The linkage between education and development is well established. For the equality of women, educational attainment is critical factor. It is said that if we educate a man we educate an individual, if we educate a woman we educate a family and a nation. It means that education of women plays an important role in shaping the society and economy. An improvement in their contributes to the development of family, society and the nation. At present, almost all the nations have recognized the importance of education and their responsibility in educating people.

The educational base in Sri Lanka is well established. The country has maintained a high literacy level, and relatively high level of female participation at each stage. However, in comparison with other ethnic groups, the Indian Tamils continue to be the most depressed and educationally backward strata of the Sri Lankan society. Consequent to the citizenship laws of Sri Lanka enacted in 1948-49, most of them remained "stateless" for almost four decades. Not only this, they suffered from various other problems such as poverty; and unequal wages, as compared to other sectors of the Sri Lankan economy. They generally had working conditions, miserable housing conditions, inadequate educational
facilities, and lack of medical facilities. The socio-economic condition of the Indian Tamil community in Sri Lanka has been considerably affected by the low level of income and education, high level of disease and death rate, and high rates of infant and maternal mortality. Other underlying factors responsible for the backwardness of the Indian Tamils is the plantation economy and the political configuration that emerged in the island since independence.

Against this backdrop, the main thrust of the present study is to analyse the level and rate of educational attainment by the Indian Tamils in general and the Indian Tamil women in particular. As the other socio-economic needs, the educational needs of the community were also neglected for a long time. The fact remains that all the major educational reform programmes undertaken by successive governments in Sri Lanka, had excluded the plantation sector from their purview.

It is evident that not much work has been done on Indian Tamil community's educational status, specifically that of the Indian Tamil women's since 1971. There is hardly any full-length study available on the growth and problems of Indian Tamil women's education, especially for the period 1971-91. The proposed study is an attempt filling this gap.
There are a number of works available on the socio-economic and political conditions of the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. Donovan Moldirich, in his book entitled *Bitter Berry Bondage: The Nineteenth Century Coffee Workers of Sri Lanka*, deals with the origin of Indian Tamil community in Sri Lanka. Apart from explaining their migration pattern, the author analyses the role of Indian Tamil’s work in the development of tea industry.


Mayan Vije’s book *Where Serfdom Thrives: The Plantation Tamils of Sri Lanka*, narrates citizenship problems of the Indian Tamils. It also analyses some of their other problems, such as poor wages, poor income, high death rates and poor literacy rates.

P. Sahadevan’s work *India and Overseas Indians: The Case of Sri Lanka*, examines India’s approach towards the problem of the statelessness of the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka in the perspective of India’s overall policy towards the Overseas Indians. Apart from dealing with the entire gamut of negotiations between India and Sri Lanka on the of question state-
lessness, his study also analyses the process of repatriation of the Indian Tamils to India.

G.A. Gnanamuttu's book, *Education and the Indian Plantations Worker in Sri Lanka*, traces the history of education in the plantations. While analysing the educational policy and programmes of the government, the study finds out the reasons for the poor educational development in the estate sector.

Rachel Kurian's work, entitled *Women Workers in the Sri Lankan Plantation Sector: An Historical Analysis*, deals with the Tamil women's educational condition and produces substantial data. She also portrays a picture of women's socio-economic conditions.

The book *The Power of Tamil Women* edited by Susan S. Wadley, gives an insight into social position of the Tamil Woman in Sri Lanka. The role that woman has in her family as girl, as daughter, sister and wife. It is a comparative study of the status of Tamil Women in India and Sri Lanka.

S. Ganeshalingam's book *Pennadimai Theera (Remedies for Women's Slavery)* (in Tamil), deals with the Tamil women's problems and how far the Tamil society created new opportunities for them to overcome the constraints for their socio-economic development.

Sirima Kiribamune and Vidyamai Samarasinghe's edited book entitled *Women at the Crossroads: A Sri Lankan Perspec*
tives, contains a number of articles dealing with different aspects of women's problems in Sri Lanka. Contributors are eminent scholars who have thorough knowledge of the subject. Particularly, Swarna Jayaweera's chapter on "Education of girls and women in the context of an economically developing society" gives a clear picture on educational conditions of women at different levels i.e., primary, secondary, college, professional, etc. Beside, Radhika Coomaraswamy's paper on employment of women in various sectors of economy, explains the recruitment policies and processes.

Risseeuw Carla, Gender Transformation. Power and Resistance Among Women in Sri Lanka. This book is based on theoretical problems in gender based hierarchies which the author has traced out through her direct involvement with a group of Sri Lankan Women Coir Workers, living in the south coastal area of the Island.

The main objectives of the present study are:
(i) to examine the overall trend in the educational attainment of the Indian Tamil women in a comparative perspective;
(ii) to analyse the linkages between their socio-economic and political conditions and educational attainment;
(iii) to identify the factors impeding the growth of the Indian Tamil women's education;

(iv) to make an appraisal of successive Sri Lankan government's approach towards the Indian Tamils' education in general and women's education in particular.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter provides a background of the Indian Tamil community in Sri Lanka. Apart from tracing their historical antecedents, it analyses the Indian Tamils' settlement pattern, occupational structure and general socio-economic position as compared to other ethnic groups in the island.

In the second chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the level and rate of educational attainment by the Indian Tamil women during the pre 1971 period. The chapter also examines various educational policies of the government and the attitude of the plantation management towards education of the Indian Tamil women. While comparing the educational status of the Indian Tamil women with women belonging to other ethnic groups, the chapter also explores the reasons for the comparative educational backwardness of the Indian Tamil women.
The third chapter deals with various policies and programmes of successive governments since 1971 for the improvement of education in the plantation sector. Apart from analysing the role played by the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) in changing the government's apathetic attitude towards the socio-economic problems of the Indian Tamils, the chapter also assesses the activities of NGO's in the realm of educational development in the plantation sector.

In the fourth chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the trends in the educational upliftment of the Indian Tamil women during the period 1971-91. It also examines the factors for the growth of Indian Tamil women's education in terms of rate and level of their educational attainment, and the reasons for their educational backwardness in comparison to other ethnic groups.

The fifth chapter tries to find out the impact of educational growth of Indian Tamil women on their socio-economic and political status. The questions which this chapter tries to answer are: has the educational improvement in the estates increased the mobility of women?; has there been change in the occupational structure of the community with the improvement of education in the plantation sector; and what are the views of educated Indian Tamil women on their general socio-economic backwardness in the plantations.
While summarising the study, the concluding chapter analyses the problem and prospects of the growth of women's education in the estate sector.

Methodology

The study adopted historical-analytical method. Data was collected and produced from both the primary as well as secondary sources. The former included the Sri Lankan government's census reports, socio-economic surveys, and parliamentary debates, while the latter included books, research papers, and non-governmental organizations' reports on the educational status and achievements of Indian Tamil women. Data was also collated through interviews with the plantation workers and their leaders during the student's visit to Sri Lanka.