CHAPTER - III
THE TAMIL QUESTION: POLITICO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS
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The Tamil question emerged as soon as Sri Lanka became independent in 1948. Over years, the Tamil identity has been intermixed with their struggle for survival within a Sinhalese dominated political system. More importantly, the process of economic development and growth strategies adopted by successive governments accentuated the ethnic schism. The consequent cultural cleavage between Sinhalese and Tamils had so widened that a mere political solution by means of decentralisation of political and economic power was completely ruled out by the Tamil militant groups. This resulted in unprecedented violence in the 1980s and 1990s when the Island nation came under considerable stress. This chapter seeks to comprehend the post-colonial conditions which accentuated the Tamil question in Sri Lanka. It also tries to understand the ethnic cleavages in the perspective of the development dynamics of the Sri Lankan state.

Independence and After

The independence of Sri Lanka in 1948 was not the outcome of a bitter and bloody liberation struggle, as in many other colonial territories, but was achieved by peaceful negotiations. Even after independence the leaders decided to retain the Soulbury constitution of 1944 which had guaranteed all protection to the minorities by Section 29(2) (de Silva 1982:156). But in a few years time the Constitution had been amended to the advantage of the Sinhalese.

It is also relevant in this context to identify the major political forces in the country at that time. The United National Party (UNP) led by Don Stephen Senanayake was a major party which was founded in
1946 by a change of name of the Ceylon National Congress (CNC). In the initial stages its members included the rightist–oriented conservatives of the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslim leaders. But, later on, it became a Sinhalese–dominant group. It was the UNP which won the 1947 general elections and assumed power from the British (Ram 1989:31). The UNP government was not ready to interface with the land ownership patterns existed and the powers of the landlords, because the party’s electoral support was the Sinhalese landlords of the low country areas who through their hold over the rural peasants were able to influence their voting. Instead, the UNP government started peasant colonisation to create a class of peasants owing eight acres (Ponnambalam 1983:21). This was primarily to make a counterweight in the Marxist influenced areas.

The policy of Dry Zone colonisation was started by Senanayake, and continued up to 1970. Through this policy they opened up the jungle lands for resettlement and irrigable paddy burning. The UNP government’s aim was to create a new group of peasant colonists on whom the country was depending for marketable surplus. This policy of colonisation was against the national economic priorities at that time. All the schemes were proposed for consolidation of political power (Ibid). Besides, the UNP was against industrialisation of the country. Its power was based on urban commercial and propertied class. They thought that import substitution would make the dislocation to the trade of commercial group and consumption of the propertied class. Moreover, domestic private capital was not attracted by industrial possibilities at a time when there were plenty of opportunities in the estates. That is why, between 1951 and 1954, Sri Lankan ownership of the estates rose from 19 per cent to 26 per cent (Bhargava 1987: 199-215).

The first post-independence UNP government failed to discern the vulnerability of the export economy that the country inherited from
the colonial rulers. The conservative forces that the UNP government represented did not perceive the transformation of the economic structure to be of important concern. They failed to adopt the obvious first stage of import substitution strategy. Their only interest was with the expansion of area under the Dry Zone colonisation. The rest of the policies continued to be pro-estate sector to perpetuate the colonial economy and maintain the status quo. The Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) was another major political force at that time. It was founded by S.W. R.D. Bandaranaike after he broke away from the ruling UNP in 1951 (Ram 1989:31). In its manifesto the SLEP had declared that it would ensure the rights of Tamils, even though they were equally responsible for the Tamil subjugation.

With the introduction of electoral politics in 1948, the ruling UNP started looking for ways to attract Sinhalese votes because they constituted about 74 per cent of the Sri Lankan Population (Manor 1984:20-23). To appease the Sinhalese, Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake’s first attempt was to attack the minority Tamils. He knew that in the North and Eastern provinces, the Tamils constituted a majority, and therefore the strength of Sinhalese and the hold of UNP was too limited. Thus, by constitutional measures, the UNP government, at first, decided to deprive the Tamils of all their legislative rights. The passing of the Citizenship Act of 1948 was, thus, the beginning of this policy (de Silva 1981:493).

**Citizenship Act of 1948**

The Indian Tamils are the descendents of the workers in the plantation of Sri Lanka who were brought during the colonial rule. The British had found cheap labour from these workers for tea and coffee plantations. With the enactment of the Citizenship Act, the Sri Lankan government deprived them of all rights enjoyed by them previously and they were disfranchised (Ponnambalam 1983:34-35).
The provisions of the Act stipulated that a person born in Sri Lanka before 15 November 1948 would become a citizen only if his father was born in Sri Lanka or his paternal grandfather and great grandfather were born in Sri Lanka (Ibid). This legal formulation was seen as having the intention to deny citizenship to the plantation Tamils of Indian origin, not only those living but those still born. So it was an indication that the Sinhalese would regard the Tamils as a slave community. The legislation of 1948 denying political rights to Indian Tamils was considered by many as both ‘racist’ and ‘anti-labour’ achieving simultaneously the long-standing influence of these workers as a class and as a minority, while keeping them in an economic subordination (Jayewardene 1985:73). Moreover, the fear of inevitable extinction, then of the “Ceylonese nation,” later, of the “Sinhalese nation” had been the only rationale of the Sinhalese politicians for all the denials, deprivations and discriminations which became the systematic state policy from 1948 (Coomaraswamy 1984:191).

However, in 1949, D.S. Senanayake successfully persuaded the Tamil Congress leader G.G. Ponnambalam to join the government along with his six members of Parliament. With Ponnambalam, the most articulate and vociferous Tamil agitator, domesticated in his cabinet, D.S. Senanayake went in for the bill. By the Ceylon (Parliamentary Election) Amendment Act, No. 48 of 1949, Senanayake tied the franchise to Citizenship Act and deprived the Tamils of their vote (Ponnambalam 1983:77). The section 4 (1) of the Act simply stated that “no person shall be qualified to have his name entered or retain in any register of electors in any year if such person is not a citizen of Ceylon” (Jayewardene 1985:73).

Nearly one million Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka had lost their right to vote with the implementation of this Act. It may be noted that they were the working class in the Island. In fact, at that time, the plantation workers were about one-third or more of the working
class population of the country (Aziz 1989:112-113). Moreover, the solidarity of Tamil working class with their Sinhalese counterpart was a constant danger to the upper class control of the state. These fears forced Senanayake to hit the very root of the democratic strength of the working class of Ceylon (Cheran 2009:xvi).

In the 1956 general elections, the SLFP led by S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake became the ruling party. The SLFP won the elections with its “Sinhala only” programme in the Sinhalese areas. After assuming power, Bandaranayake passed his first legislation, the ‘Sinhala Only Act,’ that put an end to equal status ensured by the Tamil language and made Sinhala the only official language (Obyasekera 1984:160-162).

**Language and Tamil Identity**

During the colonial rule, English was imposed upon the society for their administrative conveniences. Moreover, the Christian missionaries and their educational institutions gave emphasis on English language. These institutions and their activities concentrated more on the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. But Buddhists clearly resisted the expansion of Christian missionary activities. As a result, they could not set up as many schools in the southern areas as they could in the Tamil areas of northern and eastern provinces (Coomaraswamy 1984:175). These schools, owned and operated by Christian missionaries, had been imparting English education to Tamils and consequently during the British rule and immediately after independence, Tamils enjoyed a disproportionate share of jobs as state officers, teachers etc. because of their proficiency in English language. Enterprising Jaffna traders too established themselves in Colombo and other parts of the country. This situation gradually changed with Sinhalese assuming power (Cheran 2009: xv-xvii).
A change in the situation started with the victory of Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)–led coalition government in 1956. The support base of this government was the Sinhalese petty bourgeoisie consisting of Buddhist monks, Sinhalese educated school teachers, and indigenous medical practitioners (Ponnambalam 1983:23). They were already occupying respectable positions in the Sinhalese society. They felt neglected and discriminated by their westernized rulers. So they mobilized their representatives to protect their interests. They were supported by Buddhist revivalists. The new government boosted this revivalism. The first step taken by the SLFP government in 1956 to appease these Buddhist revivalists was to make Sinhala the only official language of the state. Till that time, English was used as the official language of the state (Manogaran 1987:47). This was a great blow to the educated Tamils.

This Act demanded the proficiency of Sinhala in the civil service. Officials, who did not know Sinhala, were deprived of the right of increments and promotions on this ground. So the Tamils were forced to learn Sinhala Language or leave employment (Alagappan 1985:81). During this time the Minister of Education pleaded for the abolition of English medium schools. By 1958, the admission to teachers training college was restricted to Sinhalese teachers only. The government tried to implement all these things in a hectic way. Because it was necessary to appease the racial and religious elements of the Sinhalese group who had been the backbone of the SLFP Victory in the election (Vaidik 1986:25).

The Sinhala only Act negated the purpose of education and shut out Tamils from their traditional path of employment which they had been following from the time of colonial rule. But simply by knowing the official language it became easy for the Sinhalese to have employment without any competition. As a result of this government policy, the Sinhalese became the official rulers and the
Tamils were reduced to mere subject people. And the employment opportunities in the public service were practically closed to Tamils.

By this time, the Tamils strongly feared that their language, culture, franchise etc would severely be tampered with and demonstrations were held by Tamils against the official language act. This was stifled by pro-Sinhala elements in Colombo and violent riots followed, which caused 150 deaths (Wilson 1982:165). This was a first major conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils in the Island after independence. In the wake of this, Bandaranaike met Chelvanayakam and evolved a compromise called the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact (Aziz 1989:115).

**Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact**

Bandaranayake–Chelvanayakam Pact was signed on 20 July 1957 and was tabled on Parliament on 26 July 1957. This pact recognised the Tamil as the “language of national minority of Sri Lanka.” And the language of government of administration in the northern and eastern provinces was Tamil, with provision for Sinhala speaking people in that area (Manogaran 1987:153-154). Moreover, the regional councils would be established in Tamil areas. Accordingly, the Northern Province was to constitute one regional council and eastern province was to be divided into two or more councils. And these councils had only limited powers (Ponnambalam 1983:110-111). But the pro-Sinhala Organizations, including the United National Party (UNP) protested against this Pact. The Sinhala militants and other Sinhala youths wanted ‘Sinhala Only’ and Tamil subjugation. To give expression to these hopes, J.R. Jayewardene of the UNP led his famous march to ‘Kandy’ on 4 October 1957 (Ibid). As the pressure from the Sinhalese clergy came in, Bandaranayake was forced to revoke the pact in 1958.
Thereafter, the Tamils began to defy the law prescribing the Sinhalese letters “SRI” and used Tamil equivalent on their vehicles. The Buddhist Bhikkhus retaliated by leading a campaign to deface Tamil writings on the name boards in government buildings throughout the Sinhala areas (Jayewardene 1984:171-172). They also provoked the ordinary Sinhala people against Tamils. As a result there were sporadic acts of violence against Tamils in Colombo and other suburban areas. Riots continued to erupt in many parts of Sri Lanka and a number of Tamils were attacked and killed. On the fourth day of rioting i.e. on 29 May 1958, the country was put under an emergency rule. These riots resulted in 12000 Tamils having to flee from their houses and took shelter in refugee camps (LTTE 1984:36-38). After this riot, the gap between the Sinhalese and Tamils grew wider.

In the 1960 general election, Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the widow of the S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, formed a coalition with leftist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and got majority. During these years a religious revivalism took place in Sri Lanka which found expression in the demand for Buddhist–Sinhala nationalism (Ramaswamy 1987:121-122). It may also be noted that the Sinhala only Act passed by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike government was implemented meticulously by Mrs. Bandaranaike’s government. The Sinhala language was used vigorously in the administration and courts. In 1964, responding to this, the Federal Party (FP) organized ‘Tamil Only’ Campaign (Ibid). It appealed to the Tamil speaking people all over the Island to transact their business in Tamil. A Tamil postal service system was also organised. It was during this time that the citizenship question again came to the forefront.
Sirima–Shastri Pact

The question of citizenship for persons of Indian origin Tamils, who were brought to Sri Lanka by the British during the colonial rule to work in their plantations, had already become a subject of dispute between the government of Sri Lanka and India. Discussions between the two governments continued and on 30 October 1964 an agreement was signed between Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Lal Bahadur Shastri, the prime ministers of the two countries (India MEA 1964; Bahadur 1986:71). This agreement was known as Sirima–Shastri Pact. By this Pact 5,25,000 persons of Indian origin would be granted Indian citizenship, out of 9,75,000, and progressively repatriated to India over a period of 15 years. And 3,00,000 persons would be granted Sri Lankan citizenship during the same 15 years period. Then the status and future of 1,50,000 persons were to be the subject of separate agreement between the two governments (India, MEA 1964).

Even though the pact was signed in 1964, its implementation was slowed down by the Sri Lankan government led by UNP. But in 1970 when Bandaranaike came to power, she expedited the repatriation and registration of Tamils. In 1974 she concluded another agreement with Indira Gandhi – the then Prime Minister of India regarding the remaining 1,50,000 on the basis that 75,000 would be repatriated to India and the other 75,000 would be registered as citizens of Sri Lanka (Kodikara 1982:35). This Pact was known as Sirima-Gandhi Pact. Although an agreement was reached between Sri Lankan and Indian governments for repatriation and registration, its implementation was not easy for both governments, because the people were not willing to be repatriated to India. What they wanted was to become citizens of Sri Lanka. But the Federal Party, the Tamil Congress (TC) and Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) opposed to the element of compulsion and the replacing of Indian Tamils in separate electoral rolls
(Ponnambalam 1983:81). The result was that the Ceylon Workers Congress, the most powerful trade union cum political party led by S. Thondaman withdrew its support to the government and the SLFP government went out of power in 1964.

The UNP again came into power after the 1965 general election. Dudley Senanayake, the leader of the party, formed the ‘National Government’ with the support of Federal Party (Ramaswamy 1987:124-125). Senanayake made a settlement with Federal Party and included a minister in the cabinet. But the provisions of the settlement did not come into effect due to the Sinhala hardliners. This led to the resignation of the minister belonging to the Federal Party and the withdrawal of support to the government (Ibid).

Bandaranaike’s SLFP returned to power in 1970 with the declaration to provide a new constitution which would ensure the Tamil identity and their rights. But the new constitution, on the contrary, made Sri Lanka a Sinhala–Buddhist state. The introduction of the constitution was unilateral (Wilson 1974:132). It was stated in Chapter II of the constitution that “the republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism, while assuring all religious rights guaranteed by section 18 (1)d” (de Silva 1981: 550-551).

The Tamils viewed this as another attempt to further marginalize the already deprived sections of the society. It was during this time that the Bandaranaike government introduced an educational discriminative policy, called standardisation Programme in 1970.

**Standardisation Programme**

It was a selective device which was mainly aimed at subjugating the Tamil students. According to this programme the Tamil students were required to obtain a higher aggregate of marks for
university admissions than their Sinhala counterparts (Alagappan 1985:81-82). This severely undermined the Tamil prospects for higher studies. The new scheme turned out to be far more discriminating than the earlier one denying thousands of deserving students the right of higher education.

With the introduction of standardization programme, within half a decade, the number of Tamil candidates in the universities went down sharply (Ibid). As the statistics show, the percentage of Tamil students in 1971 at the university level was 40.7, 40.8 and 31.1 in the faculties of engineering, medical and science respectively (Vaidik 1986:70-73). It was reduced to 14.1, 17.4, and 21 per cent respectively in 1975 after the introduction of standardization programme, while the percentage of Sinhala candidates increased from 55.9 to 83.4 in engineering, 53.7 to 78.9 in medicine and 65.3 to 76 in science (Ibid).

Along with the standardisation, the abolition of English medium schools also came as a shock to the Tamil students. This was another measure to repress the progress of Tamil students who were well proficient in English and had better chances to get admission in universities and also to get employment in government and other sectors. The Sinhala students, who had poor knowledge in English were lagging far behind the Tamils (LTTE 1983:13). So for the benefit of these Sinhala students and also to appease the Sinhala clergy the government introduced various destructive measures which ultimately threatened the very future of Tamil population. This also caused unemployment among the Tamils and became an important issue later on. This was one of the reasons why the Tamil youths became more and more militant in their approach.

Thus, the language had been a major issue of Tamil identity since the 1950s. The petty bourgeoisie among the Sinhalese thought that once their language positioned as official language they could get
more opportunities in public sector employment. On the other hand, the Tamils who enjoyed good positions during the British days were aware of the impact of the new policy on them. They thought that the policy would affect their employment opportunities in public services, and it actually happened over years. Non-violent protest against this policy was followed by a series of riots (de Silva 1982:165).

The special distribution of Tamil and Sinhalese populations allowed the ethnic divide to foment on the issues of two languages. Each community tried to protect and foster their own languages. In a pre-capitalist society like Sri Lanka issues like religion and language became a hot point for the bourgeoisie. At the same time state also allowed these issues to widen the ethnic schism in such a way that political parties could use these issues for their success in election (Ponnambalam 1983:102). The SLFP government had done this in 1956.

After SLFP came to power in 1956, the dominance of Tamils in the political field gradually declined. Moreover, the government had followed a variety of measures to jettison the Tamils from the Island. The temporarily uneven capitalist development, ie. the shift between inward and outward looking growth strategies added grief to the Tamil community. During the years after independence the economic development in Sri Lanka was concentrated mainly in areas except all northern and eastern provinces. These provinces had a relatively poor resource base and large areas of land remained ill-suited for agriculture, and industrialization was concentrated outside the provinces (Bhargava 1987:222-230).

The shift from import substitution to export promotion growth strategies led to major changes that affected the nature of the state in the long-run. The liberalisation and open door policy diluted the state regulation of the private sector. The protected industrial
class in the import substitution phase was made to face the demands of an open liberalized economy. The two classes who benefited from liberalization measures were the monopoly capitalists and those persons who were associated with trade and services (Lakshman 1987:10-19). During this time, it was alleged that the state gave political patronage to Sinhalese capital and discriminated against Tamil capital in the industrialisation phase and its highly discriminating attitude against Tamil capital was more clearly seen in the case of non-monopoly capital. The Tamil non-monopoly capital did not emerge in the light industries in the absence of political patronage (Ibid). Light industrial activity attracted mainly Sinhalese capital. However, trading and services continued to be dominated by the Tamils (Gamage 1999:315). With the opening up of the economy non-monopoly capitalists suffered the most, as they were devoid of special concessions because the domestic market they controlled was flooded with imported goods. As the trade being controlled by Tamils, they stood to benefit from opening up of economy (Bhargava 1987:226).

In the employment pattern too, the Tamils benefited more from opening up of economy. The closed economy had developed a public sector where Sinhalese were given preference by making knowledge of Sinhala language an essential qualification for employment (Bhargava 1987:226). At the same time private sector opened opportunities for non-Sinhalese group as English came to be used for business transaction. This created more employment opportunities for Tamils. (Ibid)

The case of skilled labour was not different in those days. Most of the job seekers were looking for government jobs due to higher wages and additional benefits, unlike the private jobs. Those who did not get high-paying (government) jobs eventually took upon whatever jobs available in the market at lower wages. The reason for educated young people were likely to be unemployed,
along with other factors, was that government used to hire disproportionately large number of better educated workers (Dickens 1996:622).

But the conditions changed when the SLFP government again came to power in 1970. It declared to provide a new constitution which would ensure the Tamil identity and their rights. But the new constitution, on the contrary, made Sri Lanka a Sinhalese Buddhist state. The introduction of the constitution was unilateral. The Tamils viewed this as another attempt to further marginalize the deprived sections of the society. Meanwhile the Bandaranayake government introduced an educational discrimination policy called standardization programme in 1970 (Swan 1989:359). It weighted the marks of Tamil applicants downwards which meant they had to score more marks than the Sinhalese to compete with them for access to higher education, particularly professional education. The Tamils considered this as a blatant discrimination. In 1969, the Tamils were able to secure 50 per cent of the admissions to the medical faculty and 48.3 per cent to engineering. After standardization formula their share dropped to 28 per cent and 19 per cent respectively in 1977 (Ram 1989:46-47). The unemployment rate became very high among Tamils and wages became low. Until this time, there was no distinction between Sinhalese and non-Sinhalese workers.

The formula was withdrawn in 1978 but reintroduced a new discriminatory formula. This formula envisaged admission of 30 per cent on merit, 55 per cent on district basis and 15 per cent from backward areas. The new formula turned out to be far more discriminatory than the earlier one denying thousands of deserving Tamil students the right of higher education (LTTEg 1983:13).

The liberalisation policy, however, resulted in high inflation rate and found high monetary wages (Ram 1989:46-47). The economic
opportunities increased for the urban poor along with the economic insecurity. The crisis created by opening up of the economy manifested itself in ethnic violence. Sinhalese non-monopoly capitalists were robbed off their markets and did not surrender to the changed circumstances. Their frustrations carried them to mobilise the urban poor to carry out hostile attacks and rioting against Tamils. The Buddhist Maha Sangha ideology of Sinhalese dominance helped to fan the growing frustration among the Sinhalese against the Tamils (Bhargava 1987:227).

Most of the local garment manufacturing units were owned by the Sinhalese. The rest of the few non-Sinhalese units had been made the target of violence. In all export oriented industries, where both Sinhalese and Tamils had been competing for export market, the Tamils were the target of violence (Ponnambalam 1983:102-143). 70 per cent of the coconut processing units were owned by Sri Lankan and Indian origin Tamils. These units became the target of attacks. Even the small Muslim community engaged in gem business had been threatened. These attacks and violence were masterminded by the Sinhalese elites. Their primary aim was to dismantle the Tamil industry in order to have the Sinhalese a fair position in the markets. Even the non export-oriented companies were attacked by Sinhalese rioters (Ibid). The traditional businessmen including the Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils in Pettah controlling the wholesale business also entered in imported commodities. This was not acceptable to the Sinhalese businessmen and so violence had been directed against them also (Bhargava 1987:123-131).

Majority of the plantation workers were Tamils of the Indian origin who constituted 10.6 per cent of the Sri Lankan population. They were organized under the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC). Their leader S. Thondaman had served the Sri Lankan Cabinet continuously for 21 years from 1978 and was a cabinet minister in the J.R. Jayewardene led government (Swamy 2007:45). As
plantation was a major foreign exchange earner, the pleasing of these plantation workers was crucial for economy. That was how the rise of Thondaman to power was seen in the context of the appeasement policy followed by the government. Through this process the plantation workers - Indian Tamils – had nearly lost the opportunity to bargain effectively with the system. At the same time it was a necessity for the government to keep these workers satisfied because of the connection of the plantation with the world economy. This was achieved through partial acceptance of their demands and the rise of Thondaman to power (Wijesinha 2007: 42-43).

However, these plantation workers were sandwiched between Nuvara Eliya and Badulla districts. They were in a constant state of siege under the state supported Sinhalese hardcore elements. The economic oppression combined with politico-cultural discriminations kept the Indian Tamils in a state of alienation (Bhargava 1987: 221-225). Another problem of special distribution was concerned with the colonisation in the catchment areas of the major irrigation projects.

**Colonisation**

Another most striking sphere of discrimination is to be found in the Sri Lankan governments’ consistent policy of colonisation of Traditional home lands, as the Tamils termed, by Sinhalese settlers. That is, from 1950 onwards successive governments of Sri Lanka had undertaken large scale colonisation of the Tamil dominated provinces with a view to changing the ethnic and demographic composition of these areas. In fact, the government undertook large scale state sponsored and aided colonisation (Karan 1989: 61-62).
In Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Vavuniya districts the irrigated lands have been opened for Sinhalese settlement. Mahaveli development project, the biggest single development programme in the country, the control and redirection of the waters of the great Mahaveli river, was an example. The newly irrigated lands, by this programme, were given to large number of Sinhalese settlers (Shastri 1990:63-66). In Trincomalee, the relative weight of the Sinhalese grew from half that of Tamils in 1946 to an equal weight thirty five years later. Along with this, the government divided the Batticaloa district into two. A large new district of Ampari in which the Tamils were reduced to a minority, and the Muslims and Sinhalese became the substantial components of the population (Shastri 1990:66). And the Tamils were left to concentrate in the small district of Batticaloa. The percentage increase of Sinhalese in the northern and eastern provinces is noted in the table below (Kearney 1987:186).

One of the important among these projects was the Mahaveli irrigation project. The areas of location of this project included the four districts of Trincomalee, Vavuniya, Batticaloa and Ampari. These were Tamil majority districts. In an address to the political parties’ conference, former president Jayewardene suggested that the land allotments would be made in the national ethic ratio of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. The suggested distribution was as follows (Ibid: 224).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Number of allotments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sinhalese</td>
<td>75,504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka Tamils</td>
<td>12,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>7,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Tamils</td>
<td>5,683</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These allotments were made in Trincomalee and Batticaloa which drastically changed the ethnic ratio in the colonized districts. This can be evident from the table given below (Kearney 1987:186).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Sinhalese per cent increase</th>
<th>Tamil per cent increase</th>
<th>Ratio Sinhalese to Tamil Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jaffna</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mannar</td>
<td>634.4</td>
<td>236.6</td>
<td>268.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vavuniya/Mullativ</td>
<td>412.2</td>
<td>604.5</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trincomalee</td>
<td>449.7</td>
<td>185.0</td>
<td>243.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matticaloa/Ampari</td>
<td>1225.0</td>
<td>209.4</td>
<td>585.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Nationality</td>
<td>137.8</td>
<td>155.1</td>
<td>88.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through this programme, the government could create two Sinhalese constituencies within the Tamil enclave. This was clear from Jayewardene’s speech in Trincomalee during an official visit in 1978. He was reported to have said:

Trincomalee belongs to the nation. At the nearby town of Mutur, a Tamil majority has now become a balanced population of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese, and deliberate gerrymandering means that Mutur’s two parliamentary seats now return Sinhalese and one Muslim, but no Tamil (Walker 1980:3).

By the end of 1980, some 247,111 acres of paddy land and 135007 acres of high land were developed under a major colonisation programme. According to the records, the proportion of Sinhalese
among the allottees settled was about 81 per cent (Sastri 1990:62). This was a figure above the percentage of Sinhalese in the total population. Among the Island’s nine provinces, most of them had been occupied by Sinhalese. Within the two minority provinces, Sinhalese constituted 89 per cent of the allottees in the district of Amapari, 64 per cent of those in Trincomalee and 7 per cent of those in Vavuniya (Ibid:63). But in Jaffna, Mullaithivu, Batticaloa and Mannar, the percentage of Sinhalese allottees was low. Despite minority sensitivity and objections, the centre made no attempt to maintain the ratios by settling the underprivileged persons belonging to the minority groups (Ibid).

The investments in irrigation and land development made possible an increase in the net harvested area and an intensification of agricultural production through a greater application of labour and chemical inputs. As a consequence, a shift took place in the major rice producing regions of the island. The national production of paddy increased by 121 per cent between 1947 and 1975. The contribution of the rural dry zone rose from less than 35 per cent of the total output to nearly half in the same period. The net harvested area in the dry zone increased by 86 per cent and the number of paddy workers by 152 per cent against the national averages of 43 per cent and 112 per cent, respectively (Moore 1985:148-151).

Successive governments at the centre tried to make the process of migration and resettlement possible and attractive for the Sinhalese beneficiaries. No effective charges for land irrigation were made for these allottees (Shastri 1990:63). Increase in the production rate made the farmers to earn more. But again the advantages had gone to Sinhala families because a major share of the land was cultivated by the Sinhalese settlers. Moreover, this uneven benefits of the development can be gauged from the uneven spread of irrigation facilities, which favoured overwhelmingly Sinhalese dominated areas in the region. By the
late 1970s, these irrigation schemes covered 94 per cent of the total irrigated areas in the North Central Province and 76 per cent in Ampari district (Ibid). However, the governments overall policies increased the control of land by the members of majority group and gave broader support to its elites. The political leadership of the newly settled areas devolved to Sinhalese traders and former public servants. Again they made favours to the economic development of the Sinhalese settlers.

The inefficiency of the Colombo centred bureaucracies added urgency to the demand of the minorities for a more decentralized administration. Bureaucratic inefficiency and partiality were evident in the management of paddy procurement schemes, distribution of tractors for agricultural purposes, and irrigation schemes. The master plan of Mahaveli Development Project (MDP) was envisaged to fulfil it within 30 years. Under accelerated Mahaveli Development Project, adopted in 1978, five major reservoirs were scheduled to be constructed over six years. Of this, above 90 per cent of the land would lie in the Amapri and Trincomalee districts (Moore 1985:94-100). But, according to the allotment system, above 70 per cent of the catchment area should go to Sinhalese. Though the original plan provided for some water to Northern provinces, this part of the project was later abandoned because of the scarcity of water in the catchment area (Ibid).

Thus, although the rural dry zone developed as a whole, the Sinhalese areas and parts of the population benefitted disproportionately. The Sinhalese dominated state apparatus promoted, both explicitly and implicitly, their interests. This intensified apprehensions among Tamils that they were being marginalized even within their own areas. The terms of trade discriminated against them in the interest of social peace in Sinhalese areas. The situation made a powerful rationale to the
Tamils to favour regional authority. The Tamil organizations viewed it with serious concern. According to one of these organizations:

The most vicious form of oppression calculated to destroy the national identity of Tamils was the state-aided aggressive colonisation swallowed three thousand square miles of Tamil Eelam. This planned occupation of Tamil lands by Sinhala people aided and abetted by the state was aimed to annihilate the geographical entity of the Tamil nation (LTTEi 1984).

**Underdevelopment of Jaffna**

Jaffna is a densely populated district with low population growth. And only limited incomes could be derived from its intensively cultivated land. Most of the small holders obtained their income from non-agricultural sources. Moreover, it had only a small size of paddy holdings, a low average of paddy production per cent of population (Sastri 1990:69). However, a larger increase in paddy output was achieved in Jaffna in the post-independence period. This is achieved through a greater application of labour, sinking of private wells, and application of intensive production techniques. This provided the indication of efforts used by the Jaffna cultivators to increase their production (Moore 1985:108-109). An import substitution agricultural policy by the centre and a serious foreign exchange situation in the 1970s led to a sharp rise in the domestic prices of Chillies and Onions. And the use of credit also made possible a dramatic change in the production of these food crops during this time (Gunawardana 2000:15-20). The high prices motivated peasants in Jaffna to increase the production. And the production of Chillies and Onions increased at a rate of 29 and 14 per cent respectively per annum (Ibid).

This development and prosperity was not favoured by the government investments or irrigation schemes such as the ones
that favoured the Sinhalese peasants. Indeed, the Northern Province (NP) had been neglected totally. The loans allotted to Jaffna peasants had not been gifts like the loans in the colonisation schemes. Credit was the only element which was available in the whole island on equal basis (Sastri 1990:70). But the government’s change of policy to dismantle the import barrier in 1977 made considerable changes in the prosperity of NP. It became disastrous for the subsidiary crop economy of the North to sustain on low costs of these crops. Moreover, extensive pumping of water resulted in scarcity of water, and increased grade of salinity. This also adversely affected the production of crops (Ibid).

The alternative economic opportunities available in minority areas were limited. This is strictly because of the fact that almost 90 per cent of the industry in the Island has been located in the Western Province (WP) (Manogaran 1987:130-134). The northern and Eastern Provinces had industries to the minimum, having only 6 per cent and 2 per cent respectively of the Island’s industry. Of the forty major industrial units only five were located in the Tamil areas (Ibid: 139). These five units were capital-intensive and offered only limited opportunities of employment. The labour intensive units in the North and East were Gal Oya and Kantalai sugar Plantations and factories. Again this benefitted more to the Sinhalese.

According to Tamils these units were exploitative because the region in which these were located was primarily meant for their proximity to the specific raw materials. There was no attempt from the side of the government to increase the employment potential in these industries. Besides, there had been no effort by the government to invest in the areas or projects which have more productive capabilities in the north, like fishing (LTTEg 1983:1-15).

It is in the background of negligible central investment and limited opportunities for employment, and the impact of language and
university admission policies that the middle class Tamil youths organised themselves in a revolutionary way. The counter violence of Sri Lankan army and the settlement of armed Sinhalese in the Tamil majority areas by government only fanned the ethnic violence in the entire society.