who think they represent the Sinhalese people created a situation where the President’s good plans have been wrecked and thousands are fleeing to India. (Lanka Guardian 1.11.83)

This situation, once again reveals the general inability of the Tamils to make use of the existing institutional structures to work out an agreeable solution.

It should also be remembered that, in the attacks by the armed forces at Vavuniya and Trincomalee, it was the Indian Tamil immigrants from the plantations who suffered the worst. It is a well known fact that the main beneficiaries of the Gandhiyam movement were these migrant Indian Tamils, and the attack on that movement was an effort to disestablish the farm hands of Indian origin from the Vavuniya district.

There is also an international dimension to the presence of these Tamils of Indian descent in these areas of conflict. Some of them are citizens of Sri Lanka, but most of them are “stateless” citizens coming under the purview of the Srirama-Shastri Pact. The Government of India has the right to intervene on their behalf. This factor has been of decisive diplomatic significance in the effort to solve the Sri Lankan Tamil question.

### **Youth Militancy**

The one factor which changed the whole character and course of the Sri Lankan Tamil question is the emergence of youth militancy expressing itself through violent attacks on the armed forces and the police and on those whom it thinks are traitors to the Tamil “Cause”. Theirs is a guerilla strategy. Described as “terrorists”, their actions have been directed against the state as an institution.

The emergence of this movement has radically altered the character of politics and modes of political communication among the Tamils. There is a ban on this type of organizations -“The Prevention of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam And Other Similar Organizations Law” (1978).

The underground character of the movement, their guerilla type organization and the ban imposed on their activities make it virtually impossible for anyone to discuss in critical, academic terms the nature and the

features of their activities. However, due to reasons of political expediency, there have been interesting articles and reports giving some insights into the organization and motivations of the movement. The articles in Week End, Sun, Sunday Island, and now in the book "The Agony of Sri Lanka" by T.D.S.A.Dissanayake provide useful pictures of their organization and activities.

The publications of the various groups of the movement e.g.pamphlets and leaflets - are distributed in places where the public gathers - markets, bus stands etc. with such smoothness that before one realizes what is happening, one has a leaflet in the hand the changed modes of communication is also seen in the wall posters. With a ban on their movement and with censorship of news about them, they use the wall posters as the media for their "messages".

Going by such material as is available, there are at least five major organizations: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam-led by Prabhakaran, Peoples Liberation Organization for Tamil Eelam led by Uma Mahesvaran, Tamil eelam Liberation Organisation associated with the late Kuttimani, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Army, with information relating to leadership not known. It is quite evident that, inspite of a common aim – the establishment of Tamil Eelam – these organisations are not united.

All the group speak in terms of Marxist concepts of political and economic liberation. All of them advocate armed struggle for the establishment of Tamil Eelam. It is significant that in the posters and handbills there is no reference to past ethnic glories or to golden ages of Tamil culture, a characteristic feature of the rhetoric of the Dravida Movements of Tamilnadu. Here the emphasis is on a Marxist formulation of the Tamil Question. It is equally clear that these organisations oppose the TULF for its parliamentarianism.

From the reports and analysis it is evident that the field of recruitment for these groups comes mainly from those who have passed the A L Examination. But with the intensification of the efforts of the Security forces to crack down on the activities of these youth movements, the field of recruitment seems to be getting wider. In the view of the authorities, any Tamil youth is therefore liable to be arrested and this has increased the number of missing Tamil Youths.

### **The role of the Sri Lankan Tamil expatriates**

Had it not been for the role played by the Tamil expatriates living in various parts of the Western World, concentrated more in England and the US, the Tamil question would not have received the international attention it has. It is not too difficult to identify the motivating factor-most of them had been victims of discrimination in Sri Lanka, either at the level of the admission to the University or at the level of Employment, and had decided to leave the country because they knew they had no place within the existing system.

To have a full understanding of the mind of the Tamil expatriate, it is essential to understand the highly centripetal character of the family units in the Sri Lankan, especially the Jaffna Tamil Social Organisation. One studies more to earn more and one earns more to better the prospects of the family as a whole. Really speaking, the family or the household is yet the basic social unit in Jaffna life. Centrifugalism occurs only to enrich and strengthen the centre (the family). And when it is found that the locus of that centre is threatened, then it is natural that there is a rallying of forces. With the threat to property and life, the dreams of seeing a family of well established brothers and sisters and of a well earned retired life in the place of your birth, with the soil under your feet, belonging to you, are shattered. For people who are confronted with various disabilities in their places of work, discrimination and uncertainty of status in their own place of birth is an even greater factor of disturbance. This deprivation has led the more articulate of the expatriate to pool their resources to publicise their cause.

### **Ethnically and Political Consciousness**

It would be quite correct to hold that the politicisation of the large mass of the Tamil population started only with the threat to their lives in their own social units of existence. When faced with the reality of discrimination and its ethnic basis, ethnicity decides the form and content of political consciousness.

Attention should be paid at this stage to the differences in the class character of the ethnic cry raised at the level of the Sinhala masses. Recent analysis by Kumari Jayawardena have shown the class content of the ideology of Buddhist revivalism. It is important to note that this ideology of Sinhala - Buddhist revivalism had been anti-minority; in terms of historical conditioning there was a latent anti-Tamil content. As the country passed from colonialism to neo-colonialism with the consequent changes in production relations, there was a logical outflow of the anti-Tamil content.

At the level of the Tamils, the anti-Tamil cry of the Sinhalese, at the start, affected only the English educated state sector employees. It soon extended to affect the small shop owners too. With the broadbasing of education through free-education and use of the national languages as media of instruction, there came into being a new group of young men, from the lower income groups and from the peasantry and the under privileged groups, who too were discriminated against because they were Tamils. Thus ethnic consciousness has become an important factor in political consciousness. This is also the reason why the caste problem, which was once the major contradiction among the Tamils is not surfacing today in the manner it used to do; it is not that caste has ceased to be an operative factor in Tamilian socio-political life, particularly in intra-Tamil matters. The major contradiction now is the ethnic cry for it decides the crucial question of employment. Being the major contradiction it also determines the nature of the politicisation.

A correct understanding of the class character of the Tamil question as it stands today is important. A clear distinction should be made between the class basis of the ethnic cry among the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

At the level of the Sinhalese, the ethnic cry (first priority to terms of language, now in terms of religion) is whipped up to complete a process of establishing class hegemony started prior to independence but in greater measure after 1956. At the Tamil end, the ethnic cry has become the rallying point against common oppression. It is true that at the start the Tamil cry was raised by a class to preserve its own interests; but with the Sinhala bourgeoisie, using their control of state power and the ethnic cry to consolidate its position, there is a change. Today the Tamil cry is raised as a rallying point for all those who are faced with the same type of oppression. The change from F.P. (1948) to TUF (1971) to TULF (1976) is also a qualitative change; the continuity of the slogan is coterminous with the continuity of the leadership too, but it is now clear that the slogans are tending to be different. The basic contradiction the leadership of the TULF has with its own rank and file is an expression of the changed class nature of that rank and file.

It is because of this historical change that those non-Marxists concerned with the Tamil questions are now taking a Marxist position and the Marxists who are drawn into it are able to see the continuing existence of ethnic consciousness.

It is in this context that the impasse referred to at the outset becomes significant in relation to changes in the character of the problem.

### **The Problem of the Muslims and the light it throws on the Tamil Question**

A look at the recent manifestations of the problems the Muslims are facing will help to understand the intensity of ethnic consciousness in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan Muslims, known as Moors, are taken as a separate ethnic group. Language does not constitute the basis of ethnicity in this case; it is the religion that is taken as the decisive factor. In an environment in which the Sinhala and the Tamil languages are taken as the symbols of the difference between the two major communities, the Muslims did not want to highlight the fact that their mother-tongue was Tamil. There were attempts made at certain levels to describe Tamil as the home language and

not mother tongue. The Muslims of the Southern, the Western, the Central, the Northern, the Uva and even the North Central provinces are competent bilinguals, proficient in both Sinhala and Tamil languages; in this context, they were definite beneficiaries of the Sinhala Only Act., Most of the major Muslim schools in the provinces mentioned above changed over to Sinhala as the medium of instruction.

But with the “emergence” of the second stage of Sinhala ethnic chauvinism, in which emphasis was placed on the territorial factor, the Muslims living in the Eastern and Northern provinces began to feel the pinch of Sinhala ethnic consciousness. Amparai, the only district in the whole of Sri Lanka in which the Muslims are a majority, has been systematically taken away from them essentially through administrative measures and by 1992, it is estimated that the Muslims would no longer be the dominant group.

This has for the first time raised a political cleavage among the Muslims, those Muslims living in predominantly agrarian regions, as those living in Batticaloa, Amparai and Mannar districts beginning to feel that they form one group, having economic interests different from the Muslims of the Western and Southern provinces, who are largely traders. For the first time the fear of two sections of Muslim population solidifying into a permanent division of the Muslims (as those studying in Sinhala medium and in Tamil medium) has arisen. Also voices has been raised against the dominance of the Colombo based leadership among the Muslims; the position taken by the Muslim leadership is being increasingly criticised.

These developments have some relevance to the Tamil question. Firstly, it is no more possible for the Muslim leadership to say that they are not concerned about their linguistic rights and secondly it is no longer possible to argue that in Batticaloa the major contradiction is between the Tamils and the Muslims and that there is no possibility of a political co-existence.

With instances of strained relationships between the Muslims and the Sinhalese in the West (Puttalam) and in the South (Calle), there is a growing feeling among the Muslims that the Tamils have politically organized themselves better than the Muslims.

### **The Tamilnadu (and Indian) Interest in the Sri Lankan Tamil Question**

The Indian interest and the anxiety in Tamilnadu over the Sri Lankan Tamil question arise from two facts. Firstly it is also problem of the Indian citizens, those who have to be ultimately sent back to India. They have been described as people of Indian origin and there is a diplomatic agreement (Srima-Sastri Pact) in operation relating to them. So when something is done to them, whether as labourers or as Tamils, it is the duty of the Indian government to express concern.

In Sri Lanka there are Tamils of Indian origin and Sri Lankan Tamils. I have a sympathy for the Sri Lankan Tamils. The affairs of the former is Foreign Affairs; that of the latter is Internal Affairs.

- M.Kalyanasundaram  
- Virakesari 10.9.1981

By extending the language problem to full ethnic proportions and starting to attack them as Tamils, the path was irretrievably paved for Indian concern over the Up-country Tamils. And given the economic significance of the plantation labour, the sheet-anchor of the economy yet, the leadership of the Tamils of Indian origin can speak with a sense of confidence the Sri Lankan Tamil leadership cannot possibly have.

Tamilnadu's concern for the Tamils of Indian origin living overseas has been a point of irritation between the centre and the state in India. Sri Lanka was not the only place from which Indian Tamils were ejected. They were sent back from Burma and Malaysia too. Rehabilitation of these refugees was ill planned and poor executed. So when the human traffic from Sri Lanka also started moving, there was concern. The level of consciousness of this problem is well indicated in modern Tamil literature.

The sympathy for the Sri Lankan Tamil cause lies in the logic of the history of nationality formation in India during and after independence. Nationality formation within India was on an ethnolinguistic basis. Tamils and Bengalis constitute two of the highly conscious ethnolinguistic groups in India. The Pure Tamil movement, The Dravidian Movement were all parts of the Tamil consciousness. Post-Independent India accepted the linguistic basis of the states (1956). This social psychology of Tamilian consciousness, *per se* and within an all-India framework is well reflected in Tamil literature, especially in poetry from Bharathi to Bharathidasan.

With the attack on the Sri Lankan Tamils on the basis that they are Tamils, the anxiety about their linguistic brethren arose as a natural expression of extra territorial ethnic solidarity. This is not something new in Indian politics. There had been expressions of solidarity with Bengalis living in Pakistan and even with Punjabis living in the United Kingdom. There have been instances when the Central Government of India had expressed concern over the problems of such groups. Thus arose the demand in Tamil Nadu about voicing Indian concern over the Sri Lankan Tamil issue.

To add to this, there are the strategies of the - parties of Tamil Nadu. DMK, under Karunanidhi, had claimed leadership of the Tamils all over the world. Any inactivity by M.G. Ramachandran and his ADMK government could lead to massive gains to DMK, the biggest of the opposition parties in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu Congress (I) cannot isolate itself from Tamilian sentiments. Nor can the two Communist Parties keep silence over the "legitimate demands" of the Sri Lankan Tamil issue.

Though there had been concern over this problem since 1956, discernible political interest starts with the 1974 deaths at the Tamil Research Conference; interest in the Sri Lankan Tamil question increased with militant youths seeking shelter in Tamil Nadu.

Since 1977 India, the fear in India, the fear of American takeover of Trincomalee. And this changes the entire perspective of the problem.

What had started as a problem of language of the government gazettes, of attacks on the *suruttu kade* and the *tosai kades*, of media of instruction and marks to enter the University, has now become a problem of geo-politics.

December 1983

(Paper read at a Seminar held at the Social Scientists Association of Sri Lanka)

## Notes and References

1. The author wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the help given by Messrs. M.Thirunavukarasu and N. Kandaswamy in obtaining some of the data used in this paper. He is grateful to Professor Kumari Jayawardena, Dr. Newton Gunasinghe and Mr. Charles Abeysekera for their criticisms and suggestions.

It should be mentioned that it was not possible due to the prevailing conditions to discuss as openly and objectively some of the problems as one would have liked to.

2. Lanka Guardian 1.11.1983.
3. See Newton Gunasinghe's this volume.
4. These figures are taken from the document prepared by the Committee for Rational Development. See Lanka Guardian 1.11.1983
5. *ibid.*
6. Tiruchelvam, Neelan., The Sharing of Power, Lanka Guardian, Vol.3 No.5 of 15.5.1980

7. Mavatta Apiviruttie capaikalum, ilankai Tamilar piracinaiyum (Tamil), South Asia Studies Seminar  
University of Jaffna - 1980

# **The Human Rights Factor in the Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict**

## **A Review of the Developments in 1983-86.**

“Is it too late for an attempt to evolve an inter-communal approach to the language question and the related matters of education and employment? It would be a pity if the Sri Lankan leadership wait for bombs to explode and for the Prisons to fill up again, before conceding that the Tamils need a re-assurance that they have a place in the future of the Island”.

-Walter Schwarz in "The Tamils of Sri Lanka. Minority Groups Publication, London Report No.25 of September 1975.

How prophetic has been this statement made just 11 years ago? Sri Lanka is now seen and described as a paradise disturbed, almost lost, never to regain its former splendour.

This Seminar has its focus attention on the human rights issues in situations of ethnic conflict; even so, it cannot preclude analysis of contingent factors such as –

- (a) The nature of the ethnic or racial or religious conflict;
- (b) The goals and interests of the parties;
- (c) Human rights violations as causes of confrontation;
- (d) The strategies of the parties to the conflict;
- (e) The dynamics of the conflict itself;
- (f) The impact on the methods of confrontation and of the means used in the conflict;
- (g) Nature and causes of foreign involvement;
- (h) Efforts at major settlement; and
- (i) Human rights requirements to the content of a settlement.

In this context, any contribution on Sri Lanka will have to necessarily deal with how the violation of human rights actually constitutes the core of the problem and how such violations have determined the attitudes and actions of the affected party, namely the Tamils, towards not only the State but also towards the character of the political solution itself.

Such a discussion calls for, at the outset, a statement on the current situation of the conflict.

### **I**

While discussing the ethnic conflagrations in Sri Lanka it has become within the last 3 years, almost a convention, to refer to the 1983 riots as the most decisive and epoch-making event in the history of the ethnic struggle, with perhaps a heavy consciousness of the grim tragedies that took place in 1983, there had virtually been a lexical exhaustion to describe it - terms like “holocaust” and “pogrom” have very often been used.

The post-1983 events showed that it was not so much of a holocaust or a deluge. More things were yet to come; it was a water-shed, a turning-point. Looking back at the July 1983 riots in clinical historical terms, its significance lies in that it was the year in which the Tamils in Sri Lanka learnt conclusively that they cannot lay claim to any area as their unquestionably legitimate areas of residence except those they have been used to describing as their “traditional homelands”; they had to abandon their residences in other areas and seek refuge in the “traditional” areas in large numbers. 1983 therefore constitutes a landmark in

the history of the ethnic conflict in establishing the fact that it was to the North and East that the Sri Lankan Tamils could fall back. This would even apply to the plantation Tamils, for not only in 1983, but even in mid and late seventies, the displaced and the superfluous in the plantation area had to seek shelter in the northern and eastern districts.

The history of the post-1983 phase is, from the Tamil point of view, also the history of their attempt to hold on to those areas with political sanction, and constitutional acceptance.

It would therefore be advisable to delineate first, the current situation and see how it fits into the logic of events of the post-1983 period.

## II

### **The current situation could be summarised thus:**

At the political level, negotiations are being conducted for a political solution through the good offices of India. It is understood that the anxiety on the part of India to solve this problem has become the most important motivating factor in the continuity and effectiveness of the negotiations. It is generally accepted now that the Tamil United Liberation Front, the open political force that used to represent the Tamils in Parliament and is now a proscribed Party, is no more representative enough to pledge the Tamils to any settlement that has got to be implemented at the mass level. It is now made clear that without the participation and sanction of the militants, no implementation of any agreement is possible.

As for the militants' situation, the E.N.L.F. (Eelam National Liberation Front) which was the umbrella organisation of all the major militant groups, is no more in force, and it is the L.T.T.E. (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) led by Prabhakaran which is the major force, with E.R.O.S. (Eelani Revolutionary Organisation) and E.P.R.L.F. (Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front) coming next.

At the military level, negotiations seem to have no relevance at all. While talks and negotiations for talks are going on, the army attacks have been severe in the East, especially Trincomalee and Batticaloa, and air attacks all over the North and East have now become frequent phenomena. However, it is generally agreed that the militants have now grown into an important military force, so much so that, within the Jaffna peninsula, they have been able to contain the army without allowing it to move freely outside its barracks. Outside the peninsula, the movements of the army have been restrained. There have been instances of open battles between the army and the militants in certain areas in North and East. An important feature of the current situation is that due to the activities of the armed forces, especially the attack on civilians and air attacks, there has been a forging of ties between the people at large and the militants, for it is the militants with their sentry-system and with return-attacks who save the people from military attacks. This is creating a new and interesting situation in the relationship between the militants and the people. With the war becoming a total one, affiliations of the people are no more in doubt.

Human rights violations continue to increase with large numbers of Tamil youths, especially from the eastern part, being sent to the Detention Camps in Sinhala areas. The number of disappearances of Tamil people after arrests is very high in the East. The problem of the violation of human rights is no more confined to the Tamils alone. Some Sinhala youth too have been arrested. There had been a spate of such arrests in recent times, a number of them allegedly suspected to be of Marxist persuasion have been questioned and quite a number of activists have been detained. There is an uneasy silence about these arrests in the Sinhala areas. The State media do not refer to them.

In reviewing the current situation, the most important feature one has to highlight is the character of the discussion on the nature of the settlement. It is said that the maximum the government could give is Provincial Councils only. The minimum Tamil demand is for a bringing together of all traditional Tamil-speaking regions of Sri Lanka, namely the North and East. It has already been expressed on the moderate

Tamil side that the quantum of devolution should have relevance to the real needs of the Tamils, who have borne with a new found political fortitude all the losses of life and the disruption.

This, of course, has also led to the discussion on the constitutional position of Muslims in the country - whether they should have a separate terrain for them in the Amparai district or not. This also raises an equally-important question about the place of the Muslims in the Tamil-speaking areas, for there are, besides the southern part of the Eastern Province, other areas like Mannar where Muslims live in substantial numbers. As things stand (September, October 1986), there seems to be no chance of a major break through. With the distinct possibility now of Sri Lanka becoming eligible to receive American assistance against "terrorism", things can only worsen.

### III

This situation has arisen out of the impact of the events that have taken place since 1983, the date by which the Tamils had to confine themselves politically to the northern and eastern parts of the country.

The 1980s mark the beginning of an increasing involvement of militant youth organisations in obtaining a political solution to the plight of the Tamils. As had been shown earlier<sup>1</sup> the militants came into the mainstream of political life due to the collapse of the parliamentary system, especially the collapse of faith in the electoral system - first in 1981 there was mass-scale emasculating of the electoral process in the Elections for the District Development Councils which the TULF had accepted as politically enough at that time.

In fact, it has been claimed that the 1983 riots were a reprisal to the killing of the 13 soldiers in Jaffna by the militants<sup>2</sup> and understandably enough the state began combing-out operations in the north and east immediately after the 1983 riots. Looking back, it is now becoming increasingly clear that there was a two-fold attack by the government made in these areas (a) in relation to getting rid of the militants; and (b) directed towards the problem of the Sinhala settlers in the North and East.

The following constitute some of the important efforts undertaken by the state to gain full control over the Tamil areas:

- (1) The entire Sri Lankan Tamil region kept under continuous night curfew, with intermittent day and night curfews, sometimes on for 61 hours at a stretch. The districts affected by these were Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Triumalee, Batticaloa and the A.G.A.s Divisions of Thirukovil and Akkaraipattu. This went on from late 1984 to June 1985.
- (2) Full surveillance of Tamils in the non-Tamil areas, especially in Colojubo and the up-country.
- (3) Declaration of Security Zones and Prohibited Zones. On 29.11.84 Jaffna and Kilinochehi were declared Security Zone districts. People could not enter or leave the Zones without informing the Government. Following were some of the regulations imposed in the Jaffna district -
  - (a) Ban on all private motor vehicles and even pedal cycles. The only public transport available was the bus service and that too on certain routes only.
  - (b) Rationing of fuel, but fuel was not brought into the zone.
  - (c) Legal ban on the flow and direction of traffic from within the area. No vehicles could enter the Jaffna town after 8.30 a.m.
  - (4) The entire prohibited Zone covered the littoral area within a limit of 100 meters landwards and 5 miles seawards from Mullaitivu to Mannar along the northeastern, northern and western coast. This meant that fishing, which was the main economic activity in this region, ceased immediately. There was even the legal necessity to obtain a certificate of residence.

Because of the security zone and the prohibited zone regulations, there arose an acute food and fuel shortage and virtually a breakdown in the health services. The agrarian sector too suffered. Equally significant is the disruption of the school system where some of the important schools in the areas had to be closed.

In the non-peninsula regions of the North, and the East the military undertook the following operations -

- (1) Driving the Tamil villagers from their traditional habitation, as for instance Thennamaravady in the east coast.
- (2) Mass evacuation of entire Tamil villages in the heart-lands of Tamil areas of Vavuniya and Mullaitivu, to enable Sinhala settlers there to continue. The villages of Kokilai, Nayaru and Kumulamunai in the Mullaitivu districts were affected in this manner. The number of such refugees exceeded 20,000 at the end of 1984.

One of the most oppressive actions undertaken by the army and continued even now is the “Cordon-and – search” arrests which, it was told, was undertaken to bring to book the militant youths who are at large. These operations led to mass indiscriminate arrests of youths between the ages of 17 and 25; the operation was done in such a manner that quite often males from 14 to 35 were also arrested. Most of these arrested youth were sent to Sinhala areas for detention, and thus arose the Boossa Camp.

Added to all these measures of direct oppression there was during this time open statements made by Ministers about maintaining population levels in all parts of the country at or near the national ratio of the ethnic groups. There was also the militarisation of the Sinhala settlers who were given basic military training and units of home guards were formed in the border areas.

A highly specialised Special Task Force was established in 1984 to take charge of the security operations in the eastern province. This unit, combining within it the severities of both the army and the police, has been accused of being responsible for the “disappearances” of many Tamil detainees.

There was unrelenting continuity of these activities and there occurred in late -1984 and mid -1985 two events which changed the character of the ethnic violence.

In December 1984, the Dollar and Kent Farms in the Mullaitivu District were attacked by the militants and the Sinhala “peasant settlers” there were made to leave. There has been an argument over the character of these settlements, for it is told that in August 1984, these two farms which were originally Tamil owned were taken over for the Prisons Department for rehabilitation of prisoners. It was also later brought out that, other than prisoners to be rehabilitated, there were also some dry-zone settlers. The militants' position was that these were places where trained Sinhala ex-convicts were being settled to eject the Tamil villagers of the area. This was the heartland of the Tamil Vanni.

The other major event was the incident at Anuradhapura. The Sir Lankan Ambassador to U.N. Sub-commission on the Prevention of discrimination and protection of minorities, described the event thus:

“A more serious incident took place on May 14th when Tamil terrorists disguised as Security Forces, entered the Sacred City of Anuradhapura, hallowed by Buddhists all the world over, and opened fire at random on crowds of unsuspecting civilians including a group of pilgrims engaged in religious worship, killing over a hundred people - men, women and children”<sup>3</sup>

It was common knowledge at that time that this was the response to the killing of about 70 Tamil civilians at Valvettiturai arrested after a cordon and search arrests and huddled up in a small community centre room and blasted.

From this time onwards, the game of reprisals has been taking a severe toll. During the early party of 1985, hundreds of unarmed civilians were reported killed in retaliation of attacks on Security Force personnel or Sinhala civilians. “An estimated 75 Tamil civilians were killed on 9.5.85 in Valvettiturai allegedly in retaliation for the killing of an Army Major. 48 passengers on a ferry boat from Delft were killed allegedly by Navy personnel on 15.5.85 in retaliation for the killing of 146 Sinhala civilians including women and children by armed Tamil groups the previous day; and over a hundred civilians were killed in and around Vavuniya in retaliation for a landmine explosion at the Vavuniya Army Camp on 16th August.”<sup>4</sup>

Events of this type brought the ethnic violence and its post-1983 manifestations to the door-step of every home in Sri Lanka, and understandably there was some political pressure for a settlement.

With India acting as mediator, there was a cease-fire arranged between the militants’ organisation and the Sri Lankan Government. Even though the terms of the cease-fire was never officially announced by the Sri Lankan Government, it had taken action to restrict the army to barracks, to lift the curfew which was in force in districts in the north of Sri Lanka and to lift restrictions on fishermen. There was also the release of some detainees. According to the terms of the cease-fire published in India it was to consist of four phases during which negotiation would lead to political settlement and a cessation of hostilities.

Consequent to this cease-fire, talks were held in Thimpu in Bhutan from 18th July to 13th August, 1985. The second round of talks at Thimpu took place in September 1985 and there was a complete breakdown of the talks; this resulted in the deportation of some of the spokesmen for the militants by the Indian Government (this was later withdrawn). It was in this atmosphere that a Committee to monitor the cessation of hostilities evidently agreed to by both parties as part of the cease-fire agreement started functioning on 16.10.85; the jurisdiction of this committee even covered reporting of conditions in prisons and detention camps. Predictably enough, the C.M.C.H. could not work for a long time, but its efforts brought to light the enormity of the problems such a process had to confront. With the resignation of the two Tamil members recommended for appointment to that Committee by the militants over an incident in Jaffna in which helicopter shooting had taken place at the time the Committee visited Jaffna, the Committee effectively ceased to function.

Perhaps the most staggering of all the post-1983 state action is the beginning of the attacks from the air - first it was explosives thrown from helicopters, later shooting from helicopters and finally full scale bombing. Jaffna was first bombed on 20.2.86 at Thavady. With this air attack, the lines that existed between the militants and the people began to disappear fast and there arose a situation that without the militants, it would be difficult for the people to save themselves. Attacks continue even now and the most recent one took place a week ago in Sambaltivu in the Trincomalee District. Bombings, it is claimed, are undertaken to clear up the areas of the militants. However, in terms of casualties, virtually all had been civilians.

All these have developed a sense of despondency among the people about the credibility of any move towards a solution. When there was cease-fire, there was no talks; and now when there are talks, there is no cease-fire. To the average Tamil this presents an air of unreality and it is this feeling that constitutes the psychological base for the current no-go state in the attempts to bring about a situation.

#### IV

It is important now for us to describe the human rights violations that took place amidst the actions mentioned above. Amnesty International report (April 1986) reaffirming its continued position to the refoulement to the Tamils to Sri Lanka (these are refugees who had migrated to western countries) said: - “If returned, Tamil civilians not involved in combat would be at grave risk of becoming victims of human rights violations”. These include:

- (a) Arbitrary killings by members of the Security Forces as reprisal for the Killing of their own men or of members of the Sinhala community.
- (b) "Disappearance" of people allegedly arrested by Security Force personnel;
- (c) Arbitrary arrest and detention have been long-term and in-communicado;
- (d) Ill-treatment and torture after arrest.

Amnesty International Reports on these situations are adequate evidence for the reality of these. They are:

- (1) Sri Lanka - Some recent reports of extra - judicial killings  
- September 1985 to March 1986 - ASA 37/3/86.
- (2) Sri Lanka - Disappearances - ASA 37/8/86 - First published  
- September 1986.
- (3) File on "Torture. - Amnesty International Report No.10 - October 1985.

On torture, this is what the A.I.File on "torture" has to say -

"Torture occurs in military and police camps and in Police Stations, but is rarely reported from prisons. It is used to extort "confessions" or to obtain information. It is widely used by the Army and Police including the Criminal Investigating Department and the Special Task Force".

"Army camps in the north where former detainees alleged they were tortured include Vavuniya, Paley, Elephant Pass, Pt.Pedro, Keerimalai, Thallady and Gurunagar. There have also been allegations of torture in the recently established camps of the Police Special Task Force at Kallady and Kallaru in the Eastern Province and one at the Boosa and Tangalle camps in the South".

As for "disappearances", it has been mostly in the Eastern Province. The situation has been such that the Amnesty International has recommended that the Sri Lankan Government initiates speedy and impartial investigations to clarify the whereabouts of the people reported to have disappeared in Sri Lanka and inform their relatives or their findings forthwith. It has also been suggested that the Government establishes an independent Commission to investigate all cases of disappearance in Sri Lanka.

Commenting on the data relating to "disappearances", the Amnesty International Report says:

"That except one Sinhalese, all other disappeared people are Tamils; many of the disappeared are farmers, labourers and fishermen who are from poor families. A substantial number are students and civil servants and one is a Roman Catholic Priest".

Most allegations of "disappearance" cited the Army and the Special Task Force, but some also cited the Navy and the Police. In a few incidents, the home guards are allegedly responsible. It is important to mention these to emphasize the fact of dislocation and disruption caused to civil life in these areas. The psychological impact of all these state actions is creating an almost irredeemable situation in ethnic relations. The state forces are non-Tamil (in the areas of operation) and often consider themselves Sinhala soldiers with a mission in a vanquished territory. On the Sinhala side the impression about the Tamil militant is that he is bent on eradicating everything Sinhala. It is this psychological divide which is now the most serious problem in Sinhala-Tamil relations.

## V

The question of safety and security in the various areas of the Tamil district has led to the refugee problem. Without minimising in any sense the significance of the refugees going out of Sri Lanka, the problem of

refugees within, the island needs analysis, because it is the intensity of this problem that is causing a lot of hardships for many poor Tamil people.

Tamil refugees could be classified into two major groups:

- (a) Inter-district refugees - These are Tamil families which have been dislocated from the districts where they have been living and are now seeking security and shelter in other Tamil districts; and
- (b) Intra-district refugees - These are persons and families having to leave their homes due to proximity to Army Camps and-or to the sea coast (fishing is banned) and are seeking shelter and security in safer areas within the same district.

#### **Refugee Situation as on 30.9.86**

<b>DISTRICT</b>	<b>No of Camps</b>	<b>No. Families</b>	<b>No. Persons</b>
Trincomalee	23	5,780	28,746
Batticaloa	5	2,301	10,722
Mullaitivu	8	2,420	10,889
Vavuniya	6	727	3,127
Mannar	2	233	1,047
Kilinochchi	5	280	1,397
Kilinochchi (outside camps)	-	5,300	26,500
Jaffna	11	1,201	5,301
Jaffna (outside camps)	-	-	14,699
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>18,242</b>	<b>102,428</b>

There is a tendency on the part of the Tamils to move towards safer places. The situation in the Tamil areas has been further worsened because of the abandonment of the development plans that were formulated by the Government for these areas. It is said that most of the development projects had to be given up because of problems in monitoring. However, with increased pressure on land due to refugee movement towards the north, the problem is becoming more acute. There is State assistance provided in the form of dry rations for particular periods of time, but quite often this is stopped after some time. At that point of time, it becomes extremely difficult for the people to live in the new areas. There has also been the problem of sending refugee children to schools. The schools available in the areas are not equipped to absorb these children and classes have to be run on a voluntary basis for these children and the teachers are quite often school leavers themselves.

There is a fear of rise in the rate of illiteracy.

## **VI**

How has the Tamil community been able to cope with those disruptions in its socio-economic life and yet manage to establish contact with the authorities, to report to them their grievances and also to obtain relief?

The formation of the Citizens' Committee was the answer to this need, With -

- (a) the absence of representation at the local and national levels;
- (b) the increasing severity of the military and police operations causing great loss to life and damage to property of innocent civilians; and
- (c) the breakdown of the civil administration, especially the network of the welfare services,

there arose an immediate need for the more articulate citizens of the community to group themselves together without delay to seek redress for damage done and inconvenience caused to their fellow community members and to ensure the continuity of life in the community.

Thus "crisis situation" in a particular area (village or town) creates the need for the formation of a Citizens' committee. This is done so as to have a means of establishing contact with:

- (a) the military authorities functioning within the area; and
- (b) the civil authorities to ensure the continuity of life.

The first of these Citizens' Committees rose up in the town of Jaffna in 1982 when M.P.s were taken into protective custody and the library, the market and several other buildings were burnt. At the time of its formation, it went to the extent of supporting the call of the army to join them in patrol duty. Then as crises arose in the various towns and villages, Citizens' Committees began to be formed at those levels. Thus Citizens' Committees arose in Valvettiturai, Pt. Pedro, Karaveddy, Kondavil, Mathagal, Chulipuram etc.

With the rise of such Committees in various villages and towns performing almost the same functions - i.e. contacting the military authorities, preparing affidavits, making representations to the Government Agent, there arose the need to co-ordinate the work of these Committees.

Thus a Co-ordinating Committee was formed and a Convener and a Chairman elected. Mr .R.Balasubramaniam, Secretary, Jaffna Citizens. Committee, was elected the Co-ordinator and the present writer, was elected the Chairman.

With the same situation developing in other Tamil districts (as in Mannar, Mullaitivu, Trincomalee etc.,) it was thought useful to co-ordinate the work to make it easy for joint representations and for requests for redress.

The Citizens' Committees have been non-political organizations. They are, basically, groups of citizens, combined together as an interim body performing an emergency social function of contacting the military authorities and the civil administration for immediate ameliorative measures.

These do not have elaborate constitutional frame work or constitutional structures. They are voluntary organisations. With the re-activation of the civil administration and its network of welfare activities and the efforts to re-establish the channels of political communication, the Citizens' Committees would cease to have any effective role.

These Citizens' Committees have no political function to perform.

The Citizens' Committee Movement urges the need for a permanent political solution, but reiterates that it has to be achieved and ensured through the systems of political communication available and necessary for that task. The Citizens' Committees shall not play any political role; nor are these intended for such purpose.

Even so citizens' Committees began to loom large in the socially and politically decimated life of the Sri Lankan Tamils and to some extent in the political corridors of Colombo to which they were the only "complainants" from the Tamils then available. Soon the Citizens' Committees also became the most reliable channels of information for the activities of the Army in the Tamil regions. This made them attractive to foreign-media correspondents and quite soon the Government found itself in an embarrassing position because of the reliable information that was being given by the Citizens' Committees. Looking at the rise of this Movement, 1985 constitutes its highest water-mark. It was in this year that they met the President J.R. Jayewardena and represented matters to him.

The credibility of the Citizens' Committees with the militants was also fairly high, as seen in their recommendations for appointment to the C.M.C.M. - both Mr. K. Sivapalan and Mr. K. Sivathamby were from Citizens' Committees. However, these developments quickly brought about a situation when the Government was not happy in allowing the Citizens' Committee to continue as the channels of communication for the people, especially after the breakdown of the Thimpu talks.

With the changed conditions in the military and political situations, the importance of the Citizens' Committee has now started to wane. The military situation has become so tense and the determination on the part of the State is so great that very often they do not encourage contact with civilians. This is the situation at local levels. It is now not possible for any civilian organization to get in touch with the military authorities, even through civil officers. The war in the Tamil areas have become total; state with its army on one side and the people and the militant on the other.

The people are now getting used to the disrupted civil life and are trying to work out institutional apparatuses to see them through these troubled times. The Citizens' Committee with in its limited role of presenting the difficulties of the people to the civil and military authorities, is only one of its kind. There are equally urgent problems like settlement of disputes among the people, looking into local needs of community management, and maintaining the continuity of the essential services of the community. For these there is the necessity for a different type of community leadership which, in broad class terms, the Citizens' Committees cannot provide.

With the increasing social presence of the militants in the villages, the role of the local organisation will be to concentrate more and more on social work leaving difference and political matters in their hands. That brings us to the question of increasing socialisation of militants with the people.

## VII

The militants' movements are proscribed by law and actions taken by the Government against them and the activities the militants indulge in make them necessarily militaristic. Militarism has become the *raison d'être* of their existence for they are now guerilla fighters openly fighting against the State. The more militaristic the group is, the more effective they are in terms of performing their vital function of defending the people and advancing their cause. Thus a high degree of militarism has been the keynote of the organisational upkeep of the militant movements.

With the people becoming increasingly dependent on them, the militants are now becoming a more open political force with clear-cut political targets.

It is now an established fact that socially and institutionally, they are establishing themselves as spokesmen of the community - a position which has been abrogated to them by the T.U.L.F. It is not only the sociopolitical needs that is making the militant groups becoming more and more socio-politically integrated. More importantly and perhaps more crucially it is the socio-liberationist character that is making them more and more integrated in the social life of the people. It should be understood that the Sri Lankan crisis is at one level of cognizance a National Question, at another level it is one of the social radicalism/revolt which is calling into question some of the hitherto un-questioned ideological foundations

of the Sri Lankan Tamil Society. It should be noted that the Sri Lankan Tamil youths, especially those from the northern part of the country have a tradition of non-conformist idealist struggle. The first political struggle was started by the Youth Congress in the 1929-1932. It was a movement of national-minded youth fighting for nationalism and independence inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and in its idealistic fervour, had rejected the fractional autonomy that the Donoughmore Commission recommended. It organised a boycott of the first Elections to the State Council. The movement was not a success.

The present Youth Movement started in the early 70s primarily as a result of the denial of higher education to competent Tamil students. At the start it was essentially a movement of pre-university students and some idealistic youth of the day. In its beginnings the movement opposed those opportunist Tamils who collaborated with the Government of the day. The militants at the early stages did not oppose the T.U.L.F.; the situation changed in 1977 when the T.U.L.F. became the official opposition party and was expressing its keenness for parliamentary methods of achieving Tamil Eelam. The political rift came in 1982 when the T.U.L.F. decided to accept D.D.Cs. The continuous Army attacks and State surveillance compelled the militants to base their activities across the ocean in Tamilnadu. There was a real escalation of actions against the State Forces. As guerilla fighters, they started fighting the state forces. With the cease-fire of 1985, they have become a political force, and with the current round of talks, they are almost an open political force. It is important to note that all the Tamil militant youth movements, even though they have functioned primarily as anti-Sinhala opposition groups, have equally a vision of social change. All the groups speak in Marxist terminologies, some of them more pronounced than the rest. It has now become quite clear that they are challenging very many of the established norms of Tamil society. With escalating air attacks, their integration with the masses is increasingly seen. With the collapse of the state welfare institutions at grassroot levels and with the security forces taking a hostile attitude towards all community based activities, the mantle is now falling on the shoulders of the militant groups to organize themselves at the grassroot levels for community development. This in certain areas has brought out the internal social contradictions of the community. In short, they have now become an important socio-political force and they have also clearly indicated once their fight against State oppression is over, they will leave no stone unturned towards their goal for social egalitarianism.

## VIII

The political solution that is being negotiated should take into count all these realities. A joint statement issued by the militants at the conclusion of the Thimpu Talks, has summarised in unambiguous terms, the demand of the Sri Lankan Tamils:

- (1) Recognition of Tamils as a distinct nationality;
- (2) Guarantee of the territorial integrity of the Tamil homeland;
- (3) Recognition of the right to self-determination;
- (4) Right to full citizenship of the plantation Tamils.

The government of Sri Lanka also has moved from the position of District Councils to Provincial Councils. Without going into details and technicalities of the present proposals, it could be said that the latest proposals also refuse to recognise the fact that what the government faces is a special problem that has arisen in the Tamil-speaking areas of Sri Lanka and it has to be solved at that level. Provincial Councils are going to be imposed on areas which do not want them. The demand for political power for self-management is a political problem confronted by the Government in the Tamil areas and not in other areas. What the Tamils demand is a special constitutional arrangement in which their safety as persons and security and continuity as an ethnic group are maintained. That constitutional arrangement might range from a type of federalism to separatism that is demanded by the militants. The crucial need therefore is to recognise the Tamils as constituting one political unit in this country; that unit would primarily have a

territorial dimension with definite geographically contiguous areas of habitation and collective demographic dimension with all Tamils, wherever they live in the island, deemed to be considered as belonging to the Tamil Unit. Unless this is realised, there is no possibility of a negotiated settlement. Historical fears and opportunistic party politics stand in the way of the Sinhalese to understand that the Tamils of Sri Lanka are as much part and parcel of the political, social and cultural landscape and heritage of the country, and therefore should be considered as a distinct ethnic group with a traditional homeland of its own within the island, and be given equality of treatment and be assured of the absence of discrimination at all levels. This related to the political structure of the settlement.

But more important is that the people should believe that there is an earnest and very sincere attempt being made to solve this problem. The post-1983 events described in this Paper have resulted in the absence of any trust and faith in those wielding power to implement what has been agreed upon. The major problem is that when the Tamil people opted for much less than what is being now offered, the bureaucracy and the Government did not want to implement it in the spirit of the agreement. What is the guarantee now for the implementation of a scheme in which more things are promised? This therefore, is also a question of political trust. Any proposal to settle the ethnic issue should spell out how it would be implemented, who would supervise it and with what authority? This evidently increases the importance of the role of India in settling this problem.

There is, finally, the manner in which the intended solution is being canvassed at the level of the Sinhala masses. Government spokesmen are at pains to show to the Sinhalese masses that what is being given to the Tamils is really nothing much. This makes the Tamils feel suspicious of what is being offered. Above all, it is also emerging as a question of the self respect of the community as a whole. "Why is it that the government is not telling the Sinhala people that they are giving the Tamils what they need and deserve." Should one accept a solution that is being served under the counter? This is a national problem and should be solved at that level.

1987

<sup>(1)</sup> Sivathaniby K - *Srilankan Tamul Situation 1977-83*, Paper read at a Joint Seminar on the Open Economy and its *effects*, at the S.S.A. Colombo 1983, Lanka Guardian, December 1983 and January 1984.

<sup>(2)</sup> It is now generally accepted that it was more a provocation than a cause.

<sup>(3)</sup> *(Statement by Ambassador Jaysniha Dhanapala of Sri Lanka on the subject of Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, 38th Session, August 26, 1985, Geneva)*

<sup>(4)</sup> *(Amnesty International Report on "Sri Lanka - some recent reports on extra-judicial killings. - September 1985 to March 1986)*