

**THE ROLE OF ANTI-CASTE MOVEMENTS IN THE RISE  
OF TAMIL MILITANCY IN SRI LANKA**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the Degree of*

**Master of Philosophy**

**PRIYA DHARSHINI**



**CENTRE FOR SOUTH, CENTRAL, SOUTH EAST ASIA  
& SOUTH WEST PACIFIC STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
NEW DELHI – 110067  
INDIA  
2011**



CENTRE FOR SOUTH, CENTRAL, SOUTHEAST ASIAN & SOUTH WEST PACIFIC STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**  
NEW DELHI - 110 067

Phone : 2670 4350  
Fax : 91-11-2674 1586  
91-11-2674 2580

25<sup>th</sup> July 2011

### DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “**The Role of Anti-Caste Movements in the Rise of Tamil Militancy in Sri Lanka**” submitted by me in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

Priya Dharshini

### CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

**Prof. Partha S. Ghosh**

Chairperson, CSCSEASWPS

**Prof. P. Sahadevan**

SUPERVISOR



Centre for South Central South East  
Asian and South West Pacific Studies  
School of International Studies  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi - 110 067

## Acknowledgements

Writing this dissertation has been a learning experience in more than one ways. It still has not sunk that it is finally over, it will take some more days to actually realize that. This would honestly not have been possible without the help and support of many of my comrades and friends, who in their own ways have contributed to making this dissertation possible.

I would like to acknowledge with gratitude that the guidance and encouragement of Prof. Sahadevan, from the initial days of choosing the topic to till the very last day. His comments and remarks have always been of great help. Despite his health constrains, he guided me in making this work possible.

I would also like to thank Prof. Christopher Raj, the Dean, SIS, for his support and help.

All my comrades in Democratic Students Union (DSU) – Anubhav, Anjali, Amrita, Ban, Buno, Gogol, Hem, Manobanjan, Priya Ranjan, Proteek, Ritu, Reyaz, Rubeena, Sashwati, Shriya, Umar and Viki, deserve a special mention, for helping me in every way, from getting materials to listening to my cribbing. Special thanks to Anjali, Gogol, Shriya, Umar, Viki for the extra effort that they had put in, in the last three months.

I thank Umar, for letting me use his laptop, despite having to write his synopsis and many other pressing works. Without which finishing this would have become much more difficult and painful. Thank you, Umar.

Buno, Divya, Ritu and Priya Ranjan had spent nights in helping me out with the arguments, language, editing and re-editing. Buno, needs to be thanked not just for her immense help and support she provided in the course of the dissertation, but for guiding through out since the day I became a part of DSU. Her commitment and strength has always amazed me, she would sit till early morning helping me out and

yet not miss any other activity in her tight schedule, and do all this without complaining. You are an inspiration, Buno, thank you.

I thank Divya, for patiently reading every draft and editing them. Even though she had to write her Phd, she took out time to help. As she had a strong understanding of both caste and the Sri Lankan society her suggestions were of great help.

Ban and Anubhav, had not just helped me as comrades, but have been great friends who had supported me and helped me through when I was really broken. The initial discussions with Anubhav had helped me in forming a structure and framework of the dissertation. It had also been a great experience working with them. I appreciate and thank them for having taken extra responsibilities and stretching themselves in order to give me time to do my work.

I thank Rona Wilson for his suggestions and ideas on my synopsis. I do regret for not having been able to discuss with him while writing my dissertation.

Collecting materials for the this dissertation had been a strenuous job, I thank Gurunathan, Manoharan, Venkat, P.Kumar, Senthil Kumar, Com. Kesavan, Com. Gopal and Com. Rajendhra Prasad for helping me find some of the crucial materials.

The support of my classmates and fellow travelers, Tanya, Amenio, Sajeesh, Chandramani, Laxmiprasad and Rabindra has helped me through my dissertation.

My friends have always been supportive of all my decisions and aspirations, and have always made me feel good about what I am doing. Archana, Megha, Karthikeyan, Laxmi, Anish, Revathy, Amit, Rocky, Jeyabal, Jeyaprakash, Arumugam, Vikas, Lupa, Daniel and Elliott have in their own way contributed and helped me finish my dissertation.

Nandini and Parul need a special mention for just being themselves. They have been a part of my life since my MA days. There is nothing to thank them, I just love them for being a there, to listen, to debate, fight, party to hang out and for tolerating me and understanding every time I miss a get together.

Vikram, I really appreciate the help and support that you extended, from collecting materials, with the bibliography and editing, in the last few months, despite your differences and disagreements. For just listening patiently every time I had called just to fight and vent out, some times you amaze me.

I thank my family for their support and specially my mother, who had been an inspiration to me. I have always admired her for her strength and courage, and wished I was half as strong as her. Without her love and support, I would have been impossible for me to be here and continue with my work.

Above all, I remember all those who have fought for the liberation of Tamil Eelam. Their uncompromising struggle against the Fascist Sri Lankan state might have been crushed brutally, but not defeated. The oppressive conditions still remain and so is the people's aspiration for Eelam. I remember all those who are still fighting to realize that aspiration. All those who are in India and South Asia fighting for their life, dignity, livelihood and freedom, have been an inspiration. It is their heroic resistance that has been an inspiration to all those striving for a better world that is free of all forms of oppression.

Priya Dharshini

# **CONTENTS**

Introduction	i – viii.
CHAPTER ONE Social Movements and Ethnic Nationalism: A Conceptual framework	1 – 14
CHAPTER TWO Caste Hierarchy in the Sri Lankan Tamil Society: A Historical Analysis	15 – 41
CHAPTER THREE Anti-caste Movement: Ideologies, visions and Practices	42 – 64
CHAPTER FOUR The Role Caste in Tamil Militant Nationalism	65 – 89
CHAPTER FIVE The Anti-Caste Programmes of the LTTE: An Assessment of Its Efficacy	90 – 100
Conclusion	101 – 108
<i>Bibliography</i>	109 – 117

## INTRODUCTION

Given the present context, writing about the Tamils in Sri Lanka has been a painful experience. It is all the more painful to study the struggles they have led and waged with unflinching commitment against various atrocities perpetrated on them. Be it anti-colonial movements, the anti-caste movements or their fight for the liberation of Eelam, these struggles have been waged over many decades. Today Tamils in Sri Lanka, were in news for decades as ‘terrorists’ and today they are there as ‘victims’, both the media and the academia has focused mostly on the security aspects, and conflict resolution. Only a few have attempted to study the Sri Lankan Tamil society from a sociological point of view and this dissertation is one such that focuses on the anti-caste movements its relation to the militant nationalism.

Today, northern Sri Lanka is under the occupation of the Sri Lankan armed forces. In some sense, it was the war that had pulled me towards studying Sri Lankan Tamils. This war supposedly ended in 2009—the Sri Lankan state had announced at the outset of the latest war or the Eelam War IV that theirs was going to a war to the finish, the ‘Final War’. What happened in Sri Lanka over the course of two years between 2007 and 2009 is by far the worst genocide. The Eelam War IV not only left LTTE, the organization that fought for the cause of Tamil Eelam, decimated, but also involved the killing of over 40,000 people in just one week by the Sri Lankan armed forces.

The Sri Lankan state’s genocide against the Tamil people has radically altered the lives and contexts of Sri Lankan Tamils. The entire picture of the genocide is yet to emerge. At the height of the war, convergences between imperialist and geopolitical concerns and the Sri Lankan state had dictated the international media’s overwhelming silence on the genocide. Two years later, fissures in the geopolitical

scene and contradictions between imperialist countries who have not been able to make the most of the genocide's spoils has resulted in a piece-meal release of evidence of the Sri Lankan state's 'war crimes'. International media as well as the United Nations, both otherwise completely complicit in the genocide, are now party to a complex carrot and stick strategy. As though they were in the dark till date, they are currently play-acting the role of innocent children waking up in the morning after a peaceful night's sleep only to discover that the bogeyman had visited in the meantime. Just as the *silence* during the genocide was premeditated, so too is the current *discovery* of evidence.

The genocide, which was until a few months ago, a necessary step for these international countries, has now been pronounced 'war crimes'. The Tamils' appeal for intervention during the war, papered over with cold precision by silence and censorship, is now touted as recently discovered evidence. As though these are all facts discovered after they occurred. As though they were unknown while they were occurring. But both the victims of the genocide as well as its perpetrators *know* exactly what occurred during the genocide. This genocide has left its brutal marks on the very landscape, most visibly in the form of IDP camps—camps which, by their very name, reflect semantically, the brutal suppression of a people's aspiration for national liberation by terming them 'Internally Displaced People'—and army barracks, which station the troops of the Sri Lankan state in the Tamil areas in an attempt to both completely control the lives of the Tamil people, and to prevent any kind of political mobilization against the Sri Lankan state.

Indeed, the 'victory' of the Sri Lankan state, is in itself a reflection of the international backing and support provided to it. The LTTE, which had previously fought and won three wars against the Sri Lankan state, was overpowered this time only with the military, technical, financial, diplomatic and political support extended to the Sri Lankan state by the imperialist forces. It was the nature and extent of this support that enabled the Sri Lankan state, to at last quench its chauvinistic thirst. This war was definitely the worst of all the attacks on the Tamils of Sri Lanka, but their



past has by no means been a pleasant one either. It has been, since the time of the colonizers, marked by struggles and resistance.

The demand for a separate Eelam itself underwent significant transformations over the years—from what seemed to emerge as the demand of a minority of Tamils, it became the demand of the entire Tamil population of Sri Lanka. Tamil nationalism took a militant form, entering into an armed struggle against the Sri Lankan state. The growth of militancy and the fight for separate Eelam affected the Tamil population in many ways. One of these is the attempt to homogenize Tamil society. It was an attempt to unite a Tamil population which was fragmented by caste into a single homogenous community mobilized against the Sinhalese Buddhist chauvinism. This would have been a much more difficult task without the militant anti-caste movements that weakened the caste structures and discriminatory practices that existed even before the growth of Tamil nationalism.

The following section is a brief narration of the caste system among the Tamils in Sri Lanka:

The Sri Lankan Tamil caste system is much like the Indian caste system in its structure and characteristics. It is hierarchical and ritualistic in nature, with the Brahmins at the top, followed by Vellalars, a dominant land owning caste in the north and Mukkuwars in the east. Further down are the artisans castes like the carpenters, blacksmiths and goldsmith, followed by the “inferior” castes such as the washer men, barbers and segments of fishermen. Lowest in hierarchy are the outcastes or the Pallars, Nalawas and Parayars. Each caste has its traditional occupation and ritual importance which is maintained to secure the interest of the dominant castes. These hierarchies are maintained through social practices that are linked to tradition and culture of the society and with the sanction from religion.

Unlike South India, the Brahmins, owing to their negligible presence (numerically), do not enjoy the power and influence. Their role is reduced to mere ritual importance and they do not have a say in social and political spheres. Yet the Tamils practice

untouchability and the power rested with the dominant castes like the Vellalas and Mukkuvars. There are also practices of untouchability and other social taboos and restrictions imposed on the lower castes by the dominant castes. The caste system demonstrates itself through the *jajmani* system with the Vellalas as the provider and all other castes at its service. Every caste, with the exception of the artisans, is affiliated with a Vellala family and the bond runs for generations. For each Vellala family, there are families of washer men, barber, Pallas and Nallavas who are at their service in the form of a patron-client relation. This service is passed onto the next generation.

There are clear rules of behaviour known as *thesavalami* for each caste, rules they are mandated to follow. The “lower caste” Tamils were forbidden to live near the temples, to draw water from the wells of “high caste” Tamils, wear shoes, to sit on bus seats, to attend schools, to register their names so as to receive social benefits, to cover the upper part of their body, to wear gold, men from cutting their hair, to own bicycles or cars, to cremate the dead, to convert to Christianity or Buddhism. Such practices were in the 19<sup>th</sup> century challenged by the service castes and many assertive anti-caste movements emerged against Vellala domination in Jaffna, which also had a significant impact on the Tamil polity. These movements became the founding stones of many militant movements in the national liberation struggle of Tamils.

It was the dominant Vellala elite that formed the Tamil political elite at that time. Hence the oppression against the ‘lower’ caste hardly found a voice in the Tamil nationalism in the early nineteenth century. As Pfafenberger (1990) explains, the early Tamil nationalism was a defensive nationalism that emerged in the wake of strong anti-caste movements in 1930-60. It was an attempt from the dominant Vellala elite to keep the fragmented Tamil community united in the wake of a rising Sinhalese chauvinism and thereby, to regain their dominance.

It was in the 1970s, when the demand for a separate Tamil nation gained popularity, that Tamil nationalism addressed the issue of caste. Among the six point agenda of the Tamil United Front (1972), which later became the Tamil United Liberation Front

(1976), one was the abolition of untouchability. Cheran (2009) points out that it was only when the Tamil national movement was entering into a militant phase in the late 1970s demanding a separate nation that they reached out to middle and lower classes. During the early phase of the militancy, most of these formations had a Marxist understanding and aimed to bring about a socialist revolution. In accordance to the fundamentals of Marxism, the militant organizations held a class analysis of Tamil society and mobilized the oppressed masses to fight against exploitation. Thus, the ideals of rights and liberties, which had long been the voice of the Tamil bourgeoisie and middle class, reached the lower strata of the society. The negation of the issue of caste and the interests of the oppressed masses and worse still, Vellala attempts to brutally crush their assertion were the reasons for the militancy among the oppressed castes, who wanted not only a separate state but a state free from all oppressions including caste oppression. These processes led them more towards the militant nationalism, discarding the 'defensive' nationalism of the Vellalas.

This study focuses on understanding the nature of the connections between anti-caste movements and Tamil militant nationalism. Foregrounding this attempt is the recognition that anti-caste movements as well as tamil militancy emerged almost at the same time— when these movements reached their most militant phase. The study attempts to arrive at its objective by firstly, tracing the history of the Tamils in the island from the days of their settlement in the region. and then analysing how caste became the primary social organization of the Tamils. The difference between the Indian and the Sri Lankan caste system has been dealt in detail in order to understand the Tamil caste system in Sri Lanka better. Any study of caste considers the Indian model as its ideal type and hence it becomes important to differentiate it so as to study it in its entirety and understand the local conditions and practices.

This study is an attempt to trace struggles against caste atrocities and discriminations, and the influence these movements have had on the emergence of militant nationalism. The current study is but one step in directing our attention to the need for more in-depth research, as the link between caste and nationalism particularly with

militant nationalism has so far not been the focus of studies on Tamils in Sri Lanka. Given the paucity of research on this issue, the present work does not come to final conclusions. Instead, it is an attempt to open up the scope for more research on the subject. Although it strives to represent the Tamil society during the anti – caste movements to the fullest extent possible, the study is unable to offer much by way of conclusions. In other words, this dissertation is exploratory in nature, and is a preliminary step which argues the case for detailed field research. Furthermore, materials relating to the role of LTTE in addressing the issue of caste is very limited.. Yet, this study works within these limitations to provide some insights into the field. The dissertation is organized into five chapters, details on which are given below.

### **Outline of Chapters**

The first chapter, **Social Movements and Ethnic Nationalism: a Conceptual Framework**, attempts to develop a conceptual framework on social movements based on caste and caste discrimination and their impact on nationalism. An analysis of the varied conceptualizations of these movements is provided here. The chapter also provides a detailed summary of the various theoretical understandings of caste and attempts to link caste with nationalism. The trends in nationalism, and the question of how and why caste needs to be represented within the nationalistic framework are also taken up in order to develop a framework suitable to the purposes of this study.

The second chapter, **Caste Hierarchy in the Sri Lankan Tamil Society: A Historical Analysis**, focuses on providing a historical analysis of the caste structures and hierarchy in the Sri Lankan Tamil society. It gives a detailed account of the lives of Tamils in Sri Lanka tracing back to the medieval age. It explains the context in which caste emerged as the primary social organization. It also examines the different caste groups, their traditional occupation and their relation with other castes. It

analyses the various traditional and ritual practices that kept the caste hierarchies intact. While analyzing the economic conditions of the various caste groups and determining the material basis of their socio-economic conditions, the chapter explains the rigidity of caste structure in the Sri Lankan Tamil society.

The third chapter, **Anti-Caste Movements: Ideologies, Vision and Protests**, studies the emergence of the anti-caste movements. It explains the context in which these movements emerged by looking at the changes brought about during British colonialism and its impact. It also looks critically at the revivalist movement, which with its blatantly casteist propaganda triggered the anti-caste movements in the northern part of Sri Lanka. The chapter studies the various organizations that led the movement and looks at the ideological differences and convergences in their understanding of caste. It tries to capture in detail the evolution of these movements from sporadic individual resistance to a militant movement that could push the *Vellalas* to a back seat, just as it also looks at the latter's responses to the movement. It also attempts to find the links of the anti-caste movements and the nationality movement that emerged during the 1970s and pursues an understanding of its influence on Tamil nationalism.

The fourth chapter, **Role of Caste in Tamil Militant Nationalism**, examines the growth of nationalism among the Tamils in Sri Lanka during the 1960s as the discrimination against them by the Sinhalese state increases; it studies the different trends in nationalism, and the convergence of these to the call for the formation of a separate state. In detail it studies the various aspects—cultural, economic, political—involved in the rise of militant nationalism. The chapter also studies the various militant organizations that evolved during this period, their positions on and conceptualisations of caste, and their impact on Tamil society.

The fifth chapter, **The Anti-Caste Programmes of the LTTE: An Assessment of its Efficacy**, studies LTTE's understanding of caste and its approach towards addressing the issue of caste in Sri Lankan context. The chapter has attempted to analyze the role

played by LTTE in weakening the caste system among the Tamils. It also tries to understand the context in which LTTE was placed and the difficulties it faced both internally and from external aggression, to sustain itself and also work towards its goal of achieving a separate, democratic and socialist Tamil Eelam. This has been the most difficult chapter of the present study, owing to the fact that the available data related to this issue is very limited.

The objective of the study will be to examine the causes and material conditions that led to the rise of anti-caste movements in the north and the east of Sri Lanka. It will further evaluate the effects of the anti-caste movements on the Tamil society historically and understand the subsequent changes in social relations. It would also try to explain the relations between the anti-caste movements and the ethno-nationalist separatist movement for secession. It will analyse the role of the various militant organizations, particularly the LTTE, in addressing the issue of caste and caste discriminations.

The research will try to test the following hypothesis:

The militant nature of Tamil nationalism was largely induced by caste oppression and the reluctance of the Sri Lankan Tamil political elite to address the issue of caste discrimination.

The caste factor in the militant nationalism lost its importance when the Eelam demand became the primary goal of the Sri Lankan community.

## Chapter I:

# SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND ETHNIC NATIONALISM: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

### **Introduction:**

The study of social movements, from a sociological perspective has been a relatively new concept in South Asia. From being a part of historical study, it came to be established as a specialization in Sociology. Since the early 1970s the study of social movements has gained momentum and is today a well established discipline. The study of social movements was a *turning point* in Sociology as it deviated from the conventional structural-functional approach, and brought in the new trend of analyzing a dynamic process. This does not necessarily mean that it abandoned the structural analysis of the society. The study of the social movements is closely linked and even dependent on the study of the structural conditions that lead to the rise of these movements, which give the context to understand the movements better.

There is a plethora of social movements that have emerged after the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which vary in their ideology and objectives. One among them is the movement against caste and caste discrimination. Though grounded on the same foundation – against the oppression of the upper/dominant caste – these movements differed in their objectives. While some of the early movements demanded equal treatment and aimed at abolition of oppressive practices like those against untouchability, some of them demanded reforms in the policies of the state like those for reservation for the backward sections, but there are other movements that go beyond the realm of social movements and understand the issue of caste and its oppressive structures through the

larger understanding of the feudalism and imperialism and are fighting for the annihilation of caste and every other form of oppression against the masses.

The objective of the present section is to analyse the emergence of caste associations as well as social movements against caste as specific expressions of the relationship between caste and modernity. Under modernity, it would be more difficult to argue that caste is just a traditional institution that is manifested in ritual practices. On the contrary, caste has evolved and accommodated itself within the process of modernity. Aspects of modernity have enhanced the organization of various castes, which in turn have impacted the beginning of social movements among the oppressed sections. The introduction of reservation in India and the abolition of slavery and the laws against discrimination in Sri Lanka, to take two instances from the subcontinent, opened up opportunities for organization of the oppressed sections or lower castes. This has also led to a greater influence of caste in politics. Rudolf and Rudolf see caste associations as agents of modernity. A caste association, they argue, is

....no longer an ascriptive association in the sense in which caste taken as jati was and is. It has taken on features of the voluntary association. Membership in caste association is not purely ascriptive; birth in the caste is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for membership. One must also "join" through some conscious act involving various degrees of identification....  
(Rudolf and Rudolf 1967:33)

Such associations have helped lower castes in their upward mobility and also in enabling them to act as a pressure group in contemporary polity. The emergence of caste associations also facilitated the lower castes to organize themselves against dominant castes. Not only did such associations influence the rise of movements for social justice but they also played an important role in the emergence of subaltern studies as a school of thought which conceded towards these movements. Emerging in the 1980s, the subaltern school was influenced by the British Marxists, and is seen



as the Indian version of “history from below” taking its rallying concept from the writings of Antonio Gramsci. It aimed at rectifying the elitist bias in understanding the issues of caste, gender, minorities, peasants and workers and also in documenting the lives of the oppressed.

In recent years, social movements have attracted the attention of Sociologists and Social Anthropologists. Social movements are an essential part of human societies. In some societies, they are more pronounced while in others they are latent. The study of social movements is primarily a study of social and cultural change of a social order as well as of values and norms. Social movements are collective enterprises to establish a new social order in life. Social movement is considered to be an organized attempt on the part of a section of society through collective mobilization based on an ideology.

For many sociologists, the structural basis of social movements lie in ‘discontent’ arising out of ‘relative deprivation’ and these movements may take any form ranging from a slow gradual reform movement to a radical and revolutionary one. Rao suggests the possibility of classifying movements on the basis of their consequences. A further distinction is made on the basis of the nature of change and the ideology of the movement. Movements can be aimed at reform in one or another aspect of social life, or oriented at bringing about changes in super ordinate and subordinate relationships (transformative movements) and finally those bringing about revolutionary change in every sphere of life and basic values (Rao 1979).

Broadly, there are three theories which try to explain the structural conditions and motivational forces which give rise to a movement. These are the theories of relative deprivation, strain and revitalization. The theory of relative deprivation has been developed on two different lines namely social mobility and social conflict. The former is developed by Merton (1950) and Runcinan (1966) and the latter by Marx (1973) and Aberle (1966). Merton systematically developed the concept with relation to the reference group theory and applied it to analyze social mobility. Runcinan,

following Merton, developed the concept in relation to reference group and problems of inequality and social justice. In this approach, relative deprivation forms the basis of a study of social mobility. On the contrary, Marx and Aberle emphasized the element of social conflict. Marx and Engels recognized that the dissatisfaction with the *status quo* was not determined by absolute conditions but by relative discrepancy between legitimate expectations. Aberle defined relative deprivation as a negative discrepancy between legitimate expectations and actuality. He analyzed relative deprivation in terms of material possession, status, behavior and worth.

The strain theory as propounded by Smelster (1962) treats structural strain as the underlying factor leading to collective behaviour. Structural strain occurs at different levels of norms, values, mobilization and situational facilities. While strain provides the structural condition, the crystallization of a generalized belief marks the attempt of persons under strain to assess the situation and to explain the situation by creating or assembling a generalized belief. Both strain and generalized belief require precipitation factors to trigger off a movement.

While the first two theories concentrate on negative conditions of relative deprivation and strain, the theory of revitalization posits that social movements develop out of a deliberate, organized and conscious effort on the part of members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture for themselves (Wallace 1956). Wallace analyzed the dynamics of revitalization movements in four phases: period of cultural stability, period of increased individual stress, period of cultural distortion and consequent disillusionment and period of revitalization.

The theory of relative deprivation, according to Rao, is more satisfactory in explaining the genesis of a social movement as it is pivoted around conflict and social change, motivating and mobilizing the people around a certain interest and issues. Secondly it provides the best explanation for change orientation of movements rather than looking at movements as adaptive mechanisms restoring functional utility and equilibrium.

Another important aspect of a social movement is ideology. M.S.A. Rao (1977) identifies the different themes in the ideologies of Dalit movements as (i) withdrawal and self organization; (ii) claiming higher *Varna* status as a variation of the reinterpretation principle; (iii) extolling the virtues of the Dravidian culture as against the Aryan culture (iv) negating Hinduism totally and embracing another religion and (v) the Marxian ideology of class conflict combined with caste annihilation. With these themes, Rao categorizes the protest ideologies of these movements into (i) reinterpretation of myths of origin or one's religion, (ii) rejection of Hinduism and Aryan culture, (iii) civil rights and (iv) class conflict. While the first two have a religious dimension, the next two are secular in character.

Though movements for the rights of Dalits existed even during the colonial struggle, led by Jotiba Phule, B.R. Ambedkar and E.V.Ramasamy, the Dalit movement was restricted to certain pockets and was encapsulated within the nationalist agenda till the 1980's. The introduction of reservation helped in opening up new opportunities in education and jobs for the Dalits leading to an upward mobility of a section of Dalits and resulting in the growth of a middle class among the Dalits. The rise in social mobility helped in a renewed fight for social justice in the field of politics and academics. The movement questioned the basic assumption of Brahminism and the understanding of the issue of caste by various schools of thought.

Given the overall objective of this study, it would be important to devote some attention to recent changes in the manifestations of caste. Thus, given that caste is both enduring and systemic on the one hand, and has been subject to variations across time and space on the other, it is no wonder that the question of caste have had a tremendous sway over the arena both of social movements and nationalisms in South Asia. It is owing to this context that a theoretical framework suitable to the objectives of this dissertation has to deal with the literature on caste in the region. The following section examines the main trends in understanding caste, without which understanding the contestations of caste hierarchies is impossible. Subsequently, neither is it possible to attain the main objective of this dissertation, namely, an

analysis of the role of anti-caste movements in the rise of Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka, without first understanding caste to be not only a system, but also a process, and what is more, as a system over which there have been intense contestations and resistance.

### **Understanding Caste and Hierarchies:**

While there are many divergent views on caste, most agree on its geographical locations. Indeed, caste is often argued to be not only a characteristic but *the* defining characteristic of the South Asian societies. There is also a near universal agreement on caste having been the main or at least an important principle to the social organization of these societies for many centuries now, although a recent trend in the vast body of academic literature on caste maintains that it so dramatically changed in nature during the colonial period, that what we now typically see as caste is largely an outcome of colonial rule in South Asia. Likewise, while there may be quarrel about whether caste is an 'import' into other religions practiced in the south Asian region, there is an overall acceptance of the view that caste's sanction derives forcefully from Hindu religion. In short, caste systems across South Asia have varied in content and form and yet, they have had certain characters which were common to them. Of these common characteristics, hierarchy, traditional occupation or occupational restrictions on caste groups, and restrictions on commensality between different castes are usually identified across the variations.

Though the practice of caste has existed for centuries and found its propagators, apologists, law makers, and endorsers in different individuals and texts across historical periods, an attempt to arrive at a 'scientific theory' of caste emerged only during the period of British colonialism in the region. Early writings on caste projected it as a cohesive and peacefully integrated system reproducing itself through the notion of karma, and purity and pollution. It was seen as a religious and cultural phenomenon and more specifically, a Hindu practice as it had religious sanction from

Hinduism. It is not as though contested and conflicting views on caste did not at all emerge, but that over the years, a dominant view materialized on the subject of caste.

According to the dominant pattern that emerged in the colonial and post-colonial writing, caste was not merely a system of stratification. It represented the core or 'essence' of India. It was on the one hand an institution and on the other an ideology. Institutionally it gave a frame of reference to the social organization of the society, linearly positioning various groups based on their status, social and economic holdings in the society. As an ideology, it reinforced social inequality through a system of ideas, norms and cultural practices that stemmed from the Hindu religion. It epitomized itself as a "closed system" of social stratification, where one's status, occupation and marital life is ascribed at birth and is maintained so for generations. Hence, it is against the "open system" of stratifications that exists based on class where one's economic holdings determine one's status in the society, and theoretically at least (although not in principle) one's position and status can be subjected to change. In other words, while mobility in 'open' systems of social stratification was much easier at the theoretical level, this was absent in 'closed' systems such as caste.

In theory, the caste system is interlinked with the '*Varna*' model which divides the Hindu society into four orders, viz., Brahmana, (Brahman, whose traditional occupations was priest and scholar), Kshatriya (traditionally, the ruler and soldier), Vaishya (merchant) and Shudra (peasant, labourer and servant). The first three castes are also known as 'twice-born' or '*dvija*', since the men from these castes are entitled to don the sacred thread at the Vedic rite of *upanayana*, which the Shudras were not allowed to perform. In addition to these four folds within the *varna* model, there are also untouchable castes who are literally outside the scheme. It must be emphasized at the outset here that particularly in India that has served as the location of the ideal-typical system of caste, and that others are viewed as 'variations' of this ideal-type. Thus, if caste system is an all-India phenomenon, the *varna* model provides an all-India macro-structural scheme. In other words, the *varna* model only provides a

framework within which the innumerable variations of castes throughout India are found. In addition to the four-fold model, the system had also certain very fundamental features. When early sociologists of caste such as Ghurye (1991) identified these fundamental features of the caste system—the segmental division of society; hierarchy; restrictions on feeding and social intercourse; civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections; lack of unrestricted choice of occupation; restrictions on marriage—they represented caste as a unitary system, not merely as an ordering of occupational specialization or division of labour, but as encompassing features of social structure, normative religious behaviour and as well detailing aspects of social and even personal lives of the members of various social groups.

The work of Dumont becomes imperative to the analysis of various trends in the study of caste system. Dumont had a very structuralist approach of seeing caste as a system of ideas. To him, caste was the fundamental feature of Indian society. He saw it above all as an ideology which, at its core, had hierarchy (inequality) that arose from the opposing ideas of the notion of purity and pollution. Dumont further emphasized the peculiar relationship between power and status in India. While power and status typically went along with each other in western thinking, in the caste system, status was superior to power. Invoking Weberian theory, Dumont's principle descriptions and theorizations of caste was developed in the mode of an ideal type. Scholars like Moffatt (1979) further extended this mode of theorizing to say that there was an ideological unity in the cultural consensus across caste groups in its normative order. According to scholars such as Srinivas, the *varna*-scheme is a 'hierarchy' in the literal sense of the term because the criteria of ritual purity and pollution are the basis of this differentiation. Generally speaking, the higher castes are also the more economically affluent castes, and the lower castes are generally also the lower classes. A caste can be ritually high but ranked lower in the local caste hierarchy because this hierarchy is determined by secular factors such as economic, political and educational status. Thus, one of the most striking features of caste system as an

actual reality has been the vagueness in the hierarchy, which is more predominant in the middle rungs. Such theorizations of caste were extensively criticized for their ideological bias and weak empirical groundings (Berreman 1971; Mencher 1974; Beteille 19 ; Gupta 1984). Later writings also criticize the simplification of the complex system of inequality by these early theoreticians. Jodhka, for example, points out how even practices such as untouchability was looked at uncritically. Yet there were early exceptions to such an understanding of caste. To take but one example, one of the earliest attempts towards a systematic theorization of caste is seen in the writings of Bogle (1908), where he contested the view that looked at caste as a mere system of occupational specialization. Instead, Bogle defined caste as a system consisting of hierarchically arranged hereditary groups, separated from each other in certain respects (caste endogamy, restrictions on eating together and on physical contact), but interdependent in others (traditional division of labour). He emphasized the hierarchical nature of caste and identified inequality as an essential component of the caste system.

There has been a considerable shift in later writings on caste. These are owing to many reasons. Post-colonial writings on caste shifted, as Jodhka (2010) writes, from the “book-view” to the “field view”. Nonetheless, the categories through which they imagined India remained the same. Jodhka gives the example of the village being the convenient methodological entry point to understand caste and the assumption that caste system was fundamental to the Indian structure and in turn synonymized the Hindu religion and /Indian culture. According to him, not only did the colonial rulers raise consciousness about caste through a process of enumeration and ethnographic surveys but also produced social and intellectual conditions where ‘caste became the single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all “synthesizing” India’s diverse forms of social identity, community and organization’ (Dirks 2001:5). The opinion that the colonial period has had a definitive impact on all aspects of the contemporary South Asian reality has gained considerable currency in recent scholarship. An illustrative example of this kind of scholarship can be found in Peter

Mayer's work on the 'Jajmani System'. As Mayer convincingly argues, although the *jajmani* system is popularly believed to be an ancient and pan-Indian reality, it in fact originated in northern India during the late 19th century (Mayer 1993).

Thus far, this chapter has emphasized that the *varna* model is only a ideal-type model of caste and that there are considerable differences in caste relations. These differences are usually explained by recourse to the concept of *jati*. The shift from *Varna* to *jati* and the relationship between the two has emerged along the following broad perspectives. The first is the theory of mixed unions, which holds that society was divided into four *varnas* and that the numerous *jatis* emerged out of the intermixing of these *varnas*. The second is the theory of dual reality in which *varna* provides the universal framework and *jati* refers to empirical phenomenon. The third holds that there is no difference between *varna* and *jati* and that both are the same. A fourth perspective posits that *varna* is an irrelevant and confusing category and *jati* is the only relevant category (Babu, 1989). Rendering the *varna* category irrelevant, Kosambi states that castes did not arise out of any internal division of the *varnas* in the original Vedic society, but out of an external process altogether, through the fusion of tribal elements into a general society.

The other contending issue is the relationship between caste and Hinduism. While caste indeed has a religious dimension and finds legitimacy in Hindu religious texts, it is also a socio-economic system which had its manifestation in cultural and ritual practices. Some scholars stress that the origin of the caste system lay in the nature of agrarian production and the generation of surplus in early agrarian systems (Klass, 1980). Similarly, some have pointed to the primacy of the political structuring in caste hierarchies in India (Raheja, 1988). The presence of the caste system outside India and in regions where Hinduism is not practiced can be attributed to the strong socio-economic factor.

This leads to the debate over whether caste is a structural concept or a cultural concept. This too, as shall be illustrated in later chapters, is with significant import to



anti-caste movements, for the strategies and objectives, as well as extant and limitations of the movements that partly emerge from the significance attached to the cultural aspects of caste. The difference between the two poles in the debate does not lie as much in the content as in the manner of analysis of the caste system. Many scholars argue that it is a cultural concept. They see the caste system as a system of ideas and values including beliefs and norms, as a social or cultural phenomenon peculiar to the Indian society. More precisely, they see it as peculiar to the Hindu society because among the non-Hindus, caste does not constitute religious ideology despite the fact that they have also developed 'caste-like' stratification. Hierarchy is the most important factor in this analysis. Treating caste as a cultural phenomenon within the general principle of social stratification, they pinpoint hierarchy of hereditary groups as its basis. These hereditary groups are separated by caste endogamy, restrictions on commensal relations (exchange of food and water) and physical contact. Despite this separation and exclusiveness, caste groups are nonetheless interdependent because of the traditional division of labour. The underlying principle of this arrangement is based on the opposition of the pure and impure, a sort of binary opposition between the upper castes and the 'lower' castes. Those who have championed the cultural perspective on caste include Louis Dumont, G.S. Ghurye, Edmund Leach, and M.N. Srinivas furthers the argument by elaborating on universal and particular categories, where the former views caste system as a manifestation of the universal phenomenon of social stratification while the latter explains caste system as unique to the Hindu or Indian social system. The structural understanding of caste is linked to Marxist and functionalist perspectives. To the structuralist, caste is a representation of class relations and the religious sanction is interpreted as a legitimizing ideology that sustains the existing mode of production. Since land was the basic resource and since it was possessed by the 'upper' castes, they had complete control over the means of production and exploited the landless or 'lower' castes. A number of sociologists studying Indian society have subscribed to the structural particularistic view of caste. Structural analysis of caste views it as a

system of institutionalized inequality. Thus, caste may also be understood as the structural basis of inequality.

### **Nationalism and Caste:**

*There are various contending trends in the study of nationalism, and nationalism in itself has been the subject matter of many academic works. Keeping in mind the main purpose of the study, this section devotes itself to summarizing this literature, with the understanding that the rise of nationalism has played a defining role in determining the aspects of caste relations. The discourse of nationalism is distinctively modern. It is variously argued to have originated in the seventeenth century British rebellion against monarchy (Kohn 1944, Greenfield 1991, 1992), the eighteenth century struggles of New World elites against Iberian colonialism, the French revolution of 1789 (Best 1988), and the German reaction to that revolution and to German disunity (Kedourie 1960, Breuilly 1982). In the early modern period, the idea of nation as an aggregate of people linked by co-residence or common socio-cultural characteristics that took political and cultural connotations in struggles with and between states and over state-building. This led to the distinctively modern invocation of nationalism as "a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state—a contingency already excluded by the principle in its general formulation—should not separate the power-holders from the rest" (Gellner, 1983). Nationalism involves and evolves from a fusion of several elements such as language, territory and distinction from contiguous neighbours in ways which sustains the groups' sense of 'us' and 'them'. Nationalism as a collective identity is both inter-subjective and relational. The concept of nation together with the idea of self-determination and popular sovereignty leads to the powerful formulation that this collectivity must receive one's undivided loyalty.*

Caste and nationalism has a strange mix in the South Asian context. Caste discourses have been present in different ways within the framework of nationalist discourse since the time of anti-colonial struggle. The nationalist writings during British colonial times that glorified and emphasized 'Indian culture' were mainly authored by dominant Hindus and reflected the strongly entrenched fervor of Brahmanism. Some nationalist scholars also made virulent efforts to universalize as well as normalize caste (Besant 1916). Apart from this, efforts were also made to 'transcode' the caste system as a modern institution in order to erase the debates on caste from the public sphere. Even untouchability was justified by the discourses on hygiene in the first half of the twentieth century (Aiyyer 1925). Caste was seen by most nationalists as a part of the colonial strategy to 'divide and rule'. Thus, the evoking of caste in the political domain was openly denounced and seen as efforts that collaborated with and thereby strengthened British colonial rule. The nationalisms propounded by Periyar and Ambedkar, for example, were critiqued by dominant nationalists as writings evoking caste divisions and subsequently challenging and weakening the unity among nationalists and the movement against the colonial rule since they criticized mainstream nationalism for excluding the rights of the oppressed sections.

Before proceeding to the next chapter, it would be useful to summarize the theoretical framework that has emerged from the previous sections. In particular, it would be important to see how caste and anti-caste movements can act as critical stimulants to the study of social movements and nationalism in the South Asian region. It is important for the purpose of this study to state here that the contradictory impulses contained in each of these views on caste; both emerge from and reflect back on the contestations over and the social movements against caste. For instance, an anti-caste movement could as easily uphold the view that caste has existed without significant variations and as having changing essential quality as it could uphold the view that caste has been subject to change and has taken particular forms in particular historical periods. Both could be, and have been, put to use in the service of mobilization against caste. The view that caste is an unchanging system that has oppressed and exploited lower castes for over five thousand years serve as a particularly potent

weapon of mobilization. Likewise, the mutability of caste relations and the need to pay attention to historical changes could be used to negate the idea that caste is a 'natural' order of things and instead assert that precisely because caste is a product of *human* history subject to historical change, it can also be overthrown or annihilated by the product of human action in the form of collective mobilization or a social movement aimed against it. Exactly what kind of view will be privileged over the others or what kinds of mix of these divergent trends is used by anti-caste movements and at what junctures all depend on the particular characteristics of each phase in the life of each social movement. Additionally, if any given moment is viewed as a field containing diverse elements, trends, phenomena, processes and social movements, it is equally important to state here that all these elements of the field cannot exist in pure isolation from each other. Instead, there is always considerable interaction between the elements of a given field of social relations. In other words, not only are the nature and strategies of anti-caste movements grounded in particular points in time and space, they are also not independent of other social movements in the same moment. For the purpose of the present study, this can be recapitulated or concretized in specifying the links, contradictions, relations and tensions between anti-caste movements, religious reform movements, anti-colonial movements, and national liberation struggles in the subcontinent. It is precisely the illumination of these linkages in the concrete particular context of Sri Lanka that are the subject matter of the later chapters of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER II

### **Caste Hierarchy in the Sri Lankan Tamil Society: A Historical Analysis**

#### **Introduction:**

The social history of caste in the Tamil regions of Sri Lanka cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the history of Tamils in Sri Lanka and the relationship with South India. The history of Tamils in Ceylon has been contested even today, but the factual evidences available prove that Sri Lanka and India are in the same continental self and that the depth of the gulf dividing both the countries is only 15 fathoms deep at the narrowest part and at a distance of 30 to 50 miles pointing to the possibility of Ceylon being a part of South India (Arasarathnam, 1964). Due to this proximity there had been strong commercial, political, social and cultural exchange between South India and Ceylon from the very early age.

The immigration of Tamils to Ceylon was of two types. One is the peaceful settlers and the other the invaders. These settlers came for the abundant resources available in Ceylon and had no political interest. They were never in conflict with the local rule or population. Many came also as a result of marriage between the Sinhalese kings and the Tamil brides; these were usually craftsmen, retainues of the bride who were slowly assimilated. There were also merchants who, due to non-permanency in their location, neither left any impact on the society nor were affected by it. The third category of people was the ever increasing mercenaries from South India, who lived in their cantonments with no contact with the Sinhalese society. They practiced their religion, language and their own culture.

The invaders never came in large numbers or with the interest of permanent colonization (Arasarathnam, 1964). In the third Century B.C. two Tamils described as horse traders captured the throne from the Sinhalese ruler and ruled for over 22 years. Another Tamil king of the Chola line, Elara, with the help of many Sinhalese sided and held power in Anuradhapura for 44 years till he was defeated by Duttugemunu in a political battle for dynastic power. Again in the first Century B.C. power passed to the hands of South Indian rulers. They were described as seven Tamil chiefs from the Pandyan lineage who ruled for about 14 years till they were defeated by Vattagamini. Most of the Tamil rulers also patronized Buddhism and the religions were not at conflict with each other. It was after the 26 years long rule of six Tamil rulers from the fifth Century A.D. that an anti-Tamil feeling crept into the Sinhalese society. This rule despite its patronage to Buddhism extended till the Southern most parts of the island and it was at this time Mahavamsa was written. The invasions notwithstanding, the influence of Tamils among the Sinhalese rulers and their interference in the dynastic struggles among the Sinhalese were less. In the seventh Century onwards such influence increased and they were in a position to put in power the kings favorable to them. The influence of the Tamils in the political matters was to the extent that the first temporary shift of Anuradhapura by the existing ruler was to escape from the Tamils.

#### **The Early Tamil Settlements in Sri Lanka:**

The first phase of Tamil rule which started from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C. was complete by the 10<sup>th</sup> Century. Most of the settlers during this time came from the Malabar Coast of South India, who had a social organization much different from the people of Tamil Nadu. In the sixth century these settlers moved from Jaffna to Batticaloa. The second period of Tamil rule was during the Chola period. This is marked to be different from the previous period in many ways. It was the first time that Ceylon was ruled as a part of the Indian empire under Rajaraja I and remained so till 1070. During this time, unlike

the previous period, Hinduism and Tamil interest were safeguarded and the state patronage to Buddhism declined. As it was a part of the Indian empire there was an influx of immigrants from the Chola Empire in South India to Ceylon – this time from the Coromendal Coast. The number of Brahmins increased, who facilitated the growth of Saivite Hinduism in Ceylon. The third period was the establishment of an independent Tamil Kingdom in Jaffna during the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. The intensive migration and the proximity of north to India led to the settlement of a large number of Tamils in the northern region, As a community they maintained their identity as a language-culture group. By 1325, they became strong enough to take advantage of the Sinhalese weakness and capture political power. The kingdom was founded by the Arya Chakravarthis, probably from Rameswaram, an island at the South most tip of India. The title *Arya* is taken by them as they seemed to have married into Brahmin family, denoting the intermixture with the highest *Aryan* caste.

These three phases of the Tamil rule forms the foundation to the social organisation that emerged later. The early settlers to Ceylon from South India were from the Malabar Coast. They practiced the *Marumakathayam* law which clearly indicates that a matriarchal society that is matrilineal and matri-uxorilocal (Tambiah, 1972). Under this law the property rights of women are greatly emphasized and the dowry is passed from mother to daughter. Similarly, wedding takes place in the bride's natal house and the married couple resides in bride's house along with her parents and siblings for at least a year or two, then the parents along with the siblings move to a different house, usually a smaller house which is closer to the natal house. The house and other immovable property is taken by the daughter as a part of her dowry, which Goody (1973) refers to as a pre-mortem matrilineal inheritance, where greater share of the property goes to the eldest daughter. The brother is expected to work for the dowry of his sisters and to marry only after his sisters are married. Cross cousin marriages are very common, with more frequency

of one marrying his mother's brother's daughter (MBD) over Father's sister's daughter (FZD). Another prominent feature of this society is the *Kudi*, a system of matriclans, governed by the rule of matrilineity (*Thai vazhi* or *pen vazhi*).

The second phase of invasion and expansion brought with it the Brahminical and patriarchal social structure that was by then well established in South India, which was based on the *chaturvarna* system. This migration was greater during the Chola Empire. It should also be noted that during this period immigration was at the crest and continued till the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which enabled them to seize political power and establish an independent kingdom. The patriarchal system of the Coromandel Coast encroached into the existing matriarchal system. The Patriarchal system being a stronger form of social organisation asserted itself (Arasarathnam, 1964). The inheritance of family property went from father to son and the dowry to the daughters. The position of the father became strong. The joint family system was introduced and property could not be alienated to anyone outside the family. Many such principles of the Hindu law were superimposed on the Malabar customs. These were also incorporated into the *thesavalami* law which maintained social order.

In the third phase when there was an independent kingdom in Jaffna, the social organisations began to consolidate and a new system peculiar to Ceylon Tamils which was distinct from South India emerged. The society that emerged in the post 13<sup>th</sup> century period was a synthesis of the two cultures along with the influence of Sinhalese, making it an independent identity and social organisations. This independent identity of the Ceylon Tamils is imperative and has to be understood in its entirety. It forms the base of the social organisations, which are separate from South India.

By 1325 an independent Tamil kingdom was established with Nallur as its capital. This facilitated the process of bringing the Tamils as a single socio-



cultural and political unit. As it is known, the Tamils in Ceylon had over the centuries migrated from different parts of South India and wherever they settled they established their cultural and social practices in Ceylon which they had practiced in their place of origin. Hence the Tamil society was highly heterogeneous with regard to its social organizations. By 1438 the Tamil society in Ceylon had consolidated itself as a community and developed a unified social organization and forged some customs of common usage. The institutions and social habits emerged was a result of the intermingling of various immigrants who had come from Malabar, Tamil Nadu, the Muslims and the Sinhalese. Hence, this was the period when the Ceylon Tamils got their own identity exclusive of the Tamils in India. In short, the new social order that emerged in Ceylon was the result of the amalgamation of the Coromandel culture, the Malabar tradition and the Sinhalese culture.

As the Ceylon Tamils established themselves as the people of the island by 16<sup>th</sup> Century, they had a separate territory, which was carved out as a separate homeland. They had a unique culture and language that was different from that of South India and had ceased to look towards South India for inspiration and help. The same was also extended to their social institutions and economic production. They asserted as a separate political entity with sovereignty that they vigilantly preserved from being encroached by the Sinhalese and even the Tamils of India. They were not very exceptional as artists and most art forms especially of sculpting and other major craftwork were a part of the Dravidian tradition, but they excelled in the field of literature and education. Spreading of education through literate community in urban and rural centres that started around this period was followed even in the post-colonial times. Towards the 15<sup>th</sup> century an academy was formed which was instrumental in the preservation of many ancient Tamil manuscripts. It also attempted in translating some Sanskrit works into Tamil. The study of medicine and Astrology was very popular and some medical treatises were written at this time. The Ceylon Tamils also nourished Siddha,

an indigenous form of medicine. Such efforts helped in preserving many ancient works that was even lost in South India, due to the later influence of Sanskrit. The Tamil that is spoken in Ceylon is relatively free of the Sanskrit influence and hence considered a purer form of Tamil, which is often asserted by the Ceylon Tamils, who look down upon the Indian Tamils (from Tamil Nadu).

Tamils in Ceylon were Hindus, with the exception of the Arab settlers who followed Islam, before colonisations. Tamils who had migrated from South India were almost entirely followers of Hinduism. Historically Hinduism and Buddhism had peacefully co-existed and had a lasting influence on each other. Even during the Sinhalese rule there had been Tamil settlements where Hinduism was practiced as a religion. But during the Chola reign Hinduism got state patronage and was almost elevated to the position of the official religion. This extended during the Arya dynasty, which had its roots in Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu. Hence the Arya kings were determined to strengthen the religion. The homogeneity of the population on religion, clearly defined territory and the patronage from the rulers greatly helped the growth of Hinduism in Ceylon. And soon it became a vital force and played a crucial role in the formation of social organisations in Ceylon.

The Hindus of Ceylon, almost exclusively followed Saivism, the worship of Siva. Hence Siva, *Lingam*, dancing Nataraja was common and popular among the Ceylon Tamils. Apart from Siva, Ganesha and Skandha (a pre-Aryan cult assimilated into Hinduism) were also worshipped. The Sinhalese too worshipped Skandha and Kannagi (from the epic *Silappathigaram*) in the name Pattini. Among the lower castes and backward region the worship of *munnis* is popular, which is considered to be demon worship by the Hindu pantheon. The ceremonies and rituals were similar to that followed in South India with some crucial changes. Tamil devotional literature of the Saiva tradition was used in temples instead of Sanskrit verses. The Hindu New Year

TH-18706

falling in April was celebrated more elaborately than in South India. The festivals like Deepavali and Navarathi which had northern origin were not observed.

Another feature of the Coromandel system was the caste system, which was based on Brahminical principles. Hence the Ceylon caste system too in its basic form had the characteristics of the Dravidian caste system. Land and land ownership was the nucleus of social organisation in Ceylon. Hence the agricultural caste occupied the higher rank. The major difference from the Dravidian model is that the absence of the important role given to the Brahmins.

In south India, during the medieval period there was a great influx of Brahmins from the Vijaynagar Empire. They held positions in temples and served as agents of spirituality. Due to their high position in the caste system they easily held authority over the others in the temple. Due to the expansion of the religion and thereby the temple property, Brahmins extended their power and authority from temple administration to also temporal lives. There are records of them owning even entire villages. Consequently during the British rule they stepped into the bureaucracy and retained their traditional authority. This development was not possible in Ceylon, due to various reasons. Brahmins did not migrate to Ceylon from South India in large numbers, except a few who immigrated to preach and spread Hinduism. They were limited to the religious role as the temple priest, as they were numerically weak.

Land was another crucial factor in the social organisation of the Ceylon Tamils. In early times the king and his relatives and nobles who had control over most of the land were at the top of the hierarchy. They were followed by the chief-men and other land owning communities who were at the service of the king. At the bottom were the wage labourers and slaves who had no right over land. Most of the dominant castes of today like the *Vellallas* and the



*Mukkuvars* were all chief-men who paid tribute to the king. The king never interfered in the affairs of these landlords so long they were punctual with their tribute and presented themselves annually as a mark of their allegiance. This authority helped them to establish themselves as a dominant force. All other castes were made subservient to the land owning castes and remained at their service.

### **Development of the Caste structures in Ceylon:**

As explained before, the formation of caste and caste hierarchies was more grounded on the ownership of land than on ritual purity or the notion of 'twice born' as the case with Indian caste system. Though caste system has its roots in the Indian Brahminical system, the Tamil society in Ceylon evolved a social order that was unique and distinct from that of South India based on the objective conditions that emerged during the rise of the Jaffna Kingdom. It is pertinent to understand the Ceylon Tamil caste system in terms of its structure, various castes, their origin, their relations with each other, the changes that took place, continuities and its specificities.

The structure of caste system was three fold, with the upper castes on the top followed by the *kudimai* castes and at the lowest of the hierarchy were the *Adimai* castes. The *Vellallas*, *Mukkuvars*, Brahmins and the *Veerasaiva Kurukkal* were on top of the hierarchy. *Kuimai Kudi* refers to the service castes and the *Adimai Kudi* refers to the slaves. Both the *kudimai* and *adimai kudi*s are at the service of the dominant castes. Apart from those who have migrated and settled independently, most of the service castes migrated when the kings in Ceylon took brides from South India. They came along with the bride to be at the queen's service. They settled in groups and had no interaction with the Sinhalese, thereby following and practicing the same social life as they did in their source of origin. But an influx in the migration of the service and slave castes greatly increased with the migration of the

*Vellalla* caste. The difference between the *kudimai kudi* and *adimai kudi* was that the slaves could be bought and sold at the will of the owner but the service castes only extended their service to the dominant caste and maintained ritual importance.

The *Vellallas* in Ceylon constitute about 50% of the total Tamil population. The name *Vellallas* is derived from the Tamil word *Velanmai* (cultivation) and as discussed earlier they were a cultivating landowning caste of Tamil Nadu who had migrated to Ceylon in large numbers during the Chola period and established well in Jaffna region and some in Batticaloa. They were brought as Saivite temple functionaries in perpetuity by the local kings. They did not have the ownership of the temples but were allowed to cultivate the temple lands as a reward to their services. The migrating *Vellalas* had brought with them their slaves, who were kept as labourers in the *Vellala* households. More slaves were brought from Tamil Nadu, whenever needed. Between 1694 and 1696, about 3589 slaves were brought and sold from Tamil Nadu. The *Vellallas* cherish their image of custodians of the soil, who inherited land – peaceful and honourable. They had settled primarily in the north and a few in the east. Their dominance over the region was attributed to their ownership of vast chunk of land, the numerous slaves and other service castes that were at their service, their loyalty to the king and their numerical strength. In the east though they were numerically few; they retained their superiority through their traditional authority and also by not directly confronting or challenging the status of *Mukkuvars*.

The *Mukkuvars* are the immigrants from the Malabar Coast, who had come to Ceylon to fight as a part of the Magha army and were granted land and regional chief-ship (*Mukkuvar vannimai*) in Batticaloa as a reward for their service in the army. Their origin can be traced to central and north Kerala where they were recognised as hereditary fishermen (Thurson, 1909), but they never considered themselves as fishermen in Batticaloa. Unlike the *Vellalas*

the *Mukkuvars* often celebrate their kingly and martial honour which is explicit in their names. They used their power as the chief-men to dominate other groups and possess large amount of land. In the east of Ceylon, they had complete dominance even over the few *Vellallas* present in the region. Though *Vellallas* in the east established their control over in some village, they were politically subordinate to the *Mukkuvars* overall. Through *Mukkuvarvannimai* the *Mukkuvars* made themselves masters of the land, guardians of the temples and arbiters of the social order claiming to be the Saivite crusaders who have come to expunge the Vaishnava sympathisers and restore the Saivism (McGilvray, 1982).

The other two dominant castes are the Brahmins (north) and the *Veerasaiva Kurukal* (east). Both the Brahmins and the *Veerasaiva Kurukal* belong to the priestly castes performing poojas and spreading Saivism, but their origin is traced to two different streams of Hinduism. The Brahmins are from the Sankritic Aryan tradition, who believes in the doctrine of *Chaturvarna*. The *Veerasaiva kurukkal* are non-Brahmin priests affiliated to the *Veerasaiva* lingayat sect of South India.

The *Veerasaiva kurukkal* have maintained their superiority over the Brahmins and the Brahminical 'Varna doctrines', reflecting an antipathy well known from South Indian ethnography (Parvathamma, 1971). They believe in a desire-less life, attained through prescribed daily and pre-prandial worship of the lingam aiming at realizing true spiritual union with lord Siva. It is a belief that one who has attained this state is impervious to any kind of contamination whatever the source is. Hence they are considered to be the purifiers and protectors of the village from evil forces. The lingam is worn only by practicing *Sangar Kurukal* (one who has attained spiritual union with Siva). Though the *Veerasaiva Kurukkal* were preferred over the Brahmins and patronised by the dominant castes as they are the custodians of Saivism, they were denied the support of the true *Veerasaiva* sectarian order as an outcome

of the absence of other *Veerasaiva* sects in Ceylon. Though they had retained some distinctive customs that distinguish them from the rest, like burying in sitting posture with the lingam in the mouth, they were pessimistic about retaining the *Veerasaiva* priesthood, causing the later generations to look out for other job prospects. This resulted in the growth of a heterogeneous priesthood composing of various local caste members representing their caste supported temples and also to the strengthening of the Brahminical system.

The Brahmins form the most indispensable part of the Indian social order and are at the top of the hierarchy whose authority extends beyond the realm of spirituality. In Ceylon too they have retained their spiritual superiority and the status of high caste but their authority was limited strictly to the ritual affairs of the temple. They were appointed by the *Vellallas* as the temple priest for a salary. They neither had a say in the administrative matters nor ownership to the temple lands. Unlike India their numerical strength was much weaker compared to the other castes. Though this put them at a weaker position in secular and political affairs they maintained a cordial relation with the *Vellallas*, that many *Vellalla* families address the Brahmins serving them as *sondhakara* caste (relative caste). The *Vellallas* always treat them with respect and address them politely but are stern and discipline them when the Brahmins disrespect or claim ownership of temple, which can range from warnings to the use of force.

Those belonging to the upper caste were referred as high people and despite the hostilities among each other they all acted similarly in their treatment towards the lower castes. Next to the four high castes comes the *kudimai kudi*, a collective reference to the numerous service castes. In those classification fall the artisan castes like that of Carpenters, goldsmith, blacksmith and also the barbers, washermen and the *Parayars*, who were at the service of the dominant caste; it was mandatory for them to attend the rituals of the dominant castes. During the colonial period many *kudimai kudi*s emancipated

themselves through court and refused to serve the dominant castes. Apart from the lower status vis-à-vis the 'high caste people' they were further graded amongst themselves depending on their occupation and ritual importance. Those services that do not involve menial jobs were considered above the rest. Hence the goldsmith, blacksmith and other such service groups were higher than the barbers, washer men and *parayars*.

*The adimai Kudi* refers to the chattel slaves – the *Pallas*, *Nalavas* and *Kovias*. They were landless labourers who worked in the fields of the dominant caste. They have had no right to property and were treated as a commodity of the owners, who could be bought or sold at the formers' will. They were paid at the will of the owners, who have had complete right over their earnings. They also had to pay an annual sum to their masters. The slaves should get the permission of their masters to get married, and it was given only if both the male and the female belong to the same master.

These were the major castes that form the structure of the Tamil caste system in Ceylon. Most of those castes and the relations among them had been the same as it had been in South India, except with some minor changes, with will be dealt with while studying the specificities of the Ceylon caste system. But there exist some castes that are found only in Ceylon and do not exist in South India (for example, the *Nalavas*, *Kovias* and *Thurumbas*). There are numerous sub-castes which can be classified into the three broad categories based on their occupation and hence is beyond the scope of the study (they do not significantly affect the system). While studying the caste system it is to be noted that the fishermen community has historically remained outside the purview of the Tamil caste system. Both in the north and the east the fishermen had been driven out at the time of the settlement of the *Vellallas* and the *Mukkuvars* respectively. Historians consider this as a natural process of colonisation whereby the indigenous people are driven out by the settlers.



The fact that the fisher men do not serve any of the dominant caste or a part of the rituals corroborates this argument.

### Specificities in the Sri Lankan Tamil Caste system:

Caste system universally refers to the Brahminical Hindu caste system of India and any other hierarchal social system found in South Asia is considered as variants of the Indian system. The Indian caste system is a hierarchal social order based on the *chaturvarna* principle sanctioned by the Hindu religion. It classifies the society into four varnas - Brahmin (priest), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishya (trader) and Shudra (to serve the above varnas) who are supposed to have originated respectively from the head, shoulder, thighs and foot of *Brahma*. There is also a section which lies outside the four varnas – the untouchables. One's caste is ascribed and it cannot be changed, members of each caste are expected to follow the caste occupation. Each of the varnas is strictly endogamous and has restrictions on the members pertaining to commensality, marriage, sex and physical contact with other varna or caste; any violation of these rules is dealt with severely. The core of this system is based on the concept of 'purity and pollution' as it holds the Brahmins to be pure and sacred and the untouchables and the sudhras to be polluting as they do menial jobs.

Caste system in other parts of South Asia definitely differs from this ideal type depending on the peculiar nature of the systemic organization. Further the presence of caste system even in countries that do not follow the Hindu social order confirms that caste system is not just a cultural concept but a structural phenomenon. Hence digression from the ideal type has to be seen in the context of the development of the social structure in the specific area and has to be accounted in the study of the caste and not discarded.

The Ceylon caste system is primarily based on the Hindu caste system as most of social relations that existed in South India was maintained even after the

migration to Ceylon. But the specific conditions that rose in the context of Ceylon had affected the retaining of the Brahminical Hindu social order based on the *chaturvarna* system. The major distinction of the Ceylon caste system from the Indian caste system is that apart from the ritual hierarchy it has a secular hierarchy. The ritual hierarchy follows the basic principles of the Indian system with the Brahmins at the top, affirming the relation with the Indian sub continent, while the secular hierarchy marks of departure from the Indian caste system. The gradation of different castes was based on material conditions and their access to the resources than on abstract myths as in the Indian system. Further the distinction and gradation of the castes is based on the occupation and not based on ritual purity. Although a negative idea of 'caste impurity' can be directly observed in local attitudes towards the lowest castes as they involve with menial jobs like removing polluting substances, the positive attribution of 'caste purity', which is a crucial aspect of the Indian caste system is only indirectly evident in the actions and statements of higher caste (McGilvary, 1982). The difference can be seen both at the structural level and also in term of practices. Some of these are listed below:

#### **The Position of Brahmins:**

In Hindu caste system it is universally assumed that the Brahmins are on the top of the hierarchy, despite it being challenged in many regions even in India. Even among the Brahmins, those who do the cremation rites (Maha Brahmins) are considered lower in status. In Ceylon, the Brahmins do not enjoy this privilege and as Stevenson (1954) argues that this brought a dichotomy in their sacred and secular positions. There is no ambiguity but a clear demarcation of the ritual from the secular. They are considered to be the top of the hierarchy on ritual matters and their authority is not challenged in religious and ritual spheres. But on secular terms they are nothing but temple priests who are paid by the *Vellallas*. This is also due to the fact that most of the temples are own hereditarily by the *Vellalla* families.

**The Kovias:**

Similarly the position of the *Kovias*, the chattel slaves of the *Vellalla* caste, is unique to the Ceylon system. The *Kovias* on secular terms form the lowest rung of the caste system. They work in their houses and fields of the *Vellallas* family that owns them and yet are considered to be ritually equal to their masters and therefore, can enter the temple – a privilege that other slave castes do not have. The *Kovias* are also the one who take the pyre of the *Vellalla* to the cremation ground. It is a common practice that many *Vellalla* men have *Kovia* concubines and the children born of this union are considered to be *Vellallas*. Myth has it that the *Kovias* are originally *Goigamas* (Sinhalese upper caste) who were captured after their defeat to Tamil kings.

**The Unseeable caste:**

Apart from the *adimai kudis* who are also treated similarly like the untouchables in India, the Ceylon system has another category of caste – the unseeables. The *thurumba* caste are not supposed to come out in day time and travel at night dragging a Palmyra palm so that the noise will indicate the where about of the person so that the high caste people will avoid it. Though these restrictions in mobility is found in the Indian caste system for the untouchables, there does not exist a special category as the unseeables.

**Widow Remarriage and Wearing of Sacred Thread:**

In Ceylon widow remarriage was a common practice except among the Brahmins. Such restrictions on the Brahmin women were considered as peculiar and undesirable. While in the India, the practice of *sati* (death by jumping into the burning pyre of the husband) is considered ideal and the mark of a respectable woman as she is considered to be devoid of a purpose in life without the husband. Widows are considered to be bad omen and have to wear white or saffron with their heads shaved off. There are restrictions on diet, mobility and even visibility. Widow remarriage is considered to be

against the tradition and is prohibited, except in some lower castes. The wearing of the sacred thread as an indication of marriage among the women was a practice. This is given a great religious importance in the Hindu society in India, but does not hold any significance among the Ceylon Tamils. This practice was seen only among the Brahmins and some immigrant artisan castes.

#### **Temple Entry of *Vannars*:**

An abnormal feature of caste ranking is the fact that the *Vannars* (washermen) are allowed to enter temple but the *ambattars*(barbers) are not (Banks). It is the opposite that is followed in South India since the *Vannars* are considered more polluting as they wash menstrual clothes. Yet the practice is justified by the Tamils as the help of the washer-man is needed in decorating the temple with clothes. Such practices only ratifies that the caste system is based on secular terms than on ritual purity.

#### **The *Sondakara* caste:**

Jaffna has a third system of social stratification that operates between persons of the same named castes. This system uses the idiom of caste, but the rank is dependent on acquired positions of wealth and power though there is always a time-lag between the acquisition of these desiderata and ascription of rank. Michael Banks refers these as 'sondakara caste'. One can note that the *Vellallas* address the Brahmins (who are at their service) as their *sondakara* caste.

Caste can be studied at best in the villages where the social relations are based on caste relations. Michael Banks in his study of Caste in Jaffna classifies the Jaffna village into three types:

1. Villages consisting of one ward of one caste.

2. Villages consisting of many castes by only one wards of each.
3. Villages consisting of several caste and several wards of each.

The first classification is found in the south Elephant pass, the second in the southern half of the peninsula and the third in Jaffna. Since the first and second villages are in ways homogenous the study would take the third type as the ideal village in the north. The village is a territory that has both the residential and agricultural area. It is spread out and not nucleated round one centre, like many villages in South India. Each village has many wards. The village in Jaffna has a complicated system of social relations among the wards. Each ward is consisted of several castes.

The spatial separation of each ward reflects social separation. Members of different wards of the same village have few social relations with one another. In wards with the same caste each ward tries to prove its superiority over the other, hence the inter-ward social relations become minimal even among those belonging to the same caste. Barring a few cases, as a rule, the ward groups of the same caste do not inter-marry, inter-dine, or have any social relations except some minor economic dealings and some degree of attendance at the temple festivals. But they do have marriage relations with the same *sondakara* caste (not necessarily he same caste) of the other wards. These *sondakara* relations are not permanent and keep changing; hence they are not strictly endogamous groups. The Jaffna village, unlike South India does not have a unitary structure linking together the whole village forming one social system. When members of the same caste of different wards have little to do with each other, the bond of inter-caste relationship run across village boundaries as much as within, as they could work for the same *Vellalla* family. The *Vellala* may draw its service castes from any village or each from different villages contributing to the inter-caste unity. Banks further explains that inter-caste rivalry in villages were not as much as in South India. But the rivalry between *Vellallas* leads to rivalry among those serving them, which results in people of

the same caste fighting against each other. Hence the Jaffna village is not any 'integrated' as normal villages are in Malinowski's term. But they are real units as many have documents for over the centuries.

The village system in the east is very much different from that of the north. In the east, according to McGilvary, there are two types of settlements found, one densely populated, semi-urban, coastline settlements of Hindus and Muslims and the other mainly Hindu inland villages separated by semi-saline lagoons. The Hindus and Muslims live in ethnically compartmentalized villages adjacent to each other. There are also presence of Christians, Sinhalese and Burgers who are spread through the region. The social organization is typified by bilateral cross-cousin marriage, dowry, and matrilocal residence, as well as a matrilineal clan (*kudi*) system that provides a common institutional basis for the management of Hindu temples. The basic distinction is that of the *kudi* (clan) which is interchangeably used with caste. There was no clear endogamous boundary between the ranked bilaterally constituted castes among the higher groups and the emphasis is on the *kudis*, some sharing caste names and some having distinct caste names. The economy and polity is run by the *Mukkuvars* with clear written rules called the *Mattakalappu Maaniyam*.

### **Influence of Colonialism:**

The Ceylon social organisation has undergone many changes over time since the establishment of an independent kingdom. The most significant external influence that greatly affected the social organization of Ceylon is the Colonisation, this time from the Europeans. Ceylon was colonised first by the Portuguese (1517), then the Dutch (1638) and finally the British (1803). The Portuguese had dominance over a scattered area and did not have strong political interest. They used the existing traditional system and utilised it to their advantage.

The Dutch too never had a complete political dominance over the region, though they had influence both in the north and south. They had colonised the north which already had a strong social organisation with the landowning *Vellallas* on top. As Arasaratnam (1978) demonstrates, the Dutch strengthened the dominance of *Vellalars* for their own revenue collection purposes. Jaffna appealed to the Dutch with its lucrative trade in one indigenous product, the Asian elephant, and one imported one, American tobacco, which was found to thrive in Jaffna, making it a prized possession. The Dutch strengthened and patronised the dominant castes to serve their business interests in the island. The *Vellallas*, who were the dominant force, being the landowning caste was an added advantage to the Dutch, who used their natural and human resources to strengthen their economy. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, *Vellalas* grown tobacco, which had a special appeal in the Malabar Coast made fabulous fortunes for *Vellalas* cultivators and brokers. During the Dutch rule, Jaffna exported an astonishing amount of tobacco more than 1 million pounds, for instance, in 1783 and earned an equally astonishing Rs. 80,000 in customs duties alone, a considerable sum for those days (Arasaratnam 1982:8). To ensure that *Vellalar* cultivators a steady supply of field labor, the Dutch "preserved" indigenous caste customs by reinterpreting them in accordance with Roman-Dutch law, so that *Nalavars* and *Pallars* remained slaves; the Dutch and private individuals imported thousands more *Pallar* slaves from South India during times of famine. The rigidity of the caste system in Jaffna in modern times is attributed more to the highly lucrative agricultural export economy that thrived during the Dutch period. They preserved the traditional practices of the *Vellallas*, which ensured cheap labour through the slave system that was already in vogue. Moreover the caste system and the *tesavalamai* rules followed by the Tamils were codified and reinterpreted according to the Roman-Dutch law.

The British maintained the same policies as the Dutch, but did not pit one caste against another which helped the *Vellallas* to consolidate their

dominance even under the British rule. But in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the attitude of the British changed and they brought out policies that were detrimental to the *Vellallas*. According to Rogers, the significant change in caste came in the 1830s when the British removed caste from the public domain. This did not stop caste from existing socially but caste was not a category in the administrative works, which had both advantages and disadvantages. The main disadvantage was that there were no official records of caste and caste based discrimination. But with the abolition of slavery in 1844, the *pallars* and *nalavras* could sell their labour for subsistence payments (Banks, 1960). Subsequently the courts refused to honour the legality of traditional case service obligation, and the *Vellallas* found it more difficult to prevent the subordinate castes from liberating themselves or changing their identities. Resulting in a marked increase in those claiming to be *Vellallas*, the proportion of such people increased from 30 to 50 percent between 1790 and 1950 (Banks, 1957). It became more difficult for the *Vellallas* to prevent the lower caste from climbing up the social ladder, hence they resorted to more violent ways including the use of force against the 'lower' caste Tamils.

#### **Impact of English Education:**

The British introduced English education in Ceylon through missionaries. English education gained popularity in the Tamil society as it led to better job opportunities inside and outside Ceylon. The Tamil areas in Ceylon are agriculturally less fertile; it is arid and can be cultivated only with rainfall in the north and saline in the east. Apart from the tobacco and coconut mills there are no industries. This made English education popular because it assured new job opportunity inside and outside of their state. Though the education system was free to all caste and class in reality, it was utilised by the dominant castes.



The artisan castes which emancipated itself from the traditional obligations through legal procedures got some benefit of the English education and raised its economic status, thereby calling themselves *Vellallas*. The worst affected was the 'lower' castes that had worked in the field of *Vellallas*, which was their only source of subsistence. The abolition of slavery by the British had a positive impact helping these castes to emancipate from the traditional occupation. But due to their economically weaker position in the society they could not utilise the English education in the early stages.

The section that benefited maximum with the introduction of English education was the *Vellallas*. The *Vellallas* who deduced that the export economy was failing in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century saw great prospects through English education. Hence they emphasised greatly English education that will open new arenas and agriculture which will retain their traditional dominance. They excelled in mathematics, medicine, public administration and engineering. They soon entered and achieved positions of authority in the British administration. Arasaratnam (1982) points out that by 1921 there were 10,185 *Vellallas* in "public administration and liberal arts". This also led to the migration of a significant amount of Tamils, about 10 percent of the total Tamil population, to Colombo.

One marked difference between the Tamils and the Sinhalese was their attitude towards English education. During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century both Tamil and Sinhalese society was going through a period of religious reforms. The reform movements opposed Christianity and the influence of western culture in Ceylon. Anagarika Dharmapala and Arumuga Navalar spearheaded these reform movements in Sinhalese society and Tamil society respectively. While Dharmapala opposed English education Arumuganavalar used it as a tool to raise the economic status of Tamils and did not reject English education. As a result of the reform movements there were many schools opened in the Tamil areas that was based on Hindu traditions. The growth of reform movement

only resulted in the further oppression of the 'lower' castes, as those belonging to these sections were not accepted in the schools run by the reformists. It should be noted that most of the schools run in the Tamil areas was owned by the dominant caste.

The most interesting fact is that the rise in educational status had little impact on the existing oppressive caste structure; instead of making the society more liberal, caste hierarchy was enforced with more force. The education did not change the attitude of the dominant castes towards the 'lower' castes. But it gave rise to some compulsions due to which the *Vellallas* were forced to change their attitude towards the 'lower' castes, which would be discussed in the following section.

### **Traditional Practices that Deepened the Caste System:**

The present day caste system in its discriminatory and oppressive form has its roots in the *manu smriti* that clearly lays down, through *varnashrama dharma*, the duties and privileges of each *Varna* over the other. It further gives religious sanction to the discriminatory practices against the 'lower castes' and 'the untouchables'. The caste structure is strengthened through religious practices and rituals which help to maintain the hierarchy. The Sri Lankan Tamil society, which is predominantly a Hindu society, also exhibits some typical characteristics of the Indian caste system.

Since the caste system was the basis of social organisation, it was maintained through some traditional practices historically, that defined the role of each caste in the society. These roles and duties are both ritualistic, performed during a particular festival or occasion and in normal day to day functioning. It also restricts interaction between different castes, marriage practices and occupations. In both north and east of Sri Lanka, we find clear rules that have been maintained in order to keep the caste system alive and rigid in order to serve the interests of the dominant community. A closer look at these

practices will help one to understand the deep entrenchment of the caste system in the Tamil society.

In the day to day functions, the caste system demonstrates the *Jajmani* system, with the *Vellalas* as the provider and all other castes at their service. Every caste with the exception of the artisans and the fishermen is affiliated with a *Vellala* family. For each *Vellala* family, a kin group of washermen, barber, *Pallas* and *Nallavas* is at their service in the form of client - patron relations. This service is passed to the next generation along the male line of each caste. The service caste cannot serve any other family; they are completely at the mercy of the particular *Vellala* family for their livelihood. These duties and services of each caste are well established during the domestic rituals like marriage and funeral in a *Vellala* family.

In the marriage ceremony, the Brahmin priest conducts the sacramental part of the ceremony with his chanting. The washerman decorates the house. The barber has to shave the groom on the morning of the wedding, before the ceremonial bath. The musicians provide music at the wedding and the *Kovias* cook the ceremonial feast. The goldsmith, prior to the wedding, presides over an elaborate ritual at an auspicious time when the gold for the bride's ornaments is first melted. Nearly the same pattern prevails in the weddings of the other castes, though the castes which have duties to the *Vellala* would not perform at the ceremonies of the other castes. Each of the other castes with the exception of the *Kovias* has its own priests, washermen and barbers, and they perform their set duties.

In the funeral ceremony in the *Vellala* family, the same pattern of functioning is seen. The funeral priest, the washer-man, the barber and the *Kovia* have important duties. In addition some of the 'exterior' castes (the *Pallas* and the *Parayas*) perform certain duties. While the *Parayas* beat the drums, the *Palla* women do the ceremonial weeping and *Palla* male supervise the burning of the pyre. The barber plays the most crucial role in the entire funeral.

While these domestic rituals reiterate the *jajmani* system and the loyalty of the service castes to the dominant caste, the rituals during the temple festival exemplifies the superiority of the dominant caste in the society. Further, it helps in maintaining the existing hierarchy.

In the predominantly Hindu Tamil society, temples gain a special significance as they also reflect the nature of the society and the existing caste patterns. The temples in the north and east can be classified into those belonging to the Sanskritic tradition and belonging to the folk traditions. The temples that belong to the great traditions are built according to the Hindu, Vedic prescriptions and the rituals are presided by a Brahmin priest, who alone has the access to the sanctum. These temples are dedicated to the well known gods and goddess of the Hindu pantheon like Siva, Vishnu, Subramaniya, Kali etc. The folk temples are smaller and are presided by *poojaris* who belong to the particular caste that owns the temple. They are dedicated to local deities like Bhairavar, Munni etc. The rituals of these temples are usually sacrificial, which also includes animal sacrifice. The vegetarianism which is the principal in the Hindu temples are absent in these local temples. The temples of the Sanskritic tradition is usually owned and managed by *Vellala* family in the north and by a particular *Mukkuvar Kuti* in the east, with the property rights descending to their successors. It is managed like any other private property and the enormous revenue it generates goes completely to the family. The temples of the folk tradition are owned not by a particular family but by the community or caste.

A comparative look at duties performed by each caste during the temple festivals in north and east will clearly portray reiteration of the hierarchies given by the caste system and how religion is used to sanctify the caste system.

The rites performed in these temples are those prescribed by ancient Sanskritic tradition, with the Brahmin priest performing them and he alone

having access to the holy of holies. The other interior castes are permitted to enter the other parts of the temple, but not the holy of holies. The exterior castes are not even permitted inside the temple; they have to perform their ablutions from the entrance to the temple. They decorate the outside of the temple and get some interior caste member to help them make such arrangements as are necessary inside the temple. These festivals last round the clock on each day, with the high point at night. Music and sometimes dancing performances go on till the early hours of the morning. This is often interspersed with musical lectures on the lives of the Hindu saints or gods.

From the previous section, one can gather that the traditional *jajmani* system could not be sustained effortlessly after the abolition of slavery during the British. Such policies gave a severe blow to Dutch built edifice of *vellalla* authority. In order to retain their traditional control the *Vellallas* resorted to more brutal forms of oppression. McGilvary observes that the *Vellalla* brunt fell on two untouchable castes in particular – the *Pallars* and *Nalavars*, who together constitute 18 percent of the Tamil population and were the chattel slaves of *Vellallas*. They were further forbidden to enter or live near temples; to draw water from the wells of high-caste families; to enter laundries, barber shops, cafes, or taxis; to keep women in seclusion and protect them by enacting domestic rituals; to wear shoes; to sit on bus seats; to register their names properly so that social benefits could be obtained; to attend school; to cover the upper part of the body; to wear gold earrings; if male, to cut their hair; to use umbrellas; to own bicycles or cars; to cremate the dead; or to convert to Christianity or Buddhism (Holmes 1980). Those from these castes who try to raise their position found themselves victimized by the thugs organised by *Vellallas* who would burn their huts and poison their wells or pollute it with dead animals, fecal matter and garbage, they were also beaten up, publicly lynched and some times even killed.

The *Vellallas* thought it was imperative to teach lessons to the oppressed castes in order to prevent them from “slowly slowly becoming *Vellallas*” (a Tamil proverb). As Banks notes of 1957 without these restrictions says that What would distinguish a Vellala from a Palla? There would be nothing to stop Pallas from behaving as Vellalas and calling themselves Vellalas . . . and within a short time probably becoming indistinguishable from Vellalas. Caste as it is at present would cease to exist and there would simply be larger numbers of endogamous groups all claiming to be equal to, or higher than, the others. . . . Once such a relativity of ranking was introduced, intermarriage would no doubt follow in time, as memory of which were or were not real Vellalas fell away, and the distribution of wealth changed.

To maintain the division between the dominant castes and the oppressed section, the *Vellallas* employ rituals to sustain the argument that the ‘lower’ castes are non-Tamil “aboriginals” from despicably low status (Pfaffenberger, 1982). It is with this intent that the *Vellallas* oblige their untouchable servants to remove from the house premise substance that are considered to be afflicted with demons and evil spirits, and that are associated with disorder, Madness, sterility, uncontrollable menial states and other afflictions of permitivity. In order to deny the membership, the reason given to the oppressed sections was that due to their contact with such substances, they have brought impurity and great malady to themselves that cannot be removed with any form of purification.

The emphasis of the lower status of the untouchables was maintained strictly for two reasons. One, to maintain a continue supply of cheap labour and second, to assert the high tradition of one’s family among the other *Vellallas*. But interestingly these two required two different approaches to increase their profit in agriculture, they had to lower the rates paid and ensure that the labourers live in their own marginal settlements eking out a living in peripheral employment and wage labour and to maintain their status as a true *Vellallas*. They had to be in command of the service castes and treat them in the client-patron relation, which requires a more cordial approach.

They achieved it by keeping a few families of the *Pallars* and *Nalavars* to fulfill traditional obligation and the rest appointed as wage labourers in the fields. The *Vellallas*, realizing the importance of keeping them at a meager pay, refused to pay them with cash even though the productivity was doubled and even tripled. The labourers were paid in kind with paddy for the day's work, denying or demanding for more wages would leave them unemployed. This system left a major population of the 'lower' caste outside the traditional roles, thereby not binding on them to serve only one *Vellalla* family. This resulted in the increase of a rural lumpen proletariat, who had economic sources outside the traditional *Vellalla* dominated framework, and gave the lower castes for the first time the strength to challenge the centuries old hegemony.

## Chapter III

# ANTI-CASTE MOVEMENTS: IDEOLOGIES, VISIONS AND PROTESTS

The rise of anti-caste movements of the Tamils was intrinsically linked to the revival movements which emerged as a counter to colonization and conversion to Christianity. The anti-caste movements also used some of the colonial policies to their advantage in their struggle against caste atrocities. A detailed understanding of the impact of colonialism and the revival movements is therefore essential in locating the origin of the anti-caste movements in Sri Lanka. The first section of this chapter is devoted to the understanding of colonial policies and their impact on the Sri Lankan Tamil society which is followed by a critical analysis of the revival movement. The chapter then focuses on the organizations that took up the issue of caste among the Tamils by analyzing their ideologies and visions for the movement and how far they had succeeded in their objectives. The later section will deal with the various protests launched by the main forces and their impact and the responses that they evoked from the *vellalas*.

### **Assessing the Impact of European Colonialism in Sri Lanka:**

The Sinhalese social organisations underwent many changes over time. The most significant external influence with far-reaching impact on the social organization of Sri Lanka was its colonisation by the Europeans. Ceylon was colonised by the Portuguese (1517), followed the Dutch (1638) and finally by the British (1803). The Portuguese dominated over a scattered area but they did not have strong political interest. They rather used the existing traditional system to their advantage.

**Social Reforms in the nineteenth century Sri Lanka:** Between the 1820s and the 1930s many reforms were introduced by the British. The most important was the



Colebrooke-Cameron reforms, introduced in 1833. The Colebrooke- Cameron commission suggested many radical changes that had affected the administrative, economic and social lives of the people of Sri Lanka. Criticizing the excessive power in the hands of the governors, it recommended decentralization of administration. The administrative office was made open to the natives, Ceylon civil service was introduced. But that also required an English speaking elite group that would accept the British rule and work in their interest. Mass English medium schools were opened for this purpose. Along with that, vernacular schools were also opened which were run by some missionaries.

The British administration further aimed at unifying the administration, by denying recognition to the traditional chief-ships. This was an attempt to weaken the traditional forms of social organisations. Significant change in Sri Lankan caste system occurred in 1830s, when the British decided to remove castes from the public domain, by abolishing the caste based labour system. Thereafter, caste did not stop from existing socially, but it was no longer a category in administrative works. Caste was rarely used in government pronouncements, even though it was recognised by the courts (Rogers, 1994). Further the posts of *Muthaliar* was made open to all castes. This was a severe blow to the dominant castes like the *Govigama / Vellala*, who so far had enjoyed the monopoly privilege till the new system was introduced. It helped other castes, to move up in social hierarchy. This upward mobility was so enhanced by trade and other economic opportunities that emerged during colonisation that castes like the *Karayaars* and *karavars* started questioning the dominance of *Goigamas* and *Vellalas* respectively.

Along with abolition of slavery in 1844, the government also abolished *rajakiriya* system (a traditional system of land owning under which land was gifted for the service rendered). The non-recognition of caste affected the 'oppressed castes that had worked in the fields of *Vellallas*, which was their only source of subsistence. The abolition of slavery by the British had a positive impact as it helped these castes to emancipate from the traditional occupation. But due to their economically weaker position in the society they could not utilise the English education in the early stages.

### **The influence of Economy:**

By 1820 the British government started experimenting in financial ventures like coffee plantation, which was officially launched a decade later. Between 1850 and 1880, the coffee plantation took a predominate position in shaping Sri Lanka's economy, by becoming one of the most profitable ventures in the colonial times. By 1857, the acreage under coffee increased to 80,950 (it was 50,000 in 1847). Over 48,000 acres were owned by peasants. In the mid-1830s, the British began to experiment with a variety of plantation crops in Sri Lanka, using many of the technological innovations that had developed earlier from their experience in Jamaica. Within fifteen years coffee, became so successful that it transformed the island's economy. Its reliance upon subsistence crops shifted to plantation agriculture. The first coffee plantation was opened in the Kandyan hill region in 1827, but it was not until the mid-1830s that a number of favourable factors combined to turn the widespread cultivation of the crop a highly profitable enterprise.

Governor Edward Barnes (1824-31) foresaw the possibilities in coffee cultivation and introduced various incentives for its cultivation. Hence, the export duties of coffee was lifted and exemption was made from the land produce tax. Sri Lankan coffee exports soared, filling the gap in the world market. The problem of limited availability of land for coffee estates was solved when the British government sold lands that it had acquired from the Kandyan kings. Between 1830 and 1850, coffee held the most prominent place in the economy and became a de-facto catalyst for the island's modernization. But this transformation was not a smooth one. The colonial government had to face the resistance of the Ceylonese in 1858, the first rebellion against the colonial policies. It started in the plantations in Kandy against the land acquisition. The British government which had severed its relation with the Buddhists started using the *sanga* land for cultivation. This triggered a rebellion in 1858, which was crushed by the colonial rule. But the rebellion of 1858, laid the foundation of the other anti-colonial struggles which will be discussed later in the chapter.

The coffee plantation system faced serious labor shortage. Among the Sinhalese, a peasant cultivator of paddy land held much higher status than the landless labourers. In addition, the low wages paid to hired workers failed to attract the Kandyan peasant, and the peak season for harvesting plantation coffee usually coincided with the peasant's own harvest. Moreover, population pressure and underemployment were not acute until the twentieth century. To compensate this scarcity of native workers, an inexpensive and almost inexhaustible supply of labor was found among the Tamils in southern India. They were recruited for the coffee-harvesting season and migrated to and from Sri Lanka, often amid great hardships. The immigration of these Indian Tamils began in the 1830s and became a regular flow within a decade later, when the government of India removed all restrictions on the migration of labour to Sri Lanka. They were called the plantation Tamils, the upcountry Tamils or the Indian Tamils. The Indian Tamils who were brought from South India were mostly belonging to the lower caste/ class. The migration of these Tamils from India was not as individuals but more in family units. This helped them to preserve their cultural identity. There had been very less interaction between the Indian Tamils and the Eelam Tamils, due to the confinement of the former within the estate.

Even though both the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Indian Tamils spoke the same language, practiced the same religion and traced back their roots to South India they had always maintained their distinction from each other. This was also recognized by the British in the constitutional reforms of 1924, when two members of the Indian Tamils were elected to the Legislative Council. It should be noted that about seventy five percent of the plantation Tamils who had migrated from India, belong to Pallan, Parayan and Chakkiliar (PPC) castes which constitute the lowest levels in the Indian caste system. The supervisors were selected from Kudianavar caste which was of higher status (Balasunderam 2002, Daniel 1993). The plantation Tamils were kept as bonded labours in the most inhuman conditions and the exploitation faced by them were at multiple levels: by the British and the plantation owners at one level, in the hands of the *Kangani* (supervisors) who are from upper caste at another. The oppression of the plantation Tamils were hence not only economical but included

caste discrimination too. But unfortunately the anti caste movements that emerged later did not taken into account the discrimination of the plantation Tamils, as they were always considered as intruders by the Sri Lankan Tamil population and as well as by the Tamil political leaders till the late 1970s.

### **Impact of English Education:**

The British introduced English education in Sri Lanka. There were both government run schools along with those run by the missionaries. These schools were spread in both urban and rural areas of Sri Lanka. Those in rural areas were vernacular schools run mainly by the missionaries. The English medium schools imparted the most quality education but were also the expensive. Hence the majority of the population were forced to go to the vernacular schools. But it was the English medium schools that reached to the level of university education while the vernacular schools were mainly elementary. Interestingly, the Jaffna peninsula had majority of the best English medium schools (Ryan, 1960).

### **Impact of Reforms on the Tamil Society:**

The reforms during the colonial times were aimed at improving the administration. With the introduction of these reforms administrative posts were opened to natives, which required English speaking elite. Hence, in the post-1830s period there were more emphasis on English medium schools and many vernacular schools run by the missionaries were converted into English medium schools. English education was also preferred by the people as it enjoyed distinction, prestige and opened up new employment opportunity that is inaccessible to those from a vernacular background.

The nature and aim of education also changed during this period. Prior to 1820 the government ensured that education should not be used to proselytise religion and most of the students who attended the schools were either Hindus or Buddhists (Ryan, 1970). But this policy of the government started changing since the 1920s as it came more under the influence of missionaries. Education then became a tool for conversion. This led to the state in severing its ties with Buddhism. During the

colonial rule the Christians (foreign and local) constituted about 10% of the population and they dominated the political life of Sri Lanka. This can be understood by looking at the figures of the legislature in between 1833 and 1912, the low country Sinhalese were all Christians with an exception of one. Similarly a high percentage of Sinhala and Tamil entrepreneurs and those working with the government were also Christians and missionary educated. (Jeyawardana, 1987).

The access to education was very unequal in Sri Lanka. The Tamils had more access to education than that of the Sinhalese, due to the presence of more schools in the Jaffna peninsula. Because of this, there were more Tamils in the colonial administration than the Sinhalese, which became one of the reasons for the discrimination against the Tamils in post-colonial Sri Lanka.

The *Vellalas* who had the means of subsistence to access to the best of education and employment, used it to strengthen their traditional authority over the lower castes. They did everything to prevent them from escaping their traditional roles and services. In 1830 when the British condemned and acted against the differential treatment meted out to the lower caste students in schools, with the abolition of caste, more than 15 schools were burnt down by *Vellalas*. The upper caste students had staged a walk out and went on strikes against such policies.

English education and plantation economy, along with the abolition of caste labour in 1830 and the abolition of slavery in 1844, had direct implications for the caste system in Sri Lankan Tamils. As is stated in the previous sections, in the rigid caste hierarchy among the Tamils, land owning *Vellala* caste, remained at the top. They constituted almost 50% of the Tamil population,. The caste system reinforced traditional occupation and prevented social mobility of the lower castes, especially that of the untouchable castes. But with the abolition of caste labour many castes who were previously bonded to the service of the *Vellalas* were able to sell their labour for subsistence, and enhance the process of breaking the traditional occupation (Ryan, 1970). This resulted in a marked increase in those claiming to be *Vellallas*, the proposition of such people increased from 30 to 50 per cent between 1790 and 1950

(Banks, 1957). It became more difficult for the *Vellallas* to prevent the lower caste from climbing up the social ladder hence they resorted to more violent means including the use of force against the oppressed caste Tamils.

The emphasis of the lower status of the untouchables was maintained strictly for two reasons. First, to maintain a continued supply of cheap labour and second, to assert the high status of one's family among the other *Vellallas*. But interestingly, in order to increase their profit in agriculture, they had to lower the rates paid and ensure that the labourers live in their own marginal settlements eking out a living in peripheral employment and wage labour, whereas to maintain their status as a true *Vellallas*, they had to be in command of the service castes and treat them in the client-patron relation, which required a more cordial approach.

They achieved it by keeping a few families of the *Pallars* and *Nalavars* to fulfill traditional obligations while the rest were appointed as wage labourers in the fields. The *Vellallas*, realizing the importance of giving them a meager pay, refused to pay them with cash even though the productivity was doubled and even tripled. The labourers were paid in kind with paddy for the day's work, demanding for more wages would leave them unemployed. This system left a major population of the 'lower' caste outside the traditional roles, thereby not binding on them to serve only one *Vellalla* family. This led to the increase of a rural lumpen proletariat, which had economic resources outside the traditional *Vellalla* dominated system, which gave them for the first time the strength to challenge the centuries old hegemony (Pfeffenberger, 1990).

### **The Shift towards the Revivalist Movement:**

The British, during the 1840s and 1850s engaged in rampant proselytization through the missionaries. As the primary aim of education was now conversion, the missionaries took liberty in criticizing the local religious and cultural practices. But unlike India there were less scope for criticism as there did not exist practices like *sati*, *thegi* and *meriah* sacrifices and some other rituals as in India. But the missionaries

heavily criticized the practice of temple dancing and animal sacrifice and considered the caste system as obnoxious and intolerable (De Silva, 1986).

This led to the rise of revival movements in both the Sri Lankan Tamil and the Sinhalese societies, under the leadership of Arumaganalavar and Anagarika Dharmapala respectively. Arumuga Nalavar (1822 – 1979) was *Vellala*, Jaffna Tamil, with Christian education. He defended Hinduism, against the attacks of the Christian missionary. His preachings were strictly in accordance with the Saivite principles, which he considered as the better form of Hinduism and criticized all other practices that went against it. He however, conceded to the missionaries and criticized the practice of animal sacrifice, temple dancing, involvement of lower castes in rituals and the worship of demigods (a practice among the lower castes) (Pfaffenberger, 1990). He was not against Aryans or Sanskrit, but considered it to be two eyes of Saivism (Cheran, 2009). His intentions behind the revival movement was not to reform the society but to carve a place for the *Vellalas* in the Hindu pantheon, since the *Vellalas* according to the Brahminical social order fall under the *Sudhra* category yet maintained their dominant position in Sri Lanka. He combined the identity of Saivite and Tamil making it indivisible. The Tamil identity was conferred to those who are Saivite, or *Vellalas*, leading to the practice of addressing the *Vellalas* as Tamils and the rest were called by their caste names.

Arumuga Nalavar, who had worked in a Christian school for more than 14 years, had a nuanced understanding of the way in which the Christians proselytized. He knew the importance of propaganda and education in spreading any idea. Hence he structured his reform with temple lectured that mainly revolved around the topics of theology and ethics. In 1848, he founded the Veda Agama School and a Saiva Prakasa Vedyasaalai (the school of Saiva splendor). He also started printing press and journals that would publish his speeches and writings. In 1888, his close associates founded the *Saiva paripalana sabai* (assembly for management of Saivism) and a weekly, *Indhu Sadhanam* (the Hindu organ). Interestingly, the Tamil revival movement, unlike the Buddhist revival movement did not attack Buddhism or Islam. It limited itself to criticizing Christianity and the popular Hinduism.

The extremely casteist nature of the revival movement can be understood from its treatment of the lower caste. The movement that worked with the primary aim of securing the domination of the *Vellalas*, could not tolerate the emancipation of the lower castes through English education. But rightly understanding the importance of English education in employment and other opportunities the revival movement was never opposed to English education and encouraged education among the Tamils, by opening many schools in both English and Tamil medium. These schools taught *Saivaite* preachings. The most crucial factor is that these schools on principle were not open to the lower castes. Hence a majority of the population of the lower castes were denied education and hence better job opportunity forcing them to get back to their traditional caste roles.

#### **The Rise of the Organized Resistance:**

The resistance against the oppression of the *Vellalas* started during the *late* 19<sup>th</sup> century, first at the level of individual defiance or village level resistance for defending individual rights, and then against the restrictions against the lower castes. There were individuals who had to fight to defend the houses they built (lower castes were not allowed to build concrete houses), to cremate their dead (as only the *Vellalas* could cremate while the other had to bury the dead). But the resistance did not take an organized form in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The people from the marginalized sections, who were completely neglected by the Revival movement, made use of the colonial education and the job opportunities that it gave in order to enhance their social mobility. This resulted in the growth of an educated middle class population among the oppressed sections, which propelled the movement against caste, along with some progressive *Vellalas*, who were also opposed to caste discrimination.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the feeling of nationalism and anti-scolonial movement started taking shape and there was a clear demand for independence for the first time in the history of Sri Lanka. Politics, which had been the fiefdom of the *Vellalas*, never took into account the issue of caste or the caste discrimination. As a result, caste based issues found no place in the mainstream politics and the nationalism that was



propagated by the *Vellala*. Instead, the political parties projected Tamils as a homogenous whole. This trend was challenged by the emerging resistance of the marginalised sections, who had began to organize themselves.

In 1910, the first labour organization was formed in Jaffna, called the Northern Ceylon Labour Union (NCLU). It was a conglomeration of many labour movements in Sinhalese and the plantation areas. It was the first organisation that also attempted to bring in workers from various castes background and caste specific occupations under a single organization. Its aim was to form a working class solidarity beyond caste divisions. This organization was founded by A.P. Thambiah and A.K. Chellaiah, of whom, the later belonged to oppressed section. The organization brought together working class people working in tobacco factories, the fishermen, cart pullers and those in civil sectors. Most of the other workers apart from the civil sectors were in caste based occupation. Due to the rigid caste notions among the members, they could never come together as a working class and fight for their common rights. This led to fissures in the organization on caste lines, with the exception of the civil workers. Hence, the organization ceased to function. Yet, it was the first attempt to forge an organised resistance, which laid the foundation for future movements to emerge.

A decade later, as nationalism and anti-imperialist sentiments were running high, the vibrant youth movement came to the fore, which among other demands also took the issue of caste. This organization was called the Jaffna Youth Congress (JYC), which was established in 1920. Though it was a heterogeneous organization, there were some like S.H.Handy Perinbhanayagam, Subramaniam who were instrumental in making JYC focus on the issue of caste. Because of their pressure within the organization, a resolution was passed in the very first conference of JYC, held between May 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> 1924. Following which, in 1927, the Forum for Depressed Class Tamil Labours (FDCTL) was formed, which was the first organisation of the oppressed masses. Though it was formed with the help of some missionaries, it worked for the upliftment of the lives of the working class and against caste

atrocities. Their main slogan was “equality in seating and equality in eating” and they worked for equal treatment of the lower castes at par with the others.

The formation of Northern Sri Lanka Minority Tamils Mahasaba (NSLMTM) in 1943, was a turning point in the fight against caste. It was one of the few organisations which appeared consistent over the decades to carry forward the fight against caste. Despite many organisations that came up on the issue of caste NSLMTM earned a reputation as the only organisation that represented the oppressed castes, and took the fight against caste into a new phase. This was enhanced by the formation of the Communist Party in the northern region which also took the issue of caste as one of the main contradictions in the Tamil society.

### **Ideology and Vision:**

Though there were many organisations that had raised the issues of caste in Tamil society, the study would focus on three major organisations which had made an impact, and had earned a place in history of anti-caste struggles. It is the Jaffna Youth Congress, The Northern Sri Lanka Minority Tamils Mahasabha and The Communist Party. These three organisations that worked for the abolition of caste and the atrocities against the minorities but had very different visions of the Tamil society.

The Jaffna Youth Congress took inspiration from the anti-colonial movement in India. Through the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was considered to be the centre of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism, producing the earliest and non-militant all-island oriented ‘Celoneyese’ nationalist movement (Cheran, 2009). It was a secular, non-violent, nationalist anti-colonial movement inspired by the ideology of M.K.Gandhi, the nationalist leader of India. Though it differed slightly from the mainstream nationalist movements that did not give importance to caste, considering it to be divisive, it had never recognised federalism and till the mid-1940s supported united Sri Lanka. This became one of the reasons for its marginalisation in the late 1940s. The Jaffna Youth Congress was very vocal against the atrocities of the *Vellalas* against the ‘panchamars’. It did not have a conceptual or ideological understanding of caste, but had a strong position against the

overt practices that discriminated the lower caste Tamils from the others. The Jaffna Youth Congress never fought for the annihilation or abolition of caste, but to end untouchability and the restrictions that were imposed on the lower caste Tamils by the 'Tesavalamai' law.

On the other side of the spectrum was the Communist Party that was established in the northern provinces in the 1940s. It was more radical and militant and believed in the use of force when necessary. The Communist Party believed that fight against caste was part of the larger fight for the transformation of the society and to achieve a socialist state. They understood that caste was directly linked to the economic factor and the relation to the mode of production and the fight for eliminating caste in the Tamil society would have to start with changing the exploitative traditional occupation system (Vegujana-Ravana, 2007). The Communist Party could easily gain the support of the masses with the prior work of the Socialist Party, which worked in the northern Sri Lanka for a short while. In the 1960s the Communist Party split into two groups following the ideological split between Russia and China. The Communist Party Peking wing, as it was called, emerged as the more radical force that continued to fight for the emancipation of the lower caste. The Ceylon Communist party was the first organisation to conceptualise Tamils as nationality. In its 'Memorandum for a Federal Constitution' to the working committee in 1944, it had maintained that the Sinhalese and Tamils were 'distinct historically evolved nationalities' (Roberts, 1977).

Between the non-violent nationalist Jaffna Youth Congress and the more radical militant Communist Party was the Northern Sri Lanka Minority Tamils Mahasabha (NSLMTM). This was the only one that had fought against the caste system as its primary goal. Since it was a broad platform that united people of different ideology, it had as members both Tamil nationalists and Marxists who had come together on the single point agenda of fighting against the caste discrimination in the Tamil society. The Minority Mahasaba was very active and till the late 1960s, it was considered to be the representative of the powerful caste Tamils. It had a good working relation with the Communist Party resulting in the influence of the Marxists in the

Mahasabha. The collectively took up many protests and campaigns. Unlike the communist Party the Mahasaba did not initiate protest actions but thought the best way to fight against caste was through engaging with the *Vellalas* in dialogues and appealing to the larger public and the government to ensure equal treatment of the lower caste, by highlighting their suffering and bad practices against the secular, democratic fabric of the nation. This was very evident in their first temple entry movement when they, instead of mobilising a large section of the people had written an open letter to the *Vellalas*. Some of the leaders of the Mahasaba entered the Nallur Temple early morning with the support and permission of the *Vellalas*, who had owned the temple. But nevertheless as the first temple entry movement laid the foundation for a more militant one that defied the *Vellalas*.

Another force that addressed the issue of caste was the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi(ITAK) or the Federal Party. It was a breakaway faction of the Ceylon Tamil Congress, after some of the leaders decided to join with the UNP government. Though as principle it fought against untouchability and the *Vellala* domination, it was more comfortable in addressing the issues of Tamils as an ethnic group, against the Sinhalese Buddhists. Many of the members and parliamentarians of the Federal Party failed to open the tea shops and temples to lower castes in their constituency. This reduced the popularity of the Federal Party among the oppressed masses. The contribution of the Federal Party in the anti-Caste movement lay in the passing of the Prevention of Social Disability Act in 1957. The Federal Party later was instrumental in the formation of Tamil United Front (TUF), which after recognizing the separate nation struggle renamed itself as Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and played a crucial role in the rise of Tamil nationalism.

The three organisations had very different political ideologies and vision about Sri Lanka and on the Tamils in Sri Lanka in particular. They also differed in their general understanding of caste. The JYC took a more functionalist approach of abolishing untouchability and other manifestations of caste for the better functioning of the Tamil society and thereby establishing Ceylon as a single entity. The Communist Party and the Mahasabha had understood caste as a form of exploitation rooted in the

mode of production, with the access to resources completely vested in the hands of the *Vellalas*, who owned most of the lands in northern Sri Lanka. There was a convergence of the ideologies in the issue fighting against caste. Despite this sharp difference in their understanding of caste, all three thought that education and job opportunities were the only way to emancipate the lower caste from the hegemony of *Vellalas*. This could be the reason why most of the campaigns that were taken up by the three organisations in their own way revolved around equal treatment in the schools, opening up schools for the lower caste and against the restrictions imposed on the lower castes, like the restrictions on entering temples, tea shops, building of houses etc. While the Jaffna Youth Congress, envisaged an united Ceylon, and worked towards building a strong nation without divisions based on caste, race or ethnicity, the Communist Party was working for the transformation of the society based on its socialist principles and saw caste as a primary contradiction in the Tamil society. This helped in the mobilisation of the oppressed people, who sought to fight against all forms of exploitations.

It is interesting to note that while all three organisations challenged the practices of untouchability, and demanded equal treatment in schools and other places there were not much questions raised on the issue of land ownership. Even the Communist Party which identified that the issue of caste to be directly linked to the relations of production did not raise the issue of land ownership and land distribution. But the *Vellalas*, were the dominant castes, were also the land owning caste who had maintained their traditional dominance with their control over the resources. The protests actions and the movement against caste, was more directed against the manifestations of the caste than the root of the problem. There is a need for more research on this aspect of how and why was land not the centre of these movements. It is also difficult to explore this aspect since caste was abolished from the administrative works, thereby making it difficult for one to access to caste based land holdings that was present during the time of colonisation and the changes afterwards.

The other limitation that the anti-Caste movements faced was that they were all Jaffna centric and had very less influence in the rural areas except a few places where the

Communist Party had its influence. It was much easier to convince those living in Jaffna city of the undemocratic practises, banning a particular section from using certain public spaces, and against the discriminatory practices in the schools against the students from deprived sections. But in rural areas where the traditional and feudal system was far more stronger and the discrimination was directly linked to the occupation and access to recourses the *Vellalas* retained their power and dominance more strongly (Vegujana-Ravana, 2007).

### **Protests and Reactions of the *Vellalas*:**

The protest against the dominant *Vellalas* started with the formation of these different organisations. From the scattered individual defiance it took the form of organised resistance. Compared to the early 1920s when the JYC was formed, the demands of equality turned to be a more militant movement in the late 1960s.

In 1928, FDCTL launched a campaign for “equality in seating and equality in eating” in protest against caste discrimination against the Panchamar children in schools. Due to the sustained efforts over a period of two years, an administrative order was issued in the government aided schools for allowing children from low caste to sit on benches along with the other students of high caste instead of sitting on the floor, as required previously (Jodhka, 2009).

After the efforts of FDCTL, about 13 schools introduced equal treatment. The upper caste *Vellalas*, fought against it and petitioned to the schools to withdraw the order, but in vain. Under the leadership of Nadesan, they also fought against the franchise rights of the lower caste that was introduced in 1930. Nadesan went to the extent of giving up his own right to vote in protest against the order stating that universal franchise would lead to transfer of power in the wrong hands, but when *Vellalas* failed to reverse the order, they sought to further restricting the oppressed sections. However, the consciousness of the oppressed sections was much more stronger and they resolved to fight, by forming many organisation and forums that fought for the emancipation of the lower castes.

This grew with the formation of the Minority Mahasabha, which took up consistent campaigns against the discrimination of the lower caste students in the school. The Mahasaba also owned a number of schools to provide education to those from deprived background could get access to education. But the Mahasaba unlike the JYC, was not as militant and emphasised more on changing the mentality of the *Vellalas* through dialogues rather than confrontations. The JYC with their protest against the restrictions on the lower castes had antagonised the dominant section. But they organized many protest actions defying the threats and attacks from the high caste *Vellalas*. The frustration of the *Vellalas* became apparent in the way they tried to sabotage the sixth conference of JYC, by blocking the road to the conference with thorns and boulders, by removing the buckets from wells that were meant for providing drinking water and by polluting it with garbage. The JYC was instrumental in fighting for equal rights for the lower caste students in missionary school. Though it could not sustain due to the changes in the broader national framework, it did lay the foundation and a strong one for future movements and also spread the idea strongly against the practice of untouchability.

Because of the inactivity of the JYC and the more dialogue oriented approach taken by the Mahasabha, there was a need for more confrontations and militant protest action against the discriminatory practices. This gap was filled through the expansion of Communist Party in the Northern area in 1945. As the communist ideology already familiar to the Jaffna Tamils because of the works of Socialist Party, it was not very difficult for the Party to expand. The Communist Party gained the support of the oppressed sections and that of the Mahasabha, soon after its formation and campaigns. Though the Mahasabha and the Communist Party differed in their approaches and ideology they had a convergence on the issue pertaining to the marginalised sections and also in the fight against the *Vellalla* domination. This convergence was facilitated by many Marxists who were also very important members of the Mahasabha like Domiq Jeeva, Daniel, M.C. Subramaniam, K.Pasupathi and others. The Communist Party unlike the Mahasaba, initiated various protest actions.

As the Anti-Caste movement strengthened, it also reflected in the protests and campaign they had launched. Starting from petitioning to the government to implement equal treatment in the schools and from circulating magazines and pamphlets to spread awareness the movement grew more militant with the years that passed. The Communist Party along with the Mahasabha, had spread the tea shop entry movement across Jaffna and was faced with resistance from the *Vellalas*. Not stopping with the protests in the streets they also influenced in the field of Art and literature. Many writers who extended their support wrote and highlighted the conditions of the lower caste Tamils. Dalit literature which emerged during this time had a deep impact on the society. Many Art exhibitions were organized in Jaffna in 1969, against caste. Their literature, art and plays were used by the movement to mobilise the people.

The period between 1956 and 60 can be called the hay days of the Mahasabha. In 1956, for the first time the Mahasabha published a pamphlet, called "Request to the Upper caste". This pamphlet appealed to the educated, progressive sections among the *Vellala* community to open the gates of the temples to the lower castes, following which on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1956, some members of the Mahasaba entered the Nalur temple and, made history (Vegujana – Ravana, 2007). Though, the Mahasaba can be criticized for not campaigning and making it a mass temple entry defying the *Vellalas*, this act made a significant impact and led to many more temple entry movement which were much more militant and were led by the Communist Party.

Due to their persistence, more students from the backward castes were allowed in the teacher training programme. Over fifty students were taken in the programmes in 1956. They further opened government schools in the rural areas with high population for the oppressed section. Over 19 schools were opened in various places in the northern Sri Lanka.

On 20<sup>th</sup> October 1958, the Mahasabha gave a call for Tea shop Entry. This was indeed the first large scale protest taken out by the Mahasabha. In its campaign it fixed that December 13<sup>th</sup> as the date for opening up of all tea shops to the lower



castes. This angered the *Vellalas*, but they could not do anything against it as many tea shop owners too volunteered to open their shops and let those belonging to the untouchable castes to enter and sit equally with the rest of the customers. This also led to the conference of all tea shop owners in Jaffna who collectively agreed to open their shops. Since then, December 13<sup>th</sup> is observed the Minorities Day among the Tamils.

The Sinhalese, who saw the divisive role of caste among the Tamils took the opportunity to spread Buddhism. The Buddhists opened schools primarily in rural areas of the northern Sri Lanka and openly propagated the Buddhist religion in order to escape caste atrocities. This move angered the *Vellalas* but, they were silenced when other voices even amongst themselves pointed out that this was their own doing. The Mahasabha and the Communist Party did not agree with the conversion stating that the reason for the oppression of the lower caste lies not in religion, but in the economic factors and the emancipation too can come only in raising the living standards and not merely by conversion. Yet there were some who took it as the option and converted to Buddhism. However, the growing ethnic tension between the Tamils and the Sinhalese rendered the conversion plan of the Buddhists unsuccessful.

The split in the Communist Party directly affected the Mahasabha. The Marxist in the Mahasabha too split along the lines of parliamentary path and the revolutionary path. Those who supported the revolutionary path broke away from the Mahasabha. This gave new shape to the anti-caste movement too, the difference that reflected in the anti-caste movement is well explained by Vegunana Ravana (2009), with the following example. In mid-1963, the upper caste goons, burnt down the houses of the lower caste villagers in Neelveli, while the Mahasabha typical to its nature, simply brought out a poster condemning the incident. The Communist Youth Union, which supported the Peking wing later during the split in 1964, gave a call for a protest march, which was very successful. They further collected relief for the affected people and marked a new beginning for these movements. The Mahasabha weakened by the split, formed the United Minorities Front in 1965 along with various other organizations that represented the other lower caste groups.

The Communist Party with a new vigour, campaigned effectively against caste atrocities among the villagers and the peasants. They participated at local level protests for the right to have water and other issues which affected the daily life of the oppressed people. The Party in 1966 decided to go in for a massive protest march against the caste atrocities as till that day despite the numerous protests from various sections, the atrocities still existed against the lower castes. It gave a call for a march from Sunagam towards Jaffna town. Despite police denying permission for the rally, thousands of volunteers including students, peasants, workers across caste boundaries assimilated in Sunagam. The rally on its way to Jaffna was attacked by the police and the *Vellala* goons, injuring some of the leaders who led the rally, and arrested them. But despite the arrest of some leaders the thousand of people who had participated in the march forced the police to let them proceed and the march successfully ended in Jaffna town. For the first time in the history of Jaffna thousands of people came together demanding the dismantling of caste structure, marching with the slogan "Dismantle caste structure!, long live Social Justice!".

The October Revolution as it is called left a lasting impact on the Tamil society. The Communist Party became the single force to fight against the caste atrocities after the October Revolution.

The Communist Party after long deliberation and debates identified that the way ahead was through democratic struggles and mass mobilization of the people. The proposal of revolutionary violence was rejected by the party, claiming that such attitude would lead to chaos. The party believed that the democratic struggles will have greater effect on the people and it should not turn into a situation of spiral violence. The party said that arms and revolutionary violence should be used only at the right moment, else it will be counter productive, and hence it resolved to use violence only in resistance if it was faced with violence from the *Vellala* goons but never to be the first one to attack.

With this understanding it started the campaign for the rights of the minorities and from the 1960s to the 1970s there were tea shop entry and temple entry programmes

across northern areas along with workshops and conferences on this issue. The movement spread from village to village starting from Sanganaï. The movement in Sanganaï, lasted for more than two years, but eventually faced the backlash of the *Vellalas*. The *Vellalas* surrounded the village and cut off all facilities to the village, but that had no impact on the movement. Sanganaï became an inspiration to the progressive sections of the society. The two other incidents in the same year were the *Savagasangari – Mattuvil* temple entry and the *Mavidapuram* temple entry.

As the protest grew militant continuing for years, the *Vellalas*, along with the police resisted the movements. Their resistance ranged from not opening up the temple gates for the lower castes to mindless violence and lumpenism. The police which had willingly extended its support to the *Vellalas*, stood as mute spectators, when the *Vellala* thugs beat up the protestors. The police also misusing its power denied permission for many of the protests. In Sanganaï, a village where the Tea shop entry movement reached its militant form and was successful, the police arrested two of the participants and detained them over night for interrogation (torture), they were released after a large number of protestors gathered at the Sanganaï police station demanding their release. But the very night, the Communist leader, Muthaiya's house was ransacked by the *Vellala* thugs, for leading the movement. The Nichamam village was targeted by the *Vellalas*, who had opened fire and blasted country bombs in the areas of the lower castes. This was resisted by the villagers who had tactfully stopped the *Vellalas* from causing more harm and damaging the fields. This incident took place on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1967 and resulted in one causality (Vegujana – Ravana, 1989). The *Vellalas*, indulged in individual targeting of those who had organised the protests, on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1968, S.Rathanam, was brutally murdered by the *Vellalas* in Maduvil. This was followed by the arrest of two other protestors who were tortured in custody by the police.

During the Savsangari Temple entry in 1968, the *Vellalas* tried to prevent it with their best efforts and with the aid of the police. It was considered to be a land mark event in the Anti-Caste struggle. The temple was locked to prevent the entry of the lower caste people, they had stopped all functions of the temple and had fenced the pond

from which the water was to be used for the offerings to the deity. Apart from this the pond and the temple were heavily guarded by police and *Vellala* thugs and the protestors were neither allowed to enter the temple nor allowed to fetch water from the pond. When the protestors, broke the fence and forcefully entered into the pond it led to a violent clash between the protestors and the police and the *Vellala* thugs. While the *Vellala* lumpens randomly attacked the protestors injuring many, the police used tear gas and batons to disperse the crowd. In the commotion there were also country bombs that were exploded, which was later blamed on a protestor named Chellakili. But the police were never able to prove her guilty due to lack of evidence. Following this incident, many protestors and leaders of the Anti-Caste movement were arrested and were charged under law. While the Communist party, Mahasaba and many progressive individuals extended their support to the movement, the activist the Federal Party took a middle position of neither supporting nor opposing the incident or the police action publicly. But one of its MP, Navaratham, sided with the *Vellalas* ( Vegujana – Ravana, 1989).

Such violent and brutal crushing of the Anti-Caste movements from the side of the dominant *Vellalas* triggered a more militant struggle among the lower caste. The movement for the annihilation of caste all over Jaffna and in many other places in the north and some parts of the east had mainly youth as its members, who became more militant with every blow from the *Vellalas* and the police. Towards the end of 1960s and the early 1970s there were reports of the use of country bombs against the *Vellalas* and in many of the tea shop and temple entry movements that followed. It was also unfortunate that many died in the process of making these bombs (Vehujana – Ravana, 2007).

These movements had a lasting impact on the Tamil society and led to the changes in the approach towards caste and the lower caste. The *Vellalas*, could not assert or control these movements with their brute force and had to concede by opening the temples for the lower castes, and allowing them to enter into the tea shops. Their

dominance was challenged socially and the rule of *Tesavalami* which gave legitimacy to the restrictions on the lower caste was challenged as well. These movements also had an impact on the Tamil nationalism that was growing in the wake of Sinhalese chauvinism.

As it has been discussed earlier the Federal Party had been instrumental in the passing of the Prevention of Disabilities Act in 1957, but it was never implemented in the Tamil areas due to the connivance of the police with the *Vellalas*. This was noted by the Sinhalese politicians who had used it as an excuse to delay and deny the regional autonomy demanded by the Tamils. The Federal Party realized the discontent of the oppressed Tamils when the All Ceylon Tamils Minority United Front, requested the then Prime Minister to stay the Dudley Senenayake – Chelvanayagam pact in 1965 till the caste based discrimination has been eradicated from the Tamil society. The Federal Party did not have a consistent position on the issue of caste and kept wavering specially on the temple entry issue. This led to discontent among the federal party and its youth wing which was more radical and was losing faith in the leadership. This also led to political defeat of some veterans of the Federal Party forcing them to field a few Tamils who belonged to deprived sections in order to secure their electoral victory (Wickramasinghe, 2006).

The impact of the Anti-Caste movements could no longer be brushed under the carpet by the Tamil nationalists. They were forced to take a position on the issue of caste. The rigidity of the caste system was definitely weakened, though not abolished. As the aim and vision of the Anti-Caste movements was limited to the discriminatory practices that existed in the Tamil Society, these movements had been successful in their objectives. They further influenced the discourse of nationalism by forcing the major political parties like the Federal Party to take a position on the issue of caste. It was for the first time that the mainstream politics that had been completely dominated by the *Vellalas* was forced to recognise the issue of caste and publicly criticise the discriminatory practices.

The following chapter will look into the emergence of Tamil nationalism and the role of caste in the militant nationalism that emerged as a counter to the defensive nationalism that emerged in the wake of the discrimination of the Tamils by the Sinhalese government.

## CHAPTER IV

### ROLE OF CASTE IN TAMIL MILITANT NATIONALISM

#### **Introduction:**

The last chapter dealt in detail with the anti-caste movements and the responses it had in the Tamil society. The time period in which these movements were active was also the time Tamil politics was entering a major paradigm shift and this chapter will study how the anti-caste movements influenced the rise of the new political understanding. It is clear from the previous chapters that the social, economical and political life of the Tamils in Sri Lanka was dominated by the *Vellala* elite. Till 1950s a separate Tamil nationalism did not exist, the Tamil political leaders had been leading members of the Ceylon National Congress and led anti-colonial movements. The Tamil politicians had vociferously campaigned for the independence of united Ceylon and worked to strengthen 'Ceylonese' nationalism.

The first rupture emerged as both the Tamil and Sinhalese elite could not agree on the communal distribution of seats. While the minorities opted for communal representation the Sinhalese demanded territorial representation, which clearly would be in their advantage. Though this did cause a rift, it was not strong enough to impel a departure. Even after the formation of Tamil Congress in 1944, which is considered to be a beginning of Tamil nationalism, the Tamil political elite were opposed to federalism. This can also be taken as the general mode of the Tamil population given that in the 1952 general election the federalism was defeated. It was with the Sinhala only movement that started in the 1956 that, federalism gained importance, yet it was till the late 1970s a peripheral discourse and those advocating federalism had been defeated in every election till the 1977 parliamentary election (Cheran, 2009).

In 1949, the Tamil Congress joined the government and supported the disenfranchisement of the plantation Tamils, causing division with the party and some under the leadership of S.J.V.Chelvanayagam, forming a new party – Federal party. This can be marked as the beginning of Tamil nationalism as post the formation of the Federal party no Sinhalese party could have a majority in the Tamil areas.

The Federal Party recognized in its first national convention in 1951 that the ‘Tamil speaking people constitute a nation distinct from that of the Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nationhood’ (Cheran, 2009). This was not the first time that the idea of a separate nationality and its recognition surfaced in the Tamil society. Prior to this in 1944, the Ceylon Communist Party in its ‘Memorandum on a federal Constitution’ recognized the Tamils and the Sinhalese as ‘distinct historically evolved nationalities’. Later in the parliament, C.Sunderalingam, MP rejected the idea of federal state and argued for a ‘new dominion of Eylom’. As a reaction to the Sinhala only movement G.G.Ponnambam who had been advocating for an united Sri Lanka, warned that such steps would force the Tamils to seek separation (Kearney, 1967).

The Sinhala only Act in 1956 and the dry land colonization in the early 1950s were pushing the Tamils towards separatism; the adoption of the 1972 Sri Lankan Republican constitution that was a majoritarian made the intentions of the Sri Lankan state very clear, thereby making any form of negotiations futile. With the formation of Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and the Vattukotai resolution in the 1976, the Tamil nationalism was fully emerged and there was no looking back.

### **The Varying Trends within The Nationalist Movement:**

Jaffna, widely identified as the center of the Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism also has witnessed the early proliferation of a militant, all-island-oriented, inclusive and trans-ethnic ‘Ceylonese’ nationalist movement. The Jaffna Youth Congress (JYC), which was at its peak in the 1930s, opposed federalism and demanded quick independence for a united Sri Lanka. They were influenced by and allied with the Indian National



Congress led by Gandhi and Nehru in India. They were totally alienated from the Dravidian sectarianism in India and local Tamil sectarianism of the Tamil Congress. The JYC distanced itself from the burgeoning Dravidian movement led by Justice Party and the Self-respect movement of Periyar E.V. Ramswamy and this is indicative of their ideology and caste prejudices. The nation till then, according to R. Cheran was 'represented and symbolized by upper caste, high class landowners (Cheran, 2009: xxiii). But the Tamil Congress, formed in 1944, soon overwhelmed the influence of the JYC and came up with a proposition of balanced representation in the legislature. Upto independence in 1948, the Tamil leadership was unanimously in favour of United Sri Lanka. Even the Tamil Congress which was promoting Tamil nationalism did not advocate even federalism. Within a few months after independence in 1948, the new Sinhala dominated government enacted the highly racist Citizenship Act of 1948, which disenfranchised the upcountry Tamils of Indian origin. But ironically the Tamil Congress supported blatantly this racist discrimination. Certain members of the Tamil Congress split up after this and formed the Thamil Arasuk Katchi (Ceylon Tamil State Party), popularly known as the Federal Party and that marked the beginning of the demand of federalism.

After the Official Language Act 1956, when Sinhalese language was promoted as the only language of the state, that Sri Lankan Tamils opted for federalism more strongly. Gradually political factors of a strong incipient nationalism grew strong and that minimized caste and other internal prejudices. (Cheran 2009). In this case the speech delivered by P. Kandiah a Tamil leader of the communist party is worth mentioning. After Sinhalese language was passed in the parliament as the only language, in his speech opposing it, he warned

“... the entire people are united, all political parties, all castes, religions urged on by the belief that the cause they fight is as urgent as it is just .... You will never crush the spirit of a people fighting for its existence. You will never make a tribe forget its history ...outside, the battles of the working class for its rights and its life. I cannot think of a fight

more righteous, or ennobling than the one which the Tamil people today are beginning for their language”

On the basis of the growing demand for a sovereign and separate state for the Tamils, it became important to have territorial denomination to that state. The exact boundaries of a Tamil homeland remained relatively unclear for a long period, although it was commonly assumed that the Federal structure will decentralize power in the Tamil dominated northern and eastern provinces (See figure 1 in appendix). These provinces included the districts of Jaffna, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Vavunia (Northern provinces) and the districts of Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee (Eastern provinces). By the mid-1970s, federalism was gradually taken over by separatism. It was the promulgation of the 1972 Republican Constitution relegating the Tamils into a second class citizenship that infuriated the Tamil masses for an immediate spur towards the call for a separate state of Tamil Eelam. Before that however, in 1972 itself after the Sri Lankan Republican constitution which made Sinhalese language the only official language and also made Sinhalese Buddhists the preferred people of the country, thereby ethnicizing citizenship. The Tamil Parties came together to form the Tamil United Front consisting of the Federal Party, Tamil Congress and Ceylon Workers' Congress. They issued a six-point plan which included a) parity of status for both Sinhala and Tamil Languages b) Citizenship rights for upcountry Tamil plantation workers c) making Sri Lanka a secular state d) fundamental rights and freedom of expression e) abolition of untouchability f) participatory democracy. The government did not agree to the plan and this fuelled further the final demand of separate Tamil Eelam. (Cheran, 2009: xxviii-xxvix). This necessitated an exact territorial boundary to be drawn, and so the historic inaugural Vaddukodai resolution of the TULF in 1976 stated that the traditional Tamil homeland would form the basis of a separate Tamil Eelam, and it was being defined by the traditional residential area of the Tamil people and consisted of the northern and eastern provinces. By 1977, the district of Puttalam was included. The territoriality of Tamil Eelam was therefore defined on the residential patterns of the

Tamils and the historical jurisdiction of the Jaffna kingdom. This construction includes the core areas of Ceylon Tamils and the Sri Lankan Muslims but excludes the plantation areas where most of the Indian Tamils stay. This territoriality was embraced by the dominant militant separatist groups the LTTE. The other militant organization like Eelam revolutionary Organization (EROS), Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) had also sought to incorporate the territories of the Indian Tamils (Stokke and Ryntveit: 2000).

### **Caste and Tamil Nationalism:**

The Tamil nationalism, as that emerged had been trying to portray the Tamils as a homogenous community, covering up the caste and ethnic (Muslims) differences. Hence it had always campaigned for the 'Tamil speaking' people making its scope broad enough to accommodate every one including the plantation Tamils. This had been a significant step even in terms of rhetoric, as Tamilness before the rise of federal party was associated with that of *Vellalas*. This can be attributed to the strengthening of anti-caste movements at the same time period and federal party, was forced to recognise the demands of lower castes.

It had recognized caste as a problem, and worked towards abolishing the discriminatory practices of caste. The significant role it played in passing the Prevention of Disability Act.. Yet as a nationalist party it was threatened by the assertion of the lower castes that had an antagonistic relation with the majority of *Vellalas*. Typical to any parliamentary political organization the federal party was more concerned about losing votes and saw both the *Vellalas* and the lower castes as vote banks, making its positions more ambiguous with regards to the temple entry movement and the atrocities against the protestors by the *Vellala* thugs and the police.

In 1967, the anti-caste movement gained momentum and took a militant form in Sangani (has been discussed in earlier chapter), the struggle for equal rights continued over two years and many of the those who had participated in the struggle were beaten up, killed or arrested under various charges. Over 80 cases had been slapped

against various comrades who had fought for their rights. The situation in Sanganai had become volatile that it had been taken up in the Sri Lankan parliament. The representative of Federal Party Mr. Amirthalingam, in his statement denied the presence of such a movement and had commented sarcastically “its not Sanganai struggle, it’s Shangai struggle” ( Vegujana – Ravana,2007).

The Mavidapuram Temple entry that created great ripples among the Tamils in Sri Lanka, happened to be in the constituency of S.J.V.Chelvanayagam. it is also said that he was close to the temple owners and hence did his first meeting of Federal party after its split from the Tamil Congress in Mavidapuram temple. The call for Mavidapuram temple entry was given in 1969, and the protest where intense and resolute. The protestors, despite the best efforts of the thugs led by Sundaralingam and those of the police, did not back off and protested for more than a month at the gates of the temple which was locked. After many being injured and some arrested and produced before the court, the temple gates were opened in 1970. The interesting fact that is to be noted here is that Chelvanayagam, in whose constituency this movement was happening and who was the head of Federal Party did not make a single public statement in this regard ( Vegujana- Ravana, 2007). These incidents involving the two most respected leaders of the Federal party also reflects the commitment that the federal party had towards addressing the issue of caste and the fight the discrimination against the lower castes.

But unlike the Tamil Congress which was blatantly castist extending its support to the *Vellalas*, the Federal Party took a middle ground and maintained an ambiguity in relation to its positions cautious not to antagonise any one side. It tried tactically to shift the focus to the Sinhalese discrimination against the Tamils – where they have a radical stand - to escape being accounted for their dubious position on caste. Such silences and ambiguity of the main stream Tamil nationalist forces did not pay them off as they had expected but backfired. In the 1970 election Amirthalingam of Federal party and Sivasithambaram from Tamil Congress, who were considered undefeatable were defeated in their own constituencies. Incidentally Amirthalingam was Sanganai.

The results of the 1970 election was a shocked to the leaders of the parties but for the youth and those from the oppressed castes it was befitting reply to the policies that the Tamil nationalist upheld towards caste.

The stand that the Federal Party had towards the issue of caste had led to discontent among the youth including the youth wing of the federal party that began criticizing the party. Gauging the general mode of the Tamil society that had been stirred up from the continuous struggles against caste atrocities the Federal Party was looking for an easy escape that would divert the attention from its castist functioning. It also feared that the Communist Party which was gaining legitimacy through its struggle for caste might as well take up the issue of nationality. It was this fear that propelled the federal party to declare the famous Vattukottai resolution (Vegujana – Ravana, 2007).

It was for these reasons the Tamil nationalism was also called the defensive nationalism. Cheran (2009) points out that the FP's resolution to favour a separate state was passed after many 'humiliating and painful' revisions and with the intent that it would be a good bargaining point. Neither the leaders nor those who voted it took it seriously but did not oppose as they saw it as a token protest against the Sinhalese and a necessary diversion from the mounting criticisms. The Federal Party escaped the pressure mounted on it through the anti-caste movements, by shifting the focus from the oppression of Tamils by the Tamils to the oppression of the Tamils by the Sinhalese. The blatantly anti-Tamil policies of the Sinhalese that followed strengthened the demand for a separate state. The youth had taken it very seriously and embarked on a separatist struggle.

## The Social and Cultural Vision of Tamil Nation, Nationalism and Caste

Tamil Nationalism as a distinct ideology traversed a long history with variant political and strategic manifestation of it. This section is an attempt to understand and analyse the changing socio-cultural facets that were encapsulated in the vision of Tamil nationhood. The role of caste becomes crucial in that. Bryan Pfaffenberger (1981) delved in details in the socio-cultural visualization of the Tamil tradition and its material underpinnings as it got articulated in the demand for a Tamil Nation. The demand for a Tamil Eelam grew from the increasing marginalization of the Tamil populace and the belligerent realization of a Sinhalese Buddhist chauvinism which relegated the Tamils to a second class citizen. This shows the increasing Tamil articulation of a 'loss of a tradition' and the urgent need to rescue that. The roots of such counterpoised tradition of the Tamils can be traced in the revivalist movement of the nineteenth century that have been mentioned earlier. As Pfaffenberger stressed the separatist cause is encouraged by a widespread fear among Ceylon Tamils which apprehended that continued Sinhala domination will eventually eradicate not only the civil rights of Ceylon Tamils, but also their unique cultural tradition. However, Pfaffenberger also rightly showed that the tradition that Ceylon Tamils wish to preserve also effectively implied ancient patterns of caste and regional discrimination favoring the powerful and conservative *Vellalar* caste of Jaffna, a caste that has for centuries dominated the political and economic affairs of Tamils in Sri Lanka. Arasaratnam (1994) also described the entrenched *Vellalar* control over all means of production and trading activities. He wrote,

“*Vellalar* syndicates emerged as revenue farmers, buying up tax collection rights to land taxes, transit dues, market dues, fishing rights and a variety of other taxes. Evidence from the end of the eighteenth century shows, which a large number of *vellalars*, who had access to capital to invest on a variety of enterprises, emerged as speculators”.

(Arasaratnam 1994: 38)

As Nithyanandam (2009) pointed out, while poverty was widespread among Tamils in Sri Lanka, it was much more among the non-*Vellalar* castes. Apart from the

Kariayar caste which controlled maritime resources, all non-Vellalar castes were oppressed and poor because of the overwhelming economic dominance of the Vellalars. While it is true that Tamil separatists, especially with the proliferation of the movement to a more militant level, no longer aimed to renew the ancient forms of Vellalar predominance, it is nonetheless true that the cultural conservatism that helps to justify the separatist drive is intrinsically tied to the legacy of Vellalar domination. While nearly all Ceylon Tamils believe that their tradition is worth preserving, and indeed must be defended at all costs, the constitutive traits of that very culture were closely related to the continued predominance of a traditional form of domination. This domination was wielded by the landholding dominant caste of the Jaffna Peninsula, the Vellalars. The Vellalars through numerical preponderance have seized nearly complete control of the region's land, economy, political affairs, educational opportunities, and jobs. And Jaffna remained as the consistent nerve center of Tamil nationalist and separatist politics.

The other Tamil regions (such as the Eastern Sri Lanka) were more politically fragmented due to the multiple fallouts of the contests between rival castes. Because of their decisive dominance in Jaffna and the availability of superior educational facilities there, which *Vellalars* have nearly monopolized, they emerged as the religious, political, and economic leaders not only of Jaffna, but almost of the whole Ceylon Tamil community. The *Vellalars* patronized the Brahmins, and in return receive from them, in public rituals, sanctified gifts that establish the *Vellalars* in the eyes of the village community as persons saturated with good fortune, the capacity to manage agrarian reproduction, and the right to command the services of non-*Vellalar* castes. In no small measure as a result of their traditional, ritual relation with Brahmins, Jaffna *Vellalars* regarded themselves as the masters of Jaffna, believing that the other castes lived there at their sufferance and for their convenience.

The Eastern region, as seen before was never dominated by *Vellalars*, but rather by Mukkuvars, who unlike the *Vellalars* do not appear to have emphasized the Brahman

alliance pattern. According to Pfaffenberger "It was not the Mukkuvar regime but rather one very nearly controlled by Vellalars that Tamil separatists have in mind when they refer to the "restoration and reconstitution" of the Tamil state of Eelam". (Pfaffenberger, 1981: 1152). Cheran (2009) also reflected similar apprehension. He mentioned that in terms of intra-political divisions the caste system had played an important role in shaping the nature and development of Tamil nationalism. It on one hand blurred class lines while on the other dampened the enthusiasm of certain social sections, especially the one belonging to the oppressed castes. Pfaffenberger further mentioned that there was the implied threat that the East Coast region would be denied its traditional autonomy under a Jaffna-controlled state as the Vellalar citizens deem Batticaloa Tamils to be of inferior status. Moreover, Jaffna's Untouchables, comprise about one-fourth of the Jaffna Peninsula's population. Untouchable political leaders have complained that the Ceylon Tamil political parties, which are overwhelmingly dominated by Vellalars, pay only lip service to the ideals of social reform.

The most glaring case that can establish the internal discriminations within the Tamil nationalist discourse is the differential treatment meted out to the up country Tamils and the lack of concrete action of the Ceylon Tamils about that. The up-country Tamils are mostly Dalit or oppressed caste population, who migrated from India between 1830-1930 to work in coffee, tea and rubber plantation. They were counted as Ceylone Tamils in the colonial census. Although they had stayed in the island for generations they were denied of citizenship status after Sri Lankan independence and most did not regain it until 1980s (Bass 2009). This was the first show of utter chauvinism by the Sri Lankan state. The government started by disenfranchising the poorest and the most vulnerable section of the country's population but it implied that for the first time the government codified in law that a section of Sri Lankan population is not Sri Lankan enough to have citizenship rights. This formed the primary edifice of the extreme ethno-chauvinism of the Sri Lankan state in the days to come. The government thus established political precedents for later communal



violence and ultimately the civil war that will wreck the country. But ironically although this is the foremost precedence of the ethnicization of citizenship and violation of fundamental rights, there were no decisive protest that came from the Sinhalese Tamils. The Tamil Congress as was mentioned earlier rather supported this brazen act of disenfranchisement. It was only S.J.V Chelvanayagam, who proclaimed while leaving TC in protest in 1949, 'Today it is the Indian Tamils, tomorrow it will be the Sri Lankan Tamils who will be axed' (Bass 2009: 141). However, his Federal Party too kept flaunting this issue as an instance of government's anti-Tamil stance, but in practice did very little to win back citizenship for them. And this had been the practice for most of the Tamil political parties of Sri Lanka. The 'pan-Tamil unity' which was often displayed by the separatist groups, had these deep seated fissures.

The treatment of the upcountry Tamils itself is a convincing evidence of the embedded casteist nature which still underpins the idea of Tamil Eelam, atleast in the dominant discourse. For a long time therefore, the upcountry Tamils did not identify with the call for a separate Tamil homeland but opted more for a multi-ethnic Sri Lanka, since their territories were not recognized within Tamil Eelam. But the upcountry Tamils were also victims of regular anti-Tamil violence. So they sympathized with the Tamil movement but did not till very late identify with it fully. As Bass also points out the upcountry Tamils have used their precarious position to their political advantage. They often acted as junior partners to Sri Lankan politicians who were in need of coalition with minority communities. The upcountry Tamils later sympathized with LTTE who although did not recognize their territories within the Tamil Eelam, did recognize their rights and dignity as part of the larger Tamil population.

The cultural dimension of Tamil separatism, which celebrates the cultural distinction of Ceylon Tamils on grounds of their religious and political conservatism, therefore was an impediment in the immediate appeal to those sections of the Tamil community who desired social reform and regional autonomy, even in the face of the manifold inequities that all Tamil folk conceive themselves to suffer under the Sinhala-dominated regime. This cultural dimension embodied in the name of 'tradition' the

superiority of the dominant caste and the marginalization of the historically depressed caste. Brian Pfaffenberger makes the following observation on the intensity of caste 'conflicts' Clearly Vellala domination is most pointedly threatened by the aspirations of the Atimal untouchables, not to destroy the social system that oppresses them, but rather to realise their ambition to become *Vellala* with whom *Pallars* claim ancient kinship. Becoming a *Vellala* involves assuming *Vellala* customs and gaining control over land. It is precisely for this reason that entire villages may be burnt down and people killed over trivial incident as a Pallar cutting his hair or wearing a shoe. For Vellala much is at stake. (Pfaffenberger, 1992). Pfaffenberger observes that while the Vellalas claim their great purity as distinct from impure fisherman's caste etc. they lead a fairly impure lifestyle. For example they do not eat beef, but eat other kinds of meat, drink alcohol (but treat the low caste toddy tappers as impure) supervise-blood sacrifices, remarry widows and throw themselves lustily into the tainting offers of day to day life. "When measured against the ranking paradigm of Dharma Sutra, the status of Vellalas appear to be both irreligious and artificially inflated" observes Pfaffenberger. He then concludes, that "the temporal powers elevate the rank of the impure and that the dominant Vellalas caste claim to be pure, is little more than artificial and invented to clothe it's naked power in the fabric of traditional authority." Pfaffenberger further observes that the unifying force of Tamil culture, moderated the schism or caste conflicts and reinforced Tamil nationalism. Tamil caste ranking ideology however cannot be isolated from Tamil nationalism which celebrates everything that is purely Tamil. The decisive challenge to this form of puritan nationalism came with the rise of militancy. In the nationalist scheme of earlier nationalism, caste hierarchies were preserved as a part of tradition, the rise of militancy sought to change that. Pfaffenberger (1990) has labelled it "a defensive Tamil nationalism" that evolved as a means of subverting Tamil 'low caste' agitations on one hand and diverting these agitations towards a larger Tamil struggle vis-a-vis the Sinhala dominated state on the other hand. Initially, this defensive Tamil nationalism was articulated and mobilized by the same Vellalar political leadership within the framework of parliamentary politics and in many ways subverting the caste

struggles operating in Jaffna society in the preceding era. This situation, however, gradually changed due to the rise of the Tamil militant groups culminating in the formation of the LTTE as the major vanguard of Tamil nationalism movement that proceeded with more militant means.

The development of the movement especially with the rise of militancy did open up the horizons of the movement to include all marginalized sections, the internal hierarchies and traditional dominance got challenged and assertion of depressed castes took place with the rise of armed struggle. Caste discriminations were lessened, proscribed and thereby reduced. But it did not completely wane the dominance of certain sections and more importantly it did not completely overhaul the vision about Eelam and practices that still remained infested with prejudices and certain bigotry.

#### **The Rise of Tamil Militancy:**

Between 1977 and 1983, the demand for a separate Tamil Eelam manifested itself in two ways. One was within the existing parliamentary process where the TULF was the prime force and the other was extra parliamentary which prioritized militancy and armed struggle, several groups with varying propensity emerged within this strain of struggle. The parliamentary process ended in 1983 when the government banned the advocacy of separation. From then onwards the only form of struggle was the Tamil militancy spearheaded by different groups. The Tamil militancy mainly carried forward by a more vibrant youth, emerged as a more effective and more organized struggle that commenced from the mid-1970s. The growth of Tamil militancy also took the movement from its upper class support base to a middle class level. It was under the United Front Government that the Tamil youth started to become disillusioned with the moderate means of 'peaceful' and parliamentary struggles and started to form armed groups. These militant groups differed in their class analysis, programme and the intensity of violence that they advocated. However, all of them had a separate, sovereign nation state of Tamil Eelam as their goal. Several factors influenced the growth of militancy along with the general disillusionment with the unsuccessful parliamentary movement. The Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP)

uprising in 1971 which was an unsuccessful attempt to overhaul the Sri Lankan state by the rural youth and unemployed urban Sinhalese youth had inspired the Tamil youth. At the same time the creation of Bangladesh through an armed struggle captured the imagination of the Tamil youth. The JVP movement however, was kept confined for the Sinhalese and they rather looked at Tamils as 'agents of Indian imperialism' and thereby not to be trusted (Cheran, 2009: xxxii).

This once again shows how the ethnic segregation and polarity had sharpened by the 1970s. The militants gradually gained popularity among the Tamil masses and they did not accept the 'terrorist' brand which the government tried to impose on the militant forces. They were rather popularly referred to as 'our boys'. (The early phase of militancy did not include women). Between 1976 and 1985 there were five major militant groups that dominated the militant politics of Sri Lanka, these were the: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), The Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the Eelam Revolutionary Organization (EROS), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil People (PLOTE). By 1987, the LTTE became the hegemonic group as the other groups either dissipated or were eliminated by LTTE. The civil war between Sri Lankan state and LTTE became severe and continued in phases.

#### **The Militant Tamil Nationalism:**

The main force behind the militant nationalism was the youth. Affected by the education policies and the futility of the parliamentary parties the Tamil population rested its hopes on the armed movement. The Rise of JVP in the south and the anti-caste movement in its militant phase, pushed the youth to towards armed movement. Attainment of a separate Tamil Eelam through an armed struggle became the demand of the Tamil population. The influence of both the JVP and the anti-caste movement led by the communist party made the political organizations to understand the Tamil society with all its complexities at a theoretical level for the first time. This resulted in the militant organizations having a strong position against caste unlike the main stream parliamentary organizations that saw nothing beyond votes. The fight for a

separate Eelam, moved from being rhetoric, and included the fight against all forms of oppression as a part of the struggle. The clear link between anti-caste movements and the militant organizations are yet to be studied in detail, but the link can be seen in the shift in the objectives and the inclusion of caste struggle in the fight for nationality.

The militant nationalism as one knows was propelled by the youth. The youth in Tamil society during the 1970s were more radical and had always been a part of the anti-caste movements. This is evident from the youth wing of Federal party and other parliamentary parties opposing the decision of the party not to support the anti-caste movements. The militant organizations, apart from their ideological positions also had the necessity to take the movement to the oppressed sections and also spread it widely in order to fight both the *Vellala* and the Sinhalese oppression. The need to have more cadres, also drove the militant organizations to recruit from the oppressed castes. The next section would analyze the programmes of some of the organizations that led the nationality movement, and from that deduce their commitment and if their fight was successful.

#### **Various militant organizations and their stand vis-à-vis caste and eradication of caste**

In 1972, a Tamil separatist group who called themselves *Tamil New Tigers* (TNT) was founded by a group of youth in northern Jaffna – they had their first ‘operation’ in 1975 killing the Tamil ‘government-loyal’ major of Jaffna. And in 1976, breakaway members of the FP with the policy to establish a separate Tamil state, Tamil Eelam in the north and east of the island, formed the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). The TULF won an overwhelming victory in the Tamil areas in the 1977 elections, and the following year, the UNP won a landslide victory in the national elections, marginalising SLFP and making TULF the main opposition party.

Prime Minister J.R. Jayawardene by that time started to introduce employment patterns similar to the standardisation system, and in 1977 changed the constitution

and introduced a Presidential system which centralized maximum power in hands of the President. As the militant organizations became more active, military involvement started to 'curb' the increasing trouble and 'anti-government' activity and attacks by Tamil militias in Jaffna – primarily by the TNT which by 1976 had changed their name to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) in 1979 – which placed severe constraint on civil liberties, reflected the President's increasing authoritarianism (Tambiah 1986). Also, the increasing frequency of army violence against Tamil civilians in Jaffna, anti-Tamil riots – in 1977, 1979, and in 1981 and the authorities' inaction to these, widened the gap between the Sinhalese and the Tamils even further. In July 1983, 13 army soldiers were killed in Tinnively in Northern Sri Lanka in an LTTE ambush. This resulted in devastating anti-Tamil riots all over Sri Lanka with its epicentre in Colombo. The government admitted 350 Tamils killed, while Tamil sources estimated 2,000. The riots resulted in between 80,000 and 100,000 refugees in Colombo alone, 18,000 households were affected. (Tambiah 1986).

The militant organizations were marked different in their party programmes from their preceding nationalist organizations. They had a different and better analysis of the Sri Lankan society and the place of the Tamils within that. Their historical and geo-political understanding of the Tamil question also reflected their advanced political analysis than their immediate predecessor. However, within the militant organizations there were differences of approaches in analysing the Tamil situation. Most of the militant organizations had Marxist propensity and envisioned a 'socialist secular Tamil Eelam'. However, their understandings varied with their finer political standings and correct/incorrect interpretation of Marxism in the specificities of South Asian country like Sri Lanka which had a recent colonial past and where feudal forces were still dominating the relation of production. Many of the militant parties with their left rhetoric were highly passionate about liberating Tamil Eelam through an armed insurgency and establishing socialism in the independent Eelam. But their analysis of the Tamil society was redolent of similar rhetoric as the nationalist parties,

and their 'Marxist' analysis of the social reality that existed within the Tamil society was often faulty. A. Sivanandan, a Sinhalese Left scholar correctly analysed the passion yet the pitfalls ingrained within the militant Left ideology of the Tamils. He wrote in 1984:

The state repression that followed...drove the burgeoning (Tamil youth) movement underground, where it began to ponder the tenets and practices of Marxism. Already, the activities of Sanmugathan's CCP in leading the depressed caste's temple entry movement in Jaffna...were fresh in their minds, and from their teachers they had learnt of the Jaffna Youth League and the once progressive policies of CP and LSSP. But they were also immersed in the nationalist rhetoric of FP and TC who like their Sinhala counterparts, kept harking back to a glorious past when the Tamils had their own kingdoms...And this uneasy mating of bourgeois historicism with historical materialism has continued to plague the theory and practice of Tamil revolutionaries even today. (Vaitheespara, 2009: 36)

The Marxist organizations indeed harped on the 'glorious Tamil past' and 'Tamil tradition', without problematizing its feudal and casteist aspects. This indeed is not a correct Marxist or historical materialist understanding. This is also clear from their (non)-understanding or the relative marginalization of the caste issue in the Tamil society. Many of their understanding can be described as crude Marxist understanding of the social reality of Sri Lanka. These problems of misunderstanding social reality come from the crude transposition of Marxist conceptions over the unique social reality of south Asia. Similar trends have been observed in the misconception of social reality perceived by the mainstream Indian Marxist parties too. Especially their understanding of caste is majorly faulty because of their wrong conceptualization of feudalism. They have always marginalized the caste question and rather given emphasis on forging class alliance among the oppressed masses. But in the South Asian context, looking at class as a homogeneous category is faulty as the deep

running fissures of caste are always present fragmenting classes. Similar problems of understanding can be seen in the approach taken by Left militant groups in Sri Lanka. A close reading of the party programmes of two major Left militant groups the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELOS) and Eelam People's Revolutionary Front (ERPLF) furnishes the lacuna in their understanding of caste. The programme of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which finally emerged as the only and most dominant militant organization, is significantly different in this regard, which shall be dealt in details in the following chapter.

### **Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO):**

The problem that Sivanandan mentioned is most glaringly reflected in the party programme of TELO. Their political manifesto starts with the vivid description of the Tamil tradition and a historical account of the Great Tamil tradition. It virtually celebrates the Tamil past without any criticism of the entrenched feudalism or the problematic casteist or patriarchal notions ingrained in that past. In the thirty years of Sinhala domination too it identifies the racist domination and riots, the land grab and the economic policies that have rendered Tamil youths unemployed as the bulk of the problem. Although it mentions about the plight of the Tamil plantation workers, it sees them as 'working class' and makes no mention about the depressed caste identity for which they were oppressed both by Sinhalese as well as Sri Lankan Tamils. Their conceptualisation of Sri Lankan domination is one which is formed around the axis of Racism and economism. In their entire political manifesto they make no internal critique of the Tamil society and its embedded problems, discriminations or social injustice. This is utterly non-Marxist approach. Their aim is clearly laid down as the formation of a socialist state of Tamil Eelam but that is simply impossible until the internal contradictions within the Tamil society is duly and simultaneously fought. TELO in its political manifesto mentions that it aims to establish a socialist state and then in a mere line they add 'by socialist state, we mean the establishment of a casteless classless social formation with the abolition of private property with the eradication of all forms of exploitation of man by man'. Their thrust is clearly on



class exploitation and they see the caste question subservient on that. They did not even bother to explicate the nature and forms of caste exploitation that existed in the Tamil society and how it blurred class alliances. They have no clear programme or agenda in fighting the caste exploitation within Tamil society and they have only talked about Sinhalese domination and ways and means to fight that. The TELO programme seen from that light is highly inadequate in its analysis and understanding.

### **Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF):**

The EPRLF is much more nuanced and advanced in its understanding of the Tamil question than TELO. But even then a careful reading of its party programme can reflect the problems in its understanding of the Tamil society and the means it has proposed to fight them. The ERPLF does not valorize a 'Tamil past' and that is one progressive aspect of their political programme. They rather have delved into the objective situation and the student/youth movements that eventually led into the formation of ERPLF. They very categorically note the importance of 'revolutionary transformation of Tamil society' and accept 'Marxism-Leninism as the ideological weapon' and sought to establish ERPLF as the 'true vanguard party that will take forward the National liberation struggle of the oppressed people of Eelam'.

However, although they have more advanced and nuanced understanding of caste than TELO, they have made some fundamental errors in their analysis. To start with the ERPLF sets out its broad political programme which includes: establishment of complete liberation of Eelam, the motherland of all Tamil speaking people; to found a socialist society by continuing struggles for social, economic and cultural liberation; to fight against imperialism, racism and Zionism as a part of their international agenda; to accept historical and dialectical materialism as their philosophy and guiding light. In this they make mention of feudalism which is so much ingrained in the Tamil society, especially with the unchallenged domination of the certain castes like the Vellalar over the means and relations of production. The feudal values which are thriving in the Tamil society also are not identified as the potent and primary

adversary that should be fought. They do however identify caste later as a hurdle in realizing the socialist goal. They mentioned it as “raising of social consciousness against caste oppression and to smash the atrocities perpetrated in the name of casteism through all means and to indicate clearly that only the economic liberation will guarantee a permanent solution to the problem”. This understanding although is far better and advanced than that of TELO, it is still inadequate. Firstly simply raising social consciousness can not fight an evil like casteism which is so deeply entrenched in the social structures. As I have shown earlier, the temple-entry movements by the untouchables were forcefully stopped by the Vellalars as it sought to challenge their ritual and social domination. The fight against caste thus some times becomes more violent and it can not be restricted to mere enhancement of social consciousness, although it is a necessary beginning. Challenging the dominant castes and their positions of superiority entails more assertive movements than simple ‘social awareness programme’. Secondly, the caste discriminations do not wane simply by ‘economic liberation’ as caste is deeply ingrained in the social and cultural facets as well. Thus a parallel movement for social justice is required to counter the hegemony of the dominant castes, long with attaining economic liberation. Here once again we see a conceptual confusion of equating caste with class as they see the emancipation mainly through economic liberation. This again is a faulty understanding of the existing social relations.

The another problematic aspect of ERPLF’s political programme is the unqualified use of the term ‘peasants’. For example, it mentions, “based on the initiative taken by GUES, the Rural Workers and Peasant Front (RWPF) was founded by the EPRLF in order to mobilize the revolutionary potentials of workers, peasants and labourers at village levels”. The peasantry in Sri Lanka, much like India, can not be considered a homogeneous category, especially with its fissures originating due to caste system. As Cheran (2009) points out, the Vellalar caste also are traditionally into farming and a section of them still continues to be peasants. Therefore unqualified use of the category of peasantry as a revolutionary ally is problematic. However, also more of Tamil peasantry belongs to depressed caste groups, its reactionary elements of the

dominant caste must be clearly identified, which is lacking in ERPLF. However, the ERPLF also talks about fighting the 'human degradation of caste' in their rural programme and that indeed is a progressive strand in the movement. In its party programme it also mentions a successful land struggle spearheaded by Rural Workers and Peasant Front (RWPF), one of its frontal organizations 'in a village in the Jaffna Peninsula when a local politician claimed the ownership of a land occupied by members of the oppressed castes for many years'. But the means of struggle described in the programme are holding of marches and poster campaigns to reclaim the land. While it successfully could prevent the land encroachment, such means are not always effective in the face of crucial and difficult fights centering around the question of land. Many fights on the land question are historically appropriated by dominant castes in India too have entailed more violent and virulent struggles. The ERPLF does not clearly mention about radical programme against the dominant castes. More crucially it makes no mention about land reform, although it talks about 'eradication of private property. Land reform is the most crucial means of establishing socialism in the primarily agrarian societies of South Asia, where land as a major means of production is always centrally appropriated by the landed dominant castes. Land reform is therefore the primary necessity to establish equality and social justice, which has been always on the primary agenda of the Marxist Leninist parties of India or Bangladesh but is so glaringly missing from the ERPLF party programme which claims to uphold Marxism-Leninism.

This shows their lack of understanding of both caste and the rural question.

### **Gendering Caste within the Tamil Nationalism and the changes with the rise of militancy**

The changing role of women and the notions about womanhood within the varying discourses of Tamil Nationalism constitute one of the major aspect of the movement. One of the most ancient and characteristic themes of Tamil culture is the enormous value placed on female chastity (*karpu*), a notion that entails a variety of customary patterns: absolute premarital chastity, chaperoning, female initiation rituals, and the

construction of a house to serve as a fortress against the intrusion of strangers. The maintenance of a girl's honour is thought to be essential to the status of her family and caste. As Pfaffenberger pointed out, few Ceylon Tamils dispute the religious value attached to chastity of women, for that value has become irretrievably tied to the polemic defense of all that is glorious and ancient in Saivism. The value is yet another marker that determined the supremacy of the Vellalar in the Jaffna hierarchy. The Vellalars advertised the virtue of their woman with stout fenced houses and practice of variety of rites that sustained the power and purity of women. The standards of 'purity' of women are sustained by the economic wealth of Vellalars which are required not only build the tall fenced houses and invest in rites but which also ensured that they can do without their women going out and earning for the family. The lower castes could not afford any of these although they regarded the notions of chastity with high esteem. The Vellalars being the dominant castes their notions of chastity of women and restriction in their mobility became supreme social value in the Tamil society. The Vellalars looked down upon the Veddahs as relative unchastity of their women lowered their status. They are called, rather unsympathetically, "the fools of the jungle" (*kattu mirantikāl*), and are thought to be themselves responsible for their lowly state, because they fail to maintain the chastity of their women and thereby invite supernatural wrath. Similarly, the two untouchable laboring castes Nalavars and Pallars were seen as 'uncivilized' as their women were forced to work for a living under the Vellalalars in their rice fields and for gathering fodder. As Pfaffenberger puts, 'The chastity value is disputed by no one, but it is nonetheless a value tinged with the reality of Vellalar domination' (1152). Jaffna Tamils believe very firmly that the other Tamil-speaking groups of the island-the Tamil-speaking Muslims, the upcountry Tamils of the central highlands, and the East Coast Tamils-are also less diligent than Jaffna Tamils in keeping up the ancient ways, and on this account Jaffna folk rank them lower and refuse to marry them.

Chastity of women thus was a prime hallmark of 'Tamil civilization' and preserving it became a necessity in the Tamil nationalist agenda too. Here again the standard set by the dominant Vellalars became the necessary benchmark which other castes fought

to achieve. The early Tamil nationalists sought to preserve this conservative notion of woman as a marker of the purity of their nationhood.

However, with the rise of militancy, the scenario considerably changed. As Cheran (2009) puts, from the ideal of conservative, protected and docile 'femininity', promoted by Tamil nationalists, the Tamil woman transformed into a public figure, engaged in warfare (xliii). All the militant groups had women's wings, and women's participation in the struggle by coming out of their earlier restrictive domesticity was now valorized. The women's group of LTTE was called *Suthanthirap Paravaigal* (Birds of Freedom), the ERPLF had Eelam Women's Liberation Front (EWLF), the PLOTE named its women group *Thamil Eela Mahalir Peravai* (Women's Organization of Tamil Eelam) and *Eela Mahalir Munnani* (Eelam Women's front) was the name of the women's front of EROS. Not having a women's wing was considered a draw back of an organization. The exact number of women who have been part of the militancy is not known. But there were no woman leader in the central leadership of any of the organizations.

The LTTE was late in recruiting women in their organization, but once they did they right away started to train them militarily. Women formed a significant portion of LTTE's Sea tiger squads, black tiger squads (suicide warriors) and regular combat forces. However, they were no women in the decision making bodies.

The joining of woman in the militant movement, did break to a large extent the stereotypes upheld by dominant caste values that virtually captivated women in the name of chastity and honour. In a collection of poem *Vaanathiyin Kavithaikal* (1991), by one of LTTE's fallen fighters, Vanathy in a poem invites other Tamil women who are 'confined in the kitchen by patriarchy and waging a silent war with fire' to join the struggle for national liberation which she maintained would liberate all women from the clutches of patriarchy. On an ideological level too, interviews given by Thamilini, one of LTTE's senior woman leaders, also clearly testify the birth of a new Tamil womanhood which is critical of patriarchy and all other forms of oppression (Cheran 2009).

However, although participation of woman in militancy did challenge to great extent the casteist notions of patriarchy that dominated Tamil culture, it was not overhauled. Rather it remained in various ways in determining the facets of the 'new womanhood' as well. In 1985, for example, posters were put up in Jaffna against birth control. The LTTE newspapers and magazines invoked the symbol of the great Tamil mother who would rise up to the occasion by giving birth to more sons and daughters. In the symbols, the *thamilthay* (Tamil mother) sits embodying all constructed and attributed 'Tamilian qualities' with the Tiger woman warrior. The woman warrior is also projected as a 'virgin' warrior, reinforcing the patriarchal value of chastity upheld by traditional Tamil discourse.

The same could be seen in Tamil Eelam Penal Code that was implemented in 1994 in the LTTE controlled regions. The TEPC included a series of provisions that reflected a strongly masculine agenda aimed at cultural and moral regulation of women.

If a pregnant woman is found guilty of serious crime, the sentence can include 'rigorous punishment' which is a form of hard labour in slave like situation. Abortion is illegal, according to the penal code with narrow exceptions where the mother's life is in danger, but even then no abortion beyond 90 days is allowed. There was no crime of sexual harassment. And complaints of rape would have to be made within three months of the incident. However, the progressive aspect of the penal code, as Cheran points out is the absence of explicit linguistic sexism. To describe rape the TEPC used a newly coined Tamil term *Paaliyal Valluravu* (forced sex). The traditional term *Katpalippu* (meaning destruction of chastity and sacred value) had been discarded. Rape was treated as a very serious offence, punishable by death penalty. Sex with women of age between 15-18 are not permitted, unless it is between husband and wife and is sanctioned by the parents. Prostitution (*parathaimai*) is a crime for women only and the punishment can be four years of rigorous or ordinary punishment with fines. As Cheran puts the 'the foregoing review of the Penal Code's treatment of women as both perpetrators and victims of crime highlights the male centric values that permeates the TEPC itself and serves to mirror the wider LTTE nationalist project' (Cheran, xIv).

The militancy therefore struck at certain feudal aspects of casteist patriarchy, while at the same time reinforced certain entrenched aspects of the same.

Hence the militant nationalism had many problems from within and from outside. From what was emerging as a friendly co-operation between organizations that worked together for a common goal, there emerged competition and rivalry, leading to loss of many fighters. The movements had to fight intra and inter organizational rivalry along with the faulty understanding of the objective conditions, along with joining the immense trust some organizations reposed on India, led to their failure. The LTTE, was successful in analyzing the role of India correctly, and the opportunism of some organizations that turned revisionists. The role of the Marxist parties in the Tamil struggle have also been dubious as many of them were sponsored and backed by Indian state during the struggle with Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). After being marginalized by LTTE many of the forces got dissipated or they joined the mainstream parliamentary struggle. The next chapter will delve more closely into the programme and policies of the LTTE and the differences it held in terms of nationality and caste question.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ANTI-CASTE PROGRAMMES OF THE LTTE: AN ASSESSMENT OF ITS EFFICACY

#### **Introduction:**

The earlier chapter has in detail accounted the emergence of Tamil Nationalism, the various trends and the advancement from defensive nationalism to militant nationalism. The understanding on the issue of caste by various militant organisations that emerged at that time had also been discussed. This chapter will be devoted on LTTE, which emerged as the most powerful of all the militant organisations and how as an organisation it addressed the issue of caste. Through original documents of LTTE, this chapter will explore their position on caste and their programmes towards the annihilation of caste in the Tamil Society in Sri Lanka. It will further discuss the limitations both internally and externally faced by LTTE in this process.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE), established itself as an organisation in 1976, changing its name from Tamil New Tigers (TNT) which was formed in 1972, and came out publicly claiming the responsibility of the murders of 11 people in 1978. This announcement is considered to be the starting of a new era in the Sri Lankan Tamil History. Compared to the other militant organisations that existed at that time, LTTE was the smallest in terms of the numbers of cadres and remained so till the early 1980's. But with time it became the most dominant militant organisation as well as one of the most respected and feared organisations of the militant struggle for the separate state of Tamil Ealam. This organisation that started with six members established and ran a parallel government with all three defence forces (Army, Navy and Air Force), intelligence, political and administrative wings. This chapter will concentrate only the on the relation between LTTE and caste, not emphasising on its military and political aspects.



## **LTTE and Caste:**

*“Aim of the LTTE is to establish a separate Tamil state (Eelam), which would be socialist and casteless, through armed struggle” - Prabhakaran.<sup>1</sup>*

As it is clear from the words of LTTE supremo, annihilation of caste was an important factor in the agenda of the organization and the way it visualized the Tamil Eelam. Caste-based discrimination in Sri Lanka has traditionally been strongest among the Tamils in the north, i.e. the Jaffna society after the provincial capital. Decades of war caused further tensions and enormous suffering to this area; but for the “lower castes”, the rule of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) has also created opportunities. As Manoharan (2008) puts it ‘the LTTE is the militant version of Tamil nationalism that grew out of a campaign for access to the temples in the 1960s’. The traditionally untouchable castes – known collectively as the Panchamars – rebelled against oppression from the dominant and landowning caste of Vellalars. The Tamil militant nationalism thus had two aims: to fight the dominating Sinhalese; and to “heal caste wounds” within the Tamil community (Pfaffenbereger 1990). Over the last couple of decades, Sri Lanka has experienced a number of transitions that have contributed to the struggle against caste-based discrimination. In the war-affected Jaffna society, the Tamil Tigers have banned discrimination based on caste. E. Pararajasingham, Head of the LTTE Judicial Division in an interview said, “We made caste discrimination a crime. These could be considered some of the milestones of the Tamil Eelam judicial system”. (TamilNet 30.10.2003)

Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam (1994) had delved into details to explain the rise of Tamil youth militancy. She specially looks at the ascendancy of the LTTE and depicts it as a ‘Kariyar caste led movement’. Rajanayagam looks at this as a potent challenge to the deeply embedded Vellalar hegemony of the Tamil society. The earlier leadership of the nationalist and reformist Tamil movements was invariably led by Vellalars and they sought to retain their hegemony as well. Moreover these movements never took a clear and categorical position to identify caste as a social oppression internal to the Tamil society and did not take categorical programmes to annihilate it or fight the social

---

<sup>1</sup> Prabhakaran’s interview to Sudeep Mazumdar, *Newsweek*, 11 August 1986.

discrimination through caste. This lacuna, as shown in the previous chapter, was also there, sometimes glaringly, in the political programmes of other militant organizations. The LTTE had a clearer position and political programme on caste and caste oppression.

### **LTTE's Party Programme and practice: Notions about Caste and Its Annihilation**

The LTTE's programme clearly said that National Liberation and Social Revolution constituted two basic political objectives of the LTTE. It has been mentioned in the writing that 'by Social revolution we mean the socialist transformation of our social formation and a creation of a radical new society free from all structures of oppression and exploitation'. They locate the menace of caste oppression in this context. They further elaborate the nature of Tamil society in Sri Lanka and their analysis is most apt and objective compared to other militant organizations.

As per the analysis of LTTE,

"Ours is neither an advanced capitalist society nor a pre-capitalist feudal formation. Eelam social formation is a unique socio-economic organization structured by combined modes of production with capitalist and feudal elements interwoven with caste system to form the foundation of this complex society. The nature and the structure of the economic organization underlying our social system is oppressive and based on social injustice.

The LTTE is committed to the abolition of all forms social oppression and exploitation to the establishment of a classless society. We hold the view that an authentic socialist system can only be established by effecting a fundamental transformation in the economic structure, by the transformation of the economic relations of production, by the abolition of the relations of productions based on social injustice and the exploitation of man by man.

The caste system is another social evil that perpetuates inequality and inhumanity. It is an oppressive system inextricably linked to class

structure and based on exploitative economic practice with ideology playing a crucial role in its origin and in the legitimization of the system. **The LTTE is committed to the total eradication of the caste system.** The institution of an equalitarian socialist economy and the introduction of a revolutionary system of education will pave the way for the eradication of the caste system.” (Emphasis in the original)

This analysis is indeed far more advanced and nuanced than the analysis of caste by any other militant organizations in Sri Lanka. They correctly assess the thriving role of feudalism that perpetuates in the relations of production and is manifested most blatantly in the caste system. Such categorical analysis is indeed unique to LTTE. No other militant organization could analyse the social reality of the Sinhala Tamil society with such theoretical clarity. LTTE unlike ERPLF or TELOS did not declare Marxism-Leninism as their guiding principle. But their analysis of Sri Lankan society was more correct from a Marxist-Leninist methodology. Sumantra Bose (1994) looked at the work and programme of LTTE from a Leninist perspective and he sees the ascendancy of LTTE largely as a progressive phenomenon given the caste class background of its constituency and explains the mistakes and excesses of it as arising from petty bourgeois prejudice. For Bose, ‘not only the LTTE is not an artificial imposition on Tamil society, but is the concentrated expression of Jaffna Society, a phenomenon organic to the Tamil social formation (Bose: 89). Attempting to explain the popularity of the struggle by the LTTE among the Tamil masses, despite the enormous suffering that it had produced, he observes, ‘it is only when addresses this dialectic between the national and the social that one begin to understand the resilience and enduring mass appeal of the struggle for Tamil Eelam’ (Bose: 92). Hellman-Rajanayagam also looks at the LTTE programme with sympathy when it comes to realizing social justice along with national liberation. ‘The aims of social justice have been realized best by the LTTE who are as mixed by caste and religion as one could wish’ (Hellman-Rajanayagam 1994: 136).

In one of the rare ethnographic researches on LTTE by a researcher Trawick as noted in 1963,

“...the LTTE perceives their role to be more than freeing the Tamil society from the Sinhala oppression. Supporters of the LTTE have said that the civil war is a ‘good medicine’ for the Tamil society. They say that Tamil society has serious flaws, particularly caste discrimination and oppression of women and only the revolution led by the LTTE can rid the society of these flaws....A socially egalitarian policy governs the LTTE combatants; there is supposed to be no correlation between rank and caste, the rank of a person is not revealed until his or her death, and women are said to achieve liberation from oppressive gender roles through active combat”. (Thanges- Sylva: 63)

But despite such good understanding some scholars (Thanges-Sylva 2009) hold that the LTTE did not implement or take up a programme for a radical transformation of the Tamil society. They refrained from taking up the struggle against caste or caste discrimination as a decisive and concrete agenda. They proscribed caste discrimination and kept themselves limited to that. But caste being an institution deeply entrenched in the society it requires far more concrete action to annihilate that. The LTTE had not try to uplift the conditions of the Panchamars, nor had it mobilize them against caste discrimination as such (Ravikumar 2005). While it has imposed an unspecified and non-descript ban against caste discrimination, the LTTE did not vigorously pursued or enforced this ban with any degree of consistency and perseverance. In some ways, the LTTE and the militant Eelam campaign did silence a potential Dalit struggle in the interest of a larger ethno-nationalist struggle in Jaffna society (Ravikumar 2005). There are also criticisms that the LTTE’s cardinal emphasis was on militarization. It was an extremely centralized and disciplined force. Such discipline with the official proscription of caste discrimination brushed caste under cover although the discriminations remained.

The LTTE sought to identify with all Tamils irrespective of caste and even though its non-Vellalar leadership was apparent it did not publicly respond to any caste grievances or articulate any caste sentiments as such in an obvious attempt to lead a mass nationalist movement in a caste divided society. This deliberate strategic position actually concealed the real situation as far as continuing manifestations of caste inequalities were concerned.

(Thanges Sylva: 52). It is also pointed by some that the LTTE made Jaffna society caste blind rather than making it casteless. The Jaffna University, the premier academic institution in Jaffna, has followed a policy of discouraging any research on caste in Jaffna society, reflecting a widespread trend towards denial of caste and ignoring it in the interest of upholding Tamil nationalism. There is, however, an allegation that caste continues to be an important factor in recruiting staff to this academic institution, reportedly controlled by a small Vellalar academic elite (Thanges Sylva: 62).

### **War, militancy and caste:**

The civil war that broke out in North East Sri Lanka in the 1980s has had varied brunt on the Tamil caste system in general and caste-based discrimination in particular. First, a unified ethnic consciousness among all groups of Tamils irrespective of caste increased due to the campaigns led by the Tamil militants as well as the oppression and military actions undertaken by the state targeting all Tamils (Daniel & Thangaraj 1994). Also, due to the mass displacement of people in the long march from Jaffna to Vanni in 1995, people from different castes had to intermingle and interact with each other in emergency situations of all kinds, making it difficult to sustain untouchability and caste-based social distance on a systematic footing. Although the Tigers were confronted by a Sinhala-Buddhist army, religion was not a factor in LTTE's ideology. The LTTE wanted to avoid division in Tamil society based on religion, class or caste. Most of the LTTE cadres were Hindus or Christians. The numbers of Muslim cadres had dwindled after 1990, partly because of their alleged collusion with state forces and partly due to forced Muslim exodus from Jaffna peninsula by the LTTE. (In October 1990 about 90,000 Muslims were forced by the LTTE to move from the entire North in just 48 hours).

All LTTE ceremonies were secular, although rooted in traditional Tamil customs. According to Michael Roberts (2005), in its formative decades the LTTE was "a Karaiyar-led and dominated group." There was a stage when Uma Maheswaran (a Vellalar) was raised to a leadership position, but sharp personal conflicts between him and Prabhakaran led to his eviction from the LTTE. During the mid-1980s, apart from Ponnammam, Yogi and Rahim, there were relatively few Vellalar in the top rungs of the LTTE. Prabhakaran himself, Mahattaya, Kittu (died in 1993), Charles Anthony (died in 1982), Victor (died in

1985), Kumarappa (died in 1987) and Soosai are believed to be Karaiyar in caste identity (Roberts 2005). Traditionally, the Karaiyar are associated with deep sea fishing, but their own lore points to the engagement as warrior mercenaries and sea captains in the distant past. The Karaiyar “have a general reputation for toughness.”(Thanges-Sylva 2009). From its inception, the LTTE leadership came from a lower middle class background, usually with white-collar occupational ambitions but grounded in vernacular in both education and orientation unlike the Western orientation and bilingual skills of the Vellalar elites of the previous decades. In the LTTE leadership, Prabhakaran himself came from a middle class Karaiyar background but others such as Mahattaya were from the lower strata of the Karaiyar and poorer in economic background. The lower class and lower caste dimension was also emphasized by the presence of a few individuals from the depressed castes, such as Tamil-Chelvan (killed by a Sri Lankan air force attack in 2007) from Ampattar or barber caste, who rose to the powerful position of the deputy leader of the movement. (Thanges Sylva, 2009)

The Tiger symbol used by the LTTE, an allusion to the symbol of the South Indian Chola Empire, highlighted its Tamil links. The Tigers’ ideology of violence was drawn from the Dravidian National Movement in Tamil Nadu in the 1950s and 1960s and marked a revival of the martial culture of long-suppressed military castes of South India, such as the Maravars, who were listed as a criminal caste by the colonial British government of India and were also suppressed by other dominant castes. (Manoharan 2008)

War and the accompanying emigration and social upheavals have further loosened the grip that “upper caste” Vellalars traditionally had on “lower caste” Panchamars. New organisations sprung up to fight various discriminatory practices, even though some argue that the Tigers’ reluctance to discuss caste issues might have silenced a more thorough struggle against the inherited inequalities and discrimination.

Later, in the 1980s, the LTTE banned caste discrimination altogether which further eliminated a number of the accompanying practices. At the same time, however, any discussion of caste was discouraged as the Tigers needed the support from Panchamars as well as the Vellalars in the struggle against the State. The LTTE might in this way have silenced a broader “lower caste” struggle. The war and displacements did however force

the various castes to intermingle, which made it more difficult to sustain untouchability and caste-based social distance. When the more resourceful Vellalars fled the war zone, it created new space for the lower castes or Panchamars. In the LTTE war cemeteries, the movement has defied the caste system by erecting monuments for all martyrs side by side, irrespective of their caste. Reportedly, there are many inter-caste marriages within the movement. There were many waves of selective out-migration of 'high caste' and 'high class' Vellalar families from Jaffna, thereby leaving a political and social vacuum in Jaffna society and enabling the downtrodden to assert themselves like never before. Finally, with the rise of the LTTE with many of its leaders and cadres drawn from 'lower and intermediate castes' in society, explicit disregard for caste in the mobilization and training of LTTE troops, campaigns and explicit ban on caste, the caste hierarchy has ceased to be a powerful force in society. (Thanges and Sylva 2009) In some cases, an upward social mobility of the Panchamars were possible as they were able to buy land. However, the Panchamars did complain that they often had to pay an extra amount to be allowed to buy the land from the "upper castes". (Thanges-Sylva 2009) Many high-caste Tamils were forced to rethink caste divisions, as young Tiger rebels, many of whom were low-caste and used to be treated with disdain, were now affectionately called 'thambi' (our boys) as the struggle gathered momentum and support.

The war and repression also brought some changes in the conditions of the upcountry Tamils and the discriminations they suffered. The patterns of bonded labour in the plantations traditionally utilised caste-based divisions of labour; Kanganies (supervisors) were mainly "higher caste" Kudiyanavars while the workers were from "lower castes". However, they shared resources like water, Kovil (temple) and accommodation. Homogeneity among worker families eroded the notion of untouchability. Trade unions to some extent replaced the role of castes. Ethnic marginalisation and outbursts of ethnic riots where the Indian Tamils became victims made them forge a new "Malaiyaha" ("hill country people") identity to assert their cultural distinctiveness. Ethnic solidarity was strengthened as distinct from caste identity. The concept of "Malaiyaha" allows the "upper castes" to forge vertical ties with the "lower castes", while the "lower castes" can redefine their identity in a more respectable manner in ethnic rather than caste terms. (Balasundaram-Chandrabose 2009).

Vaitheespara (2009) quotes the detail work on Tamil Eelam struggle to that appeared in the Tamil magazine *Uyiruppu*. He shows this work provides a through critique of the LTTE and attributes LTTE's success to a narrowly focused and uncomplicated goal of building up ruthless fighting machinery. They point out that although the LTTE successfully broke the backbone of the earlier Vellala led elite leadership, it could not break with the ideological hegemony of this caste/class nor the intolerant, patriarchal and puritanical value system inherited from the days of Navalar. They charge that although practical considerations had led the LTTE abandon caste hierarchies among its cadres, it was not systematically encouraged and propagated among general Tamil population. They also critique the leadership cult of LTTE and its uncritical valourisation of the hallowed Tamil past. Thus the study concludes that rather than changing the Tamil social formation, the LTTE has instead put itself on the top of the existing system ensuring thereby the persistence of the oppressive social hierarchy and the socio-cultural norms and values that thrived them. However, the study also sought to balance its critique with the admission that propelled by its pragmatic consideration especially to sustain its militarism, the LTTE over the years became much more broad based and brought into its fold significant numbers of lower and oppressed castes as well as women. In this process they became instrumental in infusing social change with the potential for a truly revolutionary social formation (Vaitheespara,2009: 50).

### **LTTE's Impact on the Tamil Society:**

The impact that the LTTE has on the Tamil society is phenomenal. This section will look into the impact it had in relation to the issue of caste. All criticisms notwithstanding the LTTE had through its practice upheld the annihilation of caste. It was one of the few organisations that treated every cadre equally irrespective of their background. Though the other organisation, including some Marxist organisations had failed in practice and had rifts on the line of caste. This can be attributed to the presence of the dominant *Vellalas* among the leadership, which as the earlier sections have established is not the case with the LTTE.

The LTTE has been the most strict and disciplined organisation and it was this loyalty to the organisation and the organisational principles that helped LTTE cadres to maintain its strict rules of not discriminating among the cadres. From the process of recruiting to the



training and those who were chosen to the field it stressed on one's skills rather than their religious, caste or other affiliations. It had encouraged inter caste marriages among its cadres.

It had also taken up the issue of caste during its rule over the north and the east of Sri Lanka. In the war-affected Jaffna society, the Tamil Tigers banned discrimination based on caste. E. Pararajasingham, head of the LTTE Judicial Division in an interview said, "We made caste discrimination a crime. These could be considered some of the milestones of the Tamil Eelam Judicial System". (TamilNet 30.10.2003). Any form of discrimination in the lines of caste was made a punishable offence. It also made the practice of giving and getting dowry a punishable crime. Further the LTTE also banned the caste based occupations which was a source of discrimination among the Tamils, and opened common stores where the services were made available (Vegujanana – Ravana, 2007). The caste system which was considerably weakened with the anti-caste movements was with such steps and implementation of these policies further weakened.

Though these steps were taken by the LTTE, some of the criticisms that have been leveled against the LTTE, that it did not take up the issue of caste seriously, is not without proof. But this has to be understood in the context that the LTTE worked and tried to pursue these policies. It was a nationalist movement that fought for the establishment of a separate state. According to the LTTE, the primary contradiction has been the fight for liberating Tamil Eelam from Sri Lanka and caste and the fight for the annihilation of caste took a back seat in the face of defending the Tamil people from the genocidal attacks from the Sri Lankan state. In the country that was under civil war for decades, the process of politicisation and the propaganda that was needed in order to bring about a change in the mentality of the people was not feasible to be taken up. The failure of the LTTE to address the issue of caste can be attributed to the extremely volatile and difficult war situation that existed in the Tamil areas.

The information and data about the LTTE's programme on caste are not easily available. The war crisis has indeed impeded the access to such information. But it remains an area that needs to be further explored. The LTTE worldwide has been vilified as a 'dangerous terrorist group' by most imperialist academia and media. But the truth is it led one of the most valiant struggles for national liberation which also faced the most fearsome and

ruthless repression. But among the Tamils worldwide, in Sri Lanka, India and in the larger diaspora there lies strong sympathy for LTTE. The reason for that sympathy and support among the masses apart from the national liberation struggle, also comes from their attempts to transform the existing oppressions entrenched in the Tamil society of Sri Lanka. The LTTE may have several drawbacks, especially in their strategy and tactics but to understand this force beyond the usual security centred paradigm is a historical necessity.

## CONCLUSION

This study's introduction began by referring to the Sri Lankan state's latest war against and its genocide on the Tamils who were struggling for national liberation of Eelam. Given the magnitude of the genocide and the nature of the war, it has been difficult to sustain a sharply focused interest on the objective of this study. The war and the genocide eclipsed the entire Tamil population of the island who, apart from being killed, raped and brutally tortured, were also forcibly displaced from their homes and their homeland. Split asunder from the Eelam they have aspired to, they currently reside in IDP camps, having been classified as 'Internally Displaced People'. Avowedly set up as temporary rehabilitation camps that would become meaningless after the completion of the colossal 'reconstruction programmes' engineered by the Sri Lankan state, these IDP camps are beginning to take on the appearance of more permanent 'homes'. Instead, the state has implemented its old strategy of attempting to change the demographic character of Tamil dominated areas. The latest effort in this direction has been the facilitation of Sinhalese settlers in the Tamil areas. In effect, the 'reconstruction' has meant nothing but a reordering of the territory to serve the alliances between the Sri Lankan state and various imperialist countries on the one hand, and a large-scale influx of non-Tamils into the region in order to smoothen the exploitation of the 'natural resources'. This move has led to a better convergence of global imperialist and local Sinhalese interests, with the latter partaking in these new circumstances in the form of better equipped local allies and fully rounded national elite capable of assisting the imperialist forces in a complete exploitation of the region.

If the outcomes of this war reflect on the question of control from one direction, this study has approached similar questions on control from another direction. It has had to deal with the question of caste in the process of arriving at its main objective, which has been an analysis of the relationship between anti-caste movements and

militant Tamil nationalism. It thus had to bring to the forefront the crucial link between caste and control over resources as well as human labour. Caste, as made evident at various points in the dissertation, was revealed to be a particular mode of organizing social relations. Although it is practices such as untouchability or other phenomena framed around notions of ritual purity, and an ideal-type version of a system based on the *varna* model that are most commonly cited within the literature on caste, this study argued that caste cannot be divorced from the economy or from the question of how it organizes social relations in such a manner as to strengthen, maintain and justify dominant caste groups' control over resources and the labour of untouchable and other lower castes.

Indeed, as this study has demonstrated, the history of caste relations among the Sri Lankan Tamils reverses this received wisdom. There is no doubt about the fact that caste has played a crucial role in the Sri Lankan Tamil society. With a clearly defined social hierarchy and occupations based on caste, it became the social institution around which the Tamil society in Sri Lanka organized itself. The discrepancy between the ideal-type of caste system and the Sri Lankan Tamil social organization are so much as variance with each other, that the rise of Vellalas to a position of ascendancy in Sri Lankan Tamil society, usually attributed both to their numerical strength and as well as their control over resources, had to be explained by scholars as a case of Sudra dominance. This dissertation confronted the discrepancy by developing an understanding of caste's link with the economy and its role in maintaining and strengthening control.

The dissertation subsequently had to detail the changes to caste relations during the colonial period. This was undertaken in order to place not only the changing nature of Vellala dominance but also to emphasize how the same phenomena such as the introduction of modern systems of education and changes in production processes had unintended consequences in the form of a growing lower caste resistance to Vellala dominance and norms and rules such as *thesavalamai*. Having already developed a theoretical framework suitable to the task at hand, it then looked at the increasing

political organization of lower castes in the form of caste associations and anti-caste movements which continued till the mid 1970s, by which time, it had also turned into a militant movement against caste.

This study then pivoted around the changing permutations and combinations in the alignment of social forces and movements, in particular the changing relationship between anti-caste movements and Tamil nationalist movements. The following section summarizes the findings of the dissertation—

The time that the anti-caste movements reached their peak was also the time when the Tamil society was facing discrimination by the Sinhalese Buddhist state which propelled the growth of Tamil nationalism. The Tamil nationalism that emerged in the early 1950s was a 'defensive' nationalism that tried to brush the issue of caste aside and project the Tamils as a homogenous community; the anti-caste movement resisted such efforts and forced the mainstream Tamil national organizations to recognize caste. The militant nationalism that emerged at that juncture was influenced by the anti-caste movement and hence recognized that caste is an exploitative system which has to be annihilated.

Most of the militant organization that emerged during were also Marxist organizations and recognized caste as one of the contradictions within the Tamil society that needs to be fought in order to form a separate Eelam. But unfortunately not many of the organization followed the same. They could not successfully implement the equal treatment with the organizations, and since most of these organizations also were headed by *Vellalas*, the hegemonic mentality reflected in their actions and practices.

Among the many militant organizations in that period, another name emerged namely, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which although the smallest initially, maintained high levels of discipline. The LTTE recognized the Tamil society as semi-feudal, and thus the fight against caste became as important as the fight against the Sinhalese state. It was successful to a great extent in making the

organization secular and not based on any one religion or caste. Amongst all the other *Vellala* dominated organization, LTTE was the only one which was led by a *Karaiyar* leadership. As it gained power and established itself as the sole force of the Tamils fighting for separate Eelam with the support of the people, it also implemented policies against caste. It abolished caste and made caste discrimination a punishable offence. Moreover, the constant aggression and genocidal attacks from the Sri Lankan state and the displacement of people from one place to another as a result of war also reduced the practice of caste discrimination in comparison to times of relative peace.

What one can observe is that though the anti-caste movements and the militant nationalism had similar approach to the Tamil society there was no structural convergence among the forces that led these movements. Yet, they had some overlap in terms of their understanding and approach towards organizing masses. They had no direct convergence but the solidarity they extended towards each other was evident. The participation of the Tamil masses and the culture of mass politics that emerged during the heydays of the anti-caste movement was also followed by the militant organizations who campaigned in the villages and recruited from the rural areas.

As the militancy grew and the attacks on the Tamil population became more violent, the *Vellalas*, who were affluent and had the resources to do, left the country and moved to safer places, leading to a drastic decrease in their population. This, along with the interest shown by the militant organizations towards the eradication of caste reduced the scope for a separate movement against caste. Hence, there was a decline in the anti-caste movement and it slowly ceased to exist.

The concluding remarks of the dissertation is to point out that this decline is also because the anti-caste movements, despite their diverse understanding, had emphasized on eradicating the discriminatory practices of caste rather than the caste system itself. They thus did not move in the direction of changing the traditional mode of production. The study also emphasized the difficulties in knowing whether there was a change in the relation to the resources and the economic system that emerged during the civil war. Among the findings of this study is the understanding

that the nationality question became the primary one. Achieving separate Eelam became the primary objective of the Tamil population and hence many other issues were marginalized, including that of caste. This was primarily because there was always a war like situation that had loomed over the Tamils for decades and one has to keep in mind the war situation while studying, the relation between caste and nationality or its influence. To remove the Tamil Society out of the context of the armed struggle and to analyse it will only be a biased one with the intention of criticising the fighting forces.

Until now, there has existed one body of literature addressing caste in Sri Lankan Tamil society, and another body of literature addressing national liberation, albeit mainly for 'security' concerns. That these two bodies of literature seldom spoke to each other has been the determining factor behind the limitations of this exploratory dissertation. This study raises a series of troubled questions, questions of continued importance in the present situation. Two years since the end of the most brutal war and genocide on the entire Tamil people, the question of the relationship between anti-caste movements and Tamil nationalist struggle remains as pertinent as ever. On the surface, this seems to be a strange remark as it is still framed around the question of caste and national liberation struggle—a framework that is seemingly the least suitable to contextualize the lives, aspirations and struggles of the entire Tamil people. Other ways of looking at the situation have made their mark forcefully.

Today, the issue of caste in Sri Lankan Tamil Society is resurfacing from certain sections in Sri Lanka and in India, while the studies on the sociological aspects of the Tamil Society needs more research, one also needs to take into account certain factors. As every one knows by now that the Sri Lankan nationalism was fed and nourished with anti-Tamil feeling and every time the attacks on the Tamils had been genocidal. The anger and resentment was on the Tamil population entirely, and the Sri Lankan state did not pick and choose any particular section to be its junior partner. There have always been individuals and organizations that had stood by the Sri Lankan state and had been a part of its war against the Tamils, but as a community or as a section

there were no efforts to build a co-operation. Now, when the war is over and there are talks of peace and reconstruction, the other aspects of the society, other than militarization are being studied for the first time in some cases. These debates that are resurfacing, has a very peculiar nature and they talk about the other aspects like caste and the role of women etc. taking away from the context the liberation struggle for Eelam. What needs to be understood is that the oppressive conditions that led to the struggle for Eelam has not changed, it has in fact become much more blatant. And to not talk about nationality struggle linking up these debates to the struggle for separate Eelam is a revisionist act and will only strengthen the Sri Lankan state.

In the mainstream media, there has been a dramatic shift in the representation of Sri Lankan Tamils. It is not the “Tamil as ‘terrorist’” but the “Tamil as ‘victim’” that populates these representations. Both undoubtedly served and are serving similar interests—the one was used to whip up anti- Tamil feelings in order to service the suppression of Tamil national liberation and thereby to safeguard the imperialist interests and geopolitical concerns in the region; the other is currently being for the very same purpose and in the pursuit of the same set of interests.

With geopolitical and imperialist concerns currently pulling out image after image of victims from their repertoire of representations, it is difficult at times to even remember that it is the same Tamil people who waged heroic battles over decades. Acclimatized as we are becoming to representative techniques which privilege such uni-dimensional categorization—and what is more, which hope to somehow contain the Sri Lankan Tamils within the confines of victimhood—it becomes difficult to continue to think of national liberation as an important question for the Sri Lankan Tamils. It is all the more difficult for those removed from the everyday struggles to live, for those whose hearts do not house the battleground of memories of genocide, for those of us whose bodies and minds have not directly experienced the war. Yet, history has proven the resilience of people waging struggles against forces much more powerful than themselves. The struggle for Tamil liberation, in other words,



cannot be pronounced dead. No war has that kind of total power. No defeat is final enough.

Similarly, the war having affected all the Tamils and the displacement of the Tamil population in toto into camps is not reason enough to think that caste now has very little role to play. Although conclusive remarks cannot yet be made about the nature of caste in this kind of situation, it is still possible to imagine how caste makes its presence felt on a day-to-day basis in the camps, and how it organizes social relations amongst these displaced Tamils.

Yet, this context leads us to a further set of troubling questions. How will caste manifest itself in a situation where the Tamils, irrespective of their caste identities, have been divorced from prior social relations revolving around land and labour? Will it perhaps begin to exhibit itself a matter of ritual hierarchy, of purity and pollution, thereby beginning to mirror the very image that this dissertation has held to be limiting in the study of caste? How will the future lives of members from different caste groups begin to diverge when, and if at all, it becomes possible to utilize kinship and other kinds of networks with the diaspora Sri Lankan Tamils? In this changed context, and especially with the Sri Lankan state's thrust on settling non-Tamils in the region, will alliances be forged between Sinhalese elites and the traditional Tamil elites or perhaps, new elites? Is it possible that once again, there will be attempts to brush aside or suppress lower caste resistance to caste in the name of a regrouping around national liberation? Will the meaning of dominance and the identification of the elite themselves change in nature in this situation? Will the new elite among the Tamils be identified on the basis of difference in access to the camps' deliberately scarce basic amenities relating to food, shelter or health?

These are some of the vexed and difficult questions that might arise on the question of caste and national liberation. It remains to be seen whether these are addressed in future academic work, and how the current situation brings out particular sets of questions as the central concerns for scholarship.

Today in the *post-war* situation the debate on caste in Eelam has resurfaced. In the absence of war and any significant political movement within the Tamil society, caste line divisions are growing stronger. There is a need to further explore these new developments in the Sri Lankan Tamil society.

The hypothesis, the militant nature of Tamil nationalism was largely induced by caste oppression and the reluctance of the Sri Lankan Tamil political elite to address the issue of caste discrimination, was tested and in the course of the study, it was partially successful. A link between the casual and non-committed attitude of the Tamil political elite did have its influence on the militant nationalism, and was a vital reason for the youth of the oppressed castes to join the militant organizations that in principle but it was not completely the reason for the rise of the militant nationalism. The failure of parliamentary politics and negotiations with the Sri Lankan government and the blatantly anti-Tamil policies fuelled the shift from 'defensive' nationalism to militant nationalism.

The hypothesis, the caste factor in the militant nationalism lost its importance when the Eelam demand became the primary goal of the Sri Lankan community, was tested positive, we do find a decline in the anti-caste movements with the rise of the militant nationalism. This was due to the fact that unlike the main stream political organizations the militant organizations had an understanding of caste in the Tamil society and fought for the eradication of caste. The other reason was that the attack from the Sri Lankan state had always been of genocidal proportion and was against every Tamil, it did not discriminate on caste lines or choose any one community or caste as their junior partners. Hence there was a need to also unite against the Sinhala majoritarianism and that unity was forged through a Tamil nationalism that does not discriminate Tamils on the basis of their caste, by the militant organizations.

## References:

- Ahuja, Ram. (1993), *Indian Social System*, Jaipur: Rawat publications.
- Ahuja, Ram. (2005), *Society in India*, Jaipur: Rawat publications.
- Aiyar, J.P.V. (1925) *South Indian Customs* New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.
- Anderson, Benedict. (1991), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso.
- Arumainayagam, K. (2000), "Caste in Jaffna in 19<sup>th</sup> Century", in Duraisingam.T. (Eds.), *Politics and life in our times*, Colombo.
- Arumainayagam,K.(1979), "Kudi-makkal" (Domestic servants), *Tribune*, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1979.
- Atal, Yogesh. (1968), *The Changing Frontiers of Caste*, Delhi: National Publishing House.
- Bailey, F.G (1960), *Tribe, Caste and Nation*, Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Bailey, F.G. (1957), *Caste and the Economic Frontier*, Manchester: Manchester University Press
- \*Balasingam, Adele. (1993), *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers*. Jaffna: LTTE publications.
- \*Balasingam, Anton. (1979), *Socialisa Tamil Eelathai Nokki* (Towards a Socialist Tamil Eelam) Publication Division: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).
- Balasundaram, Sasikumar, A.S. Chandrabose & P.P. Sivapragasam, (2009) "Caste Discrimination among Indian Tamil Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka" in Kalinga Tudor Silva, P.P. Sivapragasam, Paramsothy Thanges (eds.) *Casteless or Caste-blind: Dynamics of Concealed Caste Discrimination, Social Exclusion and Protest in Sri Lanka*, Colombo Chennai: International Dalit Solidarity Network, Copenhagen, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi and Kumaran Book House
- Bass, Daniel. (2009), 'Making Sense of the Census in Sri Lanka: Upcountry Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism' in R. Cheran (ed.), *Pathways of Dissent*, Delhi: Sage Publications
- Beasant, Annie. (1916) "How Caste Helps?", 1<sup>st</sup> April, New India.
- Berreman, G.D. (1973), *Caste in modern world*, New York: General Learning Press.
- Berreman, G.D, (1971) "the Brahminical view of Caste", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol 5 (1), pp.16-25

Best, G.(1988), *The Permanent Revolution: The French Revolution and Its Legacy*. Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press

Beteille, Andre (1969), *Caste: Old and New*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House

Béteille, Andre. (1965), *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, California: University of California Press.

Beteille, Andre. (1997), *Society and Politics in India: Essays in Comparative Perspective*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Béteille, Andre. (1969), *Castes: Old and New, Essays in Social Structure and Social Stratification*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House

Bose, Sumantra (1994), *States, Nations, Sovereignty: Sri Lanka, Inida and the Tamil Eelam Movement*, London: Sage Publication

Bougle, C, (1971), *Essays on the Caste System*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Breuilly, J.(1985). *Nationalism and the State*. New York: St. Martin's Press

Bruce, Matthews, (1982) "District Development Councils in Sri Lanka". *Asian Survey*, 22(11): 1117-1134.

Bruce, Matthews, (1986), "Radical Conflict and the Rationalization of violence in Sri Lanka." *Pacific Affairs*, 59(1): 28-44.

Casie Chetty, Simon, (1934), *Castes, Customs, Manners and literature of the Tamils*, Colombo: Bailing Press.

Cheran, Rudhramoorthy (1992) 'Cultural Politics of Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka', *South Asian Bulletin* 7(1); 79-80

Cheran, Rudhramoorthy (2001) *The Six Genres: Memory, History and the Tamil Diaspora Imagination*. Colombo: Marga Institute.

Christopher, Bristol, (1876), *The Mukkuwar Law of the Rules of Succession among the Mukkuvars of Ceylon*, Colombo

Cohn, B (1996): *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

D.D. Kosambi, (1956). *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

David Kenneth (1974), "And Never the Twain Shall Meet? Mediating the structural approaches to caste ranking", in Harry, M. Buck and Glennt Yocum, (Eds.) "*Structural Approaches of South Asian Studies*", Chambersburg: Wilson Books.

David, Kenneth, (1973a), "Spatial Organization and Normative Schemes in Jaffna, Northern Sri Lanka", *Modern Ceylon Studies*, 4(1&2): pp.21-52.

David, Kenneth, (1974b), "Hierarchy and Equivalence in Jaffna, North Ceylon Normative Code as Mediators" in K. David (ed.), *The New Wind: Changing in South Asia*, The Hague: Mouton, pp.179-226.

De Silva K.M. (1986), *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880 – 1985*. Lanham: University Press of America.

Dirks, N B (2001): *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Dumont, Louis (1970), *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fuerer-Haimendorf, Christoph Von (1963), "Caste and Politics in South Asia", in C.H Philips, ed., *Politics and Society in India*, London: Allen and Unwin.

Gamini Keerawella, Rohan Samarajiva, (1994) "Sri Lanka in 1993 – Eruptions and flow". *Asian Survey*, 34(2): 168-174.

Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press

Ghurye. (1932). *Caste and Race in India*. Bombay: Popular Book Depot.

Gill, Timothy, (2007), "Making Things Worse: How "Caste Blindness" in the Indian Post-Tsunami disaster Recovery has Exacerbated the Vulnerability and Exclusion", Netherlands: Dalit Network

Gnanaprakasara, S. (1912). *Ancient History and the Religion of the Tamils* . Jaffna.

Goonesekere, R.K.W., (2001), *Caste Discrimination : A Global Concern*, (A report by Human Rights Watch for the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Durban, South Africa.

Goonesekere, R.K.W., 2000, *Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Indegenous Peoples* (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2001/16), Working paper on the topic of discrimination based on work and descent, submitted pursuant to Sub-Commission resolution 2000/4.

Gould, Harold A, (1961), " Sanskritisation and Westernisation " *Economic Weekly*, 13(25): 945 – 50.

Greenfeld, L. (1990). *The Formation of the Russian National Identity: The Role of Status Insecurity and Resentment*. *Comparative Study in Social History*, 32(3):549-91

- Greenfeld, L.(1991), "The Emergence of Nationalism in England and France". *Research in Political Sociology*, 5:333-70
- Greenfeld, L.(1992), *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press
- Guha, Amalendu.(1979). "Great Nationalism and Little Nationalism and the Problem of Integration: A Tentative View." *Economic and Political weekly*, 14(7&8): 455-58.
- Gunasingam (1999), *Sri Lankan Nationalism: The Study of its Origin*. MV: Sydney.
- Gupta Dipankar (1991), *Social Stratification*", Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Hellman – Rajanayagam, (1992), "Ethnicity and Nationalism – the Sri Lankan Tamils in the Late Nineteenth Century: Some Theoretical Questions", in D.Weidemann (Ed), *Nationalism, Ethnicity and Political Developments in South Asia*, New Delhi: Manohar Publications.
- Jaiswal, Suvira, "Caste, Ideology and Context", *Social Scientist*, Vol.25, No.5/6, (May-June 1997), pp3-12
- Jiggins, Janice (1979): *Caste and Family in the Politics of the Sinhalese*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jodhka, Shah (2010), "Comparative Contexts of Discrimination: Caste and Untouchability in South Asia", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XLV No.48.
- Kandiah, V. (1964), *Mattakalappa Tamilakam* (in Tamil), Jaffna: Ilakecari Ponnaiya Ninaivu Vellyuittu Manram.
- \*Kantha.A. and Puratchika.Se.(Eds.)(2003), *Vizhuthagi Verumagi*, (Becoming Prop-Roots, Becoming Roots), Jaffna: LTTE publications.
- Kedourie, E. (1974) *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*. New York: New American Library.
- Klass, M. (2009). "Caste: The Emergence of South Asia Social System." *American Anthropologist*, 83 (3), 696-697.
- Kohn, H. (1967) "The Idea of Nationalism", in Collier Kohn, H. (1968) *The Age of Nationalism*. New York: Harper & Row
- Kothari, Rajni (1970), (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics* Delhi: Orient Longman.
- Leach (ed), (1960), *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan*, Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- \*Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (2001), *kaathodu Sollivudu*, (Tell it in Ears), Killinochi: LTTE Publications.

- Lynch.M. Owen (1969). *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mahroof, M. (2000). "A Conspectus of Tamil Caste Systems in Sri Lanka: Away from Paratixis." *Social Scientist*, 28 (11/12), 40 - 59.
- Mahroof. M.M.M. (1997), "The European Factor in the Caste System: The Sri Lankan Model", *Social Scientist*, 25 (11/12), 3-18.
- Manoharan. N, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Crouching Violence; Hidden Peace", *Unpublished Manuscript*
- Marx, Karl and Fredrick, Engels, *On Colonialism*, Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House
- Mason, Philip (1967), *India and Ceylon: Unity and Diversity*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Mayer, P., (1993) "Inventing Village Tradition: The Late 19th Century Origins of the Jajmani System", *Modern Asian Studies*, 27: pp. 357-395
- McGillvray, D. B. (1982), "Mukkvar Vannimai: Tamil Caste and Matriclan Ideology in Batticalao, Sri Lanka." in D.B. McGillvray (Ed.), *Caste, Ideology and Interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mcgilvary,D.G. (1973), "Caste and Matriclan Structures in Sri Lanka: A preliminary Report on the fieldwork in Akkaraipattu" *Modern Ceylon Studies*, 4:5-20
- McGilvray, D. B. (1983), "Parayar Drummers of Sri Lanka: Consensus and Constrain in an Untouchable Caste." *American Ethnologist*, 10 (1), 97 - 115.
- Mencher, J.P, (1974) "The Caste System Upside down or not So Mysterious East", *Current Anthropology*, vol. 15 (4)
- Moffart, M., (1979) *An Untouchable community in South India, structure and consensus*, Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Nadel,S.F.(1957), *The Theory of Social Structure*, London: Cohen and West.
- Nithyanantham, V. (1987) *An Analysis of the economic factors behind the origin and development of Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Social Scientist Association.
- Nithyanantham, V. (2009) 'The Economics of Tamil Nationalism: Evolution and Challenges' in R. Cheran (ed.), *Pathways of Dissent*, Delhi: Sage Publications
- Omvelt, Gail, (1978), "Towards a Marxist Analysis of Caste: A Response to T.B. Ranative", *Social Scientist* 6(11): 70-76.

- Oommen, T.K. (1990), *“State and Society in India: Studies in Nation Building”*, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Pandian, J.(1987), *Caste Nationalism and Ethnicity*. Bombay: Sangam.
- Parakrama, Arjuna, (1998), *Identity in Crisis as Identity: Note from the Margins of this War*, Newton Gunasinghe Memorial Lecture.
- Peebles, Patrick, (1990), “Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.49, no.1, pp30-55
- Peribanayagam, R.S. (1965), “Caste, Religion and Ritual in Ceylon”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol.38, no.4,pp. 218-227
- Pfaffenberger, B. (1981). “The Cultural Dimension of Tamil Separatism in Sri Lanka”. *Asian Survey*, 21 (11), 1145-1157.
- Pfaffenberger, B. (1981). *Caste in Tamil Culture: The Foundations of Sudra Domination in Tamil Sri Lanka*. Bombay: Vikas Publishers.
- Pieris, Ralph (1956): *Sinhalese Social Organisation: The Kandyan Period*, Colombo: University of Ceylon Press.
- Ponnambalam, Satchi (1983), *Sri Lanka, the National Question and the Tamil Liberation Struggle*, London: Zed.
- Raghavan, M.D. (1953), “Sociology of Jaffna: The Nalvar and the Koviari,” *Tamil Culture*. April. Pp. 139-150.
- Raghavan, M.D. (1967), *The Tamil Culture in Ceylon: A General Introduction*, Colombo: Kalai Nilaiyam Limited.
- Ragunathan, M. (2002), *Social Issues in Eela Novels*, Jaffna: Mahajan.
- Rajanayagam, D. H.(2004), "Religious Ideology Among Tamils", in Morrison, *Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalization: Struggling to Create a New Social Order* (pp. 72 - 84). Colombo: Vijitha Yapa.
- Raheja, G.G., (1988), “India: Caste, Kingship and Dominance Reconsidered”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol.17
- Rao, M.S.A, (1978) *Social Movements in India*, (vol I and II), New Delhi: Manohar Publications.
- Ravikumar. (2002). Caste of the Tiger: Eelam and the Dalit Question. *HIMAL*, 15 (8), 11-15.
- Reddy, Deepa S. (2005). “The Ethnicity of Caste.” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 78 (3), 543-584.



- Robert N. Kearney (1985) "Ethnic conflict and the Tamil Separatist Movement in Sri Lanka." *Asian Survey*, Sept.; 25(9): 898-917.
- Roberts, M. (1985). "From Empiricist Conflation to Distortion: Caste in South Asia". *Modern Asian Studies*(Great Britan) 19 (2), 343-352.
- Roberts, M.(1982). *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of the Karava Elite in Sri Lanka*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rogers J.D. (1995) "Racial Identities and Politics in Early Modern Sri Lanka", in Peter Robb (Eds), *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford Press.
- Rogers, J. D. (2004). "Caste as a Social Category and Identity in Colonial Lanka", *Indian Economic Social History Review* , 41 (1), 51-77.
- Rudolph, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, (1967), *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*, Chicago: University Press of Chicago.
- Ryan, Bryce (1950), "Socio-Cultural Regions of Ceylon", *Rural Sociology*, 15:1, 3-19.
- Ryan, Bryce. (1953) *Caste in Modern Ceylon*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Schalk (1997): "Historicisation of the Martial Ideology of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)", *South Asia, Journal of South Asian Studies*, No 20, pp 1-38.
- Schalk, P (1992): "Birds of Independence or the Participation of Tamil Women in Armed Struggle", *Lanka*, No 7, pp 44-148.
- Seneviratne, (1997), *Forging of Caste and Community in India and Sri Lanka*, Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp. 120-136.
- Shah Ghanshyam, (1998) *Social Movements in India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Shantha K. H. (1992), "Interactive Ethnonationalism; an Alternative Explanation of Minority Ethnonationalism." *Political Geography*, Nov. 1992; 11(6): 526-549.
- Shantha K.H.(1992), " Sri Lanka in 1992 – Opportunity Missed in the Ethno-Nationalist Crisis." *Asian Survey*, Feb.1993; 33(2): 157-164.
- Sharma and Oomen (Eds), (2000), *Nation and National Identity in South Asia*, New Delhi: Orient Longman.
- Sharma, S.L. (1990), "The Saliency of Ethnicity in Modernization: Evidence from India", *Sociological Bulletin*, 39(1&2): 33-51.
- Silva, K.T.(1999), "Caste, Ethnicity and Problems of National Identity in Sri Lanka", *Sociological Bulletin* 1999 48 (1&2): pp. 201-217

- Sitarampalam S. K. (2004), "Tamils of Sri Lanka- The Historical Roots of Tamil Identity", in George Frerks and Bart Klem (Eds), *Sri Lankan Discourses on Peace and Conflict*, Hague, Netherlands
- Sivathambi, K.(2000), *Yaalpaanam: Chamookam Panpaadu Karuthunilai*, (in Tamil), Colombo: Kumaran Puthaka Illam.
- Srinivas M.N. (1962), *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, Delhi: Asia Publishing House
- Srinivas M.N. (Ed), (1969), *India's Villages*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House.
- Susendrarajah, S, "Caste and Language in Jaffna Society", *Anthropological Linguistics*, Vol.20, No.7, October, 1978, pp-312-319
- Stokke, Kristian and Anne Kristi Ryntveit, (2000), "The Struggle for Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka", *Growth and Change*, Vol.31, pp. 285-304
- Swamy, S.J. (1994), *Tigers of Lanka: from Boys to Guerrilla*, New Delhi: Konark.
- Tambiah, H.W (1950), *The Laws and Customs of the Tamils in Ceylon*, Ceylon: Tamil Cultural Society of Ceylon.
- Thambiah, H.W. (1954), *The Laws and Customs of Tamils of Ceylon*, Colombo.
- Tambiah, S. J. (1986), *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and Dismantling of Democracy*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press
- Thanges, P & Silva, K.T. (2009), "Elangayil Saathiyam" in Thanges, P & Silva, K.T (eds.) *Saathiyinmaiya? Saathimaraippa?*, Colombo: Kumaran Press.
- Thanges, P. (2006), *Caste and Ethnicity in Jaffna: War-induced Transformation of Identity*, Ph.D Thesis, University of Peradeniya.
- Thanges, Paramsothy. (2007), "*Yaalpaanathil Saathi: Marapum Maattamum*" (in Tamil) in *Yaalpaanach Chamookam*, Colombo: Malar Veliyeedu, pp. 11-86.
- Thanges, Paramsothy & Kalinga Tudor Silva, "Caste Discrimination in War-affected Jaffna Society" in Kalinga Tudor Silva, P.P. Sivapragasam, Paramsothy Thanges (eds.) *Casteless or Caste-blind: Dynamics of Concealed Caste Discrimination, Social Exclusion and Protest in Sri Lanka*, Colombo Chennai: International Dalit Solidarity Network, Copenhagen, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi and Kumaran Book House
- Thorat, S. & Shah, P.G.(2007), *Dismantling Desent – based Discrimination: Report on Dalit's Access to Rights*, New Delhi: NCDHR & IIDS.

Trawick, Margaret. (1999), "Reasons for Violence: A Preliminary Ethnographic Account of the LTTE" in S. Gamage & I.B. Watson (eds.), *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka*, New Delhi: Sage

Tudor Kalinga Silva & Paramsothy Thanges, (2009), "Caste Discrimination in Sri Lanka: an Overview" in Kalinga Tudor Silva, P.P. Sivapragasam, Paramsothy Thanges (eds.) *Casteless or Caste-blind: Dynamics of Concealed Caste Discrimination, Social Exclusion and Protest in Sri Lanka*, Colombo Chennai: International Dalit Solidarity Network, Copenhagen, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi and Kumaran Book House.

Uswatte Aratchy, G. (1972), *From Highway to Blind Alley: A Note on Youth and Higher Education*, Marga, 1(3): 75-85.

Vegujanam & Ravana. (1989), *Saathiyamum Atharkethiraana Poraattangalum* (in Tamil), Chennai: South Vision. Reprinted in 2007.

Wickremasinghe, N. (2006). *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age – A History of Contested identities*. London: C. Hurst & co.

Wilson, (2001) *Sri Lankan Nationalism: Its Origins and Development in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. New Delhi: Penguin Press.

Yalman, N. (1967). *Under the Bo Tree*. Los Angeles.: University of California Press.

Yalman, Nur. (1969), "The Semantics of Kinship in South Asia and Ceylon" in Thomas A. Selrok, (Eds.), 'Current Trends in Linguistics in South Asia', Vol-4, Mouton: The Hague.

[\\*http://www.tamilarangam.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&id=35&Itemid=138&limitstart=10](http://www.tamilarangam.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=35&Itemid=138&limitstart=10)