

CONCLUSION

The Indo - Lanka relationship has existed right from the dawn of history, as evidenced from archaeological and literary sources. The early history of Sri Lanka, based on the Pali literature, was exaggerated and unbelievable. The Pali literature tracing of Sri Lanka's relationship with north India, says little about the relationship between south India and Sri Lanka. The link between Sri Lanka and India has been traced only after the development of studies in archaeology and anthropology.

Generally, trading has facilitated relations between the two countries. Yet contacts between south India and Sri Lanka had political contacts since the days of Cheras. Military expeditions and the resultant capture of prisoners of wars, led to creation of settlements and marriage relations that sustained the political relationship between south India and Sri Lanka. According to a Sri Lankan legend Vijayan's invasion and his desire to marry the Pandiya Princess paved the way for the political relationship between these two countries. But from the Sri Lankan literary evidences we come to know that Sri Lanka's political contact with south India had started in the time of Sri Lankan King Sura Tissa. Since then military expeditions had followed from both sides. Parakiramabahu, the King of Sri Lanka is believed to have invaded against the kings of south India.

The relationship of these two countries had entered into a new direction after 3rd century A.D. Sri Lankan kings seeking the help of south Indian kings to protect their kingdom from the enemies within the country, especially during wars of succession because order of the day. The cultural renaissance of Pallava period in south India after 6th century A.D had its impact in Sri Lanka. This cultural influence continued during the time of imperial Cholas and lasted until Nayak period in south India.

The advent of Europeans in India and Sri Lanka radically altered the socio-economic and political conditions. Though the Portuguese and the Dutch had political control over Sri Lanka for a short period, they left behind a lasting cultural impression. In the beginning of 17th century, the English East India Company which got permission from Queen Elizabeth in England to engage in trade came to India with the objective of expanding their trade. They formed their settlements and started evincing interest in political developments in the host countries.

Like the English East India Company, the French East India Company also had colonized some parts of India in the middle of 17th century. But in the rivalry between the both, the English had emerged victorious. The British could eventually establish their monopoly in South Asia. Their attention was drawn to Sri Lanka since it provided defence to their colonial power. Particularly Trincomalee the natural harbour of Sri Lanka was considered important for strategic reasons.

But Sri Lanka was under the Dutch control then. The British did not like to break their relationship with the Dutch. They were expecting a chance which came. After capturing Kandy in 1815 and developing the plantation agriculture there, the British brought about rapid changes in the economy of the island.

The British introduced the slope cultivation and cultivated coffee first, then tea and coconut and later rubber. These plantation estates did not need much investment since land was provided at a throw-away price. The European individuals came forward to set up the estates for growing plantation crops.

The native Sri Lankan labourers were unwilling to work in estates and hence efforts were taken to bring labourers from other countries. In the beginning attempts were made to bring the labours from China but they all failed. The south Indian labourers were known for hard work at low wage and so the British preferred them to any other labour force. As the south Indian labourers were recruited under indentured labour system, numerical strength of south Indian labourers slowly increased in Sri Lanka after 1830. The labourers came from several parts of south India along with their family to Sri Lanka not only to work in the estates but also to do other manual work.

The labourers did not migrate to Sri Lanka from south India during the Portuguese and the Dutch period. But during the British rule in India, labourers were forced to migrate due to oppressive land tax,

recurring famines, and the caste discrimination practised by upper caste groups. The British adopted the Indenture System, the *Kangany* System and the *Thundu* System to draft the labourers from India to work in the European plantations.

The labourers who were brought under the Indentured Labour system in other countries became permanent citizens in due course of time. As far as Sri Lanka was concerned, this did not happen. The *Kangany* System followed to avail cheap labour alienated them from the mainstream of labour force. A *Kangany* supervised 25 or 30 labourers. He was selected from the group itself. He earned monthly wage as well as brokerage. Whenever the labourers were needed he went to south Indian villages and brought the labourers. The advance payment made was mentioned in a *Thundu* (slip) and the labourers had to work for the amount they had received. This system was called the *Thundu* System.

When the labourers were brought from south India, particularly Tamil Nadu, many promises were given to them. Before starting their journey at the south Indian harbour, the migrant labourers emigrating to Sri Lanka were subjected to a great deal of troubles. The *Kanganys* and the colonial officials exploited the migrant labourers. After the arrival of Sri Lanka they had to travel a long distance to reach the hill station where the estate was located. During their journey to the estate, the basic needs such water and food were not provided to the migrants. Some migrants affected by contagious diseases died on the way. Those

who were affected by such diseases in the estate were sent back to their mother country.

The labourers who migrated from south India were treated as slaves in Sri Lanka. They lived there only as coolies and they did not have any land or any other property in Sri Lanka. Among the south Indian labourers, only the estate workers faced many problems. Housing, food, hygiene and, education, were lacking and the low wage paid to estate labourers further miserised them. Relieving the labourers from the exploitation of estate owners posed a serious problem. Further they did not have any organization to highlight their plight.

Actually the labour unions should have emerged in estates. If it had happened it would have been the strongest one, because lakhs of labourers worked in these estates. They could have easily wrecked the economy of the country as it depended on the plantation crops. Yet there was no organization for workers in any estate for a long time. The cruel oppression of estate owners, the unwillingness of the labourers in getting citizenship, their ignorance and lack of contact with outside world were the reasons for the absence of labour organizations in the estates.

However, implementation of Compulsory Educational Act of 1920 in Sri Lanka resulted in the increase of literate people in the estates. They started reading news papers and checking their wage accounts. They could realize the oppression and exploitation of the estate owners. The Visit of Ghandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru and their addresses among

the estate labourers inspired them to join the labour unions. After the Donoughmore Constitution, around 100,000 labourers got franchise and two Members from south Indian labourers were elected to Parliament of Sri Lanka. This political environment encouraged the estate labourers to join the unions. The labour unions were founded in the beginning of 1930s with the object of improving their living condition. The unions had imbibed the idea of Indian Nationalism. Natesa Aiyar, by birth a Brahmin and by profession a journalist, came to Sri Lanka and worked for the cause of labourers. He had been in the Sri Lanka Legislative Council for a long time. He championed the cause of the estate labourers and founded the All Ceylon Estate Labourer Federation in 1931, the first trade union of estate labourers in the country.

Later Ceylon Indian Congress was inaugurated after the visit of Jawaharlal Nehru. This union used strike as a weapon and conducted many struggles under the leadership of S. Thondaman, leader of Ceylon Workers Congress. The Ceylon Indian Congress after some years had become Ceylon Workers' Congress. Owing to the difference of opinion between S. Thondaman and A. Azez, another leader of Ceylon Workers Congress, the Ceylon Workers Congress was split after 1955. This split did not affect the Ceylon Workers Congress, as even today this Congress is functioning as a political organ of the south Indian labourers.

The continuous flow of immigration of south Indian labourers into Sri Lanka had increased their numerical strength. In the beginning the

Sri Lankan politicians did not fear about their immigration. But when their number increased, the Buddhist Sinhalese leaders began to panic about their increasing numbers. Due to the continuous struggles of the south Indian immigrants, their working conditions improved. But at the political level the immigrants did not get any rights. As far as Sri Lanka was concerned it was feared that if franchise was given to the south Indian immigrants it might reduce the political power of the Sinhalese. They wrongly assumed that the south Indian labourers were responsible for the 1930s Great Depression. In this backdrop the Sinhalese politicians resorted to racist politics. Though citizenship was given to all, as far as Upcountry people were concerned voting rights were given to them with some restrictions. Nevertheless around 145,000 people in 1936 and 225,000 people in 1936 had got franchise.

After this period drastic steps were taken to control the arrival of labourers from south India. This time the Sinhala bourgeoisie took several steps to stop the labour participation in local government elections. The intention of Sinhalese harassing the south Indian labourers was to prevent the arrival of labourers in future. The incidence of sending back the south Indian labourers was on the increase. Before Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Sri Lanka thousands of labourers had been forcibly repatriated due to harassing activities of Sinhalese politicians. So the Indian Central Government, Tamil Nadu Government, Ceylon Workers Congress along with Sri Lankan Left Parties and Sri Lankan

Tamil leaders had expressed their support to the cause of stateless citizens. Only in the case of Left Parties Sinhalese politicians had voiced in favour of Indian labourers in the Legislative Council and opposed the forced repatriation of the Indian labourers. Ponnampalam Arunachchalam, G.G. Ponnampalam played a vital role in this regard.

The steps that were taken to solve the problems of south Indian labourers during the pre-independence period of Sri Lanka was not satisfactory. The Prime Ministers and higher officials from both the countries had a meeting in 1940 in Delhi. In 1941 the Indo-Lanka Conference was held in Colombo. Both the meeting and the conference yielded no substantive results. In 1946 the Indian National Congress sent their representatives to Sri Lanka to discuss the problems faced by the south Indian labourers. They held discussion with Sri Lankan Prime Minister and other officers but in this meeting too no notable results were made. The talk held in 1947 was considered commercial in the pre-independent Sri Lankan history. This was the first meeting which was conducted between Jawaharlal Nehru & D.S. Senanayake. This also gave an opportunity for the first time to both the Prime Ministers to meet and exchange views. The proposal of providing citizenship to 800,000 Indians in Sri Lanka was discussed in that meeting. The decisions regarding the provision of citizenship still an eluded solution.

Sri Lanka won independence in 1948. Like the Sinhalese the south Indians too celebrated the independence of Sri Lanka. The first

law which had been enacted in independent Sri Lankan Parliament was against the people of Indian Origin. Further the three acts passed such as Citizenship Act of 1948, Indo – Pakistan Citizenship Act of 1949 and Parliament Elections Amendment Act of 1949 deprived the citizenship and franchise rights of Sri Lankan Indians.

Due to the implementation of the Citizenship Acts, there were no representatives in Sri Lankan Parliament on behalf of south Indian labourers during the period of 1948-1972. Indians had faced obstacles to buy land, to enter government service. When the bills for the acts were tabled in Parliament, the Sri Lankan Tamils joined with United National Party of Sinhalese to support these legislations. The Left Parties, however, supported the cause of Indian labourers. Even the senior Tamil leader of All Ceylon Tamil Congress G.G. Ponnampalam supported the Citizenship Act. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, V. Naganathan and K. Vanniyasingam left All Ceylon Tamil Congress in protest to form the Federal Party. Later this party grew into an important body of Sri Lankan Tamils and influenced the Upcountry Tamil politics for a long time.

The above mentioned Acts pushed the Indians to the stage of stateless in the 1952 general election. These Acts mostly affected south Indian estate labourers than the other south Indian non-estate labourers. The estate labourers on one hand were numerically dominant but on the other were victims in many respects. Consequently the Sri

Lankan Government also succeeded in preventing the Left Parties, which supported the issues of south Indians who in turn supported the Left Parties, from entering into the Parliament.

Northern part Sri Lankan Tamils supported and saved many Indians without the knowledge of the government. At the same time a few northern part Sri Lankan Tamils betrayed them by identifying the illegal immigrants to the Sri Lankan Government. They also mocked them by using the terms *Kallathoni Thottakkattan Vadakkathaiyar*. The Indian Government did bother about the Indian labourers who immigrated during the colonial period but was not concerned about the post independent immigrants in Sri Lanka who were considered illegal immigrants.

When the south Indian labourers faced the problems of citizenship, the news papers which had been publishing in contemporary Sri Lanka gave importance to the news related to south Indian labourers. Especially the news papers from Jaffna like *EelaKesari*, the *Indu Sathanam* and *Sutantiran* voiced their sympathy in favour of Tamils.

Regarding the denial of citizenship to south Indians in Sri Lanka, there was a debate held at Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. The Assembly requested the Indian Central Government to intervene in the affairs of south Indians in Sri Lanka. Ceylon Workers Congress also requested the Indian Central Government to intervene. According to Indian Government, estate labourers were inhabitants of Sri Lanka but

in contrast the Sri Lankan Government expressed the view that the estate labourers had come to Sri Lanka for employment and to earn money. Based on these two opposing views, the negotiations going on between these two countries even after Sri Lankan independence fell through.

There was a meeting held in June, 1953 between Jawaharlal Nehru and Dudley Senanayake in London, In that meeting, Dudley told Nehru that India should accept 300,000 Indians labourers and the granting of citizenship to the remaining people would be decided later by Sri Lanka in consultation with India. If Indian Government had accepted this proposal, 300, 000 labourers would have been forcibly sent to India. But the idea of compulsory repatriation suggested by Sri Lankan Government was not accepted by Jawaharlal Nehru. Then there was another meeting held in Delhi between Jawaharlal Nehru and John Kotelawele in January, 1954. There was no significant outcome either. These negotiations came to an end affecting the relationship between two countries, during the Prime Minister ship of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. Thereafter no special discussion was held between India and Sri Lanka.

Things had come to such pass by 1960 that Indians had been pushed out from Uganda and Burma causing alarm to Government of India which tried to pre-empt such developments in Sri Lanka. India became apprehensive especially after the Indo-China war because Sri

Lanka had close relationship with China. To make things worse Pakistan had agreed to call back their people from Sri Lanka.

In the mean time Jawaharlal Nehru had passed away, succeeded by Lal Bahadur Sastri who signed a pact with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Srimavao Bandaranaike in October 1964. This pact was called Srimala-Sastri Agreement. According to this pact, 525,000 persons out of 975,000 labourers had been permitted to get franchise. About 28,262 labourers had passports and hence they had been excluded. Sri Lanka agreed to provide citizenship to 300,000 people and to consider the citizenship of the remaining 150,000 people later. More over the two countries decided to share the 150,000 people in 1:1 ratio.

Here the interesting point is that the Left Parties which had been supporting the issues of Indian labourers for a long time joined government by supporting the Srimala-Sastri Agreement. The Ceylon Workers Congress and the other labour unions however opposed this pact. The Federal Party keeping the welfare of south Indian labourers in view founded Ceylon Workers Association in Upcountry. This union along with Sri Lankan Tamils and south Indian labourers agitated against this pact.

After the implementation of Sinhala Only Act of 1956 the ethnic riots took place. But during the period south Indian labour or south Indian labour unions were not given support by Sri Lankan Tamils. The Sri Lankan Tamils expressed their protest against the riots by Gandhian

means. Actually the two sections of Tamils were suffering from racist policy of the Sri Lankan Government. But unity among them was lacking.

There were voices at the Indian Parliament and Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly against the attack of Sinhalese on the Tamils in Sri Lanka. However the two countries did not have any change in their approach. The south Indian Tamils who had lived in Sri Lanka were not ready to go to India, because some of them had been living in Sri Lanka for a long time and considered Sri Lanka as their mother country. Those who applied for citizenship in 1969 were aged people and their children had got married and settled in Sri Lanka. But due to change of circumstances they were forced to leave Sri Lanka. Most of them who returned India were exploited along the way by many officials. Further many labourers who came back to India suffered a lot of due to the lack of livelihood arrangement. Pushed to wall, the Sri Lankan Tamils were constrained to take to arms to secure justice. The relationship between the two countries had soured to such an extent that in the late 1960s and early 1970s there were hardly any initiative on both sides to resolve the tangle between Sinhalese and Tamils. Thus a beginning was made for a protracted ethnic war in the country.
