

INTRODUCTION

Overview

India - Sri Lanka contact which is traced to pre- historic time, has become possible because of the proximity of the two countries. Trade and military expeditions led to settlement of Tamils in Sri Lanka to start with. Later the bond between south India and Sri Lanka developed through marital relationship the Tamils established with their ethnic counterparts. The Pali works *Mahavamsa* and *Dipavamsa* tell us the early history of Sri Lanka. However, these Pali books provide information on the early contacts between north India and Sri Lanka. They do not give much importance to south Indian links with Sri Lanka. For a long time there is a myth that the pre history of Sri Lanka started with the arrival of Vijayan from northern India. The Sinhalese posed that they were the descendants of Aryans. This myth was believed by the persons who wrote Sri Lanka's history. But archaeological excavations done in south India and Sri Lanka reveal that there existed special contacts between south India and Sri Lanka from time immemorial.

The relationship starting from the beginning of historic period and continued during the periods of Pallava, Chola, Pandiya and Nayak rulers. The contacts between two countries which continued until the

arrival of the Portuguese and the Dutch got strengthened when the English established their total control over Sri Lanka. A new era in the relationship between India and Sri Lanka had begun.

The English rulers in Sri Lanka introduced the plantation agriculture for which the labourers were recruited from south India, notably from Tamil regions. These labourers in course of time stayed on in Sri Lanka as permanent settlers with the introduction of tea cultivation. The contributions of these labourers were considered very important to the growth of the Sri Lankan economy. Yet their life was very miserable. Apart from the oppression of planters, the Tamil population had to suffer discrimination at the hands of Sinhalese politicians. Particularly, after the independence of Sri Lanka, when the Tamil labourers' movement emerged and began to fight for the rights of the labourers, the Sri Lankan politicians in order to crush the democratic rights of south Indian labourers, passed legislations that denied citizenship to them.

The problem of the south Indian labourers gave a headache to both India and Sri Lanka. Before independence though the leaders of both the countries had met and tried to get an amicable settlement they were not successful. They started this process again after independence. Yet no satisfactory solution could be found. The problems continued to persist without any solution until 1972.

Objective

The title of the thesis is **The Indo- Lanka Relations (1931-1972)**. The focus of the thesis has been on the problems faced by Tamil labourers and the resultant strain in the relationship of both India and Sri Lanka. In the 1930's in view of Tamils' entry into politics, they challenged the political arrangements. Because of the universal suffrage given to the labourers with the introduction of Donoughmore Constitution in Sri Lanka (1931), they began to challenge the Sri Lankan politicians who began to hate the Indian labourers. The permanent solution for south Indian migrant labourers' problems proved elusive since citizenship rights were denied to a large number of Indian Tamils. The occurrences that had taken place since 1930s affected the relationship between India and Sri Lanka and the period from 1931 to 1972, covering many episodic events, has not been studied from the perspective of south Indian Tamil labourers and hence this study.

The main objective of this research is to highlight how the people of south Indian Origin were treated by the Sri Lankan Government in granting civil and political rights with focus on the grant of citizenship to immigrant Tamils.

Focus of the Study

- * The settlement and living condition of the south Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka.
- * Exploitation of Plantation labour and the laws enacted.
- * The activities of the plantation workers' unions since 1930s.
- * The talks between India and Sri Lanka and the agreements reached.
- * The role of the contemporary Jaffna Tamil newspapers in politicizing south Indian labourers.
- * Denial of citizenship to Indian immigrants and its fallout in the post independence period.
- * Issue of ethnicity and the emergent conflict of interest between Sinhalese and Tamils.
- * Circumstances leading to armed struggles between two ethnic groups.

Review of Literature

S.U. Kodikara's *Indo - Ceylon Relations since Independence*, a book based substantially on his doctoral dissertation, highlights the plight of south Indian labourers and points out how they suffered in Sri Lanka at

the hands of two successive governments. Historian V.C.B. Mendis, in his book *Foreign Relations of Sri Lanka*, traces the relations of both the countries from earliest times to 1965. This book has dealt with the foreign policy of Sri Lanka towards India in the first fifteen years of post independence period. S.S. Bindra in *India and her Neighbours* has brought out the problem of Indian's immigrants, their demand for citizenship, and other associated problems they faced. Ravikant Dubey's *Indo - Sri Lankan Relations* dwells on the relationship Sri Lanka had with India during European rule. B.B. Maheswary's study titled *India and Sri Lanka* highlights the problems of south Indians labourers in Sri Lanka.

Donald.R. Snodgrass's *Ceylon: An Export Economy in Transition*, L.F. Rushbrook Willian's *India of Today: Indian Emigration by Emigrants*, P. Ramaswamy's *New Delhi and Sri Lanka*, P. Sahadevan's *India and Overseas Indians: The Case of Sri Lanka*, A. Jeyaratnam Wilson's *Politics in Sri Lanka(1947-1979)*, D.M. Forest's *Hundred years of Ceylon Tea, 1867-1967*, G. Peiris's *Development and Change in Sri Lanka*, P.R. Ramachandra Rao's *India and Ceylon*, S. Nadesan's *A History of the Up Country Tamil People in Sri Lanka*, H.N.S. Karunatilake's *Economic Development in Ceylon*, B. Bastiampillai's *Survey of Conflicts among Communities* are the other relevant works on the subject.

D. Wesumperuma in *Indian Immigrant Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka*, Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya in *Indians in Sri Lanka*, S. Sandrasegaran's, *Illangai Indiar Varalaru* (Tamil), K. Mohanraj's

Irupatham Noottandin Naveena Adimathanam (Malayaka Tamil Makkalin Varalaru) (Tamil) and K.M.de. Silva's *A History of Sri Lanka* have dealt with the condition of south Indian labourers.

However none of the above scholars have attempted an account from the perspective of stateless labourers. While attempting such a perspective, the study seeks to mainly use the contemporary Sri Lankan Tamil newspapers and Parliamentary debates as important sources.

Hypotheses

While doing investigation, the following hypotheses are sought to be tested:

- * The Jaffna Tamils were the early Tamil migrants settled in Sri Lanka during the period of Imperial Cholas.
- * The Tamils who emigrated to Sri Lanka in the colonial period were looked upon inferiors by Jaffna Tamils.
- * The Tamils who were employed in plantations were referred to as Indian Tamils and denied equal treatment.
- * The working class movement in Sri Lanka politicised the plantation labour.
- * Feelings of political insecurity prompted the Sinhala leaders to use the ethnic card to drive a wedge between Sinhalese and Tamils.

- * The anti-Tamil feelings of Sinhalese led to solidarity between Jaffna Tamils and Indian Tamils.

Methodology and Sources

The methodology used is historical. The mode is descriptive. The sources for this research were collected from various repositories of documents in Chennai and Sri Lanka. The debates in Sri Lankan Legislative Council, State Council and Parliament, the Sri Lankan Government Reports, Indian Lok Sabha and Tamil Nadu Legislative Council and Assembly debates, contemporary news papers in Sri Lanka, legislations adopted by the colonial and the national governments, interviews with affected persons constitute the primary sources. The secondary sources such as books and journals have been extensively used. The oral information given by those who were affected by ethnic violence have been recorded. Internet sources such as website articles have also been consulted.

Chapterisation

The thesis has six chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. Chapter I traces the relations between south India and Sri Lanka from

early times to the advent of Europeans. The relationship between south India and Sri Lanka during this period was political. The political interests the Tamils had in Sri Lanka led to cultural and economic relations between the two countries.

In Chapter II the arrival of Europeans and their growing influence in Asia brought about rapid changes in the organization of polity and society in Sri Lanka. The establishment of British rule and colonization of Sri Lankan economy provided scope for employment of indentured labourers drawn from India.

The abominable living conditions of these south Indian labourers, the exploitation of their labour by Tea planters, and the consequent resistance and organization of the workers are discussed in chapter III.

Chapter IV highlights the demands of the south Indian labourers, especially the Tamil labourers who had been politicised by left-oriented trade union leaders. As British withdrawal from Sri Lanka was imminent, some Constitutional Reforms were introduced. But they fell far short of the aspirations of the labouring class. This aspect is also dwelt at length in this chapter.

The rising solidarity amongst Tamils against the discriminatory policy of Sri Lankan Government and the voice of the press in support of the stateless citizenry are described in Chapter V. The leading news papers of that time *EelaKesari*, *Indu Sathanam* and *Sutantiran* and their standpoint on citizenship rights of Tamils are highlighted in this chapter.

In Chapter VI the politics involved in the grant of citizenship to plantation workers and industrial labourers and the response of the Tamil Nationalists to the ethnic prejudice of mainstream Sri Lankan politicians are analyzed. The measures adopted by the early Sri Lankan leaders to resolve the issue of citizenship and its fallout are also discussed.

The government's unleashing of violence against the Tamil population through the uniformed and armed service personnel triggered riots. The emergence of political parties for Tamils and their role in representative politics is also explained.

The summary of each chapter is provided in the concluding part of the thesis.