In describing the growth of culture and linguistic consciousness of any community, one can not treat it in isolation, especially from the socio-economic and political factors that form the bases for such a consciousness. In the developing countries of South Asia, ethnicity has been a critical variable in the formation and reformation of the state structures. The partition of colonial India into the two states of India and Pakistan had its apparent legitimation in the ethnic distinctiveness of the two nations and the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 has signified the case of successful secessionist movement in the present century. India being the largest country in South Asia, one can discern the phenomenon of the various tribal groups moving to the phase of ethnic community encompassing in the process a number of tribes, e.g. Naga, Mizo or Meiti community. Similarly,

1. For details of the various ethnic movements in South Asia, see Urmilla Phadnis, *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia*, New Delhi, sage, 1990.
among linguistic groups a process of integrating the various dialects into a relatively standardised linguistic community paves the way for a number of ethnic communities e.g. Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Nepali, Bengali and Assamese. Similar is the case of a number of religious groups developing themselves into ethnically self-conscious communities e.g. Muslims, Sikhs and Christians etc. Sri Lanka on the other hand, a small island is facing the most dangerous ethnic crisis in its post-independence history, with conflict between the Tamil minority and the Sinhala majority. The problem between two communities is multi-dimensional, as it stems from ethnic religious and linguistic differences.

The appropriate approach for the analysis of nationality problem of minority in developing states is to analyse the historical background of the minority. As Wriggins observes, minority unity and national disunity in the developing states of today have been strongly conditioned by socio-political disturbances caused by colonial rules, independence


movements, establishment of 'self rule' and process of state formation.

Indo-Ceylonese socio-cultural sub-systemic boundaries overlap in a highly significant manner. Virtually all the major waves of migration to Ceylon have been from India. The ancestry of Sinhalese, the dominant racial group in the island, is traced to Prince Vijaya of Bengal in India, who migrated to Ceylon. The dominant minority racial group in the Island is also from India. Migrating to Ceylon in the wake of repeated invasions from South India, the Tamils eventually settled down in the north and carved out a niche for themselves in the north and east of Ceylon. In this way, the cultural and linguistic consciousness of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka has always been influenced by developments in India in general and South India in particular.

The principal approach to the study is correlative and of synthesis. It is concerned with illuminating the peculiar characteristics of the


Tamillian society of ancient period against the background of Indian social and cultural matrix. It integrates the evidences available on different achievements and different fields of Ancient Tamils and integrates it with the general trends of the period so that we do not study the society in isolation but in all its varied aspects. However, the socio-economic situation of Tamils in Sri Lanka differed accordingly to the different environment, so, we deal separately with the socio-economic conditions of Tamils in Sri Lanka.

To start with the word Tamil, it denotes the Dravidian language par excellence spoken in South India and elsewhere by the Tamils. The standard dictionary of the Tamil language, the Tamil Lexicon, *lists* the following meanings of the word *tamil*: 1. Sweetness, melodiousness; 2. Refined quality; 3. Tamil language being divided into *iyar-ramil*, *icai-t-tamil*, *nataka-t-tamil*; 4. Tamil Literature, Tamil work; 5. The Tamils; and 6. The Tamil country. It is obvious that the enumeration in the Tamil Lexicon does not pertain to a single chronological level, or one single socio-linguistic and cultural usage.

It is the general opinion of Western scholars that there was no Tamil literature before the 7th century A.D. But the fact appears to be that all that was original and excellent in the literature of the Tamil was written before the ninth century. Literary tradition in Tamilaham is not much older than the Sangam Literature. Whatever data of written characters are available earlier to them would not seem to be amenable to any rational analysis as historical material. Sangam literature was compiled in A.D. 300-600. 'Sangam' was a college or assembly of Tamil poets held under royal patronage in Madurai. It is stated in a Tamil commentary of the middle of the eighth century A.D. that three Sangams lasted for 9990 years. They were attended by 8598 poets and had 197 Pandya kings at Patrons. The first Sangam was attended by gods and legendary sages, and all its works have perished. Of the second, there survives only the early Tamil grammar, Tolkappiyam written by Tol Kapiyar. It is a work on Tamil Grammar of the Aham (love) and Puram (war), orthography, construction, prosody, figures of speech, social practices, literary conventions, etc. The poet of the third Sangam wrote 7. It seems that they do not regard Sangam as the main literary work of the Ancient Tamils.
'Eight Anthologies' (Ettutogai) which are the greatest monument of ancient Tamil literature, as well as a number of later works such as 'The Ten Songs' (Patuppattu).

The next stratum of Tamil Literature shows much greater Aryan influence, of which Jaina influence is predominant. 'The Eighteen Minor Works' (Padivenkilkanakku) are largely gnomic and moralizing in character of which the two most famous being the Tirukkural written by Tiruvallinvar (known as the 'Bible' of the Tamilland) is a series of brief metrical proverbs on many aspects of life and religion.

By the 6th century A.D. Aryan influence had penetrated the whole of the Tamil land, and her kings and chiefs worshiped the gods of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. The indigenous style of poetry was rapidly altering under the influence of Sanskrit, and the Tamil poets took to writing long poems (kavya). The earliest and greatest of these is "The Jewelled Anklet" (Silappadikaram) written by Ilango-vadigal—grandson of Chola king Karikala. A little later than 'The Jewelled Anklet' was composed its

9. Ibid.
The third Tamil epic is Sivaga-Sindamani written by a Jaina Tiruttakkadevar.

The aim and methodology of the Sangam works like Purananuru are different from other Indian literature like the Puranas. The Puranas for instance abound in supernatural elements, in Sangam-Literature we come across such miracles occasionally. The division of Tamil literary themes into Aham and Puram is a conventional division which finds mention even in Tolkappiam, the most ancient Tamil grammatical work and is found employed in the most ancient among the later Tamil poetic works like Purananuru and Ahananuru in particular and in the eight anthologies (Ettutoggai) in general. Aham literally means the inside and technically refers to all the literature that deals with situations of mutual and spontaneous love leading to union and later to honourable matrimony. Aham does not relate to 'Free Love' but freedom of choice of a spouse. This perhaps means that the sangam Tamil Society vaguely remembered a stage in its social history when 'premarital intercourse automatically

10. Ibid.

culminating in matrimony was a prevalent mode of marriage. This situation was a distinct one in the society and easily lent itself to colourful literary treatment. Treatment of Aham situation then became a distinguishing feature of Tamil literature.

The Aryan migrations are supposed to have taken place around 1500 B.C. At that time non-Aryan races were in power, almost everywhere throughout India. To the Aryan races it was a period of humiliation, and to Brahminism one of painful struggle for existence. When in later years, Brahminism was favoured by royalty, it appears to have exerted all its energy to erase every trace of the rival faith. Starting somewhere about 1000 B.C. the movement of the Aryans into the South proceeded more or less steadily and peacefully, and had reached its completion some time before the establishment of the Mauryan empire which included in its fold all India except the extreme South. The Aryans penetrated in South in sufficient numbers to communicate their own civilization to the local inhabitants, but they were not able to incorporate them thoroughly into their own society and to root out their languages and their

peculiar civilization. The bulk of the population in these parts retained their own language and customs, and both were enriched and refined by contact with the northern culture. In this way the first great cultural synthesis and fusion took place between the incoming Aryans and the Dravidians, who were probably the representatives of the Indus Valley civilization.

Geographically the limits of Tamilakam were from Venkata Hill in the North, to Cape Comorin in the South, and from the Bay of Bengal in the East, to the Arabian sea in the West. Only one language Tamil was spoken from the Eastern to Western Sea and Malayalam had not formed into a separate dialect during that period. The oldest inhabitants of the soil were the Proto-Austroloids who were found with another less well pronounced and perhaps even earlier race-group namely the Negritoids as represented by the Kadars and Pulaiyans of the Anamalai ranges and its environs and the Onges of Andaman Island. These


14. Venkata Hill is the modern Tirupathi about 100 miles North-West of Madras.

15. V. Kanakasabhai, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1979, p.10.

have been considerably overlapped by the subsequent Dravidian speaking races and these again had already mixed to a high degree with the northern Aryan groups and thus resulting in a variegated pattern linguistically, sociologically and ethnically. These semi-barbarous tribes were conquered by the Nagas, who were a very numerous and civilized race and who at one time or other ruled a great portion of India, Ceylon and Burma. The essential culture stratigraphy of Tamilaham could be sketched as follows (a) basal matrix of stone age ending with a very rich microlithic culture concentrated along a dry sand-dune ridden coastal belt, (b) the Neolithic elements commencing diffusion mainly around North Arcot and Chingleput districts, (c) the robust Iron-using culture, the main unit that brought to Tamilaham all its urban traits, its agricultural and pastoral wealth and its trade-contacts, (d) the southward expanding so-called Indo-Aryan forces strongly impinged again bringing a new socio-religious ethos and a profitable assimilation of culture.

The sangam age appears to be one of evolution from tribal chieftainships to kingdoms.

The period of the Sangam marks the last stages of the life of the tribes that existed before the dawn of the Christian era such as Kurumbar, Vetar, Irular, Eyinar etc. The Chieftain emerged as the leader of the tribes. They had all the royal paraphernalia except the CROWN and DRUM. There was no mention of law making. The duty of the Chieftains was only to administer law. Probably, it was only customary law that was administered and custom got modified in the usual way without any direct process of legislation.

The function of the chieftain was to protect and maintain the tribal social order. The continued and unabated loyalty of the tribal social order was activated at a local level largely through the institution of war, and this in turn contributed to an absence of wider unity. This may be considered as the first instance in monarchial government in South India. The desire for empire appeared and the old organisation had lost its original vigour and a process of construction had set in when territorial expansion became the favourite pursuit of the Crowned monarchs. The Chera, Chola and Pandya having been the only crowned heads among the Tamils for many


20. The possession of the CROWN and DRUM was the exclusive privilege of the crowned king.
centuries, they were collectively known as 'the three kings'. The kings had a routine of royal duties. The palace was usually noisy, the major cause of which was the 21 beating of drum. The flag was an important paraphernalia of royalty. There were many flags depending upon the man and the occasion. The Cheras adopted the 22 palmleaf flag, the Cholas the tiger flag and the 23 Pandyas, the Fish Flag. The flag of victory was a 24 white flag. Royal justice was an important 25 concept. The opposite of it was injustice and tyranny. The idea of 'Wheel of royalty,' symbolised the 26 idea of sovereignty. There were also other sets of royal paraphernalia, the royal umbrella. The royal 27 umbrella represented the kings peace and valour. If the king's army lost its umbrella in the field of battle, it was the greatest humiliation 28 that anyone could earn. The armoury was a vital 29

21. Purananuru 288
22. Ibid 56.
23. Ibid 58.
24. Ibid 58.
25. Ibid 382.
27. Ibid 71.
29. Ibid 367.
30. Ibid 81.
institutions of the kings. Even the weapons were garlanded and worshiped. The army of the king consisted of Elephant corpse, Cavalary, Chariots and Infantry. All these divisions carried flags. The forts were defended by moats, mines and turrets. The forts were built of mud and the emblem of the chieftain was inscribed on the fort. The kings ruled by the might of their sword. Yet it was enjoined upon them by some sort of tradition that it was necessary for them to be king and sympathetic towards all. The king's court was called Sabhai or Avai, it was Avaiyam, the court of justice. It was also called Olakam. The court held at Uraiyur by the Chola king was famous for its just ways. The king's court, especially the morning court was attended by men who sought justice, poets who sought honour, bards who sought reward, Chieftains who sought favour and recognition and ministers and other officials who sought advice and guidance. This was an illustrious

32. Ibid 18.21.
33. Ibid 20.
34. Ibid 7.1
35. Ibid 54
36. Ibid 39.
court where justice was never denied. However, the powers of the king were restricted by five councils, which were known as the Five Great Assemblies consisting of the representatives of the people, priests, physicians, astrologers or augurs and ministers. From the analysis of the office of the King, it is evident that in the political sphere, Tamilaham evolved a system of monarchy, which was the result of evolution from the patriarchal tribal Chieftaincy.

Apart from the crowned monarchs who ruled Tamilaham with great distinction and renown, there were, however, several princes and chiefs ruling over extensive provinces in the Tamiland, who were more or less subject to one of the three kings. Among the feudatories many were Velirs, some other were non-velir. There were seven of the feudatory rulers who played a very important role in the history of Tamil patronage of art were, Peri, Anji, Ay, Kari, Ori, Nalli and Pehan.

37. Ibid 185.
38. V.Kanakasabhai, op.cit, p.109.
Socio-Economic Structure

The social system which prevailed in Tamiland during early period was an evolution over a period of time of tribal experience and imported notions connected with Verna and Asrama. The social order was clearly community, caste and Varna dominated and the economic divisions and other interest based differences became less momentous than this one. During the Sangam period the establishment of caste and other ideas and institutions had taken roots, while from the beginning the Varna System operated only partially. The Kashatriya link in the Aryan Varna System was not found in Tamil social order, because the Tamil Kings could intermarry with the Velalas and they were not mentioned as Dvijas. The first and the last rungs of that ladder alone namely the Brahmins and the Sudras (known as Vellalar locally) were known to the local social polity. The peasants are called 'the last grade' - 'Kadaiyan.' They had other communities based on profession. Carpenter (tachchan) was a community distinguished by skilled labour. Kovalar (Idaiyar) were particular to the

40. Puran, 60.
41. Ibid 61
42. Ibid 290.
pastoral land, woodcutters were a simple folk carrying on an unskilled form of labour, fishermen (Valainar) like Idayar carried on an avocation decided by their location.

The concept of certain communities being 'low' and 'high' was not unknown to the Sangam Tamils. The low 'caste' ones were called Illisinar (Pulaimahan).

The tribal communities who peopled Tamiland before the advent of the Brahmins was not a single integrated social group. They had also their divisions, but the difference between the Brahminical Varna hierarchy and the tribal division was that the former was vertical and based on an assumption of superiority and inferiority that went with birth, the latter was horizontal. These differences in either case inhabited intermarriage, inter-dining and other aspects of social intercourse. The former groupings were marked at the Brahmanical level by referring any person to an eponymic ancestor (usually a Vedic seer)

43. Ibid 224
44. Ibid 70
45. Ibid 240
46. Ibid 82.
with regard to a gotra and the latter groupings had their totemic affiliation like the many princely families which find mention in the Sangam literature as being connected with the protected tutelary trees, for instance the Kadambus. Historically it was a fusion of the gotra and totemic system which created the peculiar cast system of the Tamil country.

Some writers say that the slavery was unknown amongst the Tamils. But the system of slavery was also prevalent portrayed in the Purananuru. Adiyurai was the word used for a slave. The Nagas were an integral part of the Tamil society. Many Sangam names like Nagarayar, Nannaganar, Bhadamilanaganar, Murudanilanaganar, Mudinagarayan, etc. indicate the prevalence of Nagas among the Tamils.

The unit base of the society in Tamiland was family. The family had been of two kinds, Individualistic family system and Joint family system. The Tamilian of the early epoch did not have joint family proprietary system for the simple reason that

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47. S. Sundararajan *op. cit* pp.122-23.
49. *Puram* 198.
50. S. Sundararajan, *op. cit* p.80.
each Tamlian married whomsoever he liked for his own happiness and his children naturally followed the parents example and set up their respective individual homes. This resulted in individualistic family. This was the natural and basic family, consisted of the parents and their minor children only. It can naturally and out of the familiar necessity, extend beyond this and include the other wife or wives of the male parent and also some sons and daughters who might have outgrown their minority but still stay on in the family awaiting matrimony or lucrative employment. This large family which included aged parents, married brothers and their families and agnostic cousins and their children and so on sheltering under common roof and subservient to the oldest male member therein was called joint family. Whatever may be the case, whether it was individualistic or joint family, but it was always patrilinear family and normative family. The head of the family was known as ilvalan, means the male head of the family. Tamil like most

51. Ibid p.117.

52. The patrilinear family is a male dominated family in which sons inherit fathers property and women had no inherent legal right to property.

53. Normative family is a well defined and functioning according to prescribed rules or prevailing conventions in comparison with or in contrast to slightly more flexible family in which mobility and freedom obtained to a greater extend.
ancient societies had different standard of conjugal morality for men and women. In Tamil the word male is An i.e. a person who governs and the female is pen i.e. a person who attracts. This clears the position regarding familiar conception of inter-personal relations between man and woman. In almost all respects they were differentially valued and the valuation was always to the disadvantage of women. Her personality was enclosed with in the four walls of her family. A woman was never really free. She could not act on her own. When she was a child, she was to be guided by her parents, which in fact means the father. After marriage she came under the complete domination of her husband and if she was unfortunate enough to survive her husband then her son might be her guide and controller. Thus from birth to death she remained the dependent of some male member of the family. Dying with one's husband was considered the great virtue of a woman, and this act of ritual suicide itself in course of time came to be called sati. But a woman who was about to commit sati was dissuaded from the extreme act of self-immolation, if it was found that she was with child at that time. This practice of a


55. *Puram* 33.
widow postponing her act of self-immolation on the occasion of her departed husband’s cremation continued throughout the history of Tamiland and can be seen examplified in the case of a Nayak princess waiting to beget the child she was pregnant with and entering the fire after that event.

The most important stage between the birth and the death was marraige. Marriage in Tamil was a duty enjoyed on both man and woman for securing other impersonal and social good. Boys were considered marriageable at sixteen and girls at twelve years of age. The institution of marriage itself would be justified, fulfilled and sanctified by the birth of children. This would mean on ‘begetting sons’ and not generally children. A child was not a luxury but a necessity for the householder.

The early Tamil funerary practices were many. The practice of placing the dead body on stretch of Kusa grass was known. The religious rituals connected with the obsequies were performed with the

58. *Puram* 228
usual earnestness. The wife did the duty of offering the Pinda to the soul of the dead husband. This pinda was called the big ball of rice or perum choru. The ground for last rituals was Perumkadu or Puramkadu. The body was either interned in an urn or thrown away to the wild animals or vultures or was burnt. The urn was called the Imattali or the Madumakkal Tali. The bamboo carrier which conveyed these bodies to the burial ground was called Kalkali Kattil.

The diet of the people was extremely plain. Rice was the staple article of food, and milk, butter and honey were in common use. Except during marriage and domestic occurrences, there was, as a rule, no family gathering at meal time and each individual took his meals at the time most convenient to himself.

59. Ibid 363
60. Ibid 234
61. Ibid 261
62. Ibid 246
63. Ibid 250
64. Ibid 238
65. Ibid 256
66. Ibid 263.
Quail fights, dances, musical entertainments and religious festivities appear to have been the chief sources of amusement to the masses of the people.

People lived in the houses of many kinds. From the mighty mention of the king to the humble hut of the villager. The mention of smoke issuing from the kiln of burnt bricks shows that they had kilns for the manufacture of bricks to build houses with. The white-washing of the walls of the houses with the plaster called 'Sudai' was known to them. The houses had an upstairs portion called 'madi' and the house itself was called 'Manai, Vidu'. The houses of the poor classes were built of mud and thatched with grass or with the leaves of the coconut or palmyrapalm, and their walls were painted with red earth.

Religion was the most conservative form of ideology. Every religious phenomenon had been formed on the traditions and had absorbed and transferred them according to new needs. They had

67. V. Kanakasabhai op. cit., p. 125.
68. Puram 228
69. Ibid 378
70. Ibid
71. Ibid 120.
belief in the doctrine of Re-incarnation Poygaiyar referred to the Chola king KO-Chenganan as having a spider in his previous birth.

The economy of the Tamil country during the Sangam period was generally satisfactory, as the trade (inland and foreign) was flourishing and the mechanical professions were fairly advanced. Coinage was known to them, and gold coins were spoken of. They knew iron, Copper, gold and silver as metals and 'Pon' was used to indicate not only the metal/gold but also a kind of coin. Pepper, Salt and other commodities were packed in bags and taken on cart over the highway from place to place for sale.

Thus the Sangam society was by no means an egalitarian society i.e. from any point of view, whether it is wealth or caste or sex. The men granted their women a traditionally inferior status, this was accepted by the woman either out of mere habit or by conscious evaluation of the advantage of the position.

72. Ibid
73. Ibid 353
74. Ibid 152
75. Ibid 60, 343, 313, 393.
It is true that KAN Sastri and others have suggested that early Tamil literature is indebted to Sanskrit and that it shows a hybrid society in which Aryan and non-Aryan elements cannot be separated. In fact, there is relatively little which the most ancient Tamils owe to Aryan influence. Words of Sanskrit origin are quite few in earliest Tamil works. This shows that Tamil literature developed at a time when Sanskrit did not have the bundle's prestige it had attained when the other South Indian languages, which from the beginning are full of Sanskrit words, developed literature. It follows that Sanskrit, and the northern culture for which it was the vehicle, has not penetrated into Tamil Nadu to a degree sufficient to supplant indigenous customs at the time when Tamil literature developed in the first century A.D. As regards customs, it is true that Brahmins were present in South India by the time to the Tamil anthologies and that they had some influence, and it is fact that Buddhism and Jainism had been present in Tamiland for a few hundred years, yet almost all the customs described in ancient Tamil are wholly alien to Aryan Indian of the time.

76. S.Sundararajan _op.cit_ p.223.
77. Ibid.
The role of Aryan culture in Tamiland has been overestimated. In the case of Tamiland the Sanskritization not only means the adoption of Aryan elements, but more so the adoption of the Dravidian customs of the upper classes. The South Indian Brahmins not only adopted many Dravidian customs but also radically altered many Aryan elements to suit the Dravidian norms. For example, Brahmins put stronger constraints on widows than other groups. All these constraints can be shown to be of Dravidian origin, including continuous tonsure, which was practiced only by Brahmins.

We find certain spectacular changes in the fundamental concepts during the Kalabhra period (300 AD-600 AD) due to the activities of many cultural groups namely the Tamil speaking natives, the Jains, the Buddhists and the Brahmins. Due to the anti-Brahminical attitude of the Kalabhras and their suppression, the Brahmins could not learn the Vedas freely and they even began to forget them. Similarly, the ancient Tamil musical tradition also

78. Ibid p.227.

lost its royal patronage and went into a low ebb during this period.

During the Pallava Pandya Age (600 A.D.-900 A.D.) the emergence of temples in the wake of the revival of Puranic Hinduism had a remarkable effect on the social life. The Bhakti movement (of Saivas and Vaishnavas) led to a perceptible decline in the performance to sacrifice to Brahmins and the practice of austerities of the heterodox cults. Instead, there emerged the cult of a personal god as represented in the incarnation and lilas, and they were seen in the images (murtis) in the different temples all over the country. This period is called the 'golden age of Tamil Hinduism'. An important offering during this period was called navakandam, the offering of one's own head to Durga. Number of sculptures depicting this act have been found in the Pallava and Pandya temples of this age. One such sculpture can be seen on the back wall of the Drapadi Ratha in Mamallapuram, another on the Pandyan Cave

80  Ibid p.46

81. Thirty Pallava Copper Plates, "Paller Copper Plattes" in S. Sundararajan, op.cit p.241.
Temples in Tiruchirapalli, Tirupparankundram, Tiruthangal etc.

During the Chola (900-1300), itinerant trade became institutionalised and the Nagaram merchants became members of a powerful supra regional commercial organisation called Disai Aigiratti Ainur-ruvar, which was involved in the administration of commercial activities in the ports. The society was at bottom tribal, and in the superstructure was communal and caste based. It was aristocratic in its outlook. While the Bhakti literature spoke of cosmopolitanism, the caste structure was acquiring greater rigidity.

The period of Chola is notable for a climax to religious rivalry, which ended in the route of heresodoxy and a decisive division between the Saivism and Vaishnavism. The edition of the Tevaram by Nambi and the Divya Prabandhem by Nathamuni was the great achievement of the period. These texts professed

82. Vogel, 'Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies', London Vol.VI, Trans, into Tamil by KAN Sastri, Kalaimagal, No.4 April 1932
83. S.Sundararajan op.cit p.253.
85. Ibid p.270.
to take the Vedas to the masses through their own mother tongue. Thus any religious innovation took place only in the name of the Vedas.

In the medieval period the Tamil land was ruled by the Vijayanagar rulers. They were the defenders of Hinduism. It was the main task of the Vijayanagar rulers to forge unity among the various castes and communities that inhabited the vast empire. Brahmins no doubt occupied an exalted position. They could not be sentenced to death whatever crime they committed. Brahmin held important post in almost all spheres, political, administrative and military besides priestly. There were many other communities such as artisans, Kaikkolas, barbers, dombaras, etc. Artisans consisted of blacksmiths, goldsmiths, brarismiths, carpenters etc. All these classes were fighting amongst themselves and wanted some social privileges particularly certain honours in public festivals and in temples.

The occupation of the Tamil country by Telugu and the Kanadese led to the supression of the older inhabitants who had to take up the menual work. Among these classes we may mention Tottiyans, Soursastras and the Reddis.

The custom in those days did not allow girls for whatever reasons to remain in their parents home for more than six to eight years after birth. The rigidity of the custom, together with the celebration of the marriage at the very early stage, left no room whatsoever, for either the bride or the bridegroom to have time to think of a partner of their choice. Dowry was prevalent. The evil of bride price was also prevalent. Monogamy seemed to have been the rule among the lower society. Polygamy was the privilege of the nobles and the wealthy. The king of course, kept a large number of wives. The custom of sati was prevalent. It, however, seems that most of the widows preferred to immolate themselves with their husbands to escape the harsh treatment by the society.

There was comparative peace and prosperity in the Tamil country after its conquest by Kampana. It led to the development of Tamil literature. Tirumalainatha and his son Paranjotiyar were well known scholars of the period. Sevvaichchbudur translated Bhagavata Puranam into Tamil Vadomalavi. Annagalayyam was the author of Irusamaya Vilakkain, a work on Vaisnavism. Jnanapvakasa Desikar was the author of two works manjarippa and Kachchi Kalanbakan.

87. Ibid p. 209.
The advent of foreigners in South India had produced drastic and revolutionary changes in the political and economic life of the people, but in relative term the social life remained unaffected. This was because of the unusual caste culture that grew within each community. When the British assumed political ascendancy in the South, the society was feudal and caste ridden as it was in the days of the medieval kingdoms. The system of government and social mechanism were marked by feudalism in its worst form which reduced most of the people to the conditions of hewers of wood and drawers of water of their lords.

The wholesome influence of the British occupation of South India was altogether lost on caste and customs of the people, practically the British failed to prove the meaninglessness of these institutions.

Resistance to British rule in South India was almost coeval with the advent of their rule. But these cannot be considered as nationalist movements. However, nationalism in South India

appeared as late as the middle of 19th century with the activities of the organization like the Madras Native Association and the Madras Hindu debating society whose main concern was administrative and political reforms.

During the revolt of 1857, South India remained remarkably calm and the Madras Presidency and especially the princely states stood solidly behind the British government and helped them even by sending voluntary subscriptions.

The third session of Indian National Congress in 1887 in Madras had its impact on the nationalist movement in South India. It succeeded to a degree in promoting the political education of the people by distributing tracts and pamphlets and by holding public meetings. This served to make the press and people more patriotic and less English admiring and more critical about British administration.

In the beginning of the twentieth century there occurred a clear division between the Brahmin and non-Brahmin groups based mainly on political matters and the questions of educational opportunity

90 Ibid
and government employment. This distance increased with the appearance of Annie Besant on the scene of Madras politics in 1914. Her emphasis on the glories of Indian past and the revival of the Brahminical tradition soon made it obvious for the lower caste majority sections that her politics was an attempt to perpetuate the high caste indifference and discrimination. This controversy consumed much of the energy of Madras.

In pre-independence era there was no such factor which threatened the cultural integrity of Tamils. Only factor which Tamils considered attached to their culture particularly after independence is language disparities with the rest of India and particularly with the North India. Tamil considered Hindi as the domination of North over South.

Hindi had been suggested as the most suitable official language for the Indian Union after Independence by the Moti Lal Nehru Report of 1928. The constitution lays down that the official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script and further, that "it shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language, to develop

it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India, and to secure its enrichment by assimilating without interfering with its genius, the forms, style and expression used in Hindustani and the other languages of India and by drawing, whenever necessary or desirable for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages. English, however, was to continue as the second official language for period of fifteen years and longer if Parliament so desired. An official language commission appointed under the terms of the constitution in 1955 to review the situation supported Hindi as the sole official language, although members from Bangal and Madras dissented in favour of English.

The Tamil is highly developed language with a classical literature comparable with that of Sanskrit. The twentieth century has seen a major revival of Tamil culture which has manifested itself in a intensive effort to purify the Tamil language of all Sanskrit influence. This cultural renaissance has led to a growing self-confidence, a new awareness of a distinct Tamilian identity and a deepning suspicion

92. The Constitution of India, Article 351.
of all northern things. Anti Brahminism and rejection of traditional Hinduism as an import from the North have found ardent exponents. There have been widespread protests against the industrial dominance of the North, and an attitude of Tamil Chauvinism has been generated.

These feelings found their first political expression in the old Justice Party, which viewed British rule as the only alternative to Brahmin dominance, then in the eccentric E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker's Self Respect Movement, and finally in the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a party particularly influential among students, which was explicitly committed to the setting up of an independent Dravidian state in south India.

In order to maintain national unity and for ensuring the development of Hindi which would ultimately replace English as the official language the education Ministers of the states evolved a formula in 1961 known as the three language formula which provided for the use of regional language, English, and Hindi, where Hindi is the regional language any

other modern Indian language preferably a Southern one is to be taught. Accordingly in 1963 an official language Act was passed, making possible the continued use of English in administration and the courts both at the centre and in the states.

**Tamils in Sri Lanka.**

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual country. According to the official census estimates for 1981, the total population of Sri Lanka was 14,850,001 of which the Sinhalese number 10,985,666 or 74.0 per cent; Sri Lankan Tamils 1,871,535 or 12.6 per cent; Indian Tamils 825,233 or 5.5 per cent; Srilankan Moors 1,056,972 or 7.1 per cent; Malays 43,378 or 0.3 per cent and others 28,981 or 0.2 per cent. As Sinhalese speak Sinhala language, Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils and Tamil Muslims speak Tamil and Burghers speak English or Sinhalese.

The Sinhalese comprise a group of people who speak an Aryan language called Sinhala. According to tradition, the first sinhalese migrant led by Prince Vijaya and his 700 followers migrated from

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Near Eastern India to Sri Lanka some 2500 years ago. They gradually took roots in different parts of the island assimilated with the aboriginal inhabitants. The early settlers either absorbed, swept away or pushed into the remoter regions of the island. These Sinhalese gradually developed a distinct identity of their own, this process was further hastened when all of them embraced the Buddhist faith around third century B.C. As time went on, the Sinhalese subscribed to the view that Sri Lanka is Sinhadvipa or the land of Sinhalese and Dhammadvipa or the land of Buddhism.

The Sinhalese hegemony in Sri Lanka began to decline as a result of systematic invasions from South India. Though there is no firm evidence as to when the Dravidians first came to the island, yet they came from very early, either as invaders or as peaceful immigrants. Tamil and other literary sources, however, point to substantial urban and trading centers in South India in the third century B.C. Very probably there were trade relations between them and Sri Lanka. Thus it would tend strongly to support the conclusion that Aryan (Sinhalese) settlement and colonisation preceded the arrival of Dravidian

settlers by a few centuries. In the early period, ethnicity was not an important point of division in society in Sri Lanka, and it would seem that neither the Sinhalese nor the Tamils remained racially pure. And Sri Lanka in the first few centuries after the Aryan settlement was a multi-ethnic society rather than a plural society.

With the rise of three Hindu powers in South India the Pandyas Pallavas and Cholas in the fifth and Sixth centuries A.D. ethnic and religious antagonisms bedevilled relations between them and the Sinhalese Kingdom. These Dravidian states were militantly Hindu in religious outlook and quite intent on eliminating Buddhist influence in South India. As a consequence, the Tamils in Sri Lanka became increasingly conscious of their ethnicity, which they sought to assess in terms of culture and religion, Dravidian/Tamil and Hindu. Thus the Tamil settlements in the island became sources of support for South Indian invaders. This led Sri Lanka from

96 A conception which emphasises harmony and a spirit of live and let live.

97 In which tension between ethnic or other distinctive groups is a main feature.

being a multi ethnic polity, into a plural society, in which two distinct groups (Sinhalese and Tamils) lived in a sporadic tension.

The inevitable result of the conquest from South India was that Hindu-Brahminical and Saiva religious practices, Dravidian art and literature, and the Tamil language itself became overwhelmingly powerful in their intrusive impact on the religion and culture of Sri Lanka. The period of the South Indian invasions of the Anuradhapura kingdom in the ninth and tenth centuries coincided with the decline of Buddhism in India and the collapse of important centres of Buddhist learning as a result of Muslim invasions. These processes proved to be irreversible. South Indian influence on Sri Lanka thereafter became exclusively Hindu in content.

If the Sinhalese perceived that Sri Lanka is Dhammadvipa and Sinhadvipa and, therefore, they have a greater historical and cultural claim to the country, equally it must be stated that the existence of powerful Tamil Kingdoms in North and East prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, as significant motivating forces for Tamil nationalism. Though not

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99 Ibid p.73
expressly stated, the Sinhalese argument attests that Sri Lanka is the land of Buddhist, Dhamma and Buddhist institutions; it is the original homeland of the Sinhalese race and Sri Lankan nationalism and Sri Lankan nation must be based on the foundation of its Sinhalese component, especially the Sinhalese language and the Buddhist faith. According to Sinhalese fanatics, all other cultural components are alien and if they still survive, it is because of the tolerance and magnanimity of the Sinhalese. The Tamil, on the other hand also have an authentic memory of shared historical experiences which are as old as the Sinhalese component. They also wielded independent political power in the North and the East from the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth centuries. At the beginning of the Sixteenth century, there were three independent kingdoms in the island, the Sinhalese kingdom of Kandy and Kotte and the Tamil kingdom in Jaffna peninsula.

The Tamil population gradually began to increase as a result of immigration from South India during the colonial era. In Sri Lanka, the first, Tamil (Indian Tamil during British colonial period) immigrants arrived towards the end of the 1820s, and their numbers increased in the course of the following decade. The size and direction of migration flows at different periods were conditioned by the
availability and the demand for labour on the one hand and the institutional conditions (Political or social) which permitted such migrations on the other.

Tamil Nadu was already densely populated in the 19th century. While the population underwent a noticeable increase, possibilities for emigration within India were limited, urban industrial development had hardly begun in Tamil Nadu, and even Madras, the capital of the Presidency, was growing slowly. Only a few small mountainous areas in the Southern ghats, such as the Nilgiris, were able to attract the migratory currents. Economic development was on the other hand, more rapid and concentrated in other parts of the British empire. This structural imbalance between concentration of capital could not fail to lead rapidly to significant demographic transfers. Since work opportunities for labourers were very limited in South India, and the job market unstable and stagnant, new possibilities of employment at a regular cash salary on overseas plantations represented for many Tamils an unheard of hope. The


111 Ibid p.112.
wages offered by the planters were far higher than those in India. Migration was thus shaped by inequalities in the colonial economy. On the other hand because of its geographic and cultural closeness, island of Cylon enjoyed ideal conditions for the massive transfer of labour from South India.

After immigration in nineteenth century and onwards, two types of Tamils reside in the island, the Sri Lankan Tamils, whose historical tradition in Sri Lanka is as old as that of the Sinhalese and the Indian Tamils, which is an immigrant community. But the Indian Tamils share the common bonds of ethnicity and language with the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Historically, the animosity of the Sinhalese towards the Tamils was political rather than racial, taking the form of rivalry between rulers of kingdoms. But in periods of co-operation the relations between two communities had been cordial to the extent that not only were the last kings of Kandy of the


Nayakkar dynasty from Madurai in South India, but the contenders to the throne (in the post-1815 period) who led revolts against the British, had to pretend to be Tamil even when they were Sinhalese in origin, in order to establish their legitimacy.

It was with the development of the colonial economy in the 19th century that tensions arose between these groups which took a communal form. Like the Sinhalese, the Tamils were unable to make a significant breakthrough into the export-import trade or the lucrative retail trade. In addition (unlike the Sinhala bourgeoisie), the Sri Lankan Tamils did not even have avenues of accumulation through graphite or liquor renting and only a few Tamils had large coconut or other plantations. In this situation, the Tamils were the main competitors with the Sinhalese for the few other avenues of advance—namely government employment at all levels and the professions: hence competitions for advance through the educational system and for employment became aggravated among these two communities.

In the late 19th century the concern for the Tamil language manifested itself in various ways. A number of societies and associations were formed for its protection and development. As early as 1898 a Tamil Academy was established in Jaffna. Madurai Tamil Sangam was founded in 1901. This trend gathered momentum during the next few decades and a number of associations were formed (The Colombo Tamil Sangam was formed in 1942). Conferences and meetings were held to celebrate different aspects of Tamil language and literature.

The linguistic and cultural awakening was confined to a few conspicuous areas and was essentially that of the middle class Tamils with the upper middle class providing the leadership. The middle class sought to revive and cultivate certain features of Tamil culture that had become part of the established order in the old society. In so far as language is concerned, the zeal for Sen-Tamil, 'Cultured Tamil' or 'Classical Tamil' which for all practical purposes


116 One such meeting was held at the Ridgeway Hall in Jaffna in 1922, presided over by A Kanagasabai. Leading personalities from Madras were invited, among them were S. Krishnaswamy Iyengar, K. Subramania Pillai a staunch Tamil revivalist, P. V. Manicka Naicker a language enthusiast and A. Madaviah the novelist.
was moribund was the basis for the founding of societies and the holding of conferences.  

117 Bharat Natyam and Carnatic music were the two forms that came to be considered the necessary artistic requirements for a cultured Tamil girl. Bharat Natyam in particular had been resuscitated in the early twenties by the efforts of people like Bharata Iyer, Rukmani Arundale and G.Venkatachalam. During the 18th and 19th centuries Bharat Natyam had become degraded and called a 'nautch dance' performed by courtesans and prostitutes. Likewise Carnatic music had been brought from the court and temple to the concert hall and along with the dance from, acclaimed as divine arts.

The nature of the linguistic and cultural consciousness of the Tamil until the 1950s was complimentary in nature. But the post independent political developments began to change this picture. The D.S. Senanayake Government after independence enacted the Citizenship Act in 1948, according to which Indian Tamils became stateless in Sri Lanka. This resulted disenfranchisement of about 900,000 Tamils of Indian origin and the constant increase of Sinhalese

seats in successive parliamentary elections. In 1954, the then existing national assembly, the state council resolved that Tamil and Sinhalese would be the official language of the island. But by the Official Language Act of 1956 SWRD Bandaranaike made Sinhala as the only official language. The government passed an order in January, 1957 that all number plates on new motor vehicles must bear Sinhalese letters. These developments increased the awareness of the Tamils as a national minority. Particularly due to the dialectal differences question such as when and from where did the Tamils come here? Are they autochthonous to the land? What is their relationship to the Sinhala people? What is their contribution to the culture and civilization of Sri Lanka? protruded to the forefront in ever increasing frequency and intensity.